



Art History Narrative and the Theory of Temporal Hierarchy



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ABSTRACT

Objective - This article examines the relationship between art history writing and the theory of temporal hierarchy, specifically the application of historical time in art historical research. The article draws on several representative viewpoints of historical time, such as the theory of historical cycles, the diversity of historical time, the temporalization of history, and the narrative of historical time.

Methodology/Technique - Combining the method of historical hermeneutics, this analysis examines the significance of the temporal hierarchy of history for the development of art history writing. The study explores the relationship and contemporary significance between art, history, and time perspectives from the perspectives of experiential space and expectancy. It explains how these concepts influence the writing of global art history.

Findings - This study will start with the three main concepts of time view in art history: cyclical view, linear development view, and art history periodization, attempting to discover the three-layer structure of "art history consciousness time view," exploring the construction process of art history view from the perspective of time, exploring and excavating people's potential cognitive consciousness, and explaining the relationship between history and time from a new perspective of relevance, further elaborating on the latest trend of art history writing under the guidance of the theory of time hierarchy. Through in-depth analysis of artistic works, the profound influence of time hierarchy on the evolution of art schools and artists' creative practices has been revealed. The continuity and correlation of art history are more critical than systematicity and wholeness.

Originality - Art history should be regarded as a part of the broader history of art, prompting us to pay closer attention to the interaction between art and society, as well as the emergence and development of artworks within their social and cultural context, when studying. The theory of time hierarchy offers a new perspective on writing art history by analyzing different temporal levels and exploring the connotations, values, and relationships between artworks and history, culture, and society profoundly.

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1. Introduction

In writing art history, the use of historical time and stages of art history occupies an irreplaceable core position.

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This method offers a clear framework for art research, profoundly influencing our understanding of the essence and value of art. The significance of historical time in writing art history books is self-evident. The concept of the time process is decisive for interpreting human world art history. These concepts originate from different time categories and apply them to other situations, such as cyclical and linear progress. Art historian Wu Hong has studied the core concept of "dynastic time" and its continued impact on Chinese art history, revealing how the historical narrative of Chinese art is intertwined with contemporary artistic creations (Hung, 2022). Yang Jiegao believes that although historical time belongs to the time prototype of humanistic construction, in terms of the hierarchical structure of ontology, narratology, theology, and other multiple meanings contained in historical time, historical time itself is a paradoxical existence, a dialectical concept (Yang, 2021). Dr. Chen Huiben compared the historical time views of Kozelek and other contemporary historical theorists, and then highlighted the utility and enlightenment of Kozelek's historical time theory. (Chen, 2019).

Art history research should not be confined to recognizing historical facts and linear descriptions of phenomena. However, it should deeply explore the principles of historical motivations and the visible forms hidden behind these artistic phenomena (Zhou, 2018). Under the influence of specific historical philosophy, art historians' understanding of the universal periodization of history, the nature of periodization, and historical evolution, whether directly or indirectly, constrains and influences their classification, interpretation, and evaluation. Therefore, the periodization of art history is not only about organizing materials, but also reflects the art historians' views on art history and methodology. (Wu, 2014). Guided by this concept, the periodization of art history has become more dynamic and diverse, reflecting the characteristics of different cultures, regions, and eras. The multidimensional research method helps reveal the profound logic of artistic development, making each stage of art history no longer an isolated unit, but an organic whole that is interconnected and interpenetrating. The creation of artists is no longer just a display of personal talent but a product closely linked to the atmosphere of the times and social background. Therefore, when interpreting an artwork, it is necessary to place it within the context of a vast historical period and to thoroughly explore its cultural significance and the spirit of the times behind it, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the development of art and insight into its internal continuity and transformative nature.

2. Reshaping the Theory of Time Hierarchy in the Conceptual Transformation of Modern Art History

2.1 The Time Process of Art History

On the historical timeline of art history, the artistic styles, schools, and trends of thought from different historical periods have impacted the formation and development of art history methodology. The art of ancient Greece and Rome is regarded as a model of art, and its artistic concepts and creative techniques have profoundly impacted the study of art history in later generations. During the Renaissance, the rise of humanistic thought prompted art historians to pay attention to artists' creative process and the background and significance of artworks, which promoted the development of art history methodology towards a more profound and more systematic direction. Art and science follow the theory of time, and historians' way of thinking is purely chronological.

