



# Audience; as the Producer of the Meaning of Artwork Investigating an Artwork from Gadamer's perspective

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**Abstract:** *In Gadamer's view, the main problem of audience is that to reconstruct and return the artwork to the initial state of its time is meaningless; however, it is to unite the work of art and attention to the melody that this work is of relevance to the present age of the audience. The method of conducting the descriptive-analytic research is library and survey methods; it is an applied research in terms of criterion, and cross-sectional research in terms of time criterion. Data were collected using a questionnaire. The number of respondents is 50 people, the samples were selected randomly from among the artistic and non-artistic people; its dimensions indicate that the audience creates the meaning in opposition to the work and invites the overall structure of the work to react. Thus, the author's intention is perhaps one of the things that the audience sometimes expresses briefly. As a result, only the audience can determine the extent to which certain norms must be rejected or taken into account; the experience of each audience is very important in this process.*

**Keywords:** *Audience, Meaning, Artwork, Hermeneutics, Gadamer.*

## INTRODUCTION

The works of art have been explained to audiences through the times by the artists and each one was presented in a different manner. Through the confrontation between the work and the audience, different views have been expressed that can be mentioned as example abundantly in art works and art. Meanwhile, Gadamer's view of the artwork and its audience should be thought over. In his opinion, the work of art does not have a specific period or, in other words, always has its present time and any time can be its period. The work of art expresses the meaning has never been reduced to what the author has intended. Perhaps, the author of the work addresses only his contemporaries, but the true existence of the artwork is in those things that they can explain and create a meaning for each audience. The key subject is that what the audiences can understand over time; the form that is in the artwork is the same one for different eras, or in any period or by any audience, this form presents something else. The significance of this matter is that the work of art can live in different times, and in facing the audience, it can display a part or the totality of itself, which perhaps, the author of the work has not paid attention to this ability of artwork during its presentation as well.

In the meantime, for more information and the background and a review of the research literature, several studies have been investigated that some samples can be pointed out such as the collected cases. Master's

thesis titled: Art in Gadamer; a look at the first part of the Truth and Method. Author: Babak Zamin Khiyabani, Supervisor: Alireza Azadi, 2015, University of Tabriz; his purpose is to study the concept of art from the perspective of Hans Georg Gadamer in his philosophical hermeneutics. Accordingly, understanding of everybody of an artwork is not exactly the same. In his view, the art is not a thing separated from the truth and rooted in a subjective aesthetic sense, but it is an aspect of truth that is revealed to us and a revelation of the truth. Another example that can be mentioned is a master's thesis titled Ontology of the Artwork from Gadamer's View. Author: Vahid Gholami Pourfard, Supervisor: Amir Nasri, 2012, Allameh Tabataba'i University. His view: Gadamer deals with the ontology of the work of art, with his critique of aesthetic consciousness, as an approach that neglects the truth of the work by subjectivising the artistic experience. In his opinion, the work is not in the form of an object in front of the subject, but in the form of interval that attracts the audience. In other words, a master's thesis titled "A Review of Gadamer's perception of the Representation in Art, Author: Sepideh Eghtedari, Supervisor: Amir Maziar, 2015, Tehran University of Art. Her view: the concept of the representation has a long-standing relation with the definition of art. In the twentieth century, Hans while Georg Gadamer mentioned the theory that many theorists of art were doubtful in its comprehensiveness, or in general, they considered it an inadequate theory for art. Based on the concept of the truth, he shows that how the existential state of the artwork is its embodiment, and how this artistic embodiment and representation realize a truth.

The aforementioned cases have somewhat criticized Gadamer's views and expressed a conception of his various ideas. According to the background presented, the present research seeks to answer the questions such as: What is created in the confrontation of the work of art and the audience in Gadamer's view? Also, what role has the audience to play in the meaning of the poster? In order to reach this goal, Gadamer's views were first gathered in this regard and in order to answer the second question on a field, three posters from the prominent Iranian designers were presented to the audience and the opinions of the audience were gathered. The method of conducting descriptive-analytic research is library and survey methods: it is applied in terms of application and cross-sectional in terms of time. Data were collected using a questionnaire. The number of respondents was 50 people, the samples were randomly selected from among the artistic and non-artistic people and the diagrams were used to report audience responses.

