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# The effect of abstraction degree in contemporary painting subjects on gallery visitors' appreciative responses: an aesthetic psychology approach

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## ABSTRACT

One of the main challenges in understanding contemporary paintings is their high degree of abstraction. Each painting simplifies and alters its subject's form, with varying degrees of similarity to objects from nature. This study aims to examine how the degree of abstraction in contemporary painting subjects affects visitors' appreciative responses using an aesthetic psychology approach. The study employs a mixed-methods approach with a multiple-case study design. Semarang Gallery and Sangkring Art Space, both reputable galleries known for their artistic collections and high visitor numbers, were selected for this study. An evaluative survey was conducted with visitors at each gallery using a standardized set of operational questions. Descriptive statistical analysis was applied to calculate the average appreciation scores for each structure within the aesthetic psychology framework. Qualitative data from interviews and observations were employed to explain and enrich the survey findings. A cross-case analysis was carried out to identify the similarities and differences in the tendencies of aesthetic psychological structures across the two galleries. The findings indicate that three types of contemporary paintings, each with a varying degree of subject abstraction, were appreciated by visitors at both Semarang Gallery and Sangkring Art Space across the affective, perceptual, and cognitive dimensions. Affective responses emerged as the most dominant, followed by perceptual and cognitive responses, with an insignificant difference level ( $p < 0.05$ ). The finding suggests that the degree of abstraction in contemporary paintings does not significantly affect the public's ability to appreciate them, particularly in affective, perceptual, and interpretative responses.



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## 1. Introduction

Contemporary art exhibitions are now widely held in cities across Indonesia. Among the various forms of contemporary art, painting is often the one that receives the most appreciation from visitors [1]. The exhibited paintings showcase a wide range of ideas, materials, and techniques, often characterized by hybrid, simulative, and ironic elements that can appear both strange and contradictory. Some paintings exhibit visual simplicity, while others present formal complexity [2]. Certain pieces address issues related to everyday life, while others critique conventional aesthetic norms. Contemporary painting is often difficult to define consistently, as its meaning no longer relies on logocentrism but has shifted toward subjective desire [3] [4]. In this context, many artworks prioritize cognitive concepts over the mere harmonization of visual forms. These cognitive elements convey intellectual messages that require deep interpretation. Painting thus functions as a medium of discourse rather than simply as an aesthetic object,

aiming to provide a more conceptual experience rather than a purely visual one [5][6][7][8][9][10]. Retinal aesthetics produced from the harmonious and complex composition of aesthetic elements is not always explicitly presented. Its aesthetic absence is often a deliberate strategy to prompt viewers to reflect, interpret, and engage more deeply with the visual puzzles on display [11]. One of the visual approaches frequently employed by artists in contemporary paintings is abstraction. The figures depicted in such works may range from clearly recognizable to highly distorted, depending on the degree of resemblance they maintain with objects from nature. Abstraction is often adopted as a deliberate strategy to achieve a desired effect within the work [12][13][14]. The development of abstraction in painting can be categorized into abstract, semi-abstract, and realistic/realism. Abstract paintings are non-objective and do not directly represent natural objects. Semi-abstract paintings contain partially representational elements, but their forms have been simplified and rearranged. In contrast, realistic paintings are representational, though they often emphasize the emotional qualities of the depicted subject. In such works, the forms remain distinctly recognizable to the viewer [12].

Although contemporary paintings are increasingly recognized and appreciated by the public, this appreciation does not always reflect a deep understanding of the artworks. A common perception states that a higher degree of abstraction in a painting's subject often hinders comprehension. The higher the degree of abstraction, the more challenging it becomes to grasp its meaning and the artist's intended message [12]. Abstraction, as practiced by artists, demands greater interpretive effort from viewers due to its simplification, deformation, and absence of representational elements [12]. This study, therefore, aims to examine the effect of the degree of subject abstraction in contemporary paintings on visitors' appreciative responses. The findings are expected to either support or challenge the ideas that non-representational or abstract paintings pose significant obstacles or even reluctance in the appreciation process. The respondents in this study consist of gallery visitors coming from diverse backgrounds in terms of education, socioeconomic status, cultural and religious affiliations, and age. While the appreciation of visual artworks has been widely studied, specific research examining the effect of the abstraction degree in painting subjects on visitors' appreciation within the framework of aesthetic psychology remains limited. Previous studies, such as those by Pelowski *et al.* and Schindler *et al.*, explored the complexity of perception and the role of emotions in art appreciation [15][16]. Nadal and Munar investigated the relation between visual complexity and appreciation, while Ho, Szubielska, and Kopiś-Posiej focused on cultural effects. Belke *et al.* highlighted the significance of cognitive aspects in the appreciation process [17][18][19]. In the Indonesian context, Saidi, Wisetrotomo, and Susanto examined the narrative, curatorial, and economic value dimensions of contemporary visual art [20][1][21].

