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## A Theoretical Analysis of Inner Art and Its Role in the Process of Human Creativity

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### Abstract

In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to the inner dimensions of the human being in explaining artistic creativity; nevertheless, the role of mental, emotional, imaginative, and unconscious experiences in many prevailing theories of art remains fragmented and lacks a coherent conceptual framework. The main concern of this study is to conceptualize the notion of “inner art” and to examine its role in the process of artistic creation. Adopting an analytical–theoretical approach and drawing on perspectives from the philosophy of art, the psychology of creativity, and aesthetic theories, the present research seeks to rethink the relationship between the human inner realm and artistic expression. Within this framework, inner art is defined as a dynamic and multilayered domain of mental, emotional, imaginative, and unconscious experiences that takes shape within the artist before the artwork's external manifestation and, through continuous interaction with external realities, determines the direction, meaning, and identity of the work. The findings indicate that the creative process is not merely a reaction to external stimuli, but rather the outcome of a complex dialogue between the artist's inner world and cultural, social, and material contexts. The article argues that recognizing inner art can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of human creativity, a redefinition of the role of subjectivity in art theory, and the development of innovative approaches to art education—approaches that emphasize the cultivation of inner awareness, imagination, and lived experience alongside the teaching of technical skills.

**Keywords:** Inner art, Artistic creativity, Inner realm, Philosophy of art, Psychology of creativity, Art education.

## 1 | Introduction

Art has always been one of the most fundamental means of expressing human experience, an arena in which people seek to embody their perceptions, emotions, thoughts, and lived experiences in tangible, meaningful form. However, in many classical and contemporary art theories, the primary focus has been on the external aspects of artistic creation, such as form, technique, style, and social context. At the same time, the artist's inner realm has received far less attention as an independent and foundational element. This theoretical neglect has reduced human creativity, in many cases, to a set of skills or reactions to external factors. In

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contrast, a substantial part of artistic creation is rooted in the human inner world. The concept of “inner art” refers precisely to this inner world, a world composed of imagination, emotions, memories, mental perceptions, and the conscious and unconscious layers of human experience. Inner art is not merely a mental precondition, but an active and dynamic ground for the formation of creative ideas and artistic meanings. In the process of creation, the artist constantly moves between this inner realm and external reality, and the artwork emerges from this complex and multilayered interaction. From this perspective, artistic creativity cannot be understood solely as the result of imitation, technical training, or social conditions; rather, it should be regarded as an inner–outer process rooted in individual human experience. Despite the importance of this inner realm, the concept of inner art has rarely been examined systematically in theoretical studies of art and has often been addressed only sporadically in fields such as the psychology of art, the philosophy of mind, or theories of the unconscious. This fragmentation has obscured the precise position of inner art within the process of human creativity and has left fundamental questions unanswered—among them, how inner art is formed, what its components are, and how it contributes to the creation of the artwork. Accordingly, the central issue of the present study is the theoretical conceptualization of inner art and its role in the process of human creativity. Adopting an analytical and interdisciplinary approach, this article seeks to clarify the relationship between the human inner realm and artistic creation, demonstrating that creativity is rooted less in purely technical or external factors and more in inner experiences and the human capacity for meaning-making. This research aims to open a new horizon in understanding human creativity and theorizing art by recognizing inner art, and to provide a foundation for rethinking art education and the cultivation of creativity.

## 2 | Research Background

The issue of artistic creativity and its sources has been one of the earliest concerns of theoretical reflection on art. In dialogues such as *Ion* and *Phaedrus*, Plato regards artistic creation as the result of an inner, non-rational force, in which the artist functions as a mediator [1]. Although Aristotle adopts a more rational approach in *Poetics*, he emphasizes the role of the faculty of imagination and inner experience in artistic imitation, regarding them as influential factors in the creation of the artwork [2]. In modern philosophy, Kant, in the *Critique of Judgment*, introduces the concept of genius as an innate ability of the mind to produce aesthetic ideas—ideas whose origin is internal and cannot be reduced to or governed by educational rules [3]. Hegel, likewise, in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, regards art as the manifestation of the Absolute Spirit and human self-consciousness, asserting that the artwork reflects the inner and historical realm of the artist’s mind [4]. These perspectives have laid the theoretical foundation for emphasizing the inner world in the explanation of art. In psychology, Freud regarded artistic creativity as a form of sublimation of unconscious desires and conflicts, viewing the artwork as a symbolic manifestation of the artist’s inner world [5]. Jung, by introducing the concepts of the collective unconscious and archetypes, considers creativity as the result of the interaction between the deeper layers of the human psyche and individual experiences, and he presents art as the realm in which these inner contents are expressed [6]. Subsequently, cognitive psychologists and creativity researchers such as Guilford view creativity as based on divergent mental processes and the individual’s internal abilities [7]. Csikszentmihalyi [8], with his Flow theory, highlights the role of inner states of focus, mental immersion, and individual subjective experience in the production of creativity. Although these theories rarely use the term “inner art,” they implicitly emphasize the importance of the human inner realm in the creative process. In contemporary philosophy and phenomenology, Husserl [9] considers lived experience and inner consciousness as the foundations for understanding and meaning. Merleau Ponty [10], in his works, presents art as the result of the embodied engagement and inner perception of the subject with the world, emphasizing the role of the artist’s mental and perceptual experience. However, these studies have primarily focused on perceptual experience or engagement with the artwork, paying less attention to inner art as a source of creativity. In domestic research, studies have been conducted in the fields of artistic creativity, psychology of art, and art education. Researchers such as Zamiri and Seyed Ahmadi Zaveh [11], in their article on identifying factors influencing the assessment and development of artistic creativity, have highlighted the role of imagination, personal experiences, and internal factors in artistic creativity. Additionally, Ahmadi [12], in discussions on aesthetics, has examined the connection between the artist’s mentality and artistic creation.

