

# A New Cultural Landscape: Art Appreciation Saudi perspective 2030

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the dynamic cultural renaissance currently unfolding within the Gulf region, particularly emphasizing the strategic incorporation of art appreciation into broader economic diversification and the shaping of national identity. Furthermore, it examines how the integration of digital media and artificial intelligence is redefining artistic production and engagement, positioning the region at the forefront of the global "creative tech" landscape. The study illustrates how art, once perceived primarily as a luxury commodity, is being repositioned as a central facet of societal advancement in key metropolitan hubs such as Riyadh, Abu Dhabi, Doha, and Dubai. Through the lens of art appreciation community theory, the analysis contends that the value ascribed to art emerges through a complex interplay among institutions, critics, and the general public—collectively forming an “art world.” Notably, the research finds that state-led initiatives, most prominently those tied to Saudi Vision 2030, are intentionally fostering this ecosystem by establishing museums, launching public art initiatives, and promoting creative education. Consequently, the Gulf’s art scene is rapidly evolving, with art now serving as both a catalyst for socio-economic development and a vital element in the ongoing articulation of national identity.

**Keywords:** Cultural Landscape, Arab Art Context, Saudi perspective 2030.

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## 1. Introduction

The Gulf region is currently witnessing a significant cultural resurgence, particularly evident in urban centers such as Riyadh, Abu Dhabi, Doha, and Dubai ([Eigner, 2010](#); [Mirgani, 2017](#)). Here, art is no longer relegated to the realm of private luxury or mere aesthetic enhancement. Instead, it plays a pivotal role in national strategies aimed at economic diversification and the construction of a collective identity. This cultural shift is strategic and intentional, with governments launching comprehensive initiatives—such as Saudi Vision 2030—that leverage art and culture as fundamental drivers of societal progress ([Mirgani, 2017](#)).

From a theoretical standpoint, this transformation can be contextualized within the framework of art appreciation community theory. This perspective posits that the value of art is socially constructed rather than intrinsic, shaped through the collaborative actions of institutions, critics, and the public ([Finkelpearl, 2012](#)). In the Gulf, the “art world” is being actively cultivated through state sponsorship, resulting in the rapid development of museums, public art programs, and expanded opportunities for local artists and art education ([Eigner, 2010](#); [Mirgani, 2017](#)).

Historically, the intersection of art and politics has been articulated through the medium of the art manifesto.

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Prior to the twentieth century, art manifestos primarily served political purposes: they critiqued prevailing cultural paradigms and proposed new aesthetic values ([Raad, 2012](#)). In many cases, these manifestos were intended as works of art in themselves, incorporating performance and graphic design elements that transcended traditional written forms—Dada manifestos being a prime example ([Fineberg, 1992](#)).

Throughout the early twentieth century, numerous artists were both politically active and deeply engaged in the creation of manifestos. Figures such as Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, the founder of Futurism, not only produced artistic manifestos but also participated directly in political life. Italian and Russian Futurists, as well as English Vorticists and French Surrealists, frequently aligned themselves with contemporary political movements, though their involvement was sometimes met with resistance or outright rejection by political organizations and authoritarian regimes ([Raad, 2012](#)).

The Futurist Manifesto, first published by Marinetti in 1909, encapsulated a radical rejection of the past and a celebration of speed, technology, and industrial modernity. Although the founding manifesto lacked a concrete artistic program, subsequent documents such as the Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting (1914) articulated a vision of “universal dynamism” in which the boundaries between objects and their environments were fluid and interconnected ([Raad, 2012](#)).

Later movements, such as the Situationist International—founded in 1957—advanced similar calls for a revolutionary transformation of art and everyday life. Their 1960 manifesto advocated for the dissolution of the boundaries between artists and non-artists, envisioning a future in which creative expression was democratized and accessible to all ([Finkelpearl, 2012](#)).

Additionally, collectives like Women Artists in Revolution (WAR) employed the manifesto form to combine art and activism, producing anti-war statements that utilized both visual and textual media ([Raad, 2012](#)).

In summary, the Gulf’s contemporary embrace of art as a tool for socio-economic transformation and identity formation is part of a larger historical continuum. Across time and place, art has functioned not only as an aesthetic pursuit but also as a medium for political engagement, social critique, and collective reimagining ([Finkelpearl, 2012](#)). The current developments in the Gulf represent a distinct iteration of this longstanding dynamic, characterized by state-led initiatives and a rapidly evolving cultural infrastructure ([Mirgani, 2017](#)).