### ***Gadamer's Hermeneutics***

Gadamer was born in 1901 in Breslau<sup>1</sup>. In Marburg he studied philosophy and was a student of Nikolai Hartmann (1882-1950), and then a student of Martin Heidegger<sup>2</sup>. Gadamer's Dissertation was a thesis entitled "Plato's Dialect Ethics" written in 1928, and published in 1933. He published his the most important work, truth and method, in 1960. His reputation from the 1960s was largely due to his role in the revival of hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics<sup>3</sup>, which was the art of interpreting sacred texts at the beginning, and later the interpretation of legal and aesthetic<sup>4</sup> texts, was transformed by Gadamer into a completely new activity, and the philosophical hermeneutics was no longer a periodic and limited activity, but an acceptable practice on a universal level. Gadamer says, "where the meaning of the text cannot be understood immediately, the interpretation is essential, wherever a person is not willing to trust something that presents a phenomenon directly to us, the interpretation is necessary" (Lan, 96, 2012). Like Heidegger, Gadamer is a critic of new resignation to the technological thinking, thinking that is rooted in subjectivism, that is to say, "the human consciousness and the reasonable certainties based on it is as the ultimate reference for the knowledge of man" (Palmer, 128, 2012). In Gadamer's view, when we separate the consciousness of "aesthetics from other areas of non-

<sup>1</sup> Historical region in Central Europe, the largest part of which is located in Poland, and a small part of it is in the Czech Republic and Germany.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) was one of the most famous philosophers of the twentieth century. He contemplated the existence in a new way. His philosophy influenced the views of many of the philosophers after him.

<sup>3</sup> The study of the correct rules of text interpretation is called the Hermeneutics. The purpose of hermeneutics is to discover messages, signs and meanings of a text or a phenomenon. Hermeneutics studies the principles of the interpretation of texts, especially literary, religious, and legal texts.

<sup>4</sup> Aesthetics is one of the disciplines of philosophy as a theory. It is defined as a reflection on aesthetic judgments, and the essence of the beauty and its relation to perception.

aesthetic experience, we are subjected to the modern thinking, and this is the result of the initiation of the object of the subject of identification in thought", this is a result of the subjectivism (Rikhtegaran, p. 161, 1999). Gadamer's hermeneutics is based on the existence and the human temporality and is based on the ontological-linguistic aspect, and this linguistic action takes place in question and answer. There is a dialectic<sup>5</sup> between the audience's personal horizon and the work, and "the mere understanding of speaking and listening to it cannot result in salvation; instead, the analyst must be able to explain the systematic function of language "(Weinsheimer, 38, 2014).

### **Artwork from Gadamer's Point of View**

Gadamer wrote an article in 1964, entitled "Aesthetics and Hermeneutics," which is one of his most important articles. In this article, Gadamer explained that if "the task of hermeneutics is to create a bridge between thought and work of art, the work of art will be beyond the realm of hermeneutics because it talks to us without any mediation, and makes some sort of empathy with us as if it does not have any distance with us, and every form of conversation with it is a conversation with us" (Ahmadi, 2001, 583). Therefore, in art, in which the truth appears, there is "autonomy, and this is not the independence that exists in aesthetic consciousness, but it is the mediation of knowledge in the deep sense of the word ... Gadamerian concept of the total mediation of the work of art has another aspect according to which we are not in any way allowed to divide elements into two aesthetic and non-aesthetic parts in the effectiveness of an artwork ... that is, in the experience of a work of art, neither form nor the content is original, but the intention and the will" (Rikhtegaran, p. 1378, 166). Gadamer concludes from the logic and the aesthetic judgment that "the distinction between the constitutive judgment and the contemplative judgment is not absolute" (Winsheimer, 2014, 90).

