

The Uncertainties in Contemporary Art

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Abstract

In quantum mechanics, uncertainty refers to the uncertainty of a measurement physical quantity, because some mechanical quantity can only be in its eigenstate under certain conditions, and the values shown are discrete. The exact value can only be obtained by measuring it in the eigenstate of this mechanical quantity. Uncertainty is like a double-edged sword, which has both advantages and disadvantages in art itself and in the process of artistic creation.

In this study, it is divided into three main parts. First, the existence of uncertainties in contemporary art is sorted out in two broad parts, the definition of the uncertainties in art and the specific expression in contemporary art, respectively, with examples from four aspects of psychological impact, accidental presentation effect, expression form and connection with the viewer. The purpose is to understand how uncertainties are expressed in the process of artistic creation. Second, the role of the uncertainties in artistic creation is analyzed through examples, and then it is proposed that artists should use uncertainties to serve art with a scientific and rational attitude. Thirdly, the application of uncertainties in my creative practice and their influences on my painting creation.

In summary, every artistic creator should take art seriously and sincerely. The relationship among the creative subject, society and life is an eternal and continuous interaction, and art is a carrier of reflection. For the problems brought by uncertainties in artistic creation, from choosing new certainty by thinking to the emergence of uncertainties, such a cycle is the process of art sublimating from life and being closely related to life.

Keywords: *uncertainties, role, presentation, double-edged sword*

1. INTRODUCTION

In this study, combined with the way uncertainties are presented in contemporary art performance and the feelings of personal creative process, the relationship between uncertainties and contemporary art and its influence on contemporary art are discussed through the perspective of the existence of uncertainty factors in contemporary art. Uncertainties usually refer to the inability to accurately predict the outcome of something. In other words, uncertainties arise whenever there is more than one possibility for the outcome of an event to occur. uncertainties have a very large coverage, it can involve every aspect of life. There is no way to define it very precisely and to delineate its properties, and it is included in the concept. I think artists are the most

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sensitive group of human beings and they are good at perceiving, observing and thinking. The thinking and the attitude of skeptical examination run through the whole process of artistic creation, which is the flow of uncertainties. The whole art activity system is full of random and fluctuating state. Any contingent subjective factor or objective factor may lead to systematic change, thus forming the ambiguity, complexity and uncertainty of art phenomenon. Therefore, the author holds that art is an organic system with the essence of two-way information feedback of systematic movement and random selection and uncertainty as its characteristics.

2. THE PRESENCE OF THE UNCERTAINTIES IN CONTEMPORARY ART

2.1 The uncertainty of art itself and its meaning

Since 1927, when the famous German physicist Werner Karl Heisenberg put forward the uncertainty principle, until now, the uncertainty has extended from the field of microphysics to the macro world, involving philosophy, economics, literature, art, etc., which provides every field of society with new inspirations. In the 1980s, the idea of deconstructionism emerged in the field of art, which led to a direct mutation of the aesthetic consciousness of art, and the traditional rules of art were completely broken and overturned by artists. Uncertainties began to be more and more widely applied to help understand and represent art, and artists began to freely exercise their subjective surreal imagination. While oil painting, photography and sculpture are still practiced by a large number of artists, multimedia and the Internet have become common artistic media, and many artists often use and mix several different media. The artists themselves, the art environment and the concentrated reflection of contemporary art consciousness are all full of uncertainties. Uncertainty first manifests itself in the uncertainty of artistic significance, from classicalism to modernism, in which people believe that some truth or absurdity about the world is expressed in art, whether ethical, political, historical or aesthetic. Classicalism and modernism are connected in this respect. Both try to express a judgment of the world's significance in an artistic way, which makes them have a clear central meaning, that is, the artist's interpretation and judgment of the world. However, since the 1950s, Western art has begun to discard this clear meaning.

The uncertainty is a huge category. There are many aspects of art alone that can be studied in depth. In this study, a brief personal definition of the uncertainty in contemporary artistic expression is explored. It is believed that uncertainties can be referred to as instability or contingency at some level, as a situation that will inevitably occur in the process of artistic creation that is not within the expected range. Artists, works and audiences constitute the whole process of artistic creation and aesthetics, and none of them is indispensable. Each of the three factors has varying degrees of instability. In the whole system, the three factors restrict and penetrate each other. Therefore, any one of these factors may lead to a qualitative change in the whole artistic activity, including subjective and objective influences, thus forming the ambiguity, complexity and uncertainty of the artistic phenomenon. This uncertainty includes the impact of the artist's psychological changes due to the external environment or psychological chance; the accidental presentation effect that appears randomly and deviates from the expectation in the process of creation; the uncertainty of artistic creation expressions and expression intentions; and the chance of the connection between the work and the viewer after the completion of the exhibition. In contemporary art, uncertainties run through from the entire process of creation to being shown in front of the viewer and it is an essential component.

