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Interpretation and appreciation of contemporary art:
A comparative study between art history students and law students

Abstract

The non-canonized contemporary art appears to challenge previous studies on interpretation and appreciation of art. It is widely known that art viewers are required to have some knowledge background or cultural capital in order to decipher works of art. Further, context of art (physical context or discursive text) becomes another important factor as it can signal value and meaning of the works. However, the situation of contemporary art (as it is diversified in forms, content and deviates from other established canons) raises the question whether the previous studies on interpretation and appreciation of art are still applicable in the present context or not. Therefore, this research master thesis proposes a study on the interpretation and appreciation of contemporary art: a comparative study between art history students and law students.

It aims to observe the interpretation process of contemporary art viewers and to search for validated factors (knowledge of art, context of art and artworks) that facilitate the viewers to interpret and appreciate artworks. The interview is specifically designed to test the role of prime factors that affect interpretation and appreciation of contemporary art and to observe the interpretation process of contemporary art viewers. In-depth interviews with 18 respondents (9 art history students and 9 law students) from Dutch universities were conducted. The respondents from both groups were asked to view three contemporary artworks under certain conditions and later to interpret and express their view on the work that they saw. These data were analyzed and compared to each other to observe differences and similarities in the interpretation and appreciation of viewers with and without art background. Results reveal that interpretation processes of both group are quite similar to one another. Cultural capital (knowledge background in art) may help viewers with art background to decipher the artworks. However, it is not as significant as everyday life experience, since the latter is applied the most by the respondents from both groups to interpret and appreciate the works. The results also indicate that the presentation context of art may affect interpretations of the respondent if it matches with the respondents' background.

Keywords: Interpretation and appreciation of art, knowledge background, general background, and context of art

Content

1. Introduction

The study of interpretation and appreciation of art has been of interest to scholars in different fields such as aesthetics, cognitive psychology and sociology. Theories and previous research that attempt to clarify this subject have mostly studied this topic in the context of conventional art or conventional aesthetics. It is generally known that contemporary art is highly diversified in its formats (i.e. painting, sculpture, installation art, mixed media, video art, happening etc.) and its subjects, which results in largely non-canonized works. This makes an undefinable contemporary aesthetic different from conventional aesthetics. The situation of contemporary art seems to imply that research in the past on this topic may no longer be adequate for understanding the interpretation and appreciation of contemporary art. Therefore, this research project proposes a comparative study on interpretation and appreciation of contemporary art from art history students and law students.

The paper consists of five sections. Firstly, it begins with a literature review to present theoretical views on art perception from three main approaches: aesthetics, cognitive psychology and sociology. Within the broad area of art perception from leading theories, the topic mainly encompasses perception, interpretation and the resulting appreciation of art. Secondly, the paper attempts to formulate shared aspects in perception, interpretation and appreciation of art addressed by the three approaches. Further, the discussion also involves problematic issues found in the review of the selected works in the previous section and as a consequence, research questions are stated. Thirdly, research operationalization is introduced. In this section, method, data collection and data analysis of this research are clarified. Fourthly, results from the data analysis are presented. The presentation of the results is divided into two sub-sections. The first section deals with a presentation of interpretation and appreciation from art history respondents and law respondents. A comparative view is discussed in this section as well. For the second section, effects of conditions under which artworks are presented and of the type of artwork in relation to interpretation and appreciation of art are revealed. The last part of this paper is reserved for discussion and answers to the central questions of this research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Art perception from aesthetic points of view

This section explores meaning construction from the most influential aesthetic points of view. To be precise, meaning construction, perception and interpretation of art, which are discussed in this section, primarily focus on explanations from formalist, expressionist, and pragmatist perspectives. The formalist and expressionist views are considered the prominent approaches in the field of aesthetics from the late 19th and early 20th century onward (Carroll, 1999). Since that time, traditional aesthetic theories (i.e. representational theories) were no longer applicable for evaluating new art movements. Both formalist and expressionist views developed in response to new art movements (i.e. Impressionism, Expressionism, Abstract art and etc.). Not as popular as the first two approaches, however, the pragmatist view on aesthetics and the role of art appears to lean more toward viewers' perspectives than other approaches. In general, aesthetic views consider art perception and interpretation as an interaction between artworks or/and artists, and audiences. Distinctions between these approaches are based on the fact that they emphasize the significance of artworks, artists, and art viewers differently. For instance, the formalist approach (i.e. Bell, 1913) considers the element of form in an artwork as the most important factor that can provide art viewers' with both meaning and aesthetic experience. Expressionist scholars pay greater attention to artists' emotions that are transmitted to works of art and stress communication between the works and/or the artists and audiences.

Construction of meaning from an aesthetic view

Before discussing art perception from formalist, expressionist and pragmatist perspectives, it is important to start with the notion of the construction of meaning in art from the aesthetic approach in general. Regarding this issue, Robert E. Innis (2001) provides a clear explanation. According to Innis, works of art contain signs that viewers are re-quired to interpret them in order to have an aesthetic experience and grasp the meaning of art. In order to interpret the works, viewers must be skillful to do so, as the process of interpretation is quite complex. One explanation is that art contains "language of a very specific sense" or "intuitive symbols" (Cassirer 1979 in Innis), so viewers who lack background on this type of language may not be able to fully understand art.

The process of interpretation involves three stages, which are perceptual, hermeneutic and semiotic. The perceptual stage entails recognition and familiarity with the form of a work. These elements in the work are supposed to attract viewers and invite them to find meaning in the work, which eventually leads them into the hermeneutic stage. Understanding the work (the hermeneutic stage), which may require time, starts with an engagement with the feeling embedded in the work itself. After that, the viewers start to contemplate the work in order to absorb complex signs or symbols in the work. The symbols reside in

'the interpretation spaces'. The last stage is semiotic, which entails the comprehension of the symbolic meanings of the work. One can say that after the process has been successfully fulfilled, the viewers appear to generate meaning out of the art object and tend to obtain an aesthetic experience as a result.

Art perception from the formalist perspective

As mentioned above, the formalist approach pays special attention to forms of art. Visual organization and forms of art are quintessential for this approach (Carroll, 1999). Viewing significant forms in artworks results in a transcendence of viewers' feelings to an aesthetic experience. In this sense, artworks become sources for viewers to generate emotional reactions, but these are thought to be a particular class of aesthetic emotions that should not be confounded with everyday sentiments.

In "Art and Significant Form", Bell (1913) explicates a common quality in art that generates viewers' aesthetic emotions. The common quality that distinguishes artworks from other objects is their 'significant form'. For Bell, the concept of significant form refers to an arrangement and combination of form, created by an artist that can stir the 'aesthetic emotion'. Not all artworks generate the aesthetic emotion; only those with significant forms (lines, colors and forms) have the potential to create such an emotion. Further, a work of art that represents an idea or a picture of life can only evoke an emotion of life, for which Bell sees no place in art, not an emotion of aesthetics. The significant form of art would ideally transcend viewers' mundane emotion to an aesthetic emotion. Having a background/knowledge of art (lines and colors) would indeed facilitate achieving aesthetic emotions. Nonetheless, Bell claims that viewers without knowledge in art can attain the aesthetic emotions too if an artwork has a significant form that can transcend the viewers' emotion into an aesthetic emotion. In order to attain a state of 'aesthetic ecstasy', Bell (1913) suggests that viewers must leave mundane feelings behind and open up to experiencing significant forms of art.

Art perception from the expressionist perspective

Generally speaking, the expressionist perspective believes that a work of art communicates with viewers. To be precise, scholars and artists advocating expression theory such as Tolstoy (18281910), Collingwood (1889-1943) and Langer (1895-1985) believe that art expresses artists' feelings and emotions (Khatchadourian, 1965; and Freeland, 2001). These feelings and emotions are also known as anthropomorphic qualities, as works of art are deemed able to communicate human qualities or humanistic properties (Carroll, 1999). The artists present their feelings in a form of exemplification, which contains symbolical language. For this reason, the artworks are a representation of symbolical language that artists apply to communicate their feelings and emotions with viewers.