That the aesthetic judgment is not absolute stems from the fact that "the work of art does not have a special period or, in other words, always has its present time, and each period can be its period. The art work represents a truth which has never been reduced to what its creator has been asking. Perhaps the creator addresses only his contemporaries, but the true existence of the work of art is in those things that can say something and the presence of the work of art in the horizons of different periods brings about different forms. The main thing is this question that what does the artwork tell us? Gadamer emphasizes that every response from the work comes only after our question" (Ahmadi, 2001, 583). Hence, Gadamer explains that this attitude to the art perspective requires ontologically a mass of existence. The artistic mind of the human being who automatically invents useful objects ultimately understands any kind of beauty in terms of his own works" (Winsheimer, 2014, 142). Another result that is followed by the distinction of the aesthetic from the non-aesthetic is the lack of attention to the temporality of the work of art. "The work of art tells something to the audience, but not in the way in which the survivals of the past, or the historical documents, which have a permanent meaning, tell the researcher of the history; the art work speaks and it must be integrated into the consciousness of each individual" (Ahmadi, 2001, 585).

Interpretation of the artwork by the audience is an event occurring in time. "Gadamer claims that the experience of the work of art goes beyond any mental and personal horizon of the interpretation, both from the horizon of the artist and from the horizon of the person who understands the work. For this reason, it is not possible for the mind's action to be the criterion of meaning of the work ... The point is neither the intention of the author, nor the work as a thing in itself outside of the history, but that which appears to occur repeatedly in historical encounters" (Palmer, 2012, 181). Each work of art has a certain meaning in the historical situation, hence the work of art and the historicity of the audience will come together; Gadamer believes that the experience and reception of the work of art exceeds the mentality of the artist and the recipient of the work ... The main issue is the nature of the work of art that is often met in different historical contexts" (Rikhtegaran, 1999, 175). The audience only determines the meaning based on the relative

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<sup>5</sup> Dialectic derived from the Greek *διαλεκτική*. The dialectic is one of the tools of philosophy and a theory about the nature of logic. The background of dialectical thought refers to the ancient Greece, and specifically to Socrates' views.

knowledge of the work of art. "Gadamer also insists on the possibility of the correct interpretation. The interpretation that belongs to what is being interpreted ... The first and final insight of Gadamer, which is the retelling of this Heidegger's conclusion that the time is the meaning of being, and every understanding is a kind of event of being" (Winsheimer, 2011, 185). By applying this ability, the mind of the audience makes sense to what is already empty, and Gadamer, based on the adaptive accuracy, which he considers to be the most important principle of understanding the work, says: "If a conversation with the work is possible, we propose the adaptation in the knowledge and pass the work into our time, and make its elements with the semantic elements of our time, readable "(Ahmadi, 2001, 600). Thus, the meaning of a work is based on the questions that the audience rises today. In the view of Gadamer, the main problem of the audience is not to reconstruct and return the work to the initial state of its time, but it is important to unify the work and attention to the address for the audience in the present age. The audience of the work should always consider this presupposition that the comprehension of a work of art is first and foremost a matter of rebuilding and building upon the existence, "that which can be understood in words; therefore, the existence which can be understood, becomes an integral part of language" (Winsheimer, 1990, 169).