The aesthetic psychology approach is particularly relevant for understanding the process of artwork appreciation, especially in the context of contemporary paintings that are rich in abstraction and symbolic meaning. Aesthetics and psychology are closely intertwined in shaping a comprehensive aesthetic experience. George Dickie argues that although the normative aspects of art cannot be reduced to psychological data, psychology is relevant in explaining how people actually respond to artworks [22]. Multisensory aesthetics can serve as a restorative stimulus [23], and aesthetic experiences have a profound psychological impact [24]. Moreover, the aesthetic experience of artworks also involves an individual's psychological processes of perception and interpretation [25]. Chatterjee and Vartanian, as well as Pearce, further emphasize that aesthetic experience is shaped by the interaction between the mental hierarchy and the nervous system, encompassing the sensorimotor system, emotional evaluation, and cognitive structures related to knowledge and meaning [26][27]. Aesthetic experience is not merely a visual reaction but rather the result of a layered interaction among the sensorimotor system, emotional evaluation, and cognitive structures related to knowledge and meaning. Thus, aesthetic psychology represents an interdisciplinary approach that explores aesthetic experience through the mental, emotional, and cognitive responses individuals exhibit when engaging with art objects [28][29]. Furthermore, Henrik *et al.*, Lin, Ognjenovic, Palmer *et al.*, and Shimamura have significantly contributed to the development of aesthetic psychology theory [30][29][31][32][33].

The appreciation of artwork does not occur in a linear or simplistic manner; rather, it comprises three stages: affection, referring to the initial emotional response, such as attractiveness or enjoyment on the first encounter; perception, defined as the ability to visually capture, identify, and organize the structures within the artworks; and cognition, the process of interpretation and finding meaning, context, and the artist's intention [29]. Therefore, this aesthetic psychology theory extends the concept of aesthetics beyond mere visual response, encompassing a comprehensive and reflective psychological experience. It not only elucidates the dynamics of aesthetic experience but also enables the appreciation process to be thoroughly and systematically analyzed [25][26][27]. While visual interest (affection) may arise spontaneously, appreciation often deepens through stages of visual perception and cognitive understanding. A solid understanding of the visual structure, such as composition, color, and form, combined with insight into the conceptual message of the artwork, greatly enhances the viewer's ability to achieve a complete aesthetic experience. In this process, the initial emotional response serves as a critical foundation for deeper levels of appreciation. The aesthetic psychology approach is crucially important in this study, as its holistic and interdisciplinary framework helps us understand how visitors appreciate contemporary paintings. Aesthetic psychology is expected to systematically break down the appreciation process through three stages: affection, perception, and cognition. Moreover, this field of study enhances the understanding that aesthetic responses to artworks can still be systematically explained, despite being subjective experiences and varying in perception and meaning.

## 2. Method

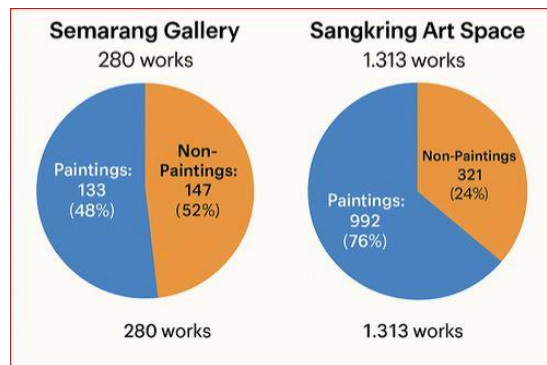
This study employs a mixed-methods approach with a multiple case study design [34]. Two reputable art galleries in Indonesia, Semarang Gallery in Semarang and Sangkring Art Space in Yogyakarta, were purposefully selected as research subjects. The selection was based on their international reputation, quality of curation, and intensity of visitation. The study focused on examining the effect of the abstraction degree of contemporary painting subjects on visitors' appreciation, applying the aesthetic psychology framework covering affection, perception, and cognition. Participants in this study were visitors to two specific exhibitions: the Yogya Annual Art #8 (2023) at Sangkring Art Space and the "*Kuas dan Kelaliman Bentuk*" exhibition (2023) at Semarang Gallery [35][36]. They ranged in age from 15 to 60 years, with no restrictions based on gender, education, socioeconomic status, cultural, or religious background. Using accidental sampling, visitors who were present and willing to fill out questionnaires and participate in interviews or observations were selected for the study. This study covered nine contemporary paintings selected as objects of visitor appreciation. These paintings were equally divided into three categories based on their degree of abstraction: abstract, semi-abstract, and realistic, with three paintings in each category. The data for this study were collected using an evaluative survey to obtain affective, perceptual, and cognitive responses to these paintings. Responses were measured with a three-point Likert scale: *Ya* (Agree), *Tidak* (Not Agree), *Ragu-Ragu* (Neutral/Not Sure). The Likert scale is simplified into three levels to make it easier and quicker for visitors to choose without causing confusion. Additionally, this scale focuses more on identifying the general tendencies of visitors' aesthetic psychological responses [37]. According to Lin, affective psychology was assessed through initial emotional responses, using word pairs such as like-dislike, ugly-beautiful, unpleasant-pleasant, and cold-warm [29]. Perceptual psychology was measured using indicators such as dynamicity, familiarity, and complexity [29]. Cognitive psychology was assessed by integrating cognitive and emotional aspects, with word pairs such as meaningless-meaningful, uninteresting-interesting, and unemotional-emotional [29]. To ensure accurate and consistent recall of their experiences with the artworks, visitors were asked to complete a Google Forms questionnaire via their mobile phones or computers. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected visitors to gain deeper insights into their aesthetic experiences, and participatory observation was carried out to directly observe visitors' interactions with the paintings, including the duration of interaction, facial expressions, and discussion engagement. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to gain an overview of the average appreciation scores across the psychological structures for the three types of paintings. Qualitative data from interviews and