The contemporary art landscape in the Gulf region has undergone a significant transformation, marked by strategic investment in both cultural infrastructure and creative talent. Leading institutions such as the Louvre Abu Dhabi and the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha now function not only as repositories of heritage but also as active agents of cultural diplomacy. By curating collections that integrate regional narratives with international perspectives, these museums have positioned the Gulf as an increasingly influential node within the global art network.

Urban initiatives, exemplified by projects like Riyadh Art and the Noor Riyadh Festival, have reimagined public spaces as accessible, open-air galleries. These endeavors democratize artistic engagement, enabling broader public participation and fostering a collective appreciation for aesthetic innovation. Such projects are notable for promoting inclusivity, encouraging dialogue among diverse audiences, and embedding art within the fabric of daily life.

A robust creative ecosystem now supports artistic practice at multiple levels. Government-funded

residencies, grants, and dedicated studio spaces offer artists essential resources for professional development. The emergence of local galleries, as well as the proliferation of digital platforms, has further expanded opportunities for artists to exhibit and monetize their work—facilitating both local and international exposure. These developments not only nurture creative talent but also diversify the region's economic base beyond traditional sectors such as oil.

Family-oriented and community arts programs are likewise proliferating, underscoring a broader commitment to cultural enrichment and intergenerational engagement. Museums such as those in Qatar and Abu Dhabi offer targeted programming—including storytelling, workshops, and interactive tours—designed to make art accessible and relevant to participants of all ages. Institutions like the Cultural Foundation in Abu Dhabi and Al Shindagha Museum in Dubai provide specialized courses and practical workshops that preserve heritage skills while encouraging contemporary artistic exploration.

The Gulf's educational institutions, notably Zayed University in the UAE, have established specialized curricula in fine arts and design, maintaining close connections with the growing creative industries. These programs provide students with valuable practical experience and facilitate professional placements, thereby contributing to the cultivation of future generations of artists.

In summary, the Gulf's evolving art ecosystem is characterized by deliberate, multifaceted investment in cultural infrastructure, public engagement, and educational advancement. This comprehensive approach has redefined the region's cultural identity, positioning art as both a driver of economic diversification and a central element of social life. Through the combined efforts of governmental policy, institutional leadership, and community participation, the Gulf is asserting a dynamic new presence within the international art world.

## **2. The Futurist Manifesto (1909)**

In 1909, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti authored the Futurist Manifesto, marking a decisive break from tradition and an enthusiastic embrace of modernity. Marinetti championed speed, machinery, industrial progress, and even violence, casting these as essential elements of a new cultural order. First published in Italian and later in French newspapers, the manifesto signaled the birth of Futurism—a movement grounded in the principle of “universal dynamism.” (Raad, 2012). This concept rejected the separation of objects and their environments, instead proposing that all elements in art and life are inextricably interconnected.

### **2.1. The Situationist International (1957)**

By 1957, a collective known as the Situationist International emerged in Italy, founded by eight members who sought to dismantle the boundary between art and everyday life. Their 1960 manifesto advocated for a revolutionary art form that was perpetually evolving, with the aim of fostering a “new human force” to address the alienation produced by technological advancement (Finkelpearl, 2012). The manifesto proposed that the role of the “amateur-professional situationist” would represent the final iteration of traditional craftsmanship, emphasizing the transformative potential of artistic practice.

### **2.2. Women Artists in Revolution (WAR) (Late 1960s)**

In the late 1960s, the group Women Artists in Revolution (WAR), which included artist Nancy Spero, emerged as an offshoot of the Art Workers Coalition. Spero, known for her anti-Vietnam War imagery and activism, joined WAR in its campaign for gender equality within the art world. The group authored manifestos and organized protests, most notably confronting the Museum of Modern Art to demand greater representation for women artists. Spero herself embraced the group's combative name, viewing it as a direct

reflection of her frustration with the systemic exclusion of women in the arts ([Raad, 2012](#)).

### **2.3. Alfred Krupa's Manifesto (1996)**

In 1996, painter Alfred Krupa composed a manifesto as part of his application for postgraduate study in Japan. This text became foundational for his subsequent artistic career, which centered on reinterpreting Western modernist aesthetics through the technique of Chinese ink painting. Krupa's manifesto is now recognized as an important document in the history of the International New Ink Art movement, which helped to reframe as a global rather than purely regional development. The original writings were lost for some time before eventually being recovered and preserved.