By formulating notions from expressionist scholars, Khatchadourian (1965) summarizes the core of the expressionist approach into 'three major theses'. Firstly, a "creative act" of an artist is a process during which the artist expresses feeling. This feeling is transmitted from the artist to the work. Therefore, the second thesis claims that the artwork is an outcome of expressions from the artist's feelings. The last thesis, thus, assumes that the artists' emotions and feelings in the works can be transmitted to qualified viewers and observers. Regarding this assumption, expression theory seems to work well with certain styles of art, such as Abstract Expressionism, which mostly deals with the expressiveness and subjectivity of an artist (Freeland, 2001).

One can say that formalist and expressionist approaches share a common notion in some aspects. That is – both approaches consider that meaning (emotional outcome) lies in works of art. What makes expression theory different from the formalist approach is that the expressionists pay attention to the emotions of artists rather than limiting themselves to the intrinsic value of an artwork (form of art), as promoted by the formalists. In sum, meaning construction based on the expression theory stems from communication between artists and viewers. It should be noted that only qualified viewers who have relevant background knowledge on artists and their work can interpret the meanings artists' express in artworks (Khatchadourian, 1965; and Freeland, 2001).

Art perception from a pragmatist perspective

The pragmatist approach rather concentrates on theory in relation to practice (Freeland, 2001). Subject-matter (content) in works of art is essential in this approach (Isenberg, 1944). Pragmatists point out that art provides knowledge, and focus on communication between art (content of art) and viewers. In this sense, expressionism and pragmatism may share a common ground. Nonetheless, pragmatists only focus on communication that presents relevant language to general viewers.

A leading scholar in this approach is John Dewey, whose primary focus is on the relationship between content of artworks and viewers' experiences. As opposed to the formalist view, Dewey (1934) proposes that experience in art cannot be separated from life-experience. Thus, the content and meaning of art, produced by artists, should be related to life-experience and should be objective.

As discussed, according to the formalist view, meaning of art appears to transcend viewers into the realm of extraordinary experience. Dewey (1934) responds to this aspect by arguing that art should be more integrated in every life, like it once had been. Shifts in the status of art from community based to status based resulted from nationalism, imperialism, modern society, capitalism and economic cosmopolitanism. These ideologies have treated art as signifying status, power and greatness of nations, communities, and individuals. As a result, the modern circumstances have created a gap between "ordinary and esthetic experience". Further, art theorists play a significant role in terms of creating this gap between arts

and experience as well. For Dewey, aesthetic quality and experience reside in our daily experience. In order to understand art, one may have to leave these dominant ideologies and theories behind, and get back to a raw feeling that comes from the interaction between the object and human life as lived by the "living creatures". In other words, art viewers construct meanings regarding artworks based on their everyday life experience.

Although Dewey's view on the content of artworks (as it should contain more objective content) appears to democratize the high status of art (i.e. criticizing the superiority of significant form and the supremacy of artists) and to strengthen the relationship between art and general viewers, his view seems irrelevant for the interpretation of some art movements. Jacobsen (1960) briefly discusses Dewey's claim that artworks need to contain objective content in order to provide relevant experiences to audiences. Jacobsen argues that the rise of new abstract art movements does not fit the explanation from Dewey. Art as experience as laid out by Dewey may not be very useful as a framework for interpreting abstract art, since this art movement primarily deals with non-objective content (Jacobsen, 1960).

2.2 Art perception from a cognitive approach

Quite different from aesthetic approaches (which often focus on meaning construction from artworks and artists' stances), the meaning construction from the cognitive approach pays close attention to the process of how viewers perceive and interpret works of art. In general, studies on the interpretation of art under the sphere of cognition can be divided into two approaches, which are (1) cognitive psychology and (2) social cognition. Cognitive psychology fundamentally takes a psychological stance to investigate the interpretation process and to observe factors that interplay in this process, whereas social cognition deals with studies that mainly focus on attitudes and meaning, defined by various groups of people. It is important to note that the literature review in this section only discusses art interpretation as dealt with in cognitive psychology. This is due to the fact that my research rather focuses on viewers' interpreting competences than on meanings of art defined by different social groups.

Meaning construction and the model of aesthetic appreciation

In general, viewers' interpretation of art is a result from an interaction between viewers and perceptual stimuli. Leder et al. (2004) proposed a model of aesthetic appreciation that mainly focuses on the appreciation of modern art. According to these authors, an analysis of aesthetic experience is primarily based on a cognitive point of view. Unlike the past with its more defined movements (i.e. Expressionism, Realism, etc.), modern art is highly individualized, which has lead to the 'disappearance' of content. Therefore, it is highly interesting to pay special attention to the interpretation of modern art.

Leder et al. (2004) offer a model to generate meaning in art based on an individual perspective (viewers with knowledge backgrounds, i.e. art experts). The model of aesthetic experience contains five stages; (1) perception, (2) implicit classification, (3) explicit classification, (4) cognitive mastering and evaluation, and (5) affective and emotional processing. Implicit classification, which primarily deals with classification of perceptual stimuli at an unconscious level, comes after viewers' perception of art (i.e. line, colors and composition). Explicit classification, a stage where the viewers apply their 'expertise' or 'knowledge' to classify the stimuli, follows when viewers attempt to analyze the content and style of an artwork. Later, the process moves to cognitive mastering and evaluation, which is an interpretation stage where people apply their cognitive experience to interpret the perceptual stimuli. These cognitive mastering and evaluation are normally 'feedback-loop' processing in order to come up with a satisfied outcome. Affective and emotional processing appears to be the end result of this process delivering an aesthetic experience to the viewer.

In addition to the model of Leder et al., an emphasis on the significance of the interaction between the fourth stage (cognition mastering and evaluation) and the fifth stage (affective and emotional processing) is also pointed out in a recent work from Hagtvedt et al. (2008). Hagtvedt et al. develop a theoretical framework, presented as a structural model, in order to study the perception and evaluation of art by viewers without a background in the arts. The authors conducted the research by providing respondents with five figurative paintings and asking for their appreciations. Their final model of artistic appreciation reveals that the interaction between emotional factors and cognitive factors results in evaluation of art. It appears that both cognitive and emotional factors correlate well with the overall evaluation of art.

Context of art

Regarding the cognitive approach, context of art greatly influences ways of the interpretation of art. "Art is always viewed in context" (Solso 1994: 101). It becomes explicit that context helps viewers form their interpretation and reaction to works of art. According to Solso (1994), context can be categorized in two kinds. That is – (1) physical context and (2) internal context (Solso calls this internal context "higher-order cognition"). The physical context (i.e. brightness in paintings) is an important factor to construct "basic perception". Brightness contrasts in pictures, an example of physical context, can affect viewers' perception. Contrast becomes an artistic strategy in order to highlight some elements in an artwork. By perceiving contrast in art, viewers can select specific elements in art and interpret the meaning of a work. Regarding the internal context, the term can be construed as viewers' knowledge backgrounds and individual capacity to understand art.

The way viewers construct meaning in art, either from internal context or physical context, is generally referred to as "top-down processing". This process occurs when viewers use their schemata (background knowledge) to interpret and understand art. Artists can

in fact play with these schemata by using visual dissonance in their works. In general, viewers are assumed to read works of art based on their expectations or their schemata (Solso, 1994). That is why the interpretation process is called top-down processing. Levels of interpretation are also varied depending on viewers' intellectual background.

In sum, the cognitive approach deviates from the explanations from the aesthetic approach by focusing on perception and interpretation of art by the viewers. Further, the approach allows us to learn how individuals interpret and appreciate works of art, and which factors determine this process to be successful.

2.3 Art perception from a sociological point of view

From the sociological perspective, viewers' competence to understand and interpret art is determined by their social classifications. This means that social factors affect viewers' capacity to understand and interpret art (artistic competence). It is generally understood that viewers who come from a dominant class are proficient in appreciating and decoding art (especially high art forms), whereas those who are from a lower class would have less capacity to appreciate art.

Construction of meaning and the concept of cultural capital

Based on Bourdieu's (1984) well-known 'cultural capital' theory, people who have more cultural capital are better able to interpret and appreciate art. This is because artworks are regarded as cultural objects that contain cultural codes or symbolic meaning. Therefore, viewers should have a certain knowledge or cultural capital, gained from education or family socialization, connected with cultural codes in order to interpret artworks. The interpretation of art primarily entails a "deciphering operation" (Bourdieu, 1984). To achieve a successful deciphering, viewers' knowledge of cultural codes must match the cultural code contained in works of art. Those without the relevant backgrounds tend to dismiss the significance of art and tend to misinterpret the work.

