

Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Yellow, Red and Blue*, 1929, oil colour on canvas.

# Transitions in Art Trends and Aesthetics

**Dr. Yam Prasad Sharma**

## Abstract

*History of art shows many movements, trends, techniques and isms of arts in sequence. One trend departs from the other. This makes the new trend innovative, creative and aesthetic. Similarly, art theories and perspectives are also changing. The departure and transition bring new insights in the creator and viewers. Some trends, techniques and philosophy work for some period of time, and then there are transitions in between them. The transitions bring new forms and perspectives that provide new aesthetic experience. When same techniques and trends run for a long period, the artworks become stale, for there is only imitation and repetition. Successful artist breaks boundaries and goes beyond the established codes and rule of creation without sacrificing the aesthetic elements in his works. Thus, transition, change and departure are the essential elements of the arts. This research paper traces transitions and departure in art trends and aesthetics and presents the values of such transitions.*

**Keywords:** *transition, aesthetics, trends, techniques, theory, perspective, pleasure*

## Introduction

One artwork is different from other artworks due to creativity and new form. The creativity brings transitions among artworks. The new form is the aesthetic aspect that touches and affects the viewer. It provides us new experience. A work of art is as exclusive as an autonomous human being having distinct individuality in terms of distinct voice, technique and style. Each art movement breaks away from the earlier one creating a transition between them. The artwork

has its own unique code for expression and creation. A creative masterpiece breaks all the established boundaries and rules with its innovative form (Gilbert 1998). Despite the experiment, aesthetic pleasure is essential for artwork. A sense of beauty arouses aesthetic pleasure and thrilling experience. Viewers identify with the characters and art form forgetting themselves.

As time is passing, art forms are also changing. The theory of fine art is also changing (Lee 2020). Making

transitions and difference is a nature of art. Greek philosopher Plato states that art is imitation of nature, but his student Aristotle argues that art is not only imitation but also a new creation because artist creates beautiful object through the representation of beautiful aspects omitting the ugly aspects of nature and inserting beautiful elements from the imagination (Adams 1992). This innovative aspect is the creative aspect of art. There is transition in the aesthetics of Plato and Aristotle. Greek arts focused on human values, but medieval arts emphasized heaven and spirit. There is a transition in the arts of these two periods.

Neoclassical arts gave emphasis to reason and strict rules whereas Romanticists presented imagination and spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings (Levinson 2003). The contrast in these two sorts of works provides strange aesthetic experience. Emmanuel Kant and Oscar Wilde argued that art is for its own sake, for the beauty (Ockvirk et al. 2002). It does not matter whether it signifies any meaning or not. Hegel states that art captures the idea leaving behind the matter whereas Marxism argues that art is a material product like other commodities. There is the change in the perspectives on art. The variation provides a sense of life.

Sigmund Freud argues that art is expression of suppressed desires and wishes. In different times, there are different world views of art (Lee 2020). Different artists have different techniques of art (Gilbert 1998). Such creative aspects bring transition in art (Barasch

1998). In the absence of such qualities, the works become pretention of art. The focus of this paper is to see the transitions from one trend to other trends.

According to new critics, art is autonomous whole. It is independent like an individual person. Art refers to itself connecting rhythm, colors, lines, proportion, perspective, images, symbols and metaphor. The inter-link creates an organic unity in an aesthetic object (Levinson 2003). Visual rhythm is the music in art that provides aesthetic pleasure to viewers (Gilbert 1998). The intentional distortion carries certain meaning. Image creates picture in our mind whereas symbol signifies something else beyond itself (Osborne 2009). This theory is in sharp contrast to theory of representation and romanticism.

Formalists argue that art becomes art because of its technique and form (Freeland 2002). Techniques and forms present the contents of a work. Forms and techniques renew our perception. They de-automatize our automatized experience of life. Because of the new form, we see the thing in new light that we have not seen earlier (Osborne 2009). The focus on form brings transition from the focus on contents, subject matters and meaning.

Karl Jung states that art is the expression of archetypes, myth, cultural rituals and collective unconscious. This theory is in contrast to Freudian psychoanalysis. Structuralism argues that hierarchy of binary oppositions like center / margin;

primary / secondary; more important / less important; light / darkness; man/ woman; life/ death; city/ town; signified/ signified structures the artwork. The emphasis of the argument is different. The difference in presentation makes a work of art aesthetic. On the other hand, postmodernists state that art dismantles the illusion of structure and organization. Plurality, relativity and open-endedness are the features of art. The priority is shifted. The existing values are subverted. The artwork signifies multiple meanings or no meanings at all. Some critics argue that art mirrors the society. Feminism and post-colonialism explain that art questions, opposes and resists the power and authority being the voice for the voiceless with the emphasis on the margin. Innovation and creation make transition in arts and aesthetics.