### **2.4. The Metamodernist Manifesto (2011)**

In 2011, artist Luke Turner authored the Metamodernist Manifesto, which articulated both a definition and an ethos for the metamodernist perspective. Turner critiqued the stagnation produced by a century oscillating between modernist idealism and postmodern cynicism. Instead, he proposed metamodernism as a "mercurial condition," one that is characterized by continual movement between oppositional states such as irony and sincerity. The manifesto concluded with a call to "go forth and oscillate," advocating for intellectual and creative dynamism.

### **2.5. The Excessivism Manifesto (2014)**

Published in the Los Angeles Downtown News in 2015, the Excessivism Manifesto defines a contemporary art movement that critiques economic materialism and the overconsumption of resources. The movement's central aim is to transcend conventional boundaries and provoke reflection on the pursuit of material goods beyond necessity. Excessivism thus positions itself as both a commentary on and a product of the global culture of excess.

## **3. Historical Arab Context and Key Manifestos**

- **Early to Mid-20th Century:** The development of modern art in the region coincided with a cultural and political renaissance. Art schools were established, and artists were often sent to study in Europe. This led to the formation of groups that sought to define a distinct artistic identity ([Eigner, 2010](#)).
- **The Baghdad Modern Art Group (1951):** This group's manifesto aimed to formulate a Pan-Arab identity by combining the country's rich heritage with progressive modern ideals. They wanted to create an art that was uniquely Iraqi and not simply an imitation of Western styles ([Eigner, 2010](#); [Raad, 2012](#)).
- **Art and Freedom Group (1939):** Based in Cairo, this group was a key example of how artists used manifestos to engage with both local and international artistic debates. Their manifesto, and others like it, often addressed questions of tradition versus modernity.
- **The Aouchem Group (1967):** This Algerian group used its manifesto to express a desire for an art that was rooted in Algerian culture and history, advocating for a modern art that was not a mere copy of European trends.
- **Museums as Cultural Ambassadors:** Institutions such as the Louvre Abu Dhabi and the Museum of

Islamic Art in Doha serve dual roles as both cultural repositories and instruments of cultural diplomacy. By curating collections that blend global and regional perspectives, these museums situate the Gulf as a pivotal node in the international art landscape.

- **Public Art and Community Engagement:** Initiatives like Riyadh Art and Noor Riyadh Festival have transformed urban environments into open-air galleries, fostering community engagement and a shared aesthetic consciousness. Such projects democratize the experience of art, making it accessible to diverse audiences and encouraging public discourse.
- **A Flourishing Artistic Ecosystem:** A comprehensive framework now supports artists at every stage, from government-funded residencies and studio spaces to vibrant local galleries and digital platforms. This infrastructure not only nurtures creative talent but also contributes to the diversification of the region's economy beyond traditional reliance on oil.

Moreover, there has been a marked increase in community- and family-oriented arts initiatives, reflecting a broader commitment to cultural enrichment and participatory engagement. These programs often merge contemporary artistic practices with traditional crafts, offering both educational value and opportunities for intergenerational connection.

Artists and art movements in the Middle East and Gulf region have used manifestos to define their goals and respond to specific historical, political, and social contexts. Unlike early European manifestos which often focused on a complete break from the past, many Middle Eastern art manifestos sought to create a unique regional identity by blending traditional heritage with modern ideals.

#### **4. Late 20th and 21st Century Developments**

**Gulf Art Movements:** In the Arabian Gulf states, art movements have emerged in response to rapid urbanization, economic growth, and the complex interplay between traditional culture and global influences ([Mirgani, 2017](#)).

"A Manifesto for Saudi Art" (2013): Artist Ahmed Mater wrote this manifesto to reflect on the evolving contemporary art scene in Saudi Arabia. It emphasized the importance of a local, communal voice and a rejection of the pressures of a commercial, global art market. He stressed the need for an art scene that is relevant to its local context and driven by the artists' voices rather than commercial interests.

**Gulf Futurism:** A more recent movement, Gulf Futurism, uses an aesthetic repertoire to critique the region's rapid development. It addresses themes like the isolation of individuals through technology, the corrosive effects of consumerism, and the erasure of history. Artists like Sophia Al-Maria and Fatima Al Qadiri are associated with this movement.

#### **5. Modern Manifestos and The Role of the Artist**

Manifestos continue to be a tool for artists to engage with social and political issues. For example, artists like Laila Ajjawi and Murad Subay have used street murals and campaigns to address themes of war, women's rights, and social unity.