In this study, the constructiveness of historical description is reflected; that is, during the process of historical review, the past is described as a continuous process, evolving over time. However, this descriptive method often leads to the neglect of individual historical events. The concept of time plays a decisive role in interpreting the art history of the human world. These concepts originate from different time categories and are applied to different historical contexts, including cyclical cycles, linear development, and prophecies of the world's end. With the help of these concepts, our expectations are constantly empowered: decline,

progress, persistence, cycles, and turning points. These concepts closely link the actual process of time with the actions and self-evaluation of the subject. Therefore, this ontological property organically unifies the subjectivity of artists with the objectivity of the temporal process of the world they inhabit in an intrinsic connection.

2.2 The Dual Significance of Art History

Regardless of the culture or period, art history always has a dual meaning: on the one hand, it refers to art events that occurred in the past arranged in a particular chronological order, and on the other hand, inseparable from the above meaning, art history also refers to the narration of the event to clarify its significance for human interpretation of self and the interpretation of the world. The former involves the chronological order of events, while the latter involves the narrative representation of these events. In most cases, this type of event refers to the chronological order of artistic events, which may be related to different things. It often involves human actions or the actions of other subjects, such as heroes and gods in mythology. It may also involve more complex phenomena, such as the production of handicrafts or artworks. From the latter perspective, art history is an interpretive representation of the past within the current cultural framework. Art history is the result of historical consciousness; that is, art history is a construction: through recollection and memory, the past is reinterpreted in a narrative form. In this way, our history is generated from the past itself, from what has happened and the existing relics, artifacts, monuments, customs, and other forms of existence.

2.3 Reconstruction of Multi-level Historical Time

The attention to the issue of time in Western intellectual history has a long history. Phenomenologists such as Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger in the 20th century revealed the existence of time in the construction of consciousness and the realm of existence, highlighting the fundamental role of time in perception and understanding, and inspiring an understanding of the primordially and multiplicity of time. This study suggests the reconstruction of a "multi-layered historical time structure." The trend of strengthening the production and dissemination of historical knowledge in a non-ordered and unstructured manner is evident, specifically in two aspects: firstly, discovering a consensus with constancy in the historical and cultural changes over time; Secondly, maintaining a dynamic structural balance in synchronic historical and cultural expressions (Meng, 2023).

In this reconstruction process, art history connects events from different periods, it reflects the evolution of historical consciousness. In the narrative of art history, observing the interweaving and collision of multiple layers of historical time not only showcases the richness of history but also reflects the diversity of human perceptions of time.

Within the narrative framework of art history, the interweaving of multiple layers of historical time has become a crucial means of exploring the evolution of historical consciousness. This is not simply a linear superposition, but rather a three-dimensional, dynamic, and interweaving state. In a three-dimensional and dynamic interweaving state, history is no longer passively recorded; instead, an active and continuous dialogue emerges to perceive the artistic language that transcends time and space. By reconstructing multiple layers of historical time, it helps to gain a deeper understanding of the complexity of artistic development and reveals the multiple dimensions of historical consciousness.

3. Historical Time Perspective in the Writing of World Art History

The theory of historical cycles, which explains patterns of historical development, emphasizes periodicity, repetitiveness, and underlying laws in the historical process. Although this theory is controversial in the academic community, it provides a unique perspective for understanding complex and ever-changing historical phenomena. Heinrich Wölfflin is primarily known for his formal theory in the study of art history. However, his concept and methodology of periodization have also significantly impacted the periodization of global art history. Wolfgang proposed a linear development view of artistic style evolution through a detailed analysis of art forms in the Renaissance and Baroque periods. He emphasized that the change in artistic style is a continuous and gradual process, and this concept has significantly impacted the later research on the periodization of art history.

