

Between Aesthetics and Politics: Narrative Review of Sociopolitical Functions of Art

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ABSTRACT: This review examines the intersection of art criticism and cultural studies in shaping sociopolitical narratives in contemporary art. The study aims to analyze how art functions as both an aesthetic form and a medium of political engagement, focusing on themes of critique, identity, commodification, and memory. A systematic literature search was conducted using Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, employing keywords such as art criticism, cultural studies, sociopolitical narratives, contemporary art, and identity politics. Inclusion criteria prioritized peer-reviewed works from 2000 to 2025 addressing sociopolitical contexts in art. The analysis revealed four dominant themes. First, art serves as a medium of political critique, providing platforms for resistance and public dialogue in contexts ranging from Kazakhstan to Mexico. Second, art mediates ideology and identity, reflecting tensions shaped by migration, gender, and globalization. Third, the global art market plays a paradoxical role by both enabling and constraining critical voices, often subordinating cultural meaning to economic value. Fourth, spectral theory offers insight into how art engages with trauma and collective memory across diverse cultural contexts. These findings highlight the influence of systemic political and economic forces on art while affirming its potential as a catalyst for dialogue and transformation. Policy support, educational integration, and digital innovation are identified as key strategies to strengthen art's critical role. Future research should expand cross-cultural comparisons and explore digital methodologies to address current gaps. The review underscores art's continuing relevance as a vehicle for sociopolitical critique in a globalized world..

Keywords: Art Criticism, Cultural Studies, Sociopolitical Narratives, Contemporary Art, Identity Politics, Art Market, Collective Memory.



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INTRODUCTION

The intersection of art criticism and cultural studies has increasingly become a focal point for understanding how contemporary art engages with sociopolitical narratives. Scholars now widely

recognize that contemporary art functions as more than a domain of aesthetic appreciation; it also operates as a potent medium for articulating political dissent, cultural identity, and social justice concerns (Mukanov et al., 2021). Artistic practices have expanded beyond traditional frameworks, incorporating discourses from anthropology, sociology, and history to critically reflect on pressing issues such as environmental crises, inequality, migration, and identity politics. As Perera and Pathak (2019) argue, the integration of interdisciplinary perspectives enriches the field of art criticism by situating works of art within broader sociocultural frameworks, thereby transforming criticism into an analytical tool that interrogates both artistic form and sociopolitical function.

The proliferation of art exhibitions and digital platforms has expanded dialogue opportunities. These platforms connect artists and audiences across cultural boundaries. In this expanded sphere, art becomes a lens through which to explore the tensions and contradictions of globalization. According to Cota and Cuenca (2020), digital art in Mexico has emerged as a form of resistance to neoliberal capitalism, simultaneously critiquing systemic inequalities and cultivating cultural literacy. This illustrates the growing importance of examining how art is embedded within sociopolitical contexts, serving as a means of amplifying marginalized voices and challenging dominant narratives. Similarly, Mammì (2025) highlights how the convergence of art, criticism, and the art market exposes inherent contradictions: while art engages with social critique, it is also commodified within global luxury industries, creating friction between critique and commodification.

Empirical evidence underscores the significance of art as a form of sociopolitical critique. For instance, studies of artistic responses to climate change demonstrate how cultural traditions are mobilized to advocate for ecological balance and sustainable development (Mukanov et al., 2021). In a related vein, Almenia (2021) illustrates how contemporary adaptations of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* interrogate gender, race, and social inequality, thereby foregrounding art's capacity to interrogate entrenched power structures. Such examples reinforce the argument that art does not merely reflect societal issues but actively shapes discourse by fostering critical engagement among audiences.

Moreover, the increasing digitization of art practices has expanded both the reach and the stakes of art criticism. As Cota and Cuenca (2020) note, the integration of digital technologies into artistic practice has opened new avenues for sociopolitical commentary, but it has also raised questions regarding the sustainability of critical discourse in a globalized media environment. Pino (2025) extends this analysis by emphasizing that digital platforms present both opportunities and challenges: while they democratize access to critical dialogues, they also necessitate new methodological approaches in criticism that can effectively account for the dynamics of digital interaction.