observations were analyzed thematically to identify psychological patterns building visitors' appreciative experiences. The study employed methodological triangulation to ensure consistency among the questionnaire, interview, and observation data. Finally, they were drawn through cross-case analysis, comparing similarities and differences in aesthetic psychological structures between visitors of Semarang Gallery and Sangkring Art Space [34].

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1. Fine Paintings Exhibition at Semarang Gallery and Sangkring Art Space

Semarang Gallery, which was established in 2001 in Semarang, aimed to introduce artwork by contemporary Asian artists, specifically from Indonesia. It has consistently worked to increase public appreciation and develop contemporary paintings in Indonesia by holding regular exhibitions. Sangkring Art Space was a gallery in Yogyakarta established in 2007 that respected differences and upheld artistic solidarity regardless of cultural origin and ideology, thereby promoting the development of contemporary paintings in Indonesia. Fine paintings exhibition program at Semarang Gallery and Sangkring Art Space was held every 2-4 months. Exhibitions showcased a wide range of works from modern to contemporary, presented as multiple and singular art. Multiple artworks combined paintings, graphics, sculptures, and photography, while a singular artwork included paintings, sculptures, graphics, ceramics, and photography. Each exhibition was accompanied by a catalog featuring introductions to the gallery and curators, works, as well as artist biographies. A curatorial introduction was also displayed on the wall as a guide for appreciation. Furthermore, the suitability of the exhibition theme and the curators' background were the main considerations. From 2018 to 2023, Semarang Gallery held 17 exhibitions, showcasing 280 works with 133 paintings (48%) and 147 non-paintings (52%). Additionally, Sangkring Art Space showed 311 works from 2018 to 2023, featuring 992 paintings (76%) and 321 non-paintings (24%) [35][36]. The significantly higher number of paintings showed that artists still favored artwork. Paintings remained highly pursued by collectors and artwork enthusiasts in Indonesia and abroad, as it was appreciated not only for their aesthetic value but also as decorations for homes, hotels, offices, and apartments. Consequently, the sales figures for paintings continued to exceed the value. The data comparison is presented in Fig. 1.



**Fig. 1.** Comparison of the Number of Artworks in Art Exhibitions at Semarang Gallery and Sangkring Art Space from 2018 to 2023.

#### 3.2. Level of Public Appreciation of Paintings at Sangkring Art Space

The three paintings selected for the survey questions represented the diversity of artworks in Yogya Annual Art #8 (YAA #8)[35]. This annual exhibition, including a large number of artists, was organized by Sangkring Art Space from June 28 to September 28, 2023. The first artwork is shown in Fig. 2. The painting, which was an abstract artwork by painter Nyoman Erawan, went beyond abstract or personal brushstrokes of color, presenting an "unseen feeling". Erawan's paintings featured free-flowing strokes of color and visuals that crossed the boundaries of space and imagination with a distinctive and strong Balinese character.





**Fig. 2.** Nyoman Erawan's Artwork, Microcosmos Dance, 210x280 cm, Acrylic on Canvas, 2019

The second artwork shown in Fig. 3 is the painting, which was titled Grateful by Rizal Hasan, measured 150x150 cm, and created with acrylic paint on canvas in 2023, depicting a semi-abstract pattern featuring typographic text that reads "Bless You" and a pair of hands. The artwork included shapes resembling fruits, leaves, tree trunks, clouds, and lightning symbols, all polished with bright colors on a white base and styled decoratively.



**Fig. 3.** Rizal Hasan's Painting, Grateful, 150x150 cm, Acrylic on Canvas, 2023

The third artwork shown in Fig. 4 the painting was titled Hero by I Made Wiradana, with a size of 150x200 cm and made in mixed media on canvas in 2023. This artwork represented Wiradana's highest representative side with a clearer identity of the subject. The subject was simple and primitive, with spontaneous and expressive brushstrokes that evoked strong emotions. The human figure and nature appeared chopped up, distorted, and humorous, with nature selected as a symbol of spirituality and primitive aspects.