The Middle East and Gulf region's art scene has moved beyond its traditional centers, with cities like Dubai and Abu Dhabi becoming major hubs for contemporary art. This shift is driven by a combination of government support, new institutions, and a new generation of artists who use their work to explore identity,

heritage, and the challenges of a globalized world.

## **6. Major Museums and Cultural Institutions:**

- Qatar Museums offer extensive programming, including monthly storytelling in Arabic, thematic family days exploring cultural heritage, interactive gallery tours, and accessible activity booklets for home engagement.
- Museum of Islamic Art (MIA), Doha connects families to its collections through hands-on workshops, story sessions, and special events, making Islamic art approachable for visitors of all ages.
- Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi provides a dedicated Children's Art Centre, with courses in art, crafts, and music for young people, as well as workshops in traditional calligraphy and other disciplines for older participants.
- Al Shindagha Museum, Dubai emphasizes Emirati heritage, offering practical workshops in jewelry making, net weaving, and incense preparation for families.

## **7. Community Art Spaces and Workshops:**

Beyond these flagship institutions, a network of community-based art studios and creative hubs has emerged, facilitating hands-on artistic experiences for families and individuals. For instance, the Art Studio at Manarat Al Saadiyat in Abu Dhabi offers multidisciplinary programs that encourage creative expression across a range of media.

In summary, the Gulf's cultural transformation is distinguished by its deliberate and comprehensive cultivation of art as both an economic asset and a foundation for social identity. Through innovative governmental policies, world-class institutions, and inclusive community initiatives, the region is redefining its cultural landscape and asserting a new narrative on the global stage.

## **8. Practicing the Artistic Lifestyle in the Gulf**

- Establishing an art career in the Gulf region now requires strategic engagement with a rapidly expanding creative infrastructure. Opportunities for artists have increased significantly in recent years, reflecting robust institutional, digital, and educational support.
- Residencies and Studio Spaces: Substantial investments in artist residencies and studios are now visible across the Gulf. For instance, the Sharjah Art Foundation's recent residency and studio programs provide artists with not only dedicated workspace but also crucial financial support. Similarly, the Cultural Foundation in Abu Dhabi has developed a residency program that integrates studio access, curatorial guidance, and monetary resources.
- Digital Integration and Online Platforms: The rise of digital art marketplaces is reshaping the way artists reach audiences and monetize their work. Platforms such as Artezaar, Art Smiley, and Monda Gallery serve as accessible venues for Gulf-based artists to exhibit and sell their work internationally. Furthermore, the emergence of "Art Dubai Digital" and AI-driven platforms allows artists to experiment with blockchain-authenticated works and generative AI, bypassing traditional gallery commission structures and reaching a tech-savvy global collector base.

- **Auctions and Galleries:** The presence of international auction houses, such as Christie's in Dubai and Riyadh, has fostered a dynamic modern and contemporary art market. Local galleries—such as Athr Gallery in Jeddah and the cluster of galleries in Dubai's Alserkal Avenue—function as important community hubs, supporting both emerging and established artists through exhibitions and professional development.
- **Educational Institutions and Tech Hubs:** Universities across the region, notably Zayed University in the UAE and the Mohamed bin Zayed University of Artificial Intelligence (MBZUAI), offer specialized degrees that merge fine arts with advanced technology. These institutions maintain close ties with the local creative industries, facilitating student internships and career placements that increasingly focus on the intersection of design, coding, and algorithmic art, thereby nurturing the next generation of "creative-tech" professionals.
- **The Gulf's art ecosystem** has evolved into a comprehensive network, encompassing institutional support, commercial platforms, digital innovation, and educational pathways. This transformation is positioning the region as a distinct and globally recognized center for art where traditional heritage and artificial intelligence coexist as dual engines of creative growth

## 9. Art Appreciation as a Strategic Tool

Art appreciation in the Gulf, especially in countries such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar, now serves strategic cultural, economic, and political functions. This is a relatively recent development. Historically, the region prioritized rapid modernization and economic growth, and cultural policy was primarily focused on heritage preservation. The current approach, however, is much broader—contemporary art is now envisioned as an engine of social change and a key element of national identity.

Ambitious national initiatives, including Saudi Vision 2030 ([Mirgani, 2017](#)), explicitly identify art and cultural development as central to economic diversification and the construction of a vibrant, modern society. This shift is largely driven by top-down government investment in cultural infrastructure.

## 10. Art Appreciation as Strategic Practice

**Museums as Cultural Ambassadors:** Institutions such as the Louvre Abu Dhabi and the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha function as both art repositories and instruments of cultural diplomacy. They display world-class collections within architecturally significant spaces, positioning their countries as global cultural hubs and fostering new forms of art appreciation that blend Western and local influences.