Despite these advancements, scholars face persistent challenges in connecting art criticism with contemporary cultural discourse. One pressing issue is the homogenization of cultural production under globalization, which risks eroding the specificity of local artistic traditions and sociocultural contexts (Almenia, 2021). The universalization of narratives may obscure localized forms of resistance, thus weakening art's role in amplifying diverse cultural identities. Perera and Pathak

(2019) caution that without careful attention to the interplay between art and anthropology, criticism risks flattening complex cultural dynamics into generalized interpretations.

Another challenge concerns methodological limitations in the current literature. As Raljević (2024) suggests, critical practices often lack robust interdisciplinary frameworks that can adequately capture the multifaceted nature of art's engagement with politics and culture. While innovative practices are emerging, including experimental forms of criticism and the incorporation of nontraditional media, there remains a need for more systematic methodologies that bridge theoretical innovation with empirical analysis. Scholars such as Shukurov (2025) emphasize that embracing inclusive, cross-disciplinary approaches is essential for advancing the field, particularly given the evolving nature of art in digital and transnational contexts.

The gaps in the literature are particularly evident in relation to digitalization. Although there is growing recognition of the role of digital media in reshaping art criticism, few studies have systematically analyzed how digital platforms transform the modalities of critique. Pino (2025) points out that digital environments create novel arenas for public engagement and protest, yet existing research has not adequately theorized how these spaces alter the dynamics of critical discourse. Similarly, while Cota and Cuenca (2020) highlight the potential of digital art to resist neoliberal structures, there is insufficient exploration of how such practices intersect with broader debates on cultural literacy and political agency. This indicates a pressing need for scholarship that interrogates the sociopolitical implications of digital transformations in art.

The primary aim of this review is to examine how contemporary art criticism and cultural studies intersect to illuminate sociopolitical narratives in art. Specifically, it seeks to analyze the ways in which art functions as a medium of ideological expression, political critique, and identity formation. By synthesizing insights from diverse geographical and cultural contexts, the review aims to construct a nuanced understanding of art's dual role as both aesthetic practice and sociopolitical discourse. This includes examining how art engages with issues such as environmental sustainability, neoliberal capitalism, gender and racial inequality, and the commodification of cultural expression.

In delineating its scope, this review focuses on comparative analyses across different geographic regions—Europe, Asia, and Latin America—where contemporary art has become a vital site of sociopolitical engagement. In Europe, the emphasis often lies in addressing capitalism, authoritarianism, and collective trauma through critical artistic practices (Mammì, 2025). In Asia, globalization has engendered new forms of hybridity in art, where local traditions intersect with global cultural flows to produce nuanced expressions of identity (Tagore-Erwin, 2018). In Latin America, by contrast, art frequently operates as a tool of political resistance, confronting social injustices and amplifying grassroots struggles (Cota & Cuenca, 2020). This geographical diversity underscores the importance of situating art criticism within specific cultural contexts, as the meaning and impact of art are shaped by the sociopolitical realities in which it is produced and received.

By examining these diverse yet interconnected trajectories, this review contributes to a deeper understanding of how contemporary art criticism and cultural studies reveal, interrogate, and

amplify sociopolitical narratives. The integration of interdisciplinary approaches and the inclusion of digital platforms as sites of critique are particularly significant in advancing scholarship that reflects the complexities of the contemporary art world. Ultimately, this review positions art as both a mirror and a catalyst: reflecting sociopolitical conditions while simultaneously inspiring dialogue, resistance, and transformation.

METHOD

This study employed a systematic narrative review methodology to collect, analyze, and synthesize literature on art criticism and cultural studies in the context of contemporary art, with a particular focus on sociopolitical narratives. The approach was designed to ensure comprehensiveness and rigor while accommodating the diversity of sources and interdisciplinary perspectives inherent in this field. The methodology was guided by established academic standards for literature reviews and emphasized transparency in the selection and evaluation process.