### **Research methodology**

The area of research is history of art and aesthetics. Through the exploration of this area, the researcher attempts to show the changes and transitions in art trends and art philosophies. Books on history of art and aesthetics and articles are secondary sources. Works of art are primary sources. It is comparative study, for it compares and contrasts various art theories and art trends to depict the transition and change. This is qualitative research, for the derived statements highly depend on the researcher's understanding on the basis of interpretation of artworks.

### **Analysis and discussion**

Going through the art history, we see the changes and transition throughout time

from the past to the present. We perceive how the then culture, society and politics have been presented in visual forms (Adams 1992). The vision or intuition of the artist are expressed through the aesthetic art form. The balance of thought and feeling makes the work more organized and complete. Painting, sculpture and architecture present the dreams, wishes, world views and values of cultures, communities and the artist's responses to the contexts (Barasch 1998). Egyptian pyramids leave traces of strange civilization that focus on immortality. The pharaoh's corpse is surrounded by architectures and arts for the sake of eternal glory. Grave is the remarkable artwork in Egyptian civilization. Wall paintings and sculptures represent the dead person's life. Greek arts present the human values and the respect for the individual freedom. There is the change in focus in terms of presentation and content.

In the middle age, artists gave emphasis to the spirit and heaven. Paintings and sculptures taught ethical values and decorated churches. The different art forms from different time render the human imagination along with mood and atmosphere of the society and artist (Osborne 2009). The history of art shows that several trends, styles and isms evolved by breaking away from existing style and trend (Greenblatt and Gunn 1992).

Aesthetic values are changing depending on culture, time, space and community. New trend comes forth breaking away from the earlier form. In this sense,

art can be taken as the metaphor of revolution and change (Gilbert 1998). Renaissance theorists argue that art provides aesthetic pleasure while teaching ethical values to the viewers. For the Romantic theorists like William Wordsworth art is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. Emmanuel Kant says that art has purposiveness without purpose. The only purpose of art and creativity is to provide aesthetic pleasure for its own sake (Barasch 1998).

In *Nāṭyaśāstra*, aesthetician Bharata Muni argues that arts have rasa or rapture. Fruits have tasty juice (*rasa*) that gives us pleasure. In the same way, a work of art has *rasa* (juice) or aesthetic pleasure. There are *nava rasa* (nine fundamental emotions or aesthetic moods) such as *śṛṅgāra*, *hāsyā*, *karuṇā*, *raudra*, *vīra*, *bhayānaka*, *bībhatsa*, *adbhuta* and *śānta*. Abhinavagupta coined *śānta rasa*. *Sthāyibhāvas* (permanent emotions) are hidden within us. When these permanent emotions find suitable cause and environment, they are revealed in the form of *rasa*.

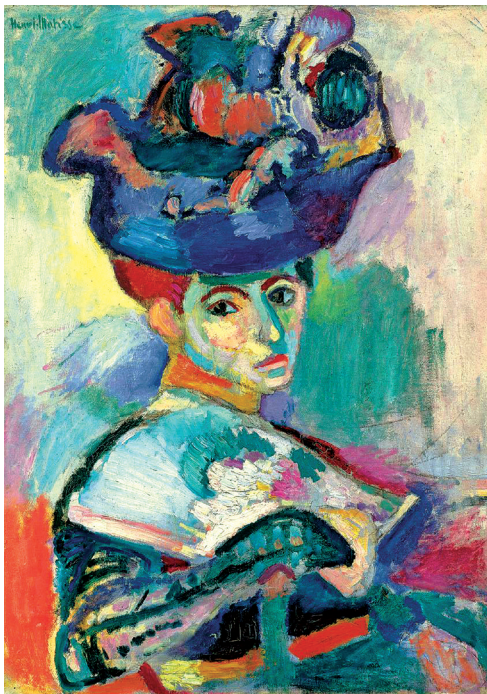
*Śṛṅgāra* is about love. Viewers get aesthetic pleasure looking at the scene of love. The permanent emotion of love revives in a youthful boy when he sees a beautiful girl who is the main cause for the arousal of his inner emotion. The chirping birds in the garden in the moonlight make the atmosphere more suitable. Then the inner experience is spontaneously revealed outside on his face and activities. The experience of this pleasure which is called *rasa*. The permanent emotion is transformed into *rasa*.