**Public Art Initiatives:** Major cities are investing in large-scale public art projects. The Riyadh Art initiative, for example, aims to transform the city into an open-air gallery, using public sculpture and installations to beautify urban spaces, engage the public, and redefine the city's visual identity.

**Supporting Local Artists:** Both government-backed organizations and private foundations are prioritizing the development of local artistic talent. Through funding, training, and exposure at international biennales and art fairs, these efforts are empowering artists from the region to explore contemporary themes and contribute to a unique Gulf art narrative, moving beyond the presentation of Western art alone.

**Economic Diversification:** The art market is emerging as a new economic sector. The increasing presence of art fairs, auction houses, and private galleries is attracting global collectors and investors, generating

employment, and supporting broader efforts to reduce reliance on oil-based economies. cultural production in the Gulf was often interpreted through an Orientalist lens. Today, art is being deployed to challenge and reframe these narratives. While there is no formalized “art appreciation community theory,” it is important to note that the meaning and appreciation of art are not entirely individual phenomena. Rather, they are significantly shaped by community, context, and shared social practices. This perspective stands in contrast to theories that emphasize only the artist’s intent or the viewer’s internal response.

The evolving dynamics of art appreciation in Saudi Arabia offer a compelling case study for the application of art appreciation community theory, particularly in the context of Saudi Vision 2030. While Vision 2030 is often perceived primarily as an economic modernization program, it also represents a transformative cultural endeavor. The initiative is constructing an “art world” infrastructure that, until recently, was largely absent on a significant scale within the Kingdom.

A notable aspect of this transformation is the pronounced role of institutional influence. Government-backed organizations, most prominently the Ministry of Culture and the Royal Commission for Riyadh City, have positioned themselves as key arbiters of artistic value. By establishing new museums, galleries, and cultural districts such as those encompassed by the Riyadh Art initiative, these institutions are defining standards for public appreciation and determining which works merit recognition. In contrast to organic, bottom-up art movements, this top-down approach exemplifies the application of community theory, with the state itself acting as the primary “community.”

The values ascribed to artistic practices are being actively redefined. Traditional forms such as Sadu weaving and Arabic calligraphy, historically regarded as craft or heritage, are increasingly presented as contemporary art through curated exhibitions and inclusion in national collections. This elevation and reframing of local artistic heritage is central to the “art world” concept, whereby the art community reassesses and recontextualizes creative practices in alignment with new cultural priorities.

The reimagined art ecosystem in Saudi Arabia also facilitates a dynamic dialogue between local and global contexts. Initiatives routinely invite international artists to engage with the Kingdom, while simultaneously promoting Saudi artists on the world stage. This exchange encourages the emergence of a hybrid cultural identity—one that synthesizes global artistic currents with deeply rooted local traditions, rather than simply emulating Western models. These theoretical developments are manifest in several practical examples across the country. Jeddah’s public art landscape, for instance, provides a vivid illustration. The city’s open-air sculpture museum, home to works by figures such as Joan Miró and Henry Moore, has undergone revitalization. Once largely overlooked, these sculptures are now integrated into broader cultural narratives through guided tours and public programming, encouraging community engagement and transforming the works into recognized cultural assets.

Riyadh’s citywide Riyadh Art initiative further exemplifies the theory in practice. The project seeks to render the entire urban environment into an accessible “gallery without walls” via public art installations. The program’s success hinges upon public engagement, cultivated through educational workshops, festivals, and outreach programs. Here, the meaning of a given artwork is shaped not only by its physical presence but through the collective experiences and discourse it generates.

Additionally, the rise of private galleries—such as Athr Gallery in Jeddah—has established vital spaces for the development of an intimate art community. These institutions play a crucial role in showcasing emerging Saudi artists, nurturing a new generation of collectors, and fostering critical dialogue. In doing so, they help shape public taste and contribute to the evolving trajectory of contemporary art in the Kingdom.

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Narrative social and community arts in the Gulf region are rapidly evolving, driven by a new generation of artists and institutional support. These art forms are used as tools to address social and political issues, preserve cultural heritage, and foster a sense of community in a region undergoing rapid transformation.

## **11. Redefining Identity and History**

Many artists in the Gulf use their work to challenge official narratives and explore themes of identity, heritage, and social change. They often create art that reflects the lived experiences of a diverse population, which includes both citizens and a large number of expatriates. This is particularly relevant in countries like Qatar, where a small native population coexists with a large migrant workforce.