However, most of these studies lack a coherent theoretical framework for conceptualizing inner art, and the concept has been addressed only sporadically and implicitly. A review of the literature indicates that, despite extensive attention to creativity and the artist's mentality, there remains a significant gap in the theoretical formulation of the concept of inner art and in explaining its role in the process of human creativity. The present study, focusing on this gap, seeks to analyze inner art as an independent and foundational concept in art theory.

### **3 | Inner Art and Its Conceptual Distinctions**

To clarify the concept of inner art and avoid theoretical ambiguity, it is necessary to examine this concept in relation to closely related terms and notions. Concepts such as inwardness, lived experience, subjectivity, and inner consciousness each, in some way, refer to the human inner realm. Yet none of them alone can fully explain artistic creation from an internal perspective. Therefore, exploring the relationship between these concepts and inner art is an essential step toward formulating the concept theoretically. Regarding the concept of inwardness, it generally refers to attention to the subject's inner realm, encompassing their mental, emotional, and perceptual states [13]. In contemporary theories of philosophy and the humanities, inwardness is often contrasted with objectivist or structuralist approaches. However, inwardness primarily refers to the existential condition of the subject and pays little attention to how this condition is transformed into artistic expression. Compared to inwardness, inner art is a more active, process-oriented concept; it not only acknowledges the existence of the inner realm but also encompasses the mechanisms by which it shapes the creation of an artwork [14]. The concept of lived experience, particularly within the phenomenological tradition, emphasizes the human being's immediate perception of the world and their meaning-making of these perceptions. Lived experience encompasses memories, emotions, sensory impressions, and the individual's everyday encounters with the world [13]. Inner art has a deep connection with lived experience, yet it is not limited to it. Lived experience becomes inner art when it moves beyond the level of individual experience and, through a creative process, is internalized, reimagined, and transformed. Thus, inner art is not a direct reflection of lived experience but the result of its creative processing within the artist's inner realm. The concept of subjectivity refers to the position of the knowing and experiencing agent in the process of perception and meaning-making. In art theory, an emphasis on subjectivity often highlights the artist's individual perspective [15]. However, focusing solely on subjectivity can lead to relativism or to reducing art to the artist's personal perspective. Inner art, while rooted in subjectivity, situates it in interaction with deeper mental, emotional, and unconscious layers, avoiding the reduction of art to mere expression of opinion or personal feeling. Inner consciousness refers to the individual's ability to observe, reflect upon, and understand their own mental and emotional states. This awareness plays a crucial role in shaping creativity by enabling the identification and guidance of inner currents. However, inner art is not solely the product of conscious awareness; it is formed in the interplay between consciousness and the unconscious. In other words, inner art is a domain in which inner awareness, imagination, and the unconscious operate simultaneously and dynamically. Across these concepts, we encounter philosophical insights and theoretical foundations that, throughout history, have addressed different aspects of this domain, collectively highlighting the special significance of the artist's inner realm. The following sections will examine these concepts in detail.