The theory of historical cycles has four characteristics: periodicity, cyclical stages, regularity and complexity, and repetition of social forms. The core of the historical cycle theory lies in the belief that historical development follows a specific cyclical pattern. This periodicity is reflected in the historical process, where different eras or civilizations often undergo similar stages of rise and fall, marked by cycles of turmoil and other patterns. Secondly, from the perspective of stage cycling, history is divided into several relatively independent yet interconnected stages, each with specific characteristics and driving forces for development. These stages may include periods of peace and prosperity, crisis and change, decline and reconstruction, and so on, which appear sequentially to form a cyclical process. The end of each stage presents an opportunity for the beginning of the next, reflecting the continuity and transformative nature of historical development. Thirdly, the theory of historical cycles emphasizes the regularity of historical development, suggesting that certain phenomena and events in the historical process can be predicted and explained. However, this does not mean that history is simply repetitive; on the contrary, it is full of complexity and contingency. Each historical stage has its unique background and conditions, which jointly shape the diversity of history. Fourthly, the theory of historical cycles also suggests that there may be some degree of repetition or similarity between different social forms.

Although the theory of historical cycles emphasizes cyclicity, it also acknowledges the accumulation of culture and the progress of human society. Humans constantly learn, innovate, accumulate, and drive society forward in each cycle. This development may manifest in technological innovation, ideological liberation, institutional improvement, and other aspects constituting the ladder of human civilization's progress. A potential flaw of this theory is that it may overemphasize the superficial similarities and periodicity of historical processes while ignoring the fundamental contradictions in historical development, which could lead to a one-sided understanding of the driving mechanisms of historical development. When applying the theory of historical cycles, it is essential to maintain critical thinking and consider comprehensively the complexity and diversity of historical development.

3.2 Complexity and Diversity of Historical Time

The current shift in historical research can be attributed to outstanding philosophical and theoretical precedents. Martin Heidegger proposes that the existence and ontological composition of the entire human consciousness are based on temporality (Heidegger, 2019). Since World War II, literary theorists, particularly narratologists, have begun conducting in-depth research on the temporal structure of texts. Wilhelm Pinder's ideas are closely aligned with the modern view of time. He believes that time has diversity. Today, it is widely believed that time is not a neutral, universal substance. In the emptiness of time, something called "history" emerges. On the contrary, time is a cultural construction that changes according to the situation, with its shape, structure, and texture constantly changing. This viewpoint has driven a highly active and diverse research field over the past 15 years, resulting in a significant shift in historical research, comparable

to the language and cultural turn that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s. It is one of the important links in the regular self-renewal of the discipline of history.

The works of Fernand Braudel, Jacques Le Goff, and other annalist historians have deepened and expanded these intuitions, developing people's keen understanding of time scales and structural diversity. In Brodard's view, the relationship between short-term interruptions, known as "events," and long-term continuity, defined as "eras," has become a central issue in the practice of historians. Legov explored the different temporal structures of occupation, worship, and religious practice.

3.3 The Impact of the Temporalization of History on the Writing of Art History Books

Kozelek proposed the temporalization of history (*Verzeitlichung der Geschichte*) through the theory of temporal hierarchy, revealing the complexity and dynamism of historical time. This theory inspires us to recognize that art history is not static, but rather dynamically evolving. Therefore, when writing art history, it is necessary to pay attention to the diversity and differences in cultural backgrounds across different historical periods and eras.

The influence of Kozelek's works on the study of temporal history is very prominent. He uses semantic changes to track epochal mutations in consciousness (Clark, 2022). He borrowed analytical categories from philosophy and literary theory and developed them into tools for calibrating the process of change - the "horizon of expectation" comes from Gadamer and Yaos' theory of reception; Timeliness, a term that represents both the characteristics of time (continuous movement, texture) and the conditions for the existence of time, derived from Heidegger; Timeization means the historicization of the past and present in modern times, originating from Arthur Oncken Lovejoy's. The Great Chain of Being. The concept of acceleration, a modern symbol of sensory perception, is associated with Nietzsche.

In the writing of art history, Kozelek's theory of temporal hierarchy has significantly influenced and inspired the writing of global art history. Firstly, it provides a multi-level understanding of time, dividing historical time into different levels, including short-term unique experiences, mid-term repeated experiences, and long-term levels (Fuberg, 2020). During the writing of art history, this multi-level understanding of time is applicable, allowing art historians to more comprehensively examine the evolution and development of artistic phenomena and styles at different time levels. Secondly, it emphasizes the dynamism and complexity of art history. Kozelek revealed the complexity and dynamism of historical time.