The first step of the methodology involved identifying the most appropriate databases for sourcing relevant literature. Given the research objectives, Scopus and Web of Science were selected as the primary databases because of their extensive coverage of high-quality, peer-reviewed journals and their systematic indexing systems. These platforms are particularly suited for retrieving scholarly works across disciplines, including art history, cultural studies, and political theory, making them indispensable for this study. In addition, Google Scholar was used as a supplementary resource to capture a broader range of materials, such as conference papers, book chapters, and working papers that may not be indexed in Scopus or Web of Science. Although Google Scholar lacks the refined indexing rigor of the other two databases, its inclusion allowed the capture of emerging discourses and diverse perspectives in the field (Perera & Pathak, 2019).

The second step involved the development and application of carefully selected keywords and search strings. Keywords were derived from core concepts central to the research focus: *art criticism*, *cultural studies*, *sociopolitical narratives*, *contemporary art*, and *identity politics*. These terms were chosen because they encompass the essential dimensions of the research question. Art criticism provided the foundation for examining evaluative discourses about artworks, while cultural studies offered an interdisciplinary perspective on the relationship between culture, identity, and power. Sociopolitical narratives directed attention to studies examining the articulation of political and social concerns in art, and contemporary art highlighted the temporal scope of the study, ensuring relevance to the present cultural and artistic landscape (Tagore-Erwin, 2018). Identity politics captured literature exploring issues of race, gender, ethnicity, and class, which are frequently embedded in contemporary artistic practices. Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) were strategically employed to refine searches. For example, the phrase “sociopolitical narratives AND contemporary art” was used to identify works addressing political themes in present-day artistic contexts, while “art criticism OR cultural studies” expanded the range of relevant material without sacrificing specificity (Skrobanović, 2022).

Following the search process, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to ensure the relevance and quality of selected studies. Inclusion criteria specified that only peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and monographs published between 2000 and 2025 were considered, ensuring contemporary relevance. Furthermore, only studies written in English were included, given the linguistic scope of this review. The focus was restricted to works directly addressing art criticism, cultural studies, and sociopolitical narratives within the domain of contemporary art. Exclusion criteria eliminated publications outside the peer-reviewed domain, such as opinion pieces or non-scholarly essays, as well as articles that primarily focused on purely aesthetic or technical aspects of art without sociopolitical engagement. Studies limited to historical art periods without reference to contemporary contexts were also excluded.

The third stage involved identifying the types of studies most pertinent to the review. Given the interdisciplinary nature of art criticism and cultural studies, the review incorporated a wide range of research designs, including case studies of specific artworks or exhibitions, ethnographic studies, comparative cultural analyses, and theoretical papers. Empirical studies employing qualitative methodologies, such as interviews with artists or analysis of artistic practices, were also included, as they provided nuanced insights into how sociopolitical narratives are constructed and received in artistic contexts. Although randomized controlled trials or large-scale quantitative studies are rare in this domain, the methodological diversity present across qualitative and mixed-methods research was embraced to capture the richness of the field (Cota & Cuenca, 2020).

The process of screening and evaluating the literature followed a multi-step procedure to ensure rigor and transparency. After conducting initial database searches using defined keywords, all retrieved articles were imported into a reference management system. Titles and abstracts were screened first to exclude obviously irrelevant studies, such as those focusing solely on unrelated fields of visual culture or literary criticism without an art-based context. Full texts of the remaining studies were then reviewed to assess their alignment with the research objectives and inclusion criteria. Each article was evaluated based on methodological rigor, theoretical contribution, and relevance to the sociopolitical dimensions of contemporary art. Studies that offered substantial insights into the intersections of art criticism and sociopolitical analysis were prioritized for inclusion.

Quality appraisal was a critical component of the methodology, as not all articles identified in the search met the same standards of scholarly rigor. Each article was assessed for clarity of research objectives, methodological transparency, and the robustness of its analysis. Particular attention was paid to whether the studies engaged critically with existing literature and whether they demonstrated theoretical innovation. In addition, the contextual relevance of the studies was considered, particularly in terms of their applicability to contemporary sociopolitical concerns. This appraisal ensured that only high-quality, contextually relevant literature was incorporated into the synthesis.

