

# THE TEMPORAL DIMENSION IN PLASTIC ARTS

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## ABSTRACT

*While traditionally considered spatial, the plastic arts possess a profound and complex relationship with time. This paper investigates "Plastic Time," a concept wherein visual art transcends the "frozen moment" to incorporate duration, memory, and decay. Through analysis of artistic practices from traditional portraiture to modern kinetic sculpture and environmental art this paper demonstrates that time is not merely an external factor but an active, integral component of visual, plastic expression.*

**Key Words:** *Plastic Time, frozen moment, plastic expression*

## INTRODUCTION

### The Spatial-Temporal Paradox:



Plastic arts defined as forms involving physical manipulation of materials (sculpture, painting, drawing) are often categorized as spatial arts, contrasting with temporal arts like music or theater. However, this distinction is limiting. As noted by early critics, while a picture may seem to represent a single, captured moment, the experience of

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creating and viewing that picture occurs within time. This paper examines how artists imbue static materials with duration.

## 2. Time as Subject and Representation (The "Frozen Moment")

Historically, the plastic arts have dealt with time by attempting to freeze it, yet this attempt often highlights the passing of time.

- **The Decisive Moment:** Artists capture a single second, such as in portraiture or photography, creating a permanent record of a transient existence.
- **Narrative Time:** Reliefs and paintings (e.g., in ancient Egyptian or medieval art) often depict multiple, successive incidents within one frame, forcing the viewer to read the story over time.
- **Memory and Decay:** Sculptures, particularly those involving oxidation or environmental exposure, represent the gradual passage of time (decay) within a singular form.

### The Temporal Nature of Viewer Experience



The act of viewing plastic art is not instantaneous.

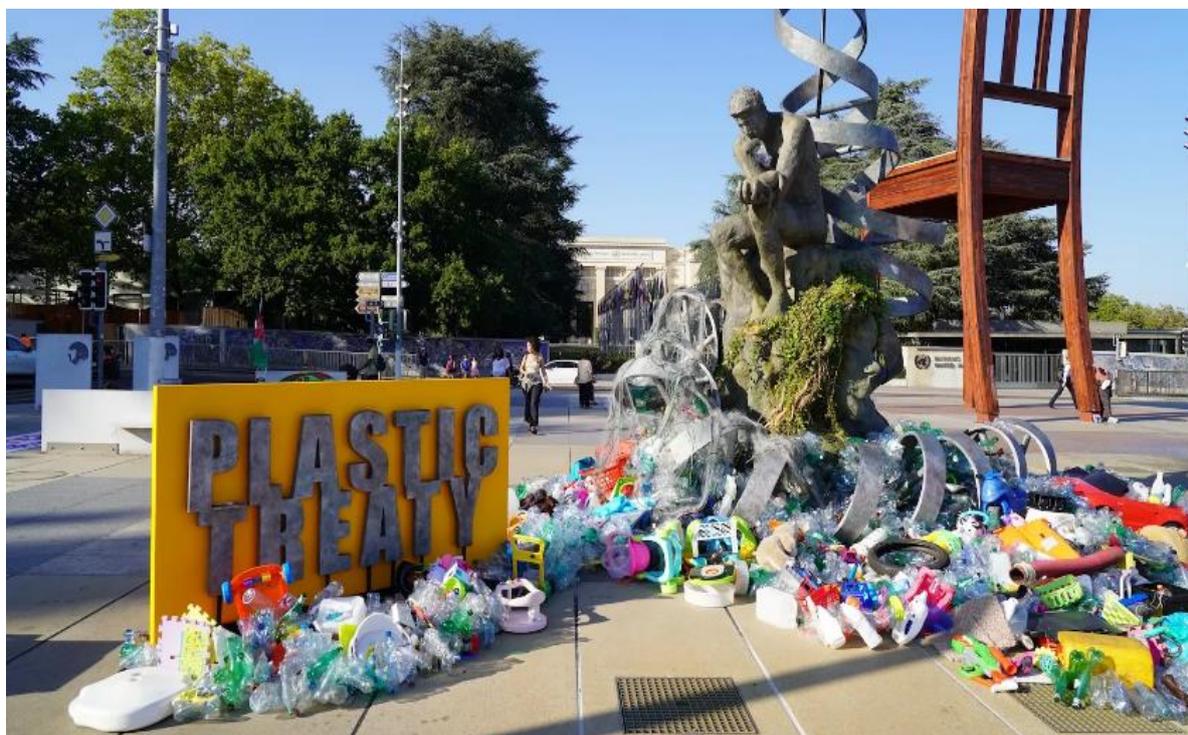
- **Viewer Duration:** Research indicates that the average viewer spends a very limited time sometimes only 10 to 27 seconds looking at a work of art.
- **The "Slow Art" Movement:** Contemporary art often demands, through complex installations or minute detail, that the viewer slow down, engaging in a longer, contemplative time-based experience.

#### 4. Kinetic and Process-Based Art

Modern and contemporary art have directly incorporated time as a material.

- **Kinetic Art:** Sculptures that move, spin, or change shape (e.g., Calder's mobiles) introduce real time into the work. The work is never the same twice.
- **Process/Ephemeral Art:** Land art or installations that degrade or change over time (e.g., ice sculptures, sand art) prioritize the process of creation and destruction over the final product.
- **Digital Collage/Media:** Contemporary, technology-driven art creates layers of time, blending past and present images simultaneously.

#### 5. Environmental Time: Plastic in Art



A contemporary, urgent intersection of time and plastic art is the use of non-biodegradable, synthetic materials

- **Subverting Decay:** Plastic in art represents an artificial, non-temporal material that does not age, creating a tension with the natural, organic world it may represent.
- **Environmental Time:** Artists use waste plastics to create sculptures that comment on the slow, geologic time it takes for these materials to degrade, highlighting humanity's impact on the planet.

## 6. CONCLUSION



Time in plastic arts is not a contradiction, but a fundamental, often overlooked, dimension. Whether through the illusion of a frozen moment, the physical movement of kinetic sculpture, or the long-term degradation of materials, the plastic arts provide a unique, tangible way for humanity to engage with, stop, and contemplate the passage of time.



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