In summary, Kozelek's theory of temporal hierarchy provided a new perspective and method for art history. By exploring and analyzing different levels of time, the researcher can delve deeper into the connotations and values of artistic works. And make connections with history, culture, and society. It enables us to have a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics and complexity of art history, emphasizing the importance of historical background. Apply theory to the analysis of the evolution of art styles, as well as comparative studies across cultures and regions. And promoting the diversification of art history research. The study can gain a deeper understanding of the development and internal laws of art history. This is significant for promoting the progress and development of the art history discipline.

3.4 Time Narrative in Art History Writing

Time has been endowed with rich narrative functions in the art of writing history. It is an important clue that showcases artistic styles, cultural conflicts, and the evolution of fusion, bridging the past and the present. On the one hand, in art history, the narrative of time has helped art historians construct a continuous and orderly framework for it. Art historians can clearly outline the evolution trajectory of artistic styles, schools,

and trends by placing artworks in specific historical periods and social contexts. This narrative style presents a dynamic development process in art history, emphasizing the close connection between artworks and the spirit of their time. On the other hand, the narrative of time also reveals the diversity and complexity of art history. Throughout different historical periods, artworks often exhibit diverse styles and themes, reflecting the cultural diversity and shifts in societal aesthetic concepts of the time. Through the narrative of time, art historians can delve deeper into the underlying reasons behind these differences and changes, thus gaining a more comprehensive understanding of art history. The viewpoint of French interpreter Paul Ricoeur is insightful. He emphasized the subjectivity and psychological nature of time, a "stream of consciousness" time that is understood and interpreted within the narrative. This has profoundly impacted the concept of time in art history writing (Ricoeur, 2009). His concept of time and narrative has profoundly assisted writing art history, mainly reflected in two aspects: endowing time with narrative power. Paul Ricoeur employed narrative theory, particularly the poetics of narrative, to endow time with narrative qualities, thereby creating a new concept of time known as the time being narrated (Luo, 2019).

In writing art history, the concept is fundamental, emphasizing that art history is not merely a record of time, but also a process of reconstructing and interpreting the past through narrative. At the same time, it is no longer a simple linear sequence but is intertwined with various factors. Such as narrative, psychology, and culture. The writer of art history needs to be like a narrator, as it places elements such as artwork, art events, and artists in the context of time and uses narrative techniques to make them coherent and meaningful. Ricoeur's theory also resolves the opposition between cosmological time and psychological time. Cosmology emphasizes objectivity and linear progression of time, whereas psychological time focuses on the subjective feelings and experiences of individual time. This opposition also exists in the study of art history. Art history writing needs to balance these two temporal perspectives, respecting the objective historical process of artistic development while also delving into the subjective feelings of artists and audiences.

3.5 Time Hierarchy Theory Promotes the Diversified Development of Art History Writing

Time hierarchy theory in art history writing promotes the diversified development of art history research. Firstly, it is necessary to examine different time levels comprehensively. The core of the theory of time hierarchy lies in subdividing historical time into distinct levels, allowing for a more accurate grasp and interpretation of the temporal elements in artistic works. These levels do not exist in isolation but are intertwined and influence each other, jointly shaping the historical depth and cultural connotation of artistic works. Short-term memory typically includes an artist's recent creative and life experiences. These memories are relatively fresh and specific, often directly reflected in the artist's works, providing the audience with intuitive and authentic aesthetic feelings. At the level of short-term unique experience, we focus on the specific historical background and unique social environment in which artworks are created. The temporal factors at this level are often closely tied to the artist's personal experiences and creative intentions, as well as the prevailing political, economic, and cultural conditions of the time.

Through in-depth analysis at this level, we can gain a more accurate understanding of the characteristics of the times and the personalized expression of artistic works. Mid-term memory involves a broader range of historical backgrounds and social changes. By excavating and organizing memories at this level, artists can create works that convey a profound sense of history and cultural connotations, triggering resonance and reflection from the audience about past times. At this level, we focus on how the artistic style, techniques, and themes reflected in works of art gradually form and impact throughout history. By examining the mid-term period, we can gain a deeper understanding of the positioning and value of artworks in art history. The long-term level focuses on a broader historical and cultural background, examining the development of art history from a longer historical perspective and identifying the long-term trends and evolution laws of art styles.