The final corpus of literature was analyzed thematically. Articles were grouped into major themes corresponding to recurring sociopolitical issues addressed in art criticism, including environmental sustainability, neoliberalism and globalization, identity politics, and the commodification of art. Within each theme, studies were further analyzed for their methodological approaches and

theoretical frameworks, which facilitated comparative insights across different geographical and cultural contexts. For example, literature on art in Latin America often emphasized resistance to neoliberal economic structures, whereas European scholarship focused more on collective memory and trauma in post-authoritarian contexts (Mammì, 2025). This thematic organization provided coherence to the review while allowing for recognition of regional diversity.

In synthesizing the literature, the methodology emphasized the integration of interdisciplinary perspectives. By incorporating works from anthropology, sociology, political science, and digital studies alongside traditional art criticism, the review aimed to reflect the complex realities of contemporary art practices. This interdisciplinary synthesis was essential for capturing the multifaceted ways in which art operates as both cultural expression and sociopolitical commentary. Furthermore, it highlighted methodological gaps in the existing literature, particularly in relation to digitalization and the globalization of art practices, underscoring areas where future research is necessary (Pino, 2025).

Overall, this methodological framework provided a structured yet flexible approach to collecting and analyzing literature on art criticism and cultural studies in the context of contemporary sociopolitical narratives. By combining the rigor of systematic database searches with the interpretive depth of narrative synthesis, the methodology ensured both comprehensiveness and critical engagement. The process underscored the value of interdisciplinary research in understanding contemporary art's role in shaping sociopolitical discourse, while also identifying critical gaps that warrant further scholarly attention. This approach, therefore, not only facilitated the current review but also contributes to establishing methodological pathways for future research in the field of art criticism and cultural studies.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this narrative review reveal that contemporary art operates as a dynamic medium for sociopolitical critique, identity representation, and cultural negotiation, while also navigating challenges of commodification and digital transformation. The results are presented thematically to reflect the major trajectories identified in the literature: art as a medium of political critique, the intersections of ideology, identity, and representation, the role of the global art market, and the application of spectral theory in addressing memory and trauma.

Art as a Medium of Political Critique

Art, both traditional and contemporary, has consistently functioned as an instrument of political critique and resistance. Scholars such as Mukanov et al. (2021) and Tagore-Erwin (2018) highlight how artistic practices often serve as vehicles for expressing dissatisfaction with oppressive power structures and governmental policies. In Kazakhstan, for example, contemporary artistic practices integrate cultural heritage with modern concerns, creating symbolic representations of identity and resistance to political pressures. This demonstrates the ability of art to serve as both a mirror of social realities and a catalyst for sociopolitical dialogue.

Case studies further illustrate the role of art in social resistance. In Mexico, artistic responses to structural violence have emerged as poignant critiques of inequality. Cota and Cuenca (2020) document how digital art platforms are employed by Mexican artists to process traumatic experiences and mobilize collective action. By embedding their critique in interactive and digital forms, these artists expand the accessibility of political discourse while fostering public engagement. Similarly, Almenia (2021) discusses how adaptations of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in contemporary film contexts interrogate political and social norms, using allegory to foreground injustices related to race, gender, and class. These examples underscore the transnational relevance of art as a medium for political engagement, transcending cultural boundaries while retaining localized meaning.

Ideology, Identity, and Representation

The representation of collective identity through art has become increasingly prominent in contexts shaped by migration, gender, and class struggles. Perera and Pathak (2019) argue that the intersection of art, anthropology, and history is crucial for understanding how art mediates cultural values and creates inclusive identity narratives. In China, Wang (2018) demonstrates that contemporary artistic practices often reveal deeply entrenched social ideologies, particularly around gender and class, while simultaneously offering counter-narratives that destabilize dominant cultural assumptions.

International comparative studies reveal similar dynamics in other regions. Doreste (2018), for instance, examines Cuban film criticism, showing how Hollywood cinema has been repurposed as a tool for constructing national identity and negotiating cultural sovereignty. In Japan, Tagore-Erwin (2018) shows how globalization has reconfigured artistic identity by fusing traditional motifs with global cultural flows, reshaping local ideologies into hybrid forms of cultural representation. These studies collectively emphasize that identity formation through art is never static; it is a process that reflects ongoing negotiations between local traditions and global influences. Thus, art emerges as a site where ideology, culture, and identity intersect, shaping collective narratives within broader sociopolitical contexts.