- **Challenging National Myths:** Some artists, like those discussed by scholar Suzi Mirgani, focus on telling stories that governments might "gloss over," providing an alternative perspective to official, state-sanctioned narratives.
- **Celebrating Cultural Heritage:** In Bahrain, initiatives like the Al-Jasra Crafts Center and the Royal Institute of Traditional Arts in Saudi Arabia work to preserve traditional art forms like dhow

building, weaving, and ceramics. These efforts ensure that cultural skills and stories are passed down through generations.

**UAE:** The Dubai Public Art initiative transforms public spaces into open-air galleries with murals, sculptures, and installations that reflect the emirate's "creative identity." Similarly, the Ras Al Khaimah Art Festival and the Al Qasimi Foundation foster grassroots artistic collaborations through residencies, workshops, and grants.

**Qatar:** Qatar Museums has launched projects that bridge literature and community. For example, the "Art on Wheels" initiative transformed a water tank truck into a mobile mural inspired by a Palestinian novel, promoting dialogue about themes of displacement and resilience. The Qatar National Library also hosts children's exhibitions that use art to engage with cultural heritage and contemporary issues.

## 12. Social practice

socially engaged practice in the arts focuses on community engagement through a range of art media, human interaction and social discourse. While the term social practice has been used in the social sciences to refer to a fundamental property of human interaction, it has also been used to describe community-based arts practices such as relational aesthetics, new genre public art, socially engaged art, dialogical art, participatory art, and ecosocial immersionism.

Social practice work focuses on the interaction between the audience, social systems, and the artist or artwork through aesthetics, ethics, collaboration, methodology, debate, media strategies, and social activism. Because people and their relationships form the medium of social practice works – rather than a particular process of production – social engagement is not only a part of a work's organization, execution, or continuation, but also an aesthetic in itself: of interaction and development.

Social practice aims to create social and/or political change through collaboration with individuals, communities, and institutions in the creation of participatory art. In the case of the Brooklyn Immersionists, who lived and worked in a toxic industrial area of north Brooklyn, both social and ecological engagement became important, leading to new theories of ecosocial subjectivity.

Artists working in social practice co-create their work with a specific audience or propose critical interventions within existing social systems to expose hierarchies or exchanges, inspire debate, or catalyze social exchange. There is a large overlap between social practice and pedagogy. Social interaction inspires, drives, or, in some instances, completes a project. The discipline values the process of a work over any finished product or object.

Although projects may incorporate traditional studio media, they are realized in a variety of visual or social forms (depending on variable contexts and participant demographics) such as performance, social activism, or mobilizing communities towards a common goal. The diversity of approaches pose specific challenges for documenting social practice work, as the aesthetic of human interaction changes rapidly and involves many people simultaneously. Consequently, images or video can fail to capture the engagement and interactions that take place during a project.

## 13. Characteristics of social practice

Socially engaged art differs from its art historical ancestors in that it is not a specific movement or style, but rather a way of defining a new social order. Thousands of existing social practice projects across the world

have taken vastly different approaches to their combination of publics, methodologies, aesthetics, and environments, yet these projects all share an aesthetic of human interaction and development. The end products of such works are not commodities, but rather processes for constructive social change. Some foundational characteristics of socially engaged art remain consistently relevant to a diverse range of works. For an artist or producer to create a successful social practice work, they must consider the unique context in which they are working and identify specific characteristics of the community and environment. They must also balance aesthetic and methodology in their work, aligning the timeline of a project with its purpose: a quick-impact ephemeral work, or the regularity of a longitudinal work.

#### **14. Community and environment**

Social practice artists and producers aim to affect their community and environment in a real (rather than symbolic) way - some specifically do so in hopes of enabling social and political change. Each project is tailored to the community and environment in which it will take place. In social practice, the identification of the public, or audience, precedes the project's development. It is impossible to create a project founded upon engagement and collaboration without first making assumptions as to who will be involved. Who the artist or producer wishes to engage and where they wish to engage are therefore core characteristics of socially engaged art.

The environment could be described on two primary levels: the broader community, city, or region; and the immediate space being occupied – a street, museum, studio, or other area. To understand the context in which they are working, artists and producers must develop relationships with individuals, organizations, and institutions that intersect many different parts of their community and environment. One theorist makes the comparison between socially engaged art projects to exotic fruit, stating that both “usually travel poorly when 'exported' to other locations to be replicated.” The community and environment are therefore not merely external influencers on a specific project, they are inherent characteristics.