According to Bourdieu (1984), the symbolic meaning contains a complex code, which is created by a master artist. As a result, the process of deciphering also deals with these complex codes in works of art. The complex code or concept of art resides in "the sphere of the meaning of the signified" (Bourdieu, 1984). Additionally, the works are significant on different levels, depending on audiences' ability to decode meaning of artworks as well as artistic competence. In other words, values of art are regarded differently depending on viewers' knowledge of the complex code or concept of art.

In order to obtain artistic competence, viewers must be taught to properly appropriate the work either through socialization by their parents and/or institutions such as school. It should be noted that these primary and secondary socialization processes happen slowly and through time. By repeatedly viewing art, familiarization in art brings a person a

sort of internalized understanding of art, which, in this case, usually occurs at an unconscious level. Perceiving art can bring 'enjoyment' and 'delight' (Bourdieu, 1984). While enjoyment is available to general viewers, delight is largely reserved for expert viewers.

Art preferences from other perspectives

Art competence and preferences in art are not completely determined by social classification as indicated by the cultural capital theory. It appears that there are other factors (such as social orientations and age) that may directly affect viewers' artistic competence and preferences in art (Van Eijck, 2011; Mason and McCarthy, 2005). Further, preferences in high art forms do not necessarily result in high art competence (Halle, 1993).

Halle (1993) conducted research to explore audiences' attitude toward abstract art by looking at which art people had in their homes and searching for reasons why they liked or disliked it. His findings present an interesting point, in that they only partly match the cultural capital theory. Halle, found that owning abstract art was restricted to upper class urban dwellers. However, the reasons respondents gave for appreciating abstract art contradicted the expectations that might be based on both Bourdieu as well as much of aesthetic theory. That is – more than half of the respondents who displayed abstract art at homes considered the paintings as decoration. Halle's critical remark towards this deviant result (from the point of view of cultural capital theory) is that not all art appreciation and cultural tastes are based on social classification or social hierarchy (Halle, 1993). There can be other reasons why people appreciate art, (or in Halle's case, display abstract art at homes), or why they do not appreciate art at all. It seems difficult to deduce modes of appropriation and meaning construction from over cultural behavior. Furthermore, in addition to class differentiation, scholars have also identified other sources of differentiation is cultural tastes, such as religion, social identity, or age (Van Eijck, 2011; Mason and McCarthy, 2005).

Art interpretation and contextualization

Similar to the observation from cognitive psychology, sociologists also consider the context of art as an influential factor in a process of perception and interpretation of artworks. While cognitive psychology rather focuses on the interaction between context inside works of art (i.e. artistic styles) and individual capacity to appropriate art, sociologists appear to be interested in how (social) context surrounding the works has influenced viewers' appreciation. In their recent research, Berghman et al. (2010) study the impact of modalities of presentation of art or contexts of art (physical context and discursive text) on the appreciation of unknown artworks. They test the idea whether these modalities (physical context [i.e. museum or publication] or discursive text [i.e. captions accompanying artworks]) affect the perceived symbolic value of the works. Thus, these contexts can give viewers a clue as to the symbolic value of unknown works of art. In order to test their assumptions, Berghman et al. (2010) conducted a pilot study to observe whether context of art (discursive modali-

ties) affects viewers appreciation or not. The results revealed that modalities (in this case discursive texts accompanying the paintings), affected the perceived quality of symbolic value of the works.

Not only the discursive text and physical context of artworks signal value in art, there is also another context that appears to facilitate the process of interpretation and realizing the value of artworks. This type of context is presented in a form of "socially organized interaction" between art viewers. Heath and Vom Lehn (2004) conducted a study on the importance of the context of interaction between viewers while viewing works of art. This interaction becomes a source of gaining meaning from art and attaining aesthetic experience. In their research, Heath and Vom Lehn (2004) conduct a study of video recordings and field observations in British and French museums and galleries to study the interaction between visitors. Interestingly, the results reveal that experiences of viewers are generated by interaction with other persons. According to Heath and Vom Lehn, the interaction with other persons constructs a context that helps the viewer to frame their understanding towards artworks or exhibitions.

3. Research problem and research questions

The literature review aimed to get a broad view of the studies that focus on perception, interpretation, and appreciation of art. Therefore, this research selected the works from aesthetics, cognitive psychology and sociology. To understand these issues, the three approaches address two important aspects: (1) the process of interpretation which later results in aesthetic experience or appreciation of art and (2) the characteristics that influence this process.

For the first aspect, we have already been informed about the process of interpretation from the aesthetic, the cognitive and the sociological points of view. The explanations of the process from the three fields are homogenous to some degree. These clarifications appear to provide a broad but relevant framework for us to understand the process of interpretation. By formulating the explanations from the two approaches, the process generally involves (1) a perceptual stage, (2) a decoding stage and (3) a comprehension stage. A successful interpretation normally bring viewers an aesthetic experience/emotion (aesthetic view and sociological view), personal satisfaction and self-rewarding (cognitive psychology), and leads to a realizing of the values of the art (sociological view).

Secondly, there are three primary variables affecting and facilitating the process of interpretation and appreciation of art. These are – (1) artworks, (2) relevant background/cultural capital and (3) context of art. The aesthetic approaches believe that the work of art itself provides meaning and appreciation for viewers. Within the sphere of artworks, visual organizations (formalist approach), contents (expressionist and pragmatist perspectives) and external context (cognitive approach) of artworks are regarded to be sources providing viewers with meaning and aesthetic experience. However, if the viewers are not familiar with works of art, artists, or languages presented in the works, it is difficult for them to achieve meaning of art and aesthetic experience.

As a result, this leads to a rise of an important aspect of the second variable, viewers' background in art. In relation to the artworks, relevant background has been emphasized by all three approaches, despite the fact different terms are used to indicate this aspect (familiarization, recognizability, internal context, habitus or cultural capital). This is because artworks are considered as an object that contains signs (Innis, 2001), anthropomorphic properties (Carroll, 1999), or cultural codes (Bourdieu, 1984). Thus, only qualified viewers are capable of interpreting and appreciating the work. It appears that the relevant background seems to be the most significant factor in comparison to the others. As also stressed by the aesthetic theorists, without familiarity with art or knowledge of artists, viewers tend to be unable to interpret, appreciate and recognize value of art.

Context of art appears to be as important as the artwork and background in art. Sociology pays attention to the context of art, which can be in the form of physical context or

discursive text. The context offers suggestions regarding the meaning and value of art. This type of context is especially influential when viewing unknown works because it can signal the value of works, in which case it may result in appreciation of artworks that people may find hard to judge otherwise (Berghman et al., 2010).

To connect the literature review with the study of contemporary art viewers, the situation of contemporary art as a highly diversified and ongoing movement appears to challenge the existing theories regarding the interpretation process and the variables that affect viewers' interpretation of art to some degree. Concerning the interpretation process, it appears that the previous research on interpretation of art or appreciation of art conducted studies by using paintings as the main perceptual stimulus (Halle, 1993; Leder et. al 2004; Hagtvedt et al., 2008; Berghman et al. 2010). Thus, it is doubtful whether the interpretation process still remains the same if viewers view other types of artwork (i.e. installation art, happening art, or media art).

Unlike other established movements (i.e. Impressionism, Expressionism, Abstract etc), contemporary art is still in a defining process, and is diversified and highly artistic/subject-based, as argued by and Leder et al (2004). This situation of canonizing the movement and the knowledge raises questions about the usefulness of the three variables. These questions include: (1) can viewers interpret contemporary art without adequate information about these typically non-canonized artworks; (2) how do artworks, backgrounds and contexts of art actually interact with contemporary art viewers; (3) how can the often rather alienating contemporary art provide aesthetic experience and meaning to viewers; (4) is knowledge background downplayed in interpreting contemporary art due to the un-canonized situation and concomitant lack of generally accepted criteria; and (5) as a consequence of this insecurity, is context of art becoming the most important criterion people have at their disposal when evaluating art at the expense of the other two?