The Art Market, Criticism, and Commodification

The global art market plays an ambivalent role in shaping the critical function of art. On one hand, it provides visibility and financial support to artists, enabling the dissemination of critical perspectives to wider audiences. On the other hand, it risks undermining the critical function of art by prioritizing commercial value over sociopolitical meaning. Mammi (2025) argues that contemporary art often operates within a paradox, where its market value eclipses its critical substance, leading to a diminished role for criticism in addressing social challenges. Almenia (2021) echoes this concern, noting that the dominance of commodification can strip art of its transformative potential, reducing it to a luxury commodity rather than a vehicle for social reflection.

Literature from Latin America further demonstrates how commodification displaces critical voices. Cota and Cuenca (2020) highlight how neoliberal capitalism in Mexico has marginalized critical discourses within the art world, subordinating them to the imperatives of profit. FAHMAWEE (2022) corroborates this by showing how critical practices are increasingly

sidelined, creating an environment where art's reflective and transformative capacities are compromised. These findings suggest that while the art market sustains artistic production, it also imposes structural constraints that reshape or even suppress art's potential for cultural critique. This dual role underscores the tension between art's economic and political dimensions, a tension that continues to define the contemporary art system.

Spectrality, Memory, and Trauma

Spectral theory, as articulated by Derrida, Fisher, and Gordon, has provided valuable tools for analyzing how art and film engage with trauma, justice, and memory. Spectrality emphasizes the persistence of unresolved histories, symbolized by the figure of the "ghost," which haunts both personal and collective experiences. In the context of art, spectral representations allow for the articulation of absences and silences that shape cultural memory. Madella (2020) highlights how such representations function as a dialogic space where past injustices are acknowledged and contested.

Applications of spectral theory in art are evident in diverse contexts. Almenia (2021) identifies spectral elements in adaptations of *The Tempest*, where the narrative serves as an allegorical stage for political trauma and unresolved social tensions. These works demonstrate how artistic forms can embody the haunting presence of history, compelling audiences to reckon with the persistence of structural inequalities. Similarly, Mukanov et al. (2021) emphasize how art rooted in cultural traditions reflects collective memory while simultaneously addressing contemporary political challenges.

Cross-cultural comparisons reveal how spectrality operates in different sociocultural settings. Pino (2025), building on the work of Fancourt and Warran (2024), compares Hitchcock's *Vertigo* with Martel's *La mujer sin cabeza*, demonstrating how both films employ spectral imagery to explore themes of justice, memory, and societal denial. These films underscore the universality of trauma while revealing culturally specific modes of representation. The notion of "social ghosts" emerging from unacknowledged collective traumas illustrates how art provides a framework for confronting unresolved historical injustices and fostering critical dialogue about justice.

Comparative Global Perspectives

The thematic findings gain further depth when considered in a global perspective. In Europe, scholarship has focused on the role of art in addressing authoritarianism, capitalism, and collective trauma, often situating artistic practices within historical legacies of war and dictatorship (Mammi, 2025). In Asia, the discourse centers on hybridity and identity negotiation, as artists respond to globalization while seeking to preserve cultural specificity (Tagore-Erwin, 2018). In Latin America, art functions predominantly as a mode of political resistance, challenging neoliberal economic structures and advocating for social justice (Cota & Cuenca, 2020). These regional differences highlight the contextual diversity of contemporary art practices, illustrating that while the themes of critique, identity, commodification, and trauma are globally relevant, their manifestations vary significantly according to local sociopolitical conditions.

Taken together, these results highlight the central role of contemporary art in reflecting and shaping sociopolitical narratives. Whether through direct political critique, identity representation, negotiation with the art market, or engagement with spectral memory, contemporary art emerges

as a critical arena where cultural, political, and social struggles are both articulated and contested. The findings also underscore the necessity of interdisciplinary approaches that integrate insights from cultural studies, anthropology, and political theory to fully grasp the complexities of art's sociopolitical functions. In doing so, the review affirms art's position not merely as an aesthetic practice but as an essential mode of sociopolitical engagement in the contemporary era.