**Fig. 4.** I Made Wiradana's Artwork, Hero, 150 x 200 cm, Mixed Media on Canvas, 2023

Based on the data collected, a total of 38 respondents appreciated the three selected paintings at Sangkring Art Space. On average, these respondents were aged 20-30 years, predominantly students, and held bachelor's degrees. The respondents were further categorized into civil servants or self-employed. Table 1 shows the results of respondents' appreciation of Sangkring Art Space based on the level of affection. The recapitulation showed that 80% of respondents answered "Yes", 7% answered "No", and 13% were "Not Answered" for questions such as like-dislike, beautiful-ugly, pleasant-unpleasant, and warm-cold towards

the three paintings. The responses showed a very high ability to appreciate the level of affection, which was 80%. Only 7% struggled to accept paintings, while 13% remained undecided.

**Table 1.** Respondents' Appreciation of Sangkring Art Space Based on the Level of Affection for Paintings

Affection Level Questions	Artwork 1 Nyoman Erawan			Artwork 2 Rizal Hasan			Artwork 3 I Made Wiradana			Total		
	Y	N	NA	Y	N	NA	Y	N	NA	Y	N	NA
Like-Dislike	36	1	1	24	6	8	30	4	4	90	11	13
Beautiful-Ugly	36	1	1	28	2	9	33	1	4	97	4	14
Pleasant-Unpleasant	27	1	10	30	3	5	25	7	6	82	11	21
Warm-Cold	35	0	3	29	4	5	34	1	3	98	5	11
Total (People)										367	31	59
Total (Percentage)										80	7	13

Table 2 shows respondents' appreciation of Sangkring Art Space based on the level of perception. For questions on the dynamicity, familiarity, and complexity of paintings 1, 2, and 3, the recapitulation in percentage showed that "Yes" answers were 80%, "No" were 7%, and "Not Answered" were 13%. Respondents further showed a fairly high level of perception appreciation at 73%. However, 14% still struggled to perceive paintings, and 13% remained undecided.

**Table 2.** Respondents' Appreciation of Sangkring Art Space Based on Perception Level of Paintings

Perception Level Questions	Artwork 1 Nyoman Erawan			Artwork 2 Rizal Hasan			Artwork 3 I Made Wiradana			Total		
	Y	N	NA	Y	N	NA	Y	N	NA	Y	N	NA
Dynamicity	32	1	5	24	10	4	33	2	4	89	13	13
Familiarity	26	1	11	25	8	5	32	1	5	83	10	21
Complexity	28	6	4	20	14	4	32	4	3	80	24	11
Total (People)										252	47	45
Total (Percentage)										73	14	13

Table 3 shows respondents' appreciation based on the level of cognition. The results signified that 72% answered "Yes ", 18% answered "No", and 20% were "Not Answered" for the questions meaningful-meaningless and emotional-unemotional towards artwork. These responses showed that appreciation at the cognitive level was quite high at 72%. Furthermore, 18% had difficulty understanding the meaning or idea of paintings, and 20% remained undecided.

**Table 3.** Respondents' Appreciation of Sangkring Art Space Based on the Level of Cognition of Paintings

Cognition Level Questions	Artwork 1 Nyoman Erawan			Artwork 2 Rizal Hasan			Artwork 3 I Made Wiradana			Total		
	Y	N	NA	Y	N	NA	Y	N	NA	Y	N	NA
Meaningful-Meaningless	26	3	9	23	7	9	33	2	3	82	12	21
Emotional-Unemotional	24	2	12	26	2	10	33	2	3	83	6	25
Total (People)										165	18	46
Total (Percentage)										72	18	20

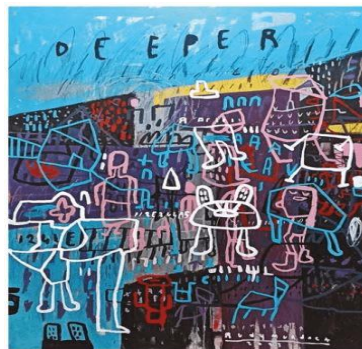
Based on Table 4, the cumulative results of respondents' appreciation at Sangkring Art Space for the levels of affection, perception, and cognition showed high appreciation across all levels. The level of affection was 80%, perception was 73%, and cognition was 72%. These results suggested that the highest level of public appreciation was affection, followed by perception and cognition.

**Table 4.** Accumulative Results of Respondents' Appreciation at Sangkring Art Space Based on Affection, Perception, and Cognition Levels

Appreciation Level	Total (%)		
	Yes	No	Not Answered
Affection Level	80	7	13
Perception Level	73	14	13
Cognition Level	72	18	20

### 3.3. Public Appreciation Level of Paintings at Semarang Gallery

The three paintings appreciated by respondents at Semarang Gallery represented the diversity of artwork in the exhibition "*Sapuan Kuas and Kelaliman Bentuk*," which took place from August 19 to October 10, 2023 [36]. The first artwork shown in Fig. 5 is the painting titled *Deeper Than Love* by Rudy Murdock and was developed with acrylic on a 140x180 cm canvas. This abstract artwork featured figures and text that were difficult to recognize with spontaneous and flexible lines and brush strokes. Furthermore, the subject was free without detailed representation.