*Hāsyā rasa* is about humor when we listen to any joke or absurd event or situation. *Karuṇā rasa* is about sympathy, empathy, pity or kindness over a suffering person. *Raudra rasa* suggests the beauty of anger. *Vīra rasa* provides the pleasure from bravery of a hero. *Bhayānaka* *rasa* is produced from the situation of fear. The situation of hatred paves the way *bībhatsa rasa*. *Adbhuta rasa* is the pleasure enjoyed by seeing wonderful or unique event, person or thing. *Śhānta rasa* is about the experience of peace, equality and enlightenment. It is about the state of mind that treats everything equally like sadness and happiness, pain and pleasure, difficulty and comfort etc. Every successful artist has his own philosophy of art and creativity (Sharma 2025). There is transition in the eastern and western aesthetics.

One art is distinct from the other works. Prehistoric men performed the rehearsal of the hunting scene in cave paintings. They prepared for the forthcoming hunting (Strickland and Boswell 1992). Figures and images were not painted to decorate the walls of the cave but arts have been used as a tool for survival.

In Greek arts, man is at center as Protagoras says, man is the measure of all things (Arnold 2020). The realization comes through human senses and intellect. Writers and artist challenged the established tradition (Matthews and Platt 2001). Greek arts gave space to man's dignity (Strickland and Boswell 1992). Greek arts celebrate the curve and beauty of human body. The ideal form in





**Henri Matisse, *Woman with a Hat*, 1905,**  
oil colour on canvas, San Francisco Museum  
of Modern Art, San Francisco.

the human figure presents the perfection with aesthetic appeal. The art forms not only represent the nature but also improve it. This is the creative aspect of Greek works. The artists stroke the balance between body and mind. They synthesized human passion with reason.

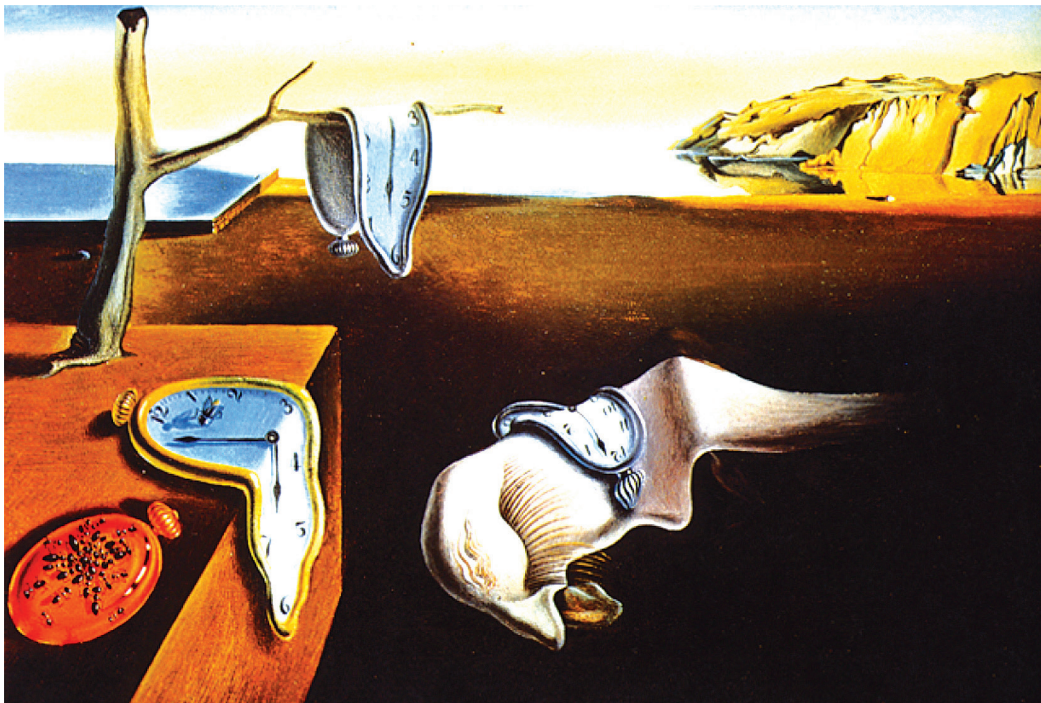
In the medieval arts, the emphasis shifted from here and now to the heaven. In contrast to Greek arts, the beauty of the human body was seen as corrupted. The focus was on soul and salvation for a glorious afterlife. Nude figures were forbidden. The Greek ideals of harmony and balance ceased to exist. Medieval architecture is plain on the outside but they are glowing with spiritually

symbolic frescoes, mosaics and stained glass inside.