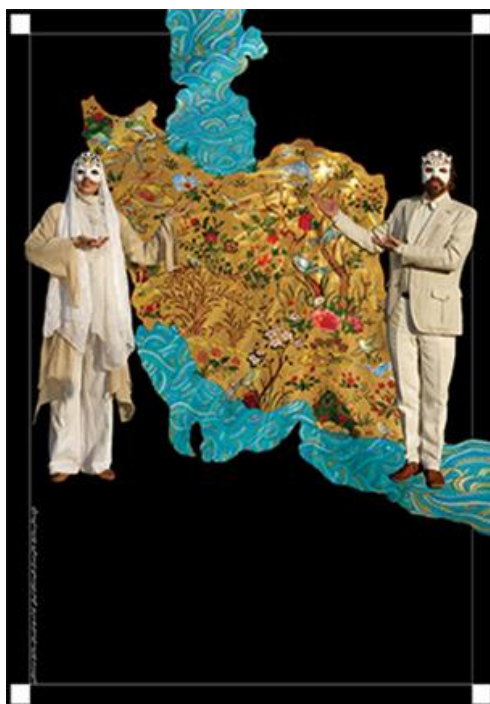
### Research Findings

Regarding Gadamer's view about the artwork and audience, it can be stated that the mind of the audience is the criterion of the production of meaning in confronting the work. In this way, the work of art is removed from its past context and becomes the meaning and form to which the current audience refers. The audience attributes a meaning to the work according to his experiences, attitudes, and outlook, which may not have been the intention of the author of the work when presenting it. Nowadays, graphics as one of the most important tools for the advertising, communication and dissemination of political, social and cultural knowledge in the advanced societies is one of the most important pillars of the social life. As the graphic art is the open transparent mirror of the current cultural issues, it registers and reflects all the spiritual and intellectual moments of the society. Therefore, the graphic art has its own special significance in public relations. By using various arts, a graphic or better graphic design creates two-dimensional works on different surfaces, such as paper, wall, canvas, metal, wood, fabric, plastic, computer monitor, rock, so forth., so that the audience of the Graphical work to learn something or picture something or to be entertained. In most of the graphics, the text, image and color are interwoven. Hence, in this section, we discuss the extent to which the graphic work, especially the poster which is a printed and reproduced work about an event for informing a wide circle of the society, can communicate with the audience. To better identify this topic, 3 posters from the pioneers of graphic designers of Iran (1. Poster of 33<sup>rd</sup> Fajr international festival of theater. Designers: Masoud Firuzkhani, Yarta Yaran, Fereshteh Taheri. 2. Poster of 30th Fajr International Theater Festival, Mohammad Jahani Moghadam. 3. Poster of 27th Fajr International Theater Festival, Mehdi Pakdel were selected and, with removing the title, a questionnaire with open questions<sup>6</sup> is provided to the statistical population of the research and they are asked to express a title for each of the works. Total respondents: 50 people, 24 men, and 26 women from artistic and non-artistic people. The findings are gathered separately according to each question in the form of the diagram and infographics<sup>7</sup>, and the unique words of the audience associated about each poster.

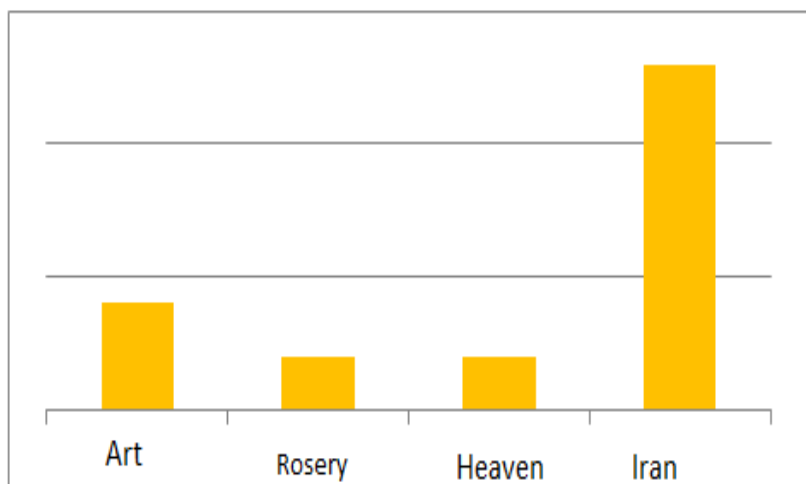
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<sup>6</sup> They are questions in which the respondent can express the answer at his own discretion. These answers can range from few words to sentences. These types of questions are used to study beliefs in a particular context.

<sup>7</sup> Infographics is representation of data using several charts and figures in the form of an image.



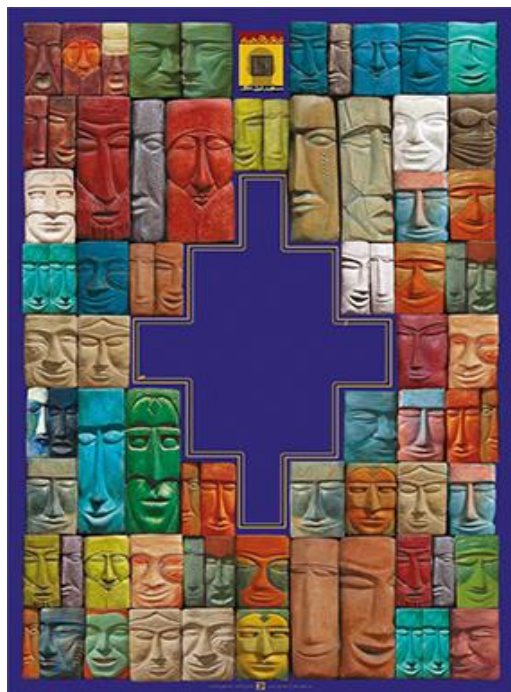
**Figure 1:** Poster of 33<sup>rd</sup> Fajr international festival of theater. Designers: Masoud Firuzkhani, Yarta Yaran, Fereshteh Taheri, Source [www.fitf.ir](http://www.fitf.ir)