2.2 The concrete expression of the uncertainties in contemporary art

2.2.1 The influence of the creative subject's psychology due to external environment or accidental inner changes

First of all, the existence of uncertainties in the process of artistic creation is physiologically-based. From

the scientific point of view, the brain is the carrier of thinking, which provides the basis for the randomness and uncertainties of artistic creation. In the cerebral cortex, there are tens of billions of neurons. There are more than 30,000 synapses on a single neuron, which serve to connect neurons. There are a vast number of synapses in the entire brain. In this vast space of possibilities, no matter how the neurons are connected, there is tremendous diversity. If we compare the collision between neurons to inspiration, then inspiration symbolizes the random uncertainties of the creative subject in creation. Because inspiration has the characteristics of chance and ambiguity, which shows the unique role of uncertainties as a non-logical phenomenon for artistic creation. Not only that, the psychology of the creative subject also changes at any time with unstable randomness. Each life experience is unpredictable, and the artist's psychological changes are influenced by the context of the times, such as war, upbringing, philosophy, etc. Similarly, human consciousness and emotions are spontaneous and unpredictable.

Therefore, the creative intention of the creative subject is not unchanging from the beginning of the conception to the end of the creation, nor is there only one form of expression and creative theme in the life of the creative subject. The inconsistency or even the opposite often occurs. The creative intention and theme are always self-adjusted, supplemented and updated with the objective world and the psychological changes of the creative subject in the process of creation. Each period reflects a different creative style, which is the individual aesthetic difference of the artist's psychological influence in each period. Sometimes when an artist is asked what the motive or original intention is for creating a certain work of art, the artist is unable to say exactly what his clear purpose is and the state he is in during the creation process. Often, many artists create artistic works in an unconscious state, and the desire to create artistic works comes from the primitive impulse of their inner emotions. Sometimes the purpose of creation will be clear and sometimes it will be vague and uncertain. This fully illustrates that the uncertainties of psychological changes has an impact on artistic creation that cannot be underestimated.

The artistic career of Yayoi Kusama, the Japanese contemporary artist known as the "queen of dots", is also constantly changing due to the influence of uncertain factors. At the age of 26, she accidentally discovered the work of American artist Georgia O'Keeffe, wrote to O'Keeffe for help and received a positive response. Two years later, Yayoi Kusama left for the United States to begin the difficult task of creating art in her life. If she had not seen O'Keeffe's paintings, if she had not asked her cousin to write to O'Keeffe, and if her letters had not been answered, Yayoi Kusama would not be Yayoi Kusama now. But these serendipitous factors happened and influenced her artistic work. The influence of her illness later led her to incorporate the extreme repetition of dots in her sculptures and installations (Figure 1), creating a space and time where the viewer is transported into a space and time filled with dots and psychedelia. Coincidentally, it also led the trend of American Pop Art, and contemporary artists such as Andy Warhol were also influenced by Yayoi Kusama.

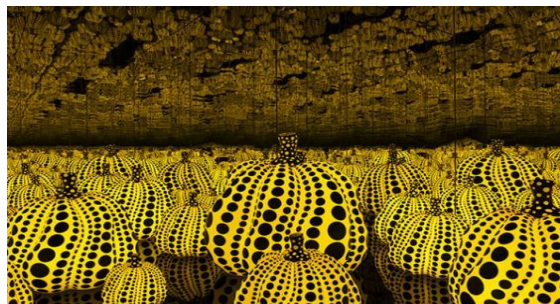


Figure 1. Yayoi Kusama's installation work

The objective world is constantly changing, presenting a state of diverse changes in things themselves and the randomness of the interaction between the creative subject and the objective environment. Objective things will act randomly on the surrounding things with multiple possibilities. The development process of the objective environment does not have only one development path, and there are multiple development directions

and possibilities. The fulcrum of each direction of development does not necessarily produce a connection and the connection is random. The connection of randomness in all processes leads to a result. The final appearance of a work of art in each artist's life is the result of random change.