In order to observe the interpretation of contemporary art and assess the role of the three variables in relation to contemporary art, this research proposes a comparative study on perception and interpretation of contemporary art viewers with and without art background. The research questions are: (1) how do viewers with/without art background interpret and appreciate contemporary art?, and (2) how do the three variables, especially context of art and background, affect interpretation and appreciation of contemporary art viewers with/without art background?

4. Research Operationalization

4.1 Method and perceptual stimuli

Method

The aim of this research project is to study interpretation processes and the role played therein by the artwork, the personal background, and the context in contemporary art viewing. A qualitative approach is the most suitable method for this research. The semi-standardized interview[1] is selected to be the main tool for data collection, in which it allows us to observe respondents' interpretation process.

In order to examine whether the variables, especially background and context of art, still influence contemporary art viewers' interpretation and appreciation or not, the experimental interview is specifically designed to achieve the purpose of this research. It is essential to use the experimental interview in order to systematically vary contexts for artworks. Interviews with art history students and law students were conducted. By applying the method used in the pilot study of contextualization of art from Berghman et al.'s research project, in an interview session each respondent was asked to view three different contemporary artworks under different conditions (untitled, titled and description condition). There are always two respondents (one art history student and one law student) who viewed the same artwork in the same conditions. After having viewed each artwork, the respondents were asked to interpret and express their view on the work they had seen.

The fieldwork of this research was conducted during one month. Nine art history students and nine law students from Dutch universities were recruited through visiting an art class and through social networks of their study programs. The interviews took place at locations of the respondents' preferences. Additionally, each interview lasted from 20 minutes to 30 minutes.

Stimulus samples

Contemporary art and its diversification are the main criteria for selecting the perceptual stimuli in this research. Nine perceptual stimuli were selected from the online catalogue of the Netherlands Media Art Institute. All perceptual stimuli are presented in digital (video) format. The perceptual stimuli can be categorized into three types of work: (1) non-representational video art (NR), (2) representational video art and installation art (R), and (3) documentations of installation art, performance art and interactive installation art (D)[2]. The three types of artwork are selected to reveal (if there are) distinctions of interpretation and

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[1] Sample of interview questions can be found in the Appendix A.

[2] Names and information of nine perceptual stimuli are presented in the Appendix B.

appreciation of contemporary art between respondents with and without artistic background. The representational works are expected to be mostly appreciated by respondents without background since they are figurative and less complicated to interpret. On the contrary, the non-representational and documentations of installation art, performance art and interactive installation art should be more appreciated by respondents with art background because the works contain abstract elements, for which they appear to require "qualified viewers". For the first two types, length of the perceptual stimuli is 30 seconds. For documentations, the perceptual stimuli lasted from five to nine minutes.

Each stimulus was presented under three conditions (untitled (C1), titled (C2) and description (C3) conditions) that were systematically varied across the two groups of students. While the untitled condition represents a non-contextual condition, the titled condition is set to provide some context for interpretations of the respondents. The description condition is regarded as the most informative condition compared to the other two. In the description condition, the respondents were informed about names and concepts of perceptual stimuli. By comparing these different conditions, it can be observed how context affects the respondents' interpretation and appreciation of art. Respondents and lists of viewed perceptual stimuli and their conditions are presented in Table1.

Table1: Respondents and list of viewed artworks and conditions

AH	L	Artwork/Conditions of artwork
AH1	L1	NR1 – C1 + R1 – C2 + D1 – C3
AH2	L2	NR1 – C2 + R1 – C3 + D1 – C1
AH3	L3	NR1 – C3 + R1 – C1 + D1 – C2
AH4	L4	NR2 – C1 + R2 – C2 + D2 – C3
AH5	L5	NR2 – C2 + R2 – C3 + D3 – C1
AH6	L6	NR2 – C3 + R2 – C1 + D2 – C2
AH7	L7	NR3 – C1 + R3 – C3 + D3 – C2
AH8	L8	NR3 – C3 + R3 – C2 + D3 – C1
AH9	L9	NR3 – C2 + R3 – C1 + D3 – C3

AH = Art history respondent L= Law respondent

4.2 Data collection and data analysis

Data collection

The data collection[3] comprises interviews with eighteen respondents: nine art history students (AH) and nine law students (L). There are thirteen female respondents and five male respondents. The ages of the respondents vary between 19 and 35. Nine art history respondents and three law respondents are Dutch students. The five international law respondents

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[3] Respondents' information can be found in the Appendix C.

are from European countries. One international law respondent comes from Mexico. The levels of education of the respondents are either bachelor or master study. While six art history respondents and nine law respondents are currently pursuing a master degree, only three art history respondents are enrolled in a bachelor program. It should be noted that two law students have a background in art. One law student (L6) has a bachelor degree in film studies, the other (L8) enjoys paintings as a hobby.

Data Analysis

All interviews have been transcribed. Data analysis proceeded in two stages. In the first stage, the interviews were divided into the two groups. The respondents from each group were analyzed together to observe processes and patterns of interpretation and appreciation of the perceptual stimuli. The second stage involved comparison of interpretation and appreciation of the perceptual stimuli between the respondents from art history and law. To assess the effect of the condition of art (context of art), this stage entails the analysis of three conditions of each artwork, viewed by the respondents from both groups. In this way, the results are expected to reveal how interpretation and appreciation are affected by conditions of the work and by the differences in background. As for conditions of art (context of art), types of the work (Representation (R), Non-representation (NR) and Documentation (D)) are also closely observed in order to know whether they affect the interpretation and appreciation of the perceptual stimuli.

In the following sections, the presentation of the results is divided into two sections. Firstly, the interpretation and appreciation of art from the art history respondents and law respondents are presented separately. The comparative view on the interpretation process and appreciation of art will be discussed at the end of this first section. The second section demonstrates the result from data analysis of interpretation and appreciation of art affected by different conditions of art and types of artwork.

5. Results

5.1 Interpretation and appreciation of art

Generally, the data analysis indicates that the process broadly contains three stages. That is (1) a perceptual stage, (2) a classification stage, (3) an arrival of meaning and evaluation stage. An emotional outcome results from this process. While the perceptual stage is only the first step, it is significant for art interpretation. The classification and interpretation stage and evaluation stage are the most dynamic stages where the interplay between background, preferences and context of art occur. The end result is an emotional outcome.

(1) Art History respondents and interpretation's process

   o Perceptual stage

As mentioned above, the interpretation process starts with the perceptual stage after the respondents viewed the perceptual stimuli. The perceptual stage is directly connected to the classification stage. Most of the time, what happens in the perceptual stage before the interpretation moves to the classification, is that the respondents were attracted by some familiar/recognizable elements in the artwork such as forms and colors. A response from AH2 toward the artwork (D1) clearly reflects this aspect:

> "Well, first I was like "what is it like inert or something". I think it's very <u>royal color</u> something like that. I'm not that sure what I'm looking at. That made me thinks of a <u>cave</u>. It may be <u>because of color</u>. I don't know (what) I'm looking at" (AH2)

Responses from AH3 and AH6 also indicate that colors and forms in the artworks appear to be the first elements interacting with them:

> "I already <u>like</u> it (D1) because of the <u>shape</u> and <u>colors</u>. It appeals to me more aesthetically than the other two (NR1 and R1)." (AH3)

> "I'm ambivalent. I don't know if I like it. It kind of makes me think that I'm having some kind of <u>shocking with all kinds of color</u> (…)." (AH6)

While forms and colors positively affect AH3, they have a negative impact on AH6. Not only do the examples of AH2, AH3 and AH6 demonstrate what happens in this initial perceptual stage, but they also pinpoint that this stage is closely associated with the classification stage. This is because perceiving or noticing these recognizable forms and colors does provide certain meaning/feeling towards the artwork as well.

   o Classification and interpretation stage

After the initial perception of the artworks, the interpretation moves to the classification stage right away. This stage primarily involves a classification of the perceptual stimuli. Regarding this phase, the respondents appear to observe whether they can relate the stimuli to one of their existing backgrounds or not. In general, the data of the art history students in-

dicate that general background (experiences from their own lives and childhoods) is primarily applied to classify and read the artwork.