#### **15. Aesthetics and methodology**

For much of art history, a work's aesthetic has been upheld as the primary measure of its quality. The 20th century broadened the public understanding of art to consider concept and process alongside aesthetic. And by the new millennium the tables had turned to emphasize process over product: one of the defining characteristics of socially engaged art. Process is determined by method; thus, social practice producers and artists are often more concerned with the methodology rather than the aesthetic of their work. Many argue that social practice has created a new aesthetic of its own: an aesthetic of human interaction and development that is based not on spectatorship but on participation. This aesthetic captures the diverse methods employed by socially engaged art and encompasses not only traditional methods of painting, photography, architecture, and performance; but also, nontraditional forms borrowed from other disciplines, such as festivals, conferences, schools, and protests.

Aesthetics are typically hierarchical, highly subjective, and greatly determined by external influencers, such as the imagery of a given culture, or the relationship between appearance and market value. To escape these external influencers, aesthetics can also be defined in terms of “aesthesis,” an autonomous realm of experience and judgment that cannot be reduced to logic, reason or morality but is of great importance to humankind. Aesthetics have the capacity to critique our beliefs and values by restructuring our perception of the world. Their application can achieve one of the core aims of socially engaged art: the definition of a new social order characterized by engagement and participation.

Methodology in socially engaged art refers to the set of practices used throughout the process and production of a project. The method is no longer a means to an end, but an end within itself: the experience of creation and experimentation is a central element of social practice. While aesthetics reframes ideas and beliefs outside of the disciplines in which we have accepted them, methodology takes the frameworks of those disciplines to produce new aesthetics. Socially engaged art has embraced conferences, urban regeneration projects, pedagogical projects, and protests, which are all frameworks borrowed from other disciplines.

While aesthetics and methodology can have conflicting interests, there are important reasons why artists and producers should seek to integrate the two. Methodology will engage the public, but aesthetics will play a large role in determining how a project is interpreted. Ultimately, the two can work together to enhance each other: the aesthetic value of a project can increase its social function, while the method can heighten the aesthetic experience through public engagement.

## **16. Community art**

known as social art, community-engaged art, community-based art, and, rarely, dialogical art, is the practice of art based in—and generated in—a community setting. It is closely related to social practice and social turn. Works in this form can be of any media and are characterized by interaction or dialogue with the community. Professional artists may collaborate with communities which may not normally engage in the arts. The term was defined in the late 1960s as the practice grew in the United States, Canada, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Australia. In Scandinavia, the term "community art" more often refers to contemporary art projects.

Community art is a community-oriented, grassroots approach, often useful in economically depressed areas. When local community members come together to express concerns or issues through this artistic practice, professional artists or actors may be involved. This artistic practice can act as a catalyst to trigger events or changes within a community or at a national or international level.

In English-speaking countries, community art is often seen as the work of community arts centers, where visual arts (fine art, video, new media art), music, and theater are common media. Many arts organizations in the United Kingdom do community-based work, which typically involves developing participation by non-professional members of local communities.

## **17. Forms of collaborative practices**

Models of community-engaged arts can vary with three forms of collaborative practices emerging from among the sets of common practices. In the artist-driven model, artists are seen as the catalysts for social change through the social commentary addressed in their works. A muralist whose work elicits and sustains political dialogue would be a practitioner of this model. In the second model, artists engage with community groups to facilitate specialized forms of art creation, often with the goal of presenting the work in a public forum to promote awareness and to further discourse within a larger community. In the process-driven or dialogic model, artists may engage with a group to facilitate an artistic process that addresses particular concerns specific to the group. The use of an artistic process (such as dance or social circus) for problem-solving, therapeutic, group-empowerment or strategic planning purposes may result in artistic works that are not intended for public presentation. In the second and third models, the individuals who collaborate on the artistic creation may not define themselves as artists but are considered practitioners of an art-making process that produces social change.

Due to its roots in social justice and collaborative, community-based nature, art for social change may be considered a form of cultural democracy. Often, the processes (or the works produced by these processes) intend to create or promote spaces for participatory public dialogue.

In Canada, the field of community-engaged arts has recently seen broader use of art for social change practices by non-arts change organizations. The resultant partnerships have enabled these collaborative communities to address systemic issues in health, education, as well as empowerment for indigenous, immigrant, LGBT and youth communities. A similar social innovation trend has appeared where business development associations have engaged with artists/artistic organizations to co-produce cultural festivals or events that address social concerns.