Art writing typically explores how works of art reflect and inherit the deep structures and values of human civilization. The temporal factors at this level are often closely linked to profound cultural traditions, such as ethnicity, religion, and philosophy, endowing artistic works with significant historical and cultural connotations. This level of memory often manifests in artistic works as symbols, symbolism, or traditional customs, offering the audience an aesthetic experience that transcends time and space.

Secondly, comparative studies across cultures and regions should be conducted. To use the theory of time hierarchy, the research compares the art history of different cultures and regions. By comparing the artistic styles, schools, and works of different cultures and regions across various time periods, the research aims to reveal their commonalities and differences, as well as how they have been influenced by historical contexts. It is possible to compare the styles and techniques of Chinese and Western painting across different historical periods, analyze their mutual influence and integration, examine the development and evolution of folk art in various regions over time, and explore their inheritance and variation.

4. The Relationship between the Levels of Historical Time and the Stages of Art History

The relationship between art history is complex and interdependent, involving the temporal hierarchy of historical time and the historical stages. Firstly, the temporal hierarchy of historical time is an overall summary of the development process of human history, it is divided according to the main characteristics and events of history. This division method helps us understand and grasp the historical development's context and phased characteristics. Historical times can be divided into several stages, including prehistoric, ancient, medieval, modern, contemporary, and others. The periodization of art history encompasses not only material organization but also reflects the perspective and methodology of the field. The names of the stages are not arbitrary; they are standardized and were influenced by historical philosophy. The installment reflects the researcher's historical perspective, research orientation, and understanding of the logic within the field of art history. Historical times can be divided into several stages, including prehistoric, ancient, medieval, modern, contemporary, and others. The periodization of it is not only about material organization but also reflects the perspective and methodology.

The division of periods in art history is necessary as it provides a framework to organize materials and interpret the evolution of artistic styles and schools. Although there are various staging methods, each method has its inherent limitations. Given the complexity and diversity of art history, no staging method can fully and accurately describe its entirety. Different staging methods emphasize different historical stages and artistic features, showcasing the diversity of art history narratives. This diversity and complexity make art history research an attractive and inspiring field, encouraging us to delve deeper into the historical development of art. Therefore, an open and critical attitude is necessary when examining the relationship between historical time levels and stages of art history. The temporal hierarchy of history and the periodization of art history are subjective interpretations of the historical development process, which must be analyzed in conjunction with specific historical and cultural contexts to comprehensively grasp the development trajectory and internal logic of art history.

When considering the periodization method, a dialectical consciousness is needed to examine the complexity and multi-level nature of historical time in art history. Firstly, when discussing the installment issue, it is important to distinguish the category of the object of discussion. Secondly, in the context of historical periodization, it is not necessary to demand consistency, and in fact, it is not always easy to achieve it. From the perspective of historical time, continuous art history is divided into paragraphs from a specific angle. Hence, the periodization of art history as a form of knowledge has an anti-historical nature. Due to this nature, evaluating historical periodization is challenging in measuring whether it is "correct" or not.

However, it should be measured by whether it is "desirable" or not, so that it can be measured by the degree to which it contributes to the narrative and interpretation of art history. This result can avoid the strict exclusivity of installment payments. At the same time, this makes art periodization a selective and instrumental process in compiling art history. The periodization system based on theories outside of history is not grounded in the principles and methods of art history, nor can it make comprehensive judgments based on these principles and methods.

There is an interdependent and intersecting relationship between the levels of historical time and the stages of art history. Firstly, the theory of temporal hierarchy provides a macro background and framework for the historical periodization of art history. The development of art history is deeply rooted in the long river of historical time, and each stage of art history corresponds to a specific historical period and its corresponding cultural background. At the same time, the historical periodization of art history also enriches the connotation of historical time levels, enabling us to have a deeper understanding and perception of the diversity and complexity of history. Secondly, in some cases, the temporal hierarchy of historical time and the historical stages of art history may intersect or merge. For example, multiple art styles and schools may exist simultaneously during a specific historical period. These styles and schools are independent of each other yet influence one another, forming a rich picture of art history during that period. Similarly, in some stages of art history, there may also be the crossing and integration of multiple historical periods, presenting a more complex historical landscape.