Being asked to interpret the artwork (NR3), a description from AH7 explicitly demonstrates that she interpreted the work based on general background:

AH7: Well, it looks like <u>war</u> or something, <u>fighting</u> or <u>night</u>. (…) Or maybe it's like a <u>rain of the stars</u> because if you look close there are some <u>starry shapes</u>. No, it's like a <u>fight</u> to me in (the) dark.

Q: Well, which element tells you that this artwork is like a fight?

AH7: <u>The flickering of light</u>. I mean, <u>you see a lot in movies</u>, right. It's like there's bombs going off everywhere, I guess it's (like) that.

It is clear that AH7 uses her background to help her classify and interpret the meaning of the artwork. Similarly, AH9 also viewed the same artwork in which she clearly applied her general background or related experience to interpret the artwork. AH9 clarified her classification of this artwork that "I think about the <u>background on a computer</u> or <u>screen saver</u>. I think about it when I see it." (AH9)

More personal childhood experiences provide another type of background that AH1 applied to classify the artwork (D1). She responded at the beginning of viewing D1 that:

"I immediately thought of <u>medical handbook</u>: a picture of an organ or something. I must say when you were to be in this room (the artwork's room) and seen and pushed into much more details, it might have been different. (When the video changed to another visual image) <u>This really looks like geology to me</u>. (…) Well, my <u>father</u>, he's a <u>geologist</u> in a way. He has a lot of books about how the earth is sediment. It's very <u>familiar to the imagery</u> that I have been <u>accustomed</u> to. (…)" (AH1)

Thus, AH1 classifies and interprets the work on the basis of her general background and her childhood memory of geology books.

In addition to general or personal background, knowledge background in art is also referred to and used in this stage by eight out of nine art history respondents (AH9 being the only exception). Regarding this aspect, the process happens in two ways. The first way is that the respondents only use knowledge background to help them classify and analyze the stimuli. Alternatively, the respondents used both general background and knowledge background at the same time to classify and interpret the artworks. Regarding the first way, previous art movements (i.e. abstract art, performance art, computer art etc.) and aesthetic aspects are referred to during this process. These movements became a framework for them to classify and later justify the artwork.

In relation to the second way, AH4's answer to NR2 indicates that both general background and knowledge background interplay in his classification stage:

"(...) I really like it. In fact, when you <u>first showed the video</u> I thought there was <u>a problem with the video</u>. It reminds me of when you start <u>youtube</u> and <u>video doesn't really work right away</u>. [...] When you said that it is <u>a work of art</u>. It's really intriguing. It really gets you. It really captivates your attention, because of <u>the light</u> and <u>the shade of move</u>. I really like it. When you think of the concept of <u>video culture</u> and <u>Internet culture</u>, it's really interesting." (AH4)

As AH4 refers to a malfunctioning video at the start, it appears that general background plays a dominant role in his first reaction. Later, his classification shifts to an employment of his knowledge background to find meaning and recognize value of the artwork.

o   Arrival of meaning, evaluation stage, and emotional outcomes

After classification and interpretation of the artworks based on general background and/or knowledge background, the third stage concerns the arrival of meaning and evaluation stage. Quite often, the arrival of meaning appears to happen before the evaluation process. During this process, it appears that the meanings produced by the respondents were compared with their background and existing preferences again to see if they conformed to the existing framework or not. What emerges after this process is an emotional outcome or an appreciation of art. In addition to the evaluation stage, the data also indicate that if the meanings of artwork do not conform to the existing background, results can be either positive or negative emotional outcomes.

A positive outcome can be observed through AH4's response to the artwork D3 which he liked the most. AH4 explains his reason that:

"Because there's a very <u>special relationship</u> between <u>artwork</u> and an <u>artist</u>. At the same time, making the artwork, the acting, she's part of the whole artwork. It's not only the screen but her (the artist) is laying on the ground. This is (a) very interesting thing. It is the thing that <u>you don't see in the early modern art</u>; when a painter makes a painting, the process of painting isn't part of the artwork, but the artwork is finished, and then it's an artwork. That's what I said interesting in <u>contemporary art</u>. The artist can have a very important role within the meaning of the work of art (...)." (AH4)

It is clear that AH4 applies his existing background to evaluate artwork D3. Although the format and the content of D3 are highly different from his specialization (early modern art), nonetheless, this difference between contemporary art (D3) and the early modern art (his background) does not reduce his interest in the artwork at all.

Concerning a negative outcome, evaluation of artwork D2 by AH6 clearly reveals that she applies her existing background to justify and evaluate the work. She explains that she does not like D2 because "It's <u>not new</u> or special. All she's done is taking something, she connected two things that were namely what your screen saver does. She connected that through her breathing patterns which <u>I personally don't see the art history in that</u>." (AH6) A

similar notion also appears in AH8's response to artwork R3 that she found no significant aspect in this work. AH8 elaborated on this aspect that "(т)his is very <u>modest</u> and <u>small</u>, which of course is not bad. I had different expectations. I guess, <u>comparing to installation art with all conceptual art in the 60s</u> so this is <u>really small</u>." (AH8)

There are also cases where the respondents could not achieve meaning of the artwork. In these cases, the data reveal two kinds of responses regarding this aspect. The first reaction is that the respondent (AH5) denied expressing his appreciation of the artwork NR2 by saying that "<u>I am very blank</u> right now with the artwork (NR2) and with the maker (the artist), it's really hard to say anything about it. If I would know something or some context of this artwork, then I would be able to talk about it. <u>Right now, I'd would rather not to talk about it.</u>" For the second type of reaction, the respondents (AH2 and AH3) felt challenged to find meaning. For example, AH2 said that she did not understand work D1. However, this situation seemed to challenge her to find meaning in some ways. She said:

"I'm not sure, maybe through time (understanding work D1). But right now, I don't (understand the work). But I <u>enjoy looking</u> at it nonetheless, maybe <u>because I don't understand it</u> actually. Because that <u>keeps me guessing</u> and if I knew exactly what it was then I was like "oh yes, I recognize it" and then move on. But now <u>I just try to figure it out</u>." (AH2)

(2) Law respondents and the interpretation process

o Perceptual stage

The interpretation process of law respondents starts again with the perceptual stage. In this perceptual stage, the data reveal that more than half of the law respondents (L1, L2, L4, R10 and L8) were attracted by the colors and forms of the perceptual stimuli. Additionally, the respondents also looked for familiar or recognizable forms in the artworks. Similarly, the perceptual stage is essentially connected to the classification stage. For example, L1 comments on the artwork D1 right after she saw the artwork that:

"At the beginning, with the <u>red color</u>, landscape is not the first thing that came into my mind. It was more like it could be like <u>blood</u> and shapes look like human body. But now, through <u>the line</u>, it obviously looks like a <u>landscape</u>. I think it really depends on the color if it's <u>grey</u>, it reminds you of (a) <u>landscape</u>, but if it's <u>red</u> it's more like <u>human blood</u>." (L1)

One can say that L1 is attracted to color (red and grey) and forms (line) of the artwork, which indeed convey to her certain meanings of the perceptual stimuli. Likewise, an expression from L2 regarding the same artwork (D1) also implies that he was captivated by the colors of the artwork. He commented on the red color of the work that it is like "<u>dripping of blood</u> like a <u>crime scene</u>. Like a horrible crime has been committed, and unfortunately the victim of the crime is bleeding to death or his <u>flesh</u>, blood is going out (…)." (L2)

- o Classification and interpretation stage

The data from law respondents indicate that all respondents apply their general background in the classification process. As discussed above, the examples of L1 and L2 in the perceptual stage are strongly connected to the classification stage. Once the color, presented in the artwork, is perceived as "red", both respondents immediately responded to the color and ascribed a meaning based on their background to the red color.