**Fig. 5.** Rudy Murdock's *Deeper Than Love* Mix Media on Canvas, 140x180 cm, 2023

The second artwork shown in Fig. 6 is the painting entitled *Duniawi* by Pidi Baiq and was created in acrylic on canvas, measuring 200x250 cm in 2023. This artwork represented a semi-abstract style because it was figuratively between abstract and realistic. Additionally, artwork was more narrative, which depicted vague, distorted figures whose identity could still be recognized. The identity of the figure was not made to imitate the shape in the real world in detail and precision, celebrate the flexibility of brush strokes.



**Fig. 6.** Pidi Baiq's Artwork, *Duniawi*, Acrylic on Canvas, 200x250 cm, 2023

The third artwork shown in Fig. 7 is the painting titled *Morning Energy* by Klowor Waldiyono and was developed with a size of 177x245 cm in 2022. This realistic artwork depicted a panoramic view of nature with trees, vines, mountains, leaves, clouds, rice fields, houses, and animals. The subjects were clearly identified, despite the winding brushstroke style.



**Fig. 7.** Kloror Waldiyono's Artwork, Morning Energy, Acrylic on Canvas, 177x245 cm, 2022

Respondents at Semarang Gallery who gave appreciative responses to the three selected paintings totaled 40. The characteristics of respondents were mainly students, averaging undergraduate and high school graduates aged around 20-30 years, with others being private employees or self-employed. Based on this survey, the results of respondents' responses to the three paintings that had been determined were observed in the table. Based on Table 5, the recapitulation in terms of percentage for the questions such as for questions such as like-dislike, beautiful-ugly, pleasant-unpleasant, and warm-cold regarding the three paintings showed that 89% answered "Yes," 4% answered "No," and 7% were "Not Answered." This suggested a very high level of affection at 89% with 4% having difficulty responding to the beauty of paintings, and 7% being undecided.

**Table 5.** Results of Respondents' Appreciation at Semarang Gallery Based on Affection Level for the Three Paintings

Affection Level Questions	Artwork 1 Rudy Murdoch			Artwork 2 Pidi Baiq			Artwork 3 Rudy Kloror			Total		
	Y	N	NA	Y	N	NA	Y	N	NA	Y	N	NA
Like-Dislike	37	0	3	33	3	4	39	1	0	109	4	7
Beautiful-Ugly	33	1	6	33	2	5	40	0	0	106	3	11
Pleasant-Unpleasant	33	3	4	27	6	7	39	1	0	99	10	11
Warm-Cold	37	2	1	37	1	2	40	0	0	114	3	3
Total (People)										428	20	32
Total (Percentage)										89	4	7

Table 6 presents respondents' responses to questions on the dynamicity, familiarity, and complexity of the three paintings. The recapitulation showed that 82% answered "Yes," 8% answered "No," and 10% were "Not Answered." This suggested a very high level of perception at 82% with 8% having difficulty perceiving paintings and 10% being undecided.

**Table 6.** Results of Respondents' Appreciation at Semarang Gallery Based on Perception Level

Perception Level Questions	Artwork 1 Rudy Murdoch			Artwork 2 Pidi Baiq			Artwork 3 Rudy Kloror			Total		
	Y	N	NA	Y	N	NA	Y	N	NA	Y	N	NA
Dynamicity	31	6	4	31	3	6	36	2	2	98	11	12
Familiarity	30	4	6	34	3	3	39	0	1	103	7	10
Complexity	32	4	4	35	1	4	31	5	4	98	10	13
Total (People)										299	28	35
Total (Percentage)										82	8	10

These results showed that respondents had developed the ability to appreciate the arrangement of elements in paintings, perceiving qualities of dynamicity, familiarity, and complexity. From these characters, paintings were considered to have a quality of beauty for respondents to feel the artwork. Table 7 shows respondents' appreciation based on the level of cognition. The recapitulation showed that 78% answered "Yes," 3% answered "No," and 19% were "Not Answered" for questions about meaningful-meaningless and emotional-unemotional aspects of paintings. This suggested a high level of cognitive appreciation at 78%, with 3% having difficulty interpreting paintings and 19% being undecided.



**Table 7.** Results of Respondents' Appreciation at Semarang Gallery Based on the Level of Cognition of the artwork

Cognitive Level Questions	Artwork 1 Rudy Murdoch			Artwork 2 Pidi Baiq			Artwork 3 Rudy Klowor			Total		
	Y	N	NA	Y	N	NA	Y	N	NA	Y	N	NA
Meaningful-Meaningless	28	3	11	32	0	8	33	1	6	93	4	25
Emotional-Unemotional	31	2	8	33	1	6	33	1	6	97	4	20
Total (People)										190	8	45
Total (Percentage)										78	3	19

Table 8 shows the cumulative results of respondents' appreciation at Semarang Gallery based on the levels of affection, perception, and cognition. The results concluded that the public who visited Semarang Gallery to appreciate contemporary paintings possessed a high level of appreciation with affection (89%), perception (82%), and cognition (78%). These figures showed that the highest level of public appreciation was affection, followed by perception and cognition.