As the field diversifies and practices are adopted by various organizations from multiple disciplines, ethics and safety have become a concern to practitioners. As a result, opportunities for cross-disciplinary training in art for social change practices have grown within the related field of arts education.

### **18. Online community art**

A community can be seen in many ways, and it can refer to different kind of groups. There are also virtual communities or online communities. Internet art has many different forms, but often there is some kind of community that is created for a project or it is an effect of an art project. One example of community art is the so-called image worm, whereby artists on a forum will build upon a canvas and smoothly transition in their own piece between the last piece using image stitching, and then the next artist will build up on it, and so on. Such pieces will eventually take on the form of a panorama, stretching on as infinitely as the community decides to continue building upon the piece.

### **19. Community-Focused Art Projects**

Art institutions and government bodies in the Gulf are increasingly supporting projects that directly engage the public and build community bonds. These projects often take the form of public art installations, workshops, and festivals.

### **20. The Role of Socially Engaged Art**

In Saudi Arabia, there's a growing movement of socially engaged and participatory art practices. These initiatives, often supported by Saudi Vision 2030, aim to use art to foster societal development and strengthen international relations. While many of these are government-led, they create opportunities for artists and the public to interact and explore themes of national identity. One example is the preservation of folk-art forms in the Al-Baha region, where local folklore groups work to revive extinct arts.

The emergence of these narrative, social, and community-focused art forms underscores a broader shift in the Gulf region's cultural landscape. Art is moving beyond traditional gallery spaces to become a more inclusive and interactive part of public life.

### **21. Results**

- In the Gulf region—Saudi Arabia leading the charge with Vision 2030—art is being strategically leveraged as an engine for economic diversification and reimagining national identity.
- There's a clear pivot away from conventional, object-based art. Instead, the spotlight's on socially

engaged projects: participatory, community-driven initiatives where the real “art” is in the process, the exchange, and the social change that happens along the way.

- Aesthetics? That’s getting a reboot. It’s less about how something looks and more about the quality of human interaction it sparks. This shift shows up in public festivals, educational workshops, and collaborative community projects.
- Substantial investment is backing this movement. We’re seeing robust support for infrastructure (like museums), talent development (think residencies and grants), and accessible public programming (family classes, for example).
- Ultimately, art is positioned as a dynamic catalyst for socio-economic progress, cultural diplomacy, and the ongoing project of redefining national identity within a global context.
- So, the region isn’t just supporting art for art’s sake—it’s clearly harnessing it as a tool for transformation and international engagement

## 22. Conclusion

The Gulf region is undergoing a significant cultural transformation, with art moving from the realm of luxury into a central force for national development and societal progress. What stands out in this shift is the strategic prioritization of socially engaged art (SEA). Instead of focusing solely on the creation of an object, SEA emphasizes process and human collaboration, actively involving communities and placing value on shared experience.

This approach to art production leans heavily on context and participation. Projects often aim to preserve folk traditions, stage public festivals, and develop educational programs. Here, the process—how people interact, share, and create meaning together—takes on as much significance as the final artistic output. In other words, the “aesthetic of human interaction” becomes a core principle in these initiatives.

Ultimately, the Gulf’s renewed cultural landscape signals more than just a proliferation of museums or galleries. Under initiatives like Saudi Vision 2030, art is being reframed as an accessible and inclusive platform for dialogue and social change ([Mirgani, 2017](#); [Finkelppearl, 2012](#)). By integrating art into the processes of economic diversification and identity formation, the region demonstrates how creative practice can drive both social innovation and a redefinition of national identity on the world stage. This evolution illustrates the power of art not merely as ornamentation, but as an instrumental force in shaping the future of society.

This study highlights a substantial transformation underway in the Gulf region’s cultural landscape, where art appreciation has evolved from a symbol of luxury into a focal point of national development strategies. Through the application of art appreciation community theory, the analysis demonstrates that the value and meaning of art in Gulf societies are now actively negotiated among institutions, critics, and the broader public—entities now empowered by robust, state-driven frameworks such as Saudi Vision 2030.

The emergence of museums, public art initiatives, and expanded creative education signals a deliberate effort to nurture a vibrant, sustainable “art world” unique to the Gulf context. Art is no longer peripheral; it has become both an instrument for economic diversification and an essential medium for articulating national identity. As these policies continue to unfold, the Gulf’s evolving art ecosystem offers valuable insights into the broader intersection of culture, policy, and social transformation in the 21st century.

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