Another interesting classification can be found in the response to the work R3 from L8. Her comments are not only an explicit example of the classification stage, but they also present how background, especially childhood background (in her case), is still influential to her perception of things. L8 offered a reason why she did not like the work R3 that:

> "Because my <u>grandmother</u> has a vase like this that I <u>don't really like</u>, that I find very <u>ugly</u>. Also, this kind of tiles (table cloth), I don't really like the color. This spot (background area) is not the color that I like. I like the flowers themselves. I don't like the background. But I love my grandmother a lot. It's not really related to my grandma." (L8)

Clearly, the vase, presented in work R3, reminds L8 of her childhood, which results in her classification of the work and later affects in her emotional outcome towards the work. It should be noted that two respondents from the law group have a background related to art. One respondent paints as a hobby (L8), while the other has a background in film studies (L6). However, their classification stages too involve more general background than knowledge background.

- o Arrival of meaning, evaluation stage and emotional outcomes

As clarified above, results from the classification stage bring meaning to the respondents. Further, the meanings are evaluated against the existing background of the respondents. The data indicate that if meanings, perceived by the respondents, conform to their existing background, then results of interpretation tend to be positive outcomes. L4 explained why she liked artwork R2:

> "(…) I like that because it still <u>doesn't (look) like a picture</u>. To me, art is, when I think about <u>art</u> I think about <u>drawing</u> and <u>painting</u>. I don't actually think about video. I know that it's also a form of art. But to me, <u>I still like drawing</u>. Maybe I am a little bit more outdated (…)." (L4)

After L4 achieved the meaning of the artwork, she started to evaluate the artwork with her existing background one more time. Based on her perception, artwork R2 contains an element that looks like drawing. Therefore, she can appreciate the artwork.

An example of meaning that does not conform to an existing background lies in a response from L1 towards the work R2. The respondent said that:

"(…) And I think what the artist tries to do is to make you feel something "levitation" and to show something miracle and a bit religious. I think that really portrays with the pose of the hand and the glass background. But there's nothing glorious about, she's just hanged there. (…)" (L1)

The presentation of religiousness in the artwork contradicts L1's perception or her existing background on what a presentation of miracle and religiousness should be, resulting in her negative response.

Similar to the case of art history respondents, there are situations in which the law respondents (L2, L3 and L5) could not achieve the meaning of art either. Results from these situations only present the respondents' negative emotional outcomes. L3 answered a question whether she liked artwork R3 or not:

"I rather say no. Because to me, I'm not sure it doesn't show anything. I don't get a message or emotion or feeling out of it. I think this is an experiment that put uncomfortable things together. I don't know if the artist has an idea behind it or not." (L3)

Not being able to achieve meaning of the artwork makes L3 dislike the work. L5 reacted in a similar manner when viewing work NR2. He stated that "I wouldn't say that I like it. (…) The reason would be that it doesn't explain anything." (L5)

(3) Comparative view on the interpretations of art history and law respondents

Although the interpretations of the art history respondents are slightly more complicated than the others, the data analysis demonstrates that the process of interpretation is homogenous for both groups to some degree. All interpretation processes start with the perceptual stage, which later move to the classification and interpretation stage. During this stage, existing backgrounds of the respondents seem to enable the process of classification to be successful. After these two stages, the respondents from both groups tend to obtain meanings of the perceptual stimuli. Before emotional outcomes were presented, most respondents would evaluate the meanings with their existing background again to see whether meanings correspond to their background or not. If the meanings conform to the respondents' existing backgrounds, then the respondents tend to have a positive outcome towards the perceptual stimuli. Negative emotional outcomes (dislike) are usually caused by a conflict between meanings obtained by the respondents and their existing backgrounds. However, a discrepancy between these two aspects can generate appreciation as well. Nonetheless, according to the data, this situation only happens with the case of AH4.

Another similarity concerns the interpretation of some perceptual stimuli. To some degree, art history respondents and law respondents interpret artwork in the same direction. Interpretations of work R1 are an explicit example. The respondents (AH2, L2, AH3 and L3) from both groups interpreted the work as spiritually and religiously laden, and found the lady in the artwork was portrayed as a master/head of the kitchen, and as a sign of fe-

male empowerment. All interpretations are primarily based on the classifications of the pose of the artist (floating in a kitchen). It can be assumed that both groups appear to use some homogenous backgrounds to classify the artworks.

An explicit distinction between two groups, found in this data analysis, lies in the fact that art history respondents tend to apply both their knowledge background (in art) and general background to classify and evaluate the perceptual stimuli, whereas the law respondents only use their general background during this process. The data indicate that most art history respondents use their knowledge background. AH9 appears to be only art history respondent that did not apply her background in interpretation process. When the knowledge backgrounds are applied, the interpretation process of art history respondents tends to be slightly more complicated than that of the law respondents. This is because the knowledge background becomes another framework (apart from personal preferences) for art history respondents to take into account when evaluating the works. It should be noted that the use of knowledge background in art does not always result in an increase of appreciation in the perceptual stimuli. In sum, the data show that the interpretation process could be successful without the assistance of knowledge background. Therefore, the main variable that facilitates the interpretation process is general background or relevant experience, since it is applied most often by the respondents from both groups.

5.2 Interpretation and appreciation of art in relation to conditions and types of artworks

As discussed earlier, context of art (physical context or discursive text) is an influential factor that may affect viewers' interpretation and appreciation of art, because it can imply meaning and value of the artworks to the viewers. This section presents the results of an analysis of interpretation and appreciation of art in relation to conditions and types of art. Overall, three types of conditions were offered to assess whether they affect the interpretation of the stimuli. The expectation was that the more information would be given on the stimuli (titles or descriptions), the more the respondents could apply this in their interpretation process. Indeed, the given information seemed to be taken into account during the respondents' interpretation process. Yet, it should be noted that this notion is only applicable to some stimuli. Table 2 is a presentation of the numbers of respondents who were able to interpret and appreciate the different types of perceptual stimuli under the three conditions. As demonstrated in Table2, the results of a comparative analysis of interpretation and appreciation of the artworks do not reveal a concrete pattern that (1) presents explicit differences between art history respondents and law respondents, and (2) demonstrates distinctions between the evaluations of works that were provided with less context and those that were provided with more context. The following paragraphs present the analytical outcomes of interpretation and appreciation of the respondents from both groups, affected by different conditions and types of stimuli.

Table2: Number of interpretations and appreciations of the perceptual stimuli under the three conditions from art history respondents and law respondents

	Untitled Condition		Titled Condition		Description Condition	
	AH	L	AH	L	AH	L
NR: Number of interpretations	3	3	2	3	3	2
Number of appreciations	2	1	1	1	2	2
R: Number of interpretations	2	2	3	3	3	3
Number of appreciations	3	2	1	1	1	2
D: Number of interpretations	3	3	3	2	3	3
Number of appreciations	2	3	2	2	3	3
Total (R+NR + D)						
Number of interpretations	8	8	8	8	9	8
Number of appreciation	8	6	4	4	6	7

AH = Art history respondents   L = Law respondents
NR = Non-representational stimuli R = Representational stimuli D = Documentation stimuli

(1) Interpretation affected by conditions and types of artwork

Although the total number of interpretations under the description condition, presented Table2, indicates that more art history respondents (9 respondents) are capable of interpreting the stimuli than law respondents (8 respondents), the difference in the number of achieved interpretations between two groups is too small to warrant any conclusions. Thus, it can be summarized that the respondents from both groups are able to interpret the stimuli and achieve meanings when descriptive information (description condition and in some cases titled condition) was added to the perceptual stimuli. The given information was added to help the respondents classify the stimuli and achieve meaning based on their backgrounds. In some cases, the respondents also took the information into account for evaluating the stimuli.