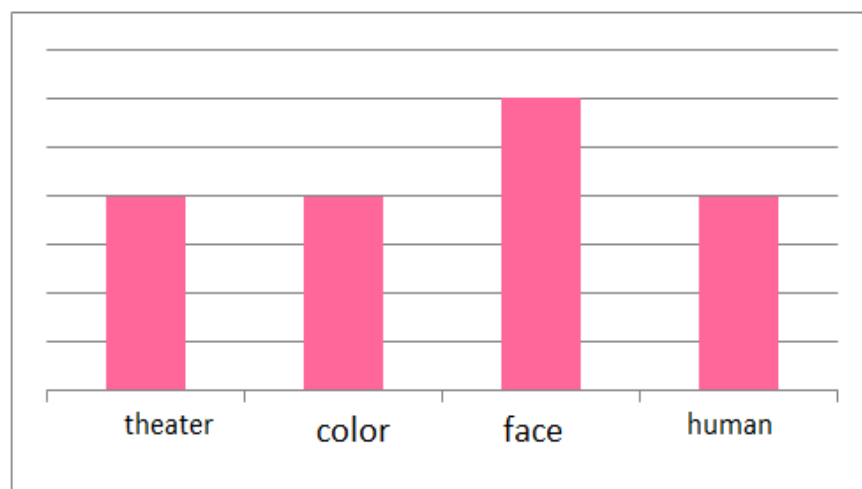
**Diagram 1:** Repetitive words of the audience of the poster of 33<sup>rd</sup> Fajr international festival of theater.

Unique words of the audience of the poster of 33<sup>rd</sup> Fajr international festival of Theater.

Fascinated - Honestly - plain - The whole world one side - My homeland - My hometown – Drawn -Long age - Beautiful nature –Traveling in Iran –the mask was not interesting -Mashhad-Sun-garden -Carpet-Magic mask -Beautiful-Vintage-Ancient culture - From the non-Iranian side. Mask - pleasant - See it in person - luxuriance - Invitation - Province - City – Hope land - motifs - Iranology - Immortal - A gift for me.



**Figure 2:** Poster of 30th Fajr International Theater Festival, Mohammad Jahani Moghadam, Source [www.fitf.ir](http://www.fitf.ir)



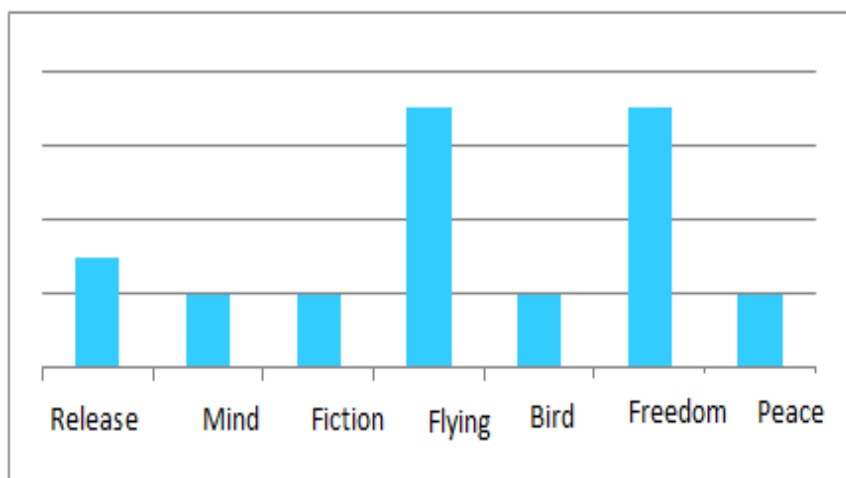
**Diagram 2:** Repetitive words of the audience, the poster of 30th Fajr International Theater Festival

Unique words of the audience of the poster of 30th Fajr International Theater Festival

Stylistics before Islam - Traditions - Thousands of nationalities - Interesting - Exciting - Bitter - Human evolution - Different mode - Meaningless-Color- myths -Ugly and beautiful - Sad and happy - life- citron - Society- Cultural science- Mask of life- Peace and friendship - ethnicity. Excellence and Development-Culture- Aryan-Cloud and Wind-land of color- Peace and Friendship-kindness -Miniature-Ethnicity-Old Myths-Clear-cleanness -Water-Grandma-Climate-my Country- Specifications of People- Swarm-Imbalance-Symbolic-Extreme-Symbol-clear difference – tumult – Bitter -information.