**Table 8.** Cumulative Results of Respondents' Appreciation at Semarang Gallery at the Affection, Perception, and Cognition Levels

Appreciation Level	Total (%)		
	Yes	No	Not Answered
Affection Level	89	4	7
Perception Level	82	8	10
Cognition Level	78	3	19

### 3.4. Public Aesthetic Psychology of Abstract, Semi-Abstract, and Realistic Paintings Based on Affection, Perception, and Cognition Levels.

The answers of respondents to questions on aesthetic psychology at the levels of affection, perception, and cognition towards the three paintings at both Semarang Gallery and Sangkring Art Space served as indicators of successful appreciation of paintings regardless of the representative style. Table 1 and Table 4 are used to identify the tendencies of visitors' aesthetic psychology within the affective structure. Table 2 and Table 5 are used to identify the tendencies of visitors' aesthetic psychology within the perceptual structure. Table 3 and Table 6 are used to identify the tendencies of visitors' aesthetic psychology within the cognitive structure. Table 4 is used to conclude the overall tendencies of visitors' aesthetic psychology at Sangkring Art Space. Table 8 is used to conclude the overall tendencies of visitors' aesthetic psychology at Sangkring Art Space. Based on Table 1, Table 2, Table 3, Table 4, Table 5, Table 6, Table 7, and Table 8, several results were summarized in the following perspective. Respondents showed the same level of affection for the three types of paintings. Preferences for abstract 1, semi-abstract 2, and realistic artwork 3 remained relatively high, reflecting a similar range of levels. This high level of agreement applied to four indicators of affection, namely like-dislike, beauty-ugly, pleasant-unpleasant, and warm-cold. Respondents' answers at Sangkring Art Space and Semarang Gallery showed no significant difference in percentage, each presenting a ratio of 80% to 89%. Although there is a slight difference in the figures, both indicate that the majority of respondents in both galleries have a strong and similar affective response to abstract, semi-abstract, and realistic artworks. From the perspective of aesthetic psychology, the level of abstraction does not influence the preference response.

Respondents showed a similar level of perception towards the three types of paintings. The ability to perceive the composition of visual elements in abstract 1, semi-abstract 2, and realistic artwork 3 remained at a high level. This applied to the three indicators of perception, namely, dynamicity, familiarity, and complexity. The responses at Sangkring Art Space and Semarang Gallery showed high agreement on understanding perception, with no significant percentage difference, each presenting a ratio of 73% to 82%. Although there is a slight difference in the figures, both indicate that the majority of respondents in both galleries have a strong and similar affective response to abstract, semi-abstract, and realistic artworks. From the perspective of aesthetic psychology, the perceptual ability response is not influenced by the level of abstraction

but rather by the structure of the visual element components, which are dynamic, complex, and familiar. Cognitive responses towards the abstract, semi-abstract, and realistic paintings at both galleries were further high. The ability to interpret the meaning of the three paintings remained consistent with high agreement on the indicators of cognition, namely the existence of meaning and important ideas. Responses at both venues showed no significant percentage difference, each presenting a ratio of 72% to 78%. Although the cognitive scores are generally high and similar, the quality and depth of understanding of each type of artwork can differ subtly. In the context of aesthetic psychology, this small variation is influenced by the level of interpretive freedom offered by the type of artwork itself. Abstract paintings allow respondents to use more imagination and connect with personal experiences, resulting in a more diverse range of interpretations compared to realistic paintings, which are more tied to concrete representation.

The results of the interview with respondents showed high consistency with the questionnaire outcomes. Unstructured and open interviews also succeeded in motivating broader and more open answers, showing that interest in artwork was not limited to a particular style. Respondents appreciated abstract, semi-abstract, and realistic styles equally, finding each form distinctive and interesting. Each had a uniqueness that was not boring and appeared in a fresh form. Lacher further stated that someone at first glance could give a like-dislike response because the visual captured the essence of the appeal [38]. Respondents found uniqueness in the shapes, strokes, colors, and composition by providing a different and new aesthetic experience [39]. Additionally, the artwork of Klowor Waldiyono was considered unique by respondents due to the dexterity and flexibility of the brush strokes, both in drawing lines, incising, and planes. Each part was created with comprehensive details and extraordinary perseverance. According to Barret, the details of the artwork were developed with free and spontaneous brush strokes, showing strong expressive values [2] and rigidity. The initial impression made respondents feel engaged, even before detailed observation. Respondents remained enthusiastic and open to new experiences, as gallery-curated selections also reinforced the arguments.