Apart from the representational stimuli and some documentation stimuli (D2 andD3), interpretations of art history and law respondents under the titled condition present contradictory results. By comparing interpretations of the respondents under the untitled condition to the titled condition, the titled condition did not affect the respondents from either group (as demonstrated by the total number of interpretations of the stimuli under untitled and titled conditions). My assumption is that titles of the perceptual stimuli are quite abstract, therefore the respondents tend to ignore them. This is evident in the case of NR1, NR2, NR3 and D1[4]. Although the data show that art history and law respondents could obtain meaning for the non-representational stimuli under the untitled condition, nonetheless the respondents did not apply the titles in their interpretation process. The re-

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[4] Titles of the perceptual stimuli are presented in Appendix B.

spondents (AH2, AH9, L2, L5 and L9) tended to achieve meaning of the works in some ways by applying their background to help them interpret the perceptual stimuli instead. For example, AH9 interpreted NR3 (Interfield) in that it seems to be "(...) psychedelic because the white color (image portrayed in the work) is booming into the screen." Further, there are some cases that the respondents (AH5 and L3) could not interpret the works (NR2 and D1) under the titled condition. These situations suggest that the titled condition provided for the respondents (AH5 and L3) did not facilitate their interpretations or help them to understand the works at all. L3's response on D1 becomes a clear example of this kind of situation. During L3's interpretation of D1, it is clear that she had a difficult time interpreting the work. Further, she attempted to use the title of the work to help her interpret it. L3 even asked for the name of D1 for the second time. Later, she replied that "[o]k but I don't get it. The name is also abstract. Sometime the name gives you a clue, sometime it doesn't." (L3)

Concerning the effect of types of artworks toward the respondents' interpretation, different types of stimuli did not have an impact to the interpretation of the respondents from both groups. The respondents, especially law respondents, may have had difficulties to interpret the non-representational stimuli. Nonetheless, they tended to achieve meaning of the stimuli at the end.

(2) Appreciation affected by conditions and types of artworks

Interestingly, though the respondents from both groups appears to be able to interpret the perceptual stimuli, nonetheless obtaining meaning of the stimuli did not always imply a positive appreciation of the works to the respondents. Appreciation of the respondents from both groups toward the non-representational and representational stimuli did not increase when titles and descriptions were added to the perceptual stimuli. Based on the empirical results presented in Table2, appreciation of the respondents from both groups of documentation stimuli (under description condition) appears to be somewhat higher that appreciation of the stimuli under untitled and titled conditions. However, according to the data analysis, it is uncertain whether their appreciations were enhanced by description, or whether the works themselves contain certain elements or contents that appealed to the respondents from both groups.

Overall, the titled condition again appears to present contradictory results. That is – by comparing appreciation of the perceptual stimuli under the untitled and titled condition, the appreciation of art history and law respondents who viewed the work under the titled condition tends to be lower. Interestingly, the respondents (AH1, AH2, AH5, AH8, L1, L2, L5 and L8) disliked the same stimuli (NR1, NR2, R1 and R3). For the documentation stimuli, AH6 and L3 did not appreciate the stimuli (D1 and D2). This low appreciation can be explained in two ways. Firstly, the respondents (i.e. AH1, AH8, L1, L3, L5 and L8) seem to require more background related to the stimuli in order to appreciate the works. Secondly, the stimuli do not match with the respondents' preference (i.e. AH5 and AH6).

Regarding the effect of types of the stimuli, the data indicate that there is no significant difference in appreciation between the two groups towards a specific type of stimulus. Nonetheless, it appears that art history respondents appreciated the non-representational stimuli more, whereas law respondents liked the representational stimuli. Additionally, the documentation stimuli were appreciated by the respondents from two groups the most. As mentioned above, the documentation stimuli seem to contain certain elements (i.e. interactive elements and relevant contents) that attract the respondents from both groups. Thus, this results in positive emotional outcomes toward the stimuli.

(3) Other remarks

During the data analysis, the results revealed an unexpected but significant factor that seemed to highly affect both the respondents' interpretation and appreciation of art. This factor is content or presentation of perceptual stimuli that entails relevant language to the respondents. There are a lot of cases that the respondents from both groups like or dislike the stimuli regardless of any conditions. Further, of appreciating or not appreciating/ being able or unable to interpret the work is not restricted to only a specific type of stimulus. In this way, it seems that neither conditions nor types of work are the main influential variables. Instead of conditions and types of work, the data indicate that the interplay between content/presentation of art and existing background of the respondents essentially determines whether the respondents managed to obtain meaning and strongly affects their appreciation of the stimuli.

In relation to this remark, two examples are selected to elaborate. The analysis of work NR2 demonstrates that the three conditions did not affect the interpretation nor the appreciation of art history and law respondents. Only one art history respondent (AH4) appreciated the artwork despite the fact that he viewed the work in the untitled condition. It appears that the presentation of NR2 contains highly conceptual and abstract language that is not shared by the respondents from both groups, except AH4. In other words, NR2 has abstract elements, which the respondents cannot classify given their background and therefore they cannot find meaning in them. Contrary to the case of NR2, work R2 is appreciated by all respondents. Its content, which refers to human traffic, and its presentation that portrays scenes of Amsterdam Central Station appear to be captivating elements to which all respondents are attracted. Regardless of conditions, all respondents are able to interpret and connect themselves to the work.

6. Discussion

To answer the first question of how viewers with and without art background interpret and appreciate contemporary art, the data indicate that the interpretation of art by the respondents entails three stages: (1) a perceptual stage, (2) a classification and interpretation stage, (3) an arrival of meaning and evaluation stage. The interpretation starts with the perceptual stage. Right after this stage, their interpretation moves to classification and interpretation of the artwork. In some cases, the two stages are closely connected, and thus are difficult to distinguish from one another. After being able to interpret the works of art, a construction of meaning occurs and leads to an evaluation of the perceptual stimuli. Subsequently, evaluating the stimuli results in an emotional outcome that can be either appreciative, unappreciative, or neutral. These four stages more or less conform to the explanations from the aesthetic viewpoint (Innis, 2001) and cognitive psychology (Leder et al, 2004; Hagtvedt et al., 2008) regarding the interpretation process of art viewers.

Based on the empirical findings, appreciation of art is the result of evaluating a work of art on the basis of the respondents' background or existing experience. In most cases, appreciative emotion is created by an achieved meaning of art relating to the viewer's background. There are some situations in which meaning of art is absent but viewers could still appreciate the work (see also Halle, 1993). The data regarding this aspect suggests that artworks contain visual elements which viewers are accustomed to. Appreciation mostly appears to be presented as a form of enjoyment (Bourdieu, 1984). For the art history group, the data analysis cannot confirm whether appreciation of the respondents can be regarded as a form of delight or not, since they tend to use knowledge background in combination with their general background to generate meaning and evaluate works of art. In this respect, the theoretical relevance of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) is only partly validated. Although cultural capital, presented in a form of art knowledge, more or less helps (art history) viewers to achieve meaning and evaluate the works, it is not as influential as everyday life experience (Dewey, 1934). Not only is the everyday life experience (general background) applied by viewers without art background, but it also dominates the evaluation of artworks of art history viewers. Regarding the aesthetic experience/emotion as put forward by Bell (1913), it is again difficult to assess whether positive emotional outcomes of the respondents in this research can be categorized as aesthetic emotion or not. This is because the expressed feelings are more or less related to mundane emotions and not specifically aesthetic emotions.

Based on a comparison of the interpretation between the two groups, the results indicate a number of similarities among the interpretation of art history respondents and law respondents. The first similarity deals with the way the respondents of both groups usually apply their existing backgrounds to evaluate the perceptual stimuli. The second similarity involves the fact that quite often the interpretations from both groups are similar to some

degree. With regard to this aspect, it appears that art history and law respondents use similar backgrounds to classify and interpret the perceptual stimuli. It may be explained in two ways. The first aspect is that both groups have cultural capital or shared knowledge of cultural codes that is the result of their primary and secondary education (Bourdieu, 1984). Or, the respondents from both groups apply their everyday life experience (collective experience) to interpret the perceptual stimuli. Therefore, their interpretation happened to be similar to each other. The latter explanation is exactly what Dewey would expect to happen when art and life are not completely separated and he would also welcome the clear presence of a common frame of reference in judging works of art. This frame of reference is very general, however, and mostly helpful only in recognizing anything familiar at all in a work of art. In that sense, it is helpful in the perceptual stage as much as in the interpretation stage.

So far, the main difference between both groups found in the analysis of the interpretation process is that different types of background are applied in the classification stage and the evaluation stage of the perceptual stimuli. To clarify, while most of art history respondents referred to their cultural capital (knowledge background in art history) in their classification and interpretation stage and their evaluation stage, the law respondents used their general background (life or childhood experience) to help them to classify and interpret the perceptual stimuli. In some cases, the cultural capital is also used in the evaluation stage, in which it also causes the interpretation process of art history respondents more complicated than those of law respondents. By applying their cultural capital as another framework, the art history respondents seem to be less easily impressed or satisfied with the perceptual stimuli than the law respondents. Although often different types of background are applied, they do not help the respondents, especially the law group, to achieve meanings of the perceptual stimuli. Moreover, they do not affect appreciation, especially among the law groups. Therefore, it can be concluded that the general background is as important as the cultural capital (and in some cases even more important) since the general background is often used by both art history and law respondents.