Neoclassical arts are rational, precise and formal. On the other hand, Romantic arts are energetic suggesting emotional ecstasy. The transition makes the works unique and different. The characters are passionate. Romantic arts break away from Neoclassical arts rejecting objectivity. The artists followed their intuition and emotion (Matthews and Platt 2001). Intense passion guided their subjective artwork.

Realism focused on objective representation of things of the contemporary reality rejecting the divinities and supernatural beings. Impressionism departed from tradition of realistic art by ignoring perspective, and chiaroscuro. Impressionist artists captured immediate visual sensations of the particular moment through color, light and shade (Canady 1959). They presented the fleeting qualities of light using choppy, short and quick brushstrokes, brightly colored patches and spots. The surface of the canvas looks rough and unfinished (Strickland and Boswell 1992). There is the distance between images on the canvas and objects in the reality.

Fauvism used wild and unpredictable colors to express inner emotions (Canady 1959). For Fauvists like Matisse, Derain and Dufy, trees are red, the sky is yellow and faces green. They used of color without reference to actual appearance of the things (Beckett 1994). The new experiment brings transition in the art



Salvador Dalí , *The Persistence of Memory*, 1931, oil colour on canvas, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

forms. This is their emotional response to the context. Fauvists refused to imitate nature. They squeezed color on the canvas directly from the tube and smeared it with a knife. The dabs of clashing colors intensify their effect. Bold brushstrokes eliminated lines. Their choppy and flowing strokes give a sense of movement.

Cubism analyzed the objects by breaking them into bits and reassembling them. Cubists like Picasso and Braque dismantled the things only to synthesize the scattered elements into a structure. They used geometric shapes to simplify the form (Sharma 2009). There is transition in geometric shapes and linear shapes. Cubism conveys a multi-faceted view of reality.

Futurism celebrated the beauty of machine, movement and speed. Futurists presented the figures of railroads, a roaring racing car, ocean liners and airplanes. They tried to capture cinematic sensation of flux. This is the celebration of the power and dynamism of modern life. Futurist atmosphere distinct from the melancholy and alienation of modern life. Futurist's hope is in contrast to expressionist's anguish.

Expressionists expressed troubled feelings and emotions rather than objective images of the real world through the distorted colors and images (Sharma, 2014). The altered and exaggerated forms and colors are applied for emotional impact. This is the development of subjective trend of art.

The anguished pictures with distorted forms and clashing colors render inner experience. Crude forms and jagged lines express the sickness of the soul. Käthe Kollwitz used stark forms and harsh lines to express the tragic loss in the war. Emil Nolde painted hideous human figures and masklike faces to suggest a deformed state. Loud colors, coarse forms and macabre figures communicate the evils.

Abstract arts abandon any reference to recognizable reality. The artworks lacked subject matter and presented no identifiable objects. Colors convey emotions irrespective of content. The artists go beyond realism (Kandinsky 1977). The compositions are completely nonobjective. In abstract paintings, shapes and colors are expressive. Arts do not reproduce the visible. There is clear transition in abstract and realistic works.

In 1916, the Dada movement protested the tragedy and madness of World War I. Dadaist artists did not trust the reason and so-called modernity. They questioned and opposed all authorities (Beckett, 1994). They denounced and shocked. Their forms are free and accidental (Strickland et al. 1992). Dada was against everything, even Dada itself. Their works are unpredictable. Dada rejected all traditions.

Surrealism experimented with free-association, dream images and automatism. Surrealists created arts without conscious control to tap unconscious imagery. They exploited bizarre and the irrational images and symbols to express hidden truths

unreachable by reasoning and logic (Arnold, 2020). Salvador Dali presented hallucinatory scenes that reject common sense. He painted in a trancelike state. Max Ernst used ambiguous titles for their artworks as 'Two Children Threatened by a Nightingale'. He called himself as "the male mother of methodical madness." Psychotic vision and images appear through wandering into some psychic hidden world. Dali deliberately cultivated paranoid delusions and hallucinations to recreate irrational and abnormal compositions. There is transition in rational and irrational, normal and abnormal representations.

Abstract Expressionism focused on dynamism and action. Artists like Arshile Gorky and Jackson Pollock gave free rein to impulse and chance effect. Pollock abandoned the paintbrush and created through pouring, slashing and dripping paints on the huge canvas on the floor. He ignored the concepts of background, foreground, focal point and perspective. The emotional energy artist smashed conventions. The canvas was an arena for the artist to act. The process of painting was an event (Strickland et. al, 1992). The focus on painting process rather than final picture brings newness and transition from other styles of art.