2.2.2 The accidental presentation effect that appears randomly and deviates from the expectation in the process of creation

In the process of creation, there are often unexpected effects that deviate from the expected conceptual pattern in the mind, which are not controlled by the subject's subjective consciousness. Such accidental presentation can be called an expression of uncertainties in art. In the process of painting, the use of various materials will produce unintentional and accidental texture effects, such as deviations in color mixing, dry and wet brush, uncontrollable condition of brush strokes, texture effects brought about by the diversity of materials such as flow, cracking, gradation, etc. The changes of these factors will lead to different effects from the expected picture, and the generation of accidental effects will bring uncertainties to the creative thinking. When this accidental effect inspires the creative subject to consider whether to leave this accidental thing in the picture according to the actual needs, then the next creation will change from what was conceived in the mind before. Obviously, the uncertainties of the picture will affect the creative subject's thinking in the creative process. The whole artistic activity forms a series of butterfly effects brought by uncertainties. The generation of uncertainties and the reactions caused by it serve the art work, which brings surprise to the creator, tests the creator's control, and also assumes the interest of the artistic creation work. A typical example would be abstract art. For the American artist Jackson Pollock, whose early works were surrealist in expression, he gradually gave up the bizarre painting and was sick of the former programmed abstract forms. So he flattened the canvas, splashed paints directly and dripped them onto the canvas, producing amazing shapes, such as his work *One* (Figure 2). For this kind of artistic creation, it is impossible to predict how the effect will appear, and everything is uncertain. In the process of creation, surprising shapes are often formed and change in many different ways. In an interview with William Wright in 1950, Pollock asked, "Is it possible to say that unconsciousness is the source of the artist's creation." "Not only is unconscious a very important aspect of modern art, but unconscious driving forces are also important when looking at paintings," he replied. It is the emphasis on unconsciousness and uncertainty that makes Pollock give certain freedom to action painting. Creation is a complicated process of movement, not a simple, superficial, empty form. Therefore, uncertainty is one of the indispensable and active factors in artistic creation activities.

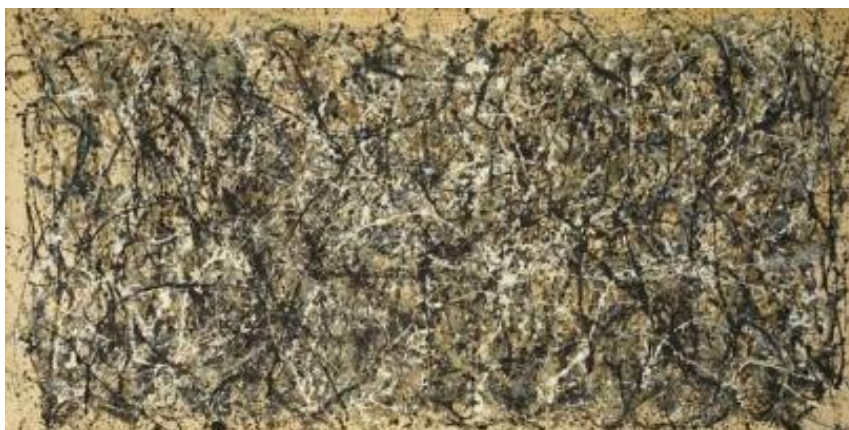


Figure 2. One: Number 31 by Jackson Pollock 269.5×530.8cm, 1950

2.2.3 The uncertainties of artistic creation expressions and expression intentions

From classical art to contemporary art, all the major changes have not shaken the creators of art to express a clear judgment of the meaning of the world in the form of art. The philosophy of deconstructionism that grew up along with postmodernism reflects this uncertainty of meaning. Deconstructionism opposes wholeness and holds that wholeness shows metaphysical nature. In traditional art, art is different from everyday things, and the subject of artistic creation explicitly gives things their own created meanings, such as aesthetic, sacred, absurd, etc. Art has a clear central meaning, but Western art has increasingly begun to abandon this central meaning since the 1950s. The meaning and composition of art began to be in an indefinable "wandering" state, such as conceptual art and event art which avoid making judgments about existence from any perspective; hyper-realism, ready-made and reproduction art, which expresses the unintentional and ignorant state of the creative subject as much as possible; collage art, which eliminates structural independence and closure, and so on. Art has become an indefinite and indiscernible state. As the curator Ferguson summarized, "Whereas photography demands precision, advanced painting seeks ambiguity." ¹ The ambiguity here refers to the subjective nature of form and intention in the process of artistic creation, which is non-deterministic. With the development of economy and technology, the Internet has played an important influence on art. The scope of art is expanding, such as installation, video, virtual, digital images, performance art and so on.