5. Results and Discussion

This article explores the temporal hierarchy theory in art history and its connection to the writing and staging of art history, highlighting the dynamic relationship between art and society. Art reflects the spirit of the times and mirrors social change. It conducted a detailed analysis of artworks from various periods, aiming to uncover the underlying social structures and cultural motivations behind the evolution of artistic styles. The study emphasizes that art history is a linear description of historical facts and phenomena and a deep exploration of the historical motivations and visible forms behind artistic phenomena (Kou, L. Y, 2023). It also discusses the theoretical construction of art history periodization, noting that art history periodization reflects the concepts and methodologies of art historians and is not merely a matter of material organization. The dialectical relationship between the methodology of art history writing and historical time suggests that the temporal process of art history is shaped by diverse artistic styles, schools, and intellectual trends across different periods. The dual significance of art history lies in its ability to record, narrate, and explain past art events.

Finally, the research raises the issue of time narrative in art history writing, emphasizing the narrative and psychological nature of time in art history writing. And the role of time hierarchy theory in promoting the diversified development of it. British historian Collingwood also emphasized the nonobjectivity of historical time, believing that historical time is characterized by subjectivity, relativity, and continuity (Wood, C. 1946). Although Kozelek acknowledges the existence of a certain continuity in history, he is more concerned with the breaks and changes that occur within it. He believed that historical periods have different "experience spaces" and "expected horizons," which can lead to the rupture and discontinuity of historical time. The development of history is not a smooth, linear process, but rather one full of various mutations and turning points (Kozelek, 1979). The article argues that art history's historical time is a complex structure interwoven with multiple lines, which lays the foundation for its methodology and promotes its ongoing updating and development. The periodization of art history should not be seen as an absolute boundary but rather as individual observation points in understanding the dynamic process of art development.

This study extends the discussion of the relationship between historical time and the stages of art history development, highlighting that this relationship is not static but evolves through continuous interaction.

Through in-depth analysis of these observation points, we can reveal how historical time shapes the form and content of art in different socio-cultural contexts, thereby influencing the narrative style of art history. The concept of time, comprising experience space and expected horizon, encompasses a range of social, cultural, and political factors, highlighting the diversity and differences of narrative time across various social contexts and cultural backgrounds, with more nuanced and complex connotations. At the same time, this also presents us with an opportunity for reflection, to re-examine the concept of time in art history writing, and to consider the relationship between the two dialectically.

Due to the article's limited length, it cannot fully explore all aspects of the theory of temporal hierarchy in art history research. However, the writing of art history should not be isolated from time. It requires us to have a deep understanding of the fluidity of time and its role in artistic creation and historical interpretation. By examining historical time from multiple dimensions, we can more sensitively capture the subtleties of artistic change, thus seeking a dynamic balance between staging and narrative, endowing art history with richer connotations and broader perspectives. In this process, art historians are not only narrators but also interlocutors, constantly communicating and reflecting on history. This will be an important direction for future research.

6. Conclusion

The historical time of art history is a complex structure interwoven with multiple lines. Art history is driven by real history, presented history, and dissolved by the history of ideas and descriptions. Historical times laid the foundation for methodology and promoted its renewal and development. The diversity of stages is not only due to the varying degrees of emphasis placed by art historians on internal and external factors, but even when dividing based on the evolution of the structural form of artworks, there will still be diversity in stages, as structural form norms include many aspects, and different art historians' emphasis on different aspects will also present different stages of art history. Objectivity is more appropriate and realistic in terms of whether it is consistent with the criteria selected by the editor rather than being a relatively real history. Furthermore, the view that any art history is only a part of the overall history of art. This understanding prompts a greater focus on the traces of interaction between art and society in research, as well as an understanding of the birth and development of artworks within a socio-cultural context.

The theory of temporal hierarchy provides a new methodological perspective for writing art history. By exploring and analyzing different temporal levels, we can delve deeper into the connotations and values of artistic works and their connections to history, culture, and society. Therefore, the narration of art history is a retrospective of the past and a revelation of the present. It enables us to extract the laws of art development from the long river of history, providing richer perspectives and dimensions for observing and interpreting contemporary art. Therefore, researchers should pay attention to the immediacy of art history writing, integrate the concept of historical time into the analysis of artistic phenomena, and explore cultural symbols that have been given different meanings in different periods. This exploration helps reveal how art reflects social changes and how its inherent value and influence are manifested over time, capturing the context of artistic development in history and providing insight into its diverse facets in different cultural contexts.

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