In-depth interviews on perception abilities showed high consistency with the questionnaire results. Respondents perceived and felt impressions of dynamism, unity, and complexity in compositions. The representative styles of abstract, semi-abstract, and realistic paintings exhibited visual beauty without rigidity. The details of the answers ranged from asymmetrical compositions and varying colors to figures and still lifes of different sizes. For respondents, simple subjects did not appear boring due to varying supporting elements. The high level of perception appreciation correlated with Monroe Beardsley's aesthetic principles of unity, complexity, and intensity [40], which were universally accepted regardless of personal tastes [41]. Respondents perceived unity through coherent visual elements that complemented each other. Works appeared complete without needing further action, with each subject supporting the others. Complexity was viewed as high visual appeal, with rich visual elements offering contrasts and subtle differences through color, texture, and subject shapes. Rizal Hasan's paintings featured busy subjects with subtle differences between elements, such as fruits, letters, leaves, tree trunks, clouds, or lightning symbols in a thin manner. Intense repetition further produced dynamism, and old-time artistic quotes with contemporary tempos developed interesting contrasts. Jenni, the owner of Sangkring Art Space, stated that the diversity of vague, clear, imaginative, and other forms or idioms structurally increased the stimulation of hope and intention to pay attention to specific and general aspects. Finally, the readiness of the appreciator to be emotionally included in the appreciation of meaning increased as respondents who were able to perceive were often able to explain the meaning of the artwork.

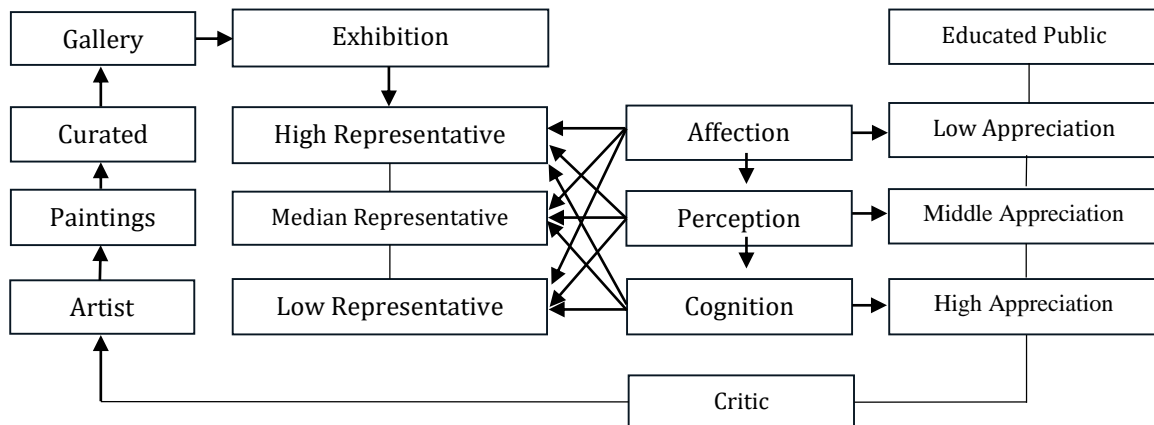
Respondents felt the intensity of paintings 1, 2, and 3, which presented compositional arrangements prompting distinct emotional qualities. Feeling the expression in every artwork was pursued, whether resulting from the success of the expression technique, the accuracy of idiom selection, the harmony of visualization, or other executions. Respondents believed that an emotional expression in artwork should be investigated as intensive, original, and sincere by the artist. Although emotional qualities such as happiness, joy, harmony, sadness, and tragedy took time to develop, respondents exhibited patience as stated by Winston, who observed that appreciators of high-quality paintings rather than popular ones could enjoy the process [42].

Respondents also provided arguments that the intensity could be felt due to the diverse idioms or symbols present. Entertaining and light paintings were preferred over others due to the offer of relaxation. The cheerful and bright colors in each form provided a heterogeneous richness, thereby helping eliminate daily work-related stress. At the cognition level, respondents did not stop at visual beauty as the meaning of the artwork was experienced, whether in the form of emotional quality or ideas, and was intriguing to understand. Emotions or ideas were considered crucial for enlightenment and soul enrichment. The ambiguity of symbols prompted numerous questions, leading to unverified interpretations. Respondents continued to think based on appropriate contextual perspectives, interpreting symbols personally and using the logic of the arguments and beliefs. Interpretations also varied widely, correlating with the contemporary paintings' enigmatic nature. Furthermore, Logocentrism was deconstructed, making the relationship between signifier and signified uncertain [4]. The spontaneous, random brush strokes and striking colors in I Made Wiradana's paintings stimulated respondents to uncover the meanings. Similarly, Klowor Waldiyono's paintings provided open interpretation due to the strange panoramas suggested with subjective colors. Communicators use the rules and conventions of the code to produce a message that will be interpreted properly, but those rules and conventions can only entail an array of possible interpretations [43].