Another manifestation of the uncertainties of contemporary art is the indeterminacy of the artistic structure. Openness is the constant structure of contemporary art, and it is full of contradictions, arbitrariness and interruptions, creating a state of unstable sway. At the same time, it embodies a diversity of styles and meanings rather than definitive forms. For example, a very distinct personal style can be seen in Giacometti's sculptures and Monet's paintings. However, in contemporary art, such as installations, multimedia, etc., it is difficult to have an independent style in terms of specific forms, but more in terms of spiritual connotations and concepts carried by the vision.

Luc Tuymans' paintings are richly processed, employing the methods of absence, reconstruction, thin painting, fiction, de-colorization, etc., and synthesizing a range of camera techniques to detach the images from the everyday. Many details of the original paintings are omitted, and the colors and brushstrokes of the paintings are added. His paintings go from order to disorder. He selectively re-establishes the elements of the image for another language and euphemistically deals with contradictions and conflicts, creating a vague, broken fragment or partial work through very introspective and euphemistic clues or hints. The events and ideas he expresses in his narratives are not clear and definite, and memory is a very important part of his works. He believes that memory itself is fragmented, subjective and uncertain, and that reproduction cannot be completely real. Memory is influenced by the environment, atmosphere and mood, and he constantly selects the parts of memory that interest him and eventually become his works. (Figure 3)



Figure 3. The Secretary of State by Luc Tuymans 45.5x61.5cm, 2005

2.2.4 The uncertainties of the connection between art and the viewer

¹ Russell Ferguson, *The Undiscover Country*, Los Angeles, The Armand Hammer Museum of Art, 2004, 18

Artistic works do not exist as separate individuals in a closed environment. Nor does the creative subject create art that speaks for itself, but needs to be shown, to relate to the times, and to interact with the viewer. When confronted with a work of art, the connection between art and the viewer is not simply a relationship of looking and being looked at. It can evoke different emotional tendencies in the viewer, perhaps evoking fantastic imagery, or strong emotional resonance, or incomprehension, or even revulsion. Whatever the case may be, it essentially creates an imaginary space between the creator and the viewer that connects the two parties. This uncertainty belongs to both the creator and the viewer. When a work of art contains content that exceeds people's everyday perception or is unexpected, or when the work presents the viewer with uncertainties about the meaning of the work's content, the imaginative space created by the work's content carries the uncertainties and makes it more likely to induce the viewer's artistic aesthetic imagination. According to David Hume, "Beauty is not a property of the thing itself. It exists only in the heart of the viewer, and each person sees beauty differently." When looking at a particular type of art, two viewers may have similar or completely opposite preferences. Each viewer's feelings after seeing the same piece may also vary depending on his or her upbringing, aesthetic inclination, intellectual training, worldview and even religious beliefs, resulting in a different understanding of the work of art. Hume denies the objectivity of artistic beauty, which is idealistic, but he is aware of the subjectivity of artistic beauty and notes that "everyone sees different beauty in his heart". Marx also pointed out that "the poor people who are preoccupied have no sense of even the most beautiful scenery, and the merchants who sell minerals only see the sub-value of minerals, but not the reward and characteristics of minerals." In contemporary art, the subject of artistic creation prefers to treat the creative activity as an experiment that requires the viewer to complete, creating a visual effect between the viewer and the work that makes the viewer think about the work. The creator expects to use the work as a link to have a deeper communication with the viewer, and the creator's unspoken thoughts in the work are more attractive to the viewer. The reason for this connection lies in the uncertainties of the work itself, while the reason for the presentation of the result of the work can be said to be the spontaneous uncertainties of the creative subject in a potentially ambiguous state. As the symbolic theorist Norman Bryson said, "The world the painter perceives is also the world the viewer is perceiving from the painter's point of view to the viewer's gaze, they aspire to the perception of the world." The creative intention of the artistic creation subject, the art work and the viewer are two-way and mutually influencing activities. In this relationship, the creator's creative intention often unintentionally conforms to the viewer's aesthetic interest or breaks the viewer's expected aesthetic vision, and the creative subject constantly renews, adjusts and controls itself with such a goal, while the viewer also gives feedback on what they understand. This cyclical process constitutes the history of artistic development in the form of uncertain choices. This leads us to the conclusion that the accepted work, that is, the work in relation to the recipient, is no longer the pure original, but the transformation and change of the original, let alone the "uncertainty" of each work of art itself. The viewer's choice of aesthetic information is also a stochastic process. Any contingency will change the direction of selection, thus forming effective information. This "creative activity" is characterized by deep random uncertainty.