Despite the fact that different backgrounds do not affect interpretation and appreciation of the respondents as a whole, the differences in background between the two groups reveal an important aspect. That is – cultural capital may cause art history respondents to be more focused on decoding the meaning of the perceptual stimuli than the law respondents, which was evident in some cases where art history respondents felt challenged when they were confronted with uninterpretable works. Perhaps, the viewers with cultural capital (art knowledge) may be trained to search for symbolic value of works of art (Bourdieu, 1984; Berghman et al., 2010).

Regarding the second question of how the information context of a work of art can influence the interpretation and appreciation of art, the data analysis indicates that while

context of art (conditions: untitled, titled and description) more or less facilitates the interpretation process, background and content of artworks directly affect both the interpretation and appreciation of art. Further, type of artwork does not affect the interpretation and appreciation of art.

Conditions appear to provide information for the respondents, which they can use in their classification and evaluation stages. This situation only happens in some cases, not all respondents were affected by the conditions. As demonstrated in Table2, the results do not reveal distinctive patterns of (1) effects of each condition and type of artwork, and (2) interpretation and appreciation between two different groups (viewers with/without art background). Perhaps, art competence and shared preferences in art are not restricted to specific educational background (i.e. art field), but are rather based on other social backgrounds (Halle, 1993; Van Eijck, 2011) that have formed individual's preference in art and acquaintances in specific art forms. Among three types of stimuli, the interpretation of representational stimuli seems to reveal the effect of different conditions the most. That is – the number of interpretations increased when different conditions (title and description) were ascribed to the stimuli. The respondents tend to apply titles and descriptions into their interpretations. Perhaps, the titles and descriptions, especially from R2 and R3, fit to what is depicted in the works and is relevant to the respondents from both groups. Also, the stimuli are all figurative and hence rather straightforward for the viewers to classify and interpret. When the conditions, especially titles and descriptions, match with the works and the respondents' backgrounds, then they tend to incorporate these conditions into their interpretation and evaluation of the works. On the contrary, if the conditions do not match with the respondents' backgrounds, they appear to be disregarded by them (especially by the law respondents), as happened in the case of non-representational stimuli, especially NR1 and NR2).

Concerning conditions in relation with appreciation of perceptual stimuli, the results seem to reveal n outcome that contradicts Berghman et. al's recent research. That is – they may not affect appreciation of the respondents. The titles and descriptions do not always result in an increase of appreciations of the artworks. The respondents' appreciations of the perceptual stimuli (under certain condition) are rather determined by their backgrounds and contents of the work. The respondents' background and contents of artworks that present relevant language to the respondents tend to affect interpretation and appreciation of the stimuli. If the respondents' backgrounds matched the content of the artwork regardless of the condition and the type of work, then the respondents were able to (1) classify, (2) obtain meaning, (3) able to evaluate the stimuli. As a result, they can determine whether they appreciate the work or not. Of course, the context provided by Berghman et al. (2010) was explicitly targeted at affecting the perceived prestige of the works, which was not the intention in the current study, where the information that was provided as a context was more neutral and accurate.

Generally, the empirical results of this research appear both contradict and confirm the notion of art perception from the prominent theories of the three approaches. What is contradicted most is the notion from the formalist perspective regarding the significant form of art (Bell, 1913). As discussed above, the results in this research indicate that viewers cannot leave the mundane world behind in order to appreciate art. They need a background related to the object in order to interpret and appreciate art.

In the case of contemporary art, everyday life experience (Dewey, 1934) may become the prime factor to facilitate viewers' interpretation and appreciation of art. This claim does not intend to downplay the significance of background in art (Bell, 1913; Isenberg, 1944; Bourdieu, 1984; Solso, 1994). Indeed, cultural capital or background in art have still been beneficial resources providing the viewers with potential meanings. But confronted with alienating forms of contemporary art, it is the general background that comes into play in the interpretation process when the viewers cannot apply their cultural capital (knowledge background) to interpret the artworks. Having some general knowledge of the arts is not always helpful, as it typically involves notions related to the most notorious (modern) art forms of the past such as impressionism, cubism or abstract expressionism, However, very few people can grasp the conceptual art that became dominant after these modernist styles and its profound influence on the contemporary art scene.

Further, the context of contemporary art (discursive text) can suggest to viewers meanings of the artworks, which can sometimes lead to a more appreciation in art. However, the context has to match with the viewers' backgrounds (either cultural capital or general background). If the context is irrelevant to the background of viewers, it does not help them in their dealing with art works.

In conclusion, the process of interpreting contemporary art is indeed very similar to what was claimed in previous scholarly work (Innis, 2001; Leder et al. 2004). Diversifications in forms or content of contemporary art appears not to be an obstacle for viewers to interpret and appreciate works as long as they contain relevant language to the viewers. In this aspect, contemporary art needs to meet certain criteria that contain recognizable elements. So the viewers can decipher the meaning of art form these elements based on their experience and backgrounds. In other words, the contemporary art regardless of any forms should contain everyday life experience in order to help the viewers to be able to interpret and appreciate the works.

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Appendix

Appendix A: List of questions

o **General background of respondents**

1. Can you please tell me about your personal background and educational background?

o **Personal preferences in art**

1. Do you have any preference for your favorite art? [What is your favorite art?]

o **Interpretation and appreciation of the perceptual stimuli, and interpretation and appreciation of the work affected by conditions**

1. Do you like this artwork? [What came into your mind when you saw this artwork?] And why?

2. May I ask you to interpret this artwork [What is your interpretation of this artwork?]

3. Comparing to the first work, which artwork do you like more? And why?

4. Comparing to the previous works (two works), which artwork do you like the most? And why?

Appendix B: Information of the perceptual stimuli

o **Non-representational works (NR)**

	Names	Artist and production	Duration
NR1	WS. 3 (Video art)	Seoungho Cho (2003)	30 seconds
NR2	Five (beamversie) (Video art)	Bas van Koolwijk (2002)	30 seconds
NR3	Interfield (Video art)	Martijn van Boven (2007)	30 seconds

o **Representational works (R)**

	Names	Artist and production	Duration
R1	The Kitchen I: Levitation of Saint Theresa (Video art)	Marina Abramovic (2009)	30 seconds
R2	Amsterdam CS (Video art)	Robert Hamilton (2002)	30 seconds
R3	Still live with flowers (Video installation art)	Eddie D. (2001)	30 seconds

o **Documentation works (D)**

	Names	Artist and production	Duration
D1	E-vovled Culture XXWide (Documentation of installation art)	Drissen & Verstappen (2007)	10.00 minutes
D2	As an artist, I need to rest (Documentation of performance art)	Sonia Cillari (2009)	7.26 minutes
D3	If you are close to me (Documentation of installation and interactive art)	Sonia Cillari (2006)	7.43 miniutes

* Due to an extensive amount of the description of the perceptual stimuli, it will be submitted separately by email.

Appendix C: Information of respondents and list of works

Art history respondent = AH   Law respondent = L

Male = Male   Female = F

Master study = MS   Bachelor study = BS

o   **Art history respondents**

Art history respondents	Gender	Age	Level of education
AH 1	F	25	MS
AH 2	F	23	BS
AH 3	F	24	MS
AH 4	M	21	MS
AH 5	M	24	MS
AH 6	F	19	BS
AH 7	F	21	MS
AH 8	F	22	MS
AH 9	F	23	BS

F = 7   M = 2   Age = 19-25

BS = 3   MS = 6

o   **Law respondents**

Law respondents	Gender	Age	Level of education
L 1	F	24	MS
L 2	M	23	MS
L 3	F	29	MS
L 4	F	23	MS
L 5	M	23	MS
L 6	F	29	MS
L 7	M	35	MS
L 8	F	23	MS
L 9	F	24	MS

F = 6   M = 3   Age = 19-25

MS = 9