**Figure 3:** Poster of 27th Fajr International Theater Festival, Mehdi Pakdel, Source www.fitf.ir



**Diagram 3:** Recurring words of the audience, the poster of 27th Fajr International Theater Festival

**Unique words of the audience of the poster of 27th Fajr International Theater Festival**

Sacred Defense - White - Getting to Exaltation - Upper - Dead - Cemetery - Peak – enthusiasm - Power of infinity – Spirit – divine realm - Innocently-Thinking- it’s not understandable - Depression- absurdity - Relaxation – confusion -Film- Beautiful sense -Divine Mercy - Unique - Interesting idea - lasting - Simplicity – thinking style -Heavenly-pleasure -Strengthening of morale -Closing load -Not pleasing- A pleasant death.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

In response to the first question of this research (how is it possible to find a relation between the work of art and the audience according to Gadamer?), we can say that: the relationship between the work of art and its audience is possible where the audience listen to his inner melody of his experiences for knowing the relationship between the form and the meaning of the work. The important thing is that the artwork tells something and the audience tries to understand it and to communicate with it. Understanding the work of art

means to answer the questions through which we find ourselves. Each act of understanding of the work is only due to the questions that we are posing. The mind of the audience is not empty at the beginning of confronting the artwork. It is a set of demands that arise from the audience's knowledge and experience, and the audience tries to recognize differences in the meaning of the work, now whether it is the same the author has in mind or not. The audience always takes a step forward when s/he understands, and whenever s/he cannot understand the work of art, the reason is that this work does not tell him anything or tells nothing to his audience. Such an interpretation of art is not merely a reproduction of meaning, but it is a creative production of meaning. It always has footprints from the present time of the audience. Whether the audience could successfully discover the true meaning of the work of art is something that cannot be determined by the limited knowledge and experience of each audience. Additionally, the audience can understand meaning, in distinguishing it from its signification, only according to what it means to him and whether its signs are familiar to him.

The answer to the second question of this research (what role does the audience play in the meaning of the poster?) clarifies this fact that the audience is actively involved in making meaning, and this is due to the factors such as audience knowledge, the ability of the audience to complete what is flawed or to choose what is important and to ignore what is not important in his view. This means that the audience is not a mere recipient of the meaning fully articulated by the author of the work, but is active in constructing the meaning. The opinions of the audiences relative to the work of art depend on the position of each audience in relation to the work of art; the audience, when exposed to the work, processes it in accordance with the theme of his/her identity, and the unity of the work is discovered by the audience as an expression of the theme of his/her identity. The audience opposed to the work of meaning, makes himself and invokes the overall structure of the work. Thus, the author's intention is just one of the cases which the audience expresses at some point or in part of the times, and only the audience can determine the extent to which some norms must be rejected or something to be accepted; in this regard, the audience's experiences storage is very important in this process. The audience's initial horizon of expectations in relation to the artwork only tells him how a work is to be valued and interpreted at the time of its creation, but its meaning is not self-subsistent, and each audience in each period gives the work of art a new meaning; it is resulted from the mental and social structure of each audience and the experiences and knowledge that the he gains during their lifetime.

### **Suggestions**

In this section, given the experiences that the researcher has gained in the process of doing this research, the following points can be made that if someone else intends to do so, he/she can benefit from the researcher's experiences in collecting information or reporting them:

1. The words of the audience can be a critique on the behavioral patterns and the lives of each person and society in which he or she lives.
2. The words of the audience can also be examined from the perspective of the psychology of art.
3. The words of the audience can also be examined from the perspective of the sociology of art.
4. The words extracted from the audience can be continued over many years and examined the feedback of the work of art in different periods, so that the perception of the audience of the work of art is evaluated in different periods.

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