Contemporary Art Criticism and Systemic Factors

The findings of this review highlight the central role of systemic factors—politics, economics, and global markets—in shaping the narratives embedded within contemporary art. As Mukanov et al. (2021) and Perera and Pathak (2019) emphasize, political and economic structures determine not only the content of artistic representation but also the frameworks through which such representations are interpreted and valued. Contemporary art criticism, therefore, extends beyond aesthetic evaluation to interrogate how cultural production reflects, reproduces, or resists systemic power relations. The intertwining of systemic conditions with art practices ensures that art cannot be divorced from its sociopolitical context, particularly in an era of heightened globalization and neoliberal transformation.

The dominance of the global art market presents a notable tension. Mammi, as cited by Skrobanović (2022), argues that the commodification of art has curtailed the transformative potential of cultural criticism. By privileging economic value over cultural significance, the global art system risks undermining art's role as a critical discourse. For instance, works that resonate with collectors or institutions may achieve prominence regardless of their critical depth, thereby constraining the diversity of sociopolitical narratives expressed through art. This systemic emphasis on market imperatives creates asymmetries in cultural representation, marginalizing critical artistic voices that resist commodification. Consequently, the role of art criticism is not only to interpret but also to challenge these asymmetries, repositioning cultural value as a counterbalance to economic determinism.

Beyond market forces, systemic political frameworks exert substantial influence. Authoritarian regimes frequently regulate cultural production, censoring critical works or co-opting artistic narratives to legitimize state ideologies. As Almenia (2021) demonstrates in her analysis of contemporary adaptations of *The Tempest*, art provides a space for subverting dominant political narratives even within restrictive contexts. This tension underscores the dual role of art as both a site of contestation and a medium of compliance, contingent upon systemic forces. Similarly, Cota and Cuenca (2020) highlight how digital art in Mexico has functioned as resistance to neoliberal violence, exemplifying the adaptability of artistic practices to systemic pressures. These examples illustrate the necessity of situating art criticism within analyses of broader structural conditions that define cultural production and reception.

Policy Recommendations and Practical Solutions

The reviewed literature provides several pathways for strengthening art's capacity as a medium of social critique. One recurring recommendation is the expansion of policies that promote public engagement with art. Cota and Cuenca (2020) argue that governments and cultural institutions should establish platforms where artists and communities can collaboratively explore sociopolitical

issues. Such platforms not only democratize access to cultural critique but also ensure that art functions as an inclusive dialogue rather than an elite practice. Public funding for art initiatives can play a crucial role here, especially in contexts where market-driven imperatives suppress critical voices.

Education also emerges as a vital strategy. Perera and Pathak (2019) emphasize the integration of art education with cultural studies and social criticism, fostering artists and critics who are socially and politically literate. By embedding sociopolitical analysis into art pedagogy, educational institutions can cultivate practitioners who view art not merely as an object of aesthetic value but as an instrument for societal change. This interdisciplinary orientation prepares artists to engage critically with systemic issues, equipping them to intervene in cultural and political debates.

Another solution lies in expanding the use of digital platforms. While Pino (2025) and Cota and Cuenca (2020) caution that digital environments can perpetuate new forms of commodification, they also highlight the democratizing potential of these spaces. Digital platforms facilitate broader dissemination of critical art, enabling marginalized communities to assert their voices in cultural discourse. Policies and institutional support for digital art can help balance the opportunities and risks, ensuring that critical narratives are not lost in the noise of commercialization. Furthermore, global collaborations fostered through digital platforms create opportunities for cross-cultural dialogue, thereby strengthening art's role as a global language of resistance and critique.

Limitations of Existing Research

Despite significant advances in scholarship on art criticism and sociopolitical narratives, several limitations remain evident. One major limitation is the insufficient attention to cultural specificity. As Skrobanović (2022) notes, much of the existing literature universalizes systemic influences without adequately accounting for local variations. While globalization has facilitated cross-cultural exchanges, it has also obscured the nuanced ways in which systemic factors operate within specific cultural contexts. Consequently, more attention must be given to how art criticism negotiates the intersection of local traditions and global influences.