Pop artists like Rauschenberg combined real objects with canvas. He blurs the boundary between art and reality. The feature of new art is experimentation. He mounted a stuffed goat wearing a tire on a collaged canvas to suggest that any material can be used in art. He combined sculpture, painting and real objects. For





**Jackson Pollock, *Full Fathom Five*, 1947,**  
mixed-media on canvas.

him, if art is not a surprise, it is nothing. It is the action of making something that the creator has not seen before. Art makes visible to the invisible things. Art renews our perception. Pop arts included the images of commodities like Coke bottles, cosmetics, hamburgers, lipsticks and celebrities (Berube, 2005). For the pop artists, the world itself is one large painting. The popular images took art out of the gallery into the open market. The art moved from the canvas to the real world. This transition provides aesthetic pleasure to the viewers (Sharma 2017).

In performance art, artist presented his body in front of an audience along with a singing, recitation of poem, dancing, talking, painting or any other activities (Sharma, 2014). Such Happenings take arts off the canvas into real life. Videos, paintings, photos, sculptures, and ordinary objects are installed in the setting to give desired effect. Performance arts blur the boundary among art, artist, real world and various genres. The comparative study shows transition between various art movements. The transition, newness and change provides aesthetic pleasure to the viewers. Beauty along with difference and uniqueness is the nature of art.

## Conclusion

Artworks differ from each other because of their form, technique and style. The similar work are tedious. The theories and perspectives on art are changing. A work of art differs from the other works like an individual person differs from the other individual. A work of art is complete in itself. As there is the change in art, there is the change in aesthetics. The transition between the art movements provides aesthetic pleasure. New theories of art are evolving even today. The emphasis is shifting in terms of imitation, creation, intuition, expression, opposition, revolution and reformulation. We cannot judge that one perspective is right and other one is wrong. Each artist can have his own world view for his creation. One art movement breaks away from earlier art movement. Art is related to people's mood, attitude and the contemporary

context. Artist responds to his context. As cultures and civilizations are changing, arts and aesthetics are also changing. Two works of art cannot be similar. Transition and change are essential in the creation of artworks for the aesthetic effect.

## Reference

- Adams, H. 1992. *Critical Theory since Plato*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers.
- Arnold, D. 2020. *Art History: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- Barasch, M. 1998. *Theories of Art, from Plato to Winckelmann*. New York: New York University Press.
- Beckett, W. 1994. *The Story of Painting*. London: Dorling Kindersley.
- Berube, M. 2005. *The Aesthetics of Cultural Studies*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Canady, J. 1959. *Mainstreams of Modern Art*. New York: Hult, Rinehart and Winston.
- Freeland, C. 2002. *But is It Art? An Introduction to Art Theory*. Oxford University Press.
- Gilbert, R. 1998. *Living with Art*. Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Greenblatt, S. and Gunn. 1992. *Redrawing the Boundaries*. New York: The Modern Language Association of America.
- Kandinsky, W. 1977. *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. New York: Dover.
- Lee, P. M. 2020. *Think Tank Aesthetics: Midcentury Modernism, the Cold War, and the Neoliberal Present*. The Mit Press.
- Levinson, J. 2003. *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*. Oxford.
- Matthews, R. T. and F. D. Platt. 2001. *The Western Humanities*. Boston: McGraw Hill.
- Ockvirk, O. G. et al. 2002. *Art Fundamentals: Theory and Practice*. 9th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Osborne, R. 2009. *Art Theory for Beginners*. UK: Oxford University Press
- Sharma, Y. P. 2009. 'Contemporary Nepali paintings: Hybridity and negotiation.' *Unpublished PhD Dissertation. Tribhuvan University*. <https://elibrary.tucl.edu.np/handle/123456789/5965>.
- Sharma, Y. P. 2017. 'Art therapy: Creativity for cure.' *Tribhuvan University Journal*, 31:1-2, pp. 239-244.
- Sharma, Y. P. 2025. 'Responding a Work of Art.' *Lalitkala Pragma*, 1:1, pp.102-112.
- Sharma, Y.P. 2014. *Nepali Painting: A Critical Analysis*. Kathmandu: Nepal Academy of Fine Arts.
- Strickland, C. and J. Boswell.1992. *The Annotated Mona Lisa: A Crash Course in Art History from Prehistoric to Post-Modern*. Kansas City: Andrews and McMeel.