3. THE ROLE OF THE UNCERTAINTIES IN ARTISTIC CREATION

Uncertainties are bound to appear in the process of artistic creation by artistic creators. Uncertainties are random in the timing, occasion, context and psychological changes of the artist in the process of artistic creation. However, art also needs "certainty". Throughout history, almost all of the iconic artists or artistic works that brought about changes have emerged by chance. History must be progressive. Is it not possible to assume that the myriad of uncertainties constitute the ultimate certainty? Suppose a work of art is transcendent, and although it is out of step with or even questioned by its contemporaries, time will give certainty to confirm it. Such a process is the emergence of contingent uncertainties in the process of artistic creation, which triggers the transcendental judgment of the individual artist, resulting in the creation of a work that is a new certainty. The new certainty can not be verified immediately, but is verified by history to be certain. If one stays at the

stage of "uncertainties", it is the same as the artist does nothing and can never produce creative works of art, that is a new certainty. The "certainty" mentioned here refers to the independent "transcendence" of each artist. Therefore, the role of "uncertainties" in contemporary art is to serve the expression of new certainty, to promote artistic development, and to enable artists to break through in new ways.

In 1912, Duchamp's exhibition work *Nude Descending a Staircase* (Figure 2-1) was returned by the Cubist Salon for various reasons, a humiliating incident that led Duchamp to turn away from any association with any school of thought and to embark on a solo anti-artist path. "The Incident of Return of the Painting" set the stage for the emergence of the shocking work *Fountain*. It was in 1917 that Duchamp, as if by prank, happened to pass by a store and saw a urinal, bought it, named it *Fountain*, signed it and sent it to an exhibition. From then on, contemporary art began. Duchamp's liberal attitude dealt a heavy blow to the art of the past, creating the possibility for more new forms of art to come to the fore. Duchamp took advantage of the uncertainties of these contingent occurrences, such as "The Incident of Return of the Painting" and the purchase of the urinal, to eventually create a new certainty. The urinal could be a work of art, then there was nothing that could not be called a work of art. Duchamp made the border between art and life dissolve. History verifies the certainty of Duchamp's transcendental judgment.

Uncertainties emerge in the process of artistic creation, and artists experiment with the uncertain factors by making subjective and transcendent judgments. Practice is the ultimate way to test the experiment. The uncertainty itself is characterized by randomness and chance, so contemporary artists should make it serve art and bring innovation to art continuously with a scientific and rational attitude.

4. CONCLUSION

At present, society is evolving at a rapid pace. Art has gone through a process from serving religion and politics to gradually dissolving the boundaries with life. History proves that art, in any form, needs to change and innovate with the times. Contemporary art is still evolving and is in a state of blossoming, with no limitations in terms of art form or content. Every form of art has its own space to survive. Such a characteristic of contemporary art is inherently uncertain. With so much tolerance today, uncertainties bring art a fair diversity of development. All factors are in the midst of uncertain changes and are indeterminate. This also gives an opportunity to all excellent forms of creation and artists to emerge. The experience of each subject of artistic creation is stage-differentiated. Environmental and psychological changes make individual artists present different stages of artistic forms and individual differences. Each subject of artistic creation should seek new creative directions in the ever-changing times, endow materials, symbols and concepts with innovative artistic concepts, and find their own independent and distinctive artistic language. The vitality of art needs to be expressed precisely in innovation and differentiation. In contemporary art, the process of subjective expression in artistic creation does not require the same objective depiction of nature as in traditional painting. Compared to traditional art, contemporary art has a very large freedom of expression and technique, so uncertainties become more important. In this study, by discussing the expression of uncertainties in art, which may be inadequate, it is hoped to provide help and inspiration for other artistic creators to understand uncertainties and make proper use of them. Through the analysis of the uncertainty in the role and relationship between the author and the viewer, we can see the rationality and judgment of the real world. There is some uncertainty in the works. Art has the creator's reflection and life reappearance, so that we can pursue the nature of the source. Art science has relativism and uncertainty. The establishment of art science or art form is a sign to approach certainty and find uncertainty in the certainty of art science.

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