Based on survey and interview data analyzed comparatively, several conclusions were drawn. Data comparisons from Sangkring Art Space and Semarang Gallery showed equivalent aesthetic psychological levels, as both groups did not suggest conflicting data. The psychological levels, from highest to lowest, started with affection, followed by perception, and finally cognition. Affection was the highest, while cognition was the lowest, with differences in each level ranging from 4% to 5%. The analysis confirmed several statements, as most respondents appreciated affection, perception, and cognition. Only a few respondents appreciated affection but were weak in perception. Similarly, a few respondents appreciated perception and found it difficult to appreciate cognition. The inequality in achieving appreciation at each psychological level originated from the need for support from perception and affection abilities for cognition. Strong affection further motivated respondents to perceive visual structure through unity, harmony, and intensity principles. The ability to perceive also stimulated the interpretation of meaning. When affection was not achieved, respondents did not progress to the perception or cognition stages. Initial interest determined whether the process of perceiving visual structure and searching for meaning continued. This sequence emphasizes that an interesting visual presentation stimulated respondents to start loving artwork [41][44]. It served as the basis or step to understanding other, more complex beauties. Davies stated that mathematics began with counting and measuring, not calculus or string theory. Physics originally related to simple principles of motion, mass, and cause and effect, not Einstein's relativity [44][45]. Similarly, a complex culture could be recognized and identified by the character through the structure of the components in paintings. The visible advantage of a structured culture lies in the beauty of paintings.

The response of the aesthetic psychological level to the three types of paintings in Semarang Gallery and Sangkring Art Space implied that both respondent groups appreciated paintings with different styles. Respondents could appreciate abstract, semi-abstract, or realistic paintings in terms of affection, perception, and cognition due to satisfaction, as the preferences were not hindered by the representative style. All paintings possessed the potential to be liked, perceived, and interpreted because definitive or non-definitive idioms had the power to stimulate respondents' affection, perception, and cognition. The representative style was not the main variable influencing the success of artwork to be appreciated. Respondents' interest rested on the unique visual identity, supported by the fulfillment of visual prerequisites such as unity, complexity, and intensity. Artwork was singularistic, and artists as humanists possessed the right to a personal perspective that was always contextualized [46]. Supporting criteria included new elements, surprising power, heterogeneity, and asymmetry as shown in paintings categorized as high artwork. On this basis, the selection of paintings with strong curation by professional curators in galleries was essentially needed. The selected aesthetic paintings stimulated the public to be interested in and love artwork, as it would continue to be perceived for visual harmony, thereby stimulating interpretation. Furthermore, when paintings exhibited

were not interesting initially, it would be difficult to respond to a higher aesthetic psychological level. Affection, perception, and cognition levels were not affected by the diversity of subjects in contemporary paintings, specifically in terms of representation (Fig. 8). The success of appreciation at a certain aesthetic psychological level greatly influenced the increase in education for the public. A good aesthetic experience made the public more critical in responding to the creation of the artists' artwork. Through this conducive cycle, the role of curators, galleries, the public, and artists was important in the development of contemporary paintings.



**Fig. 8.** The relationship between the psychological level of the public at the exhibition in the gallery in the development of artworks

#### 4. Conclusion

This study reveals that visitors to the “Kuas dan Kelaliman Bentuk” exhibition (2023) at Semarang Gallery and the Yogya Annual Art #8 (2023) at Sangkring Art Space were able to appreciate paintings regardless of the subject's degree. They did not experience significant difficulty in appreciating paintings categorized as abstract, semi-abstract, and realistic, across the three displayed artworks. Based on the aesthetic psychology framework, visitors to the two exhibitions demonstrated the capacity to appreciate artworks at the affective, perceptual, and cognitive stages. Analysis of their responses across these psychological structures showed no significant differences, as the variation in response rates did not exceed 5%. The highest level of interest was influenced by affective responses, followed by perception and cognition. Furthermore, viewers' initial emotional responses to the paintings stimulated their perception of visual structure and their interpretation of meaning. Conversely, their interpretation of aesthetic experience was supported by perceptual and initial affective responses to the paintings. Viewers' appreciation typically began with an initial sense of attraction, followed by perception, and then interpretation, regardless of whether the painting was abstract, semi-abstract, or realistic. Only a small number of respondents gave *Ragu-Ragu* (netral/tidak yakin) responses or reported a lack of understanding. Additionally, viewers' appreciation did not show a significant preference for each abstraction degree: abstract, semi-abstract, or realistic. Their initial attraction was strongly influenced by the artworks' objective visual qualities, such as unity, complexity, and intensity. This study contributes to an early understanding of the relation between the degree of subject abstraction in contemporary paintings and visitors' appreciative responses, within the framework of aesthetic psychology. However, the findings can not be generalized to all forms of visual art, as the study did not include other forms, such as minimalist paintings, conceptual art, installations, video art, or digital media. Furthermore, participants' diverse backgrounds were not categorized to evaluate their potential influence on aesthetic experience. Therefore, further research is needed by using an aesthetic psychology approach that includes a broader range of art forms and considers participants' backgrounds. This would



strengthen the validity of the findings and further explore the psychological dimensions of aesthetic appreciation.

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