Another limitation lies in the narrow focus of many studies. A significant proportion of the literature concentrates on particular artists, works, or movements, producing insightful but fragmented accounts. Such case-specific approaches limit the generalizability of findings and leave gaps in understanding how art criticism functions across broader social and political landscapes. For instance, while Almenia (2021) effectively illustrates the role of *The Tempest* adaptations in critiquing political norms, the reliance on single-text analysis narrows the scope of implications for the wider field. Similarly, studies focusing heavily on European and Latin American contexts often overlook Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, where unique sociopolitical conditions shape distinctive forms of artistic critique.

Methodological limitations also persist. While interdisciplinary approaches have enriched the field, systematic methodologies that combine qualitative and quantitative data remain underdeveloped. As highlighted by Raljević (2024), the lack of robust methodological frameworks inhibits comprehensive analysis of how sociopolitical narratives are embedded in artistic practices. Moreover, insufficient engagement with digital methodologies limits scholarship's capacity to analyze the rapidly evolving digital art landscape. Given the growing significance of online

platforms, research that integrates digital ethnography and computational analysis could provide deeper insights into contemporary dynamics of critique.

Future Directions for Research

Future research must address these limitations by adopting broader and more inclusive approaches. Cross-cultural studies are especially needed to illuminate the interplay between local and global forces in shaping sociopolitical art narratives. Comparative analyses of different regions can reveal how systemic factors manifest uniquely, thereby enriching theoretical frameworks for understanding art criticism. For instance, while European scholarship often emphasizes collective memory and trauma (Mammi, 2025), Asian and African contexts may foreground hybridity, resilience, or postcolonial identity in distinctive ways (Tagore-Erwin, 2018). Expanding the geographical scope of research will provide a more comprehensive understanding of art's sociopolitical functions.

Exploring the interaction between art and audiences also represents a promising direction. As Cota and Cuenca (2020) suggest, the critical potential of art is realized not only in production but also in reception. Audience studies can reveal how different publics interpret and engage with sociopolitical narratives in art, offering insights into the efficacy of art as a medium of critique. Additionally, examining how marginalized communities use art to articulate resistance could shed light on art's capacity to challenge dominant ideologies from below.

Finally, further research should focus on the implications of digital transformation. Pino (2025) underscores the need for updated frameworks that account for the unique characteristics of digital art and its circulation. Studies exploring how digital platforms amplify or dilute critical voices will be crucial in understanding the evolving dynamics of cultural critique. Integrating perspectives from media studies, digital humanities, and political science can provide interdisciplinary insights into the future of art criticism in an increasingly digital world.

In sum, the discussion demonstrates that while systemic factors constrain and shape artistic practices, art criticism retains the capacity to challenge these structures through critical engagement. Policy support, educational reform, and methodological innovation are vital for sustaining art's role as a medium of sociopolitical critique, while research must expand its scope to address the limitations and embrace emerging opportunities in digital and cross-cultural contexts.

CONCLUSION

This review demonstrates that contemporary art criticism and cultural studies provide a critical lens through which sociopolitical narratives are articulated, contested, and reshaped. The results highlight four central themes: art as a medium of political critique, the role of ideology and identity in representation, the ambivalent influence of the global art market, and the application of spectral theory in addressing memory and trauma. Together, these findings affirm that art functions not only as an aesthetic practice but also as an essential tool for cultural reflection and political engagement. Systemic factors such as political regimes, neoliberal economies, and market-driven imperatives significantly shape the scope of artistic expression, while at the same time limiting art's transformative potential. Policy interventions—including greater public funding, expanded art

education, and support for digital platforms—are essential to safeguard art’s role as a vehicle of critical discourse. Yet, limitations in existing scholarship, particularly the narrow focus on specific geographies or case studies and insufficient engagement with digital methodologies, restrict comprehensive understanding. Future research must expand its cultural scope, adopt interdisciplinary frameworks, and explore how digital platforms can amplify marginalized voices. Urgent attention is required to ensure that art continues to operate as a vital medium for sociopolitical critique, fostering inclusive dialogues and promoting justice in an era marked by global inequality and rapid cultural change.

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