### **4 | Inner Art in the Philosophy of Art**

Although the philosophy of art has not explicitly used the term "inner art," throughout its historical development, it has repeatedly referred to the artist's inner realm, the mental origins of artistic creation, and the role of inner experience in the production of artworks. These references have often been scattered, implicit, and dependent on the specific conceptual frameworks of each philosopher, and have rarely been formulated as an independent and coherent concept. Nevertheless, a review of these perspectives shows that inner art, as an unseen yet influential foundation, has been present in many philosophical theories of art. In classical philosophy, particularly in Plato's thought, artistic creation is associated with a kind of inner inspiration or fervor. In dialogues such as *Ion*, Plato considers art the result of a divine madness that elevates

the artist beyond calculative reason [16]. Although Plato ultimately adopts a critical stance toward art, this very conception of inspiration indicates that the source of art lies not in mere imitation of the external world, but in an inner experience that cannot be reduced to rational rules. This perspective can be considered one of the earliest philosophical references to the role of the inner realm in artistic creation. In modern philosophy, Kant represents a turning point in understanding the relationship between mind and art. In the *Critique of Judgment*, he introduces productive imagination as a faculty that mediates between understanding and sensibility. In this sense, imagination is not merely the reproduction of sensory images, but a creative and self-generating force that makes aesthetic experience possible. From this perspective, the artwork is the product of an inner activity that takes shape in the artist's mind before any external manifestation. Although Kant still emphasizes the universality of aesthetic judgment, the role of productive imagination shows that the artist's inner realm is fundamental to generating artistic meaning and form [3]. In the German Idealist tradition, particularly in Schelling's thought, art occupies a privileged position. Schelling regards art as the highest form of unity between consciousness and the unconscious, a realm in which what has taken shape in the unconscious mind is manifested intuitively and directly in the artwork [17]. In this view, the artist does not necessarily have conscious control over every element of the artwork; rather, the work emerges from the action of inner forces that operate beyond rational control. This conception is directly linked to the notion of inner art, as it regards art not as the product of deliberate planning, but as the outward expression of a complex inner process. In expressionist approaches, particularly in Benedetto Croce's thought, art is fundamentally defined as intuition or inner expression.

Croce considers art a "purely intuitive expression" that exists in the artist's mind before any material form. Within this framework, the artwork is the external embodiment of an inner image, deriving its meaning and value from this source. Although this approach has occasionally been criticized for extreme mentalism, its contribution to highlighting the inner dimension of art is undeniable, making it one of the theories closest to the concept of inner art. Phenomenology, especially in the works of Husserl [9] and Merleau-Ponty [10], opens a new horizon for understanding art in relation to inner experience. In this approach, lived experience and bodily perception replace a purely mentalistic or objective perspective. Merleau-Ponty [10] views art as the manifestation of the way human beings inhabit the world, a mode of being that is neither entirely mental nor entirely objective. From this perspective, inner art can be understood as a domain in which the artist's lived experience, sensory perception, and pre-reflective consciousness are creatively organized and manifested in the artwork. This review indicates that, although the concept of inner art has not been explicitly formulated, its core elements, from inspiration and productive imagination to the unconscious and lived experience, are present across various theories. What has been missing, however, is an integrated view of these elements as part of a dynamic, inner process that leads to artistic creation. The concept of inner art seeks to unify these scattered elements into a coherent framework, demonstrating that the human inner realm is not marginal but foundational to the philosophy of art and to understanding artistic creativity. Additionally, the psychology of creativity directly engages with inner art, offering a precise and comprehensive examination of this phenomenon. In the following section, inner art will be explored from the perspective of creativity psychology.

## **5 | Inner Art from the Perspective of the Psychology of Creativity**

The psychology of creativity is one of the fields that directly focuses on the inner processes of the human mind and, in this respect, provides an appropriate framework for explaining the concept of inner art. Unlike some art theories that consider creativity primarily as the product of external, educational, or social factors, the psychology of creativity emphasizes the role of an individual's mental, emotional, and unconscious structures in the formation of novel ideas [14]. Within this framework, creativity is not a random event but a complex and dynamic process that originates in the individual's inner realm and subsequently manifests in external forms. One of the significant contributions of the psychology of creativity is the shift from an outcome-oriented to a process-oriented perspective. In this approach, creativity is understood as a sequence of mental stages, including preparation, incubation, illumination, and evaluation. The stages of incubation and

illumination particularly highlight that a substantial portion of creative activity occurs at an inner, often unconscious, level. These stages align closely with the concept of inner art, as the artistic idea is cultivated within the individual's mental and emotional space before any external manifestation [18]. In analytical psychology, particularly in the thought of Freud and Jung, the unconscious occupies a central role in explaining creativity. Freud considers art as a form of sublimation, in which unconscious desires and tensions are symbolically and acceptably expressed [5]. From this perspective, the artwork represents the external embodiment of forces active within the artist's inner realm, which cannot be directly expressed. Jung, through his concepts of the collective unconscious and archetypes, shows that artistic images and themes are rooted in layers deeper than individual experience [6]. These perspectives emphasize that inner art is not solely the product of conscious awareness but is shaped through the interaction between consciousness and the unconscious. In many traditional theories, emotions have been positioned in opposition to reason; however, contemporary psychology of creativity shows that emotions play a fundamental role in motivating, sustaining, and deepening the creative process. Emotions can direct attention toward specific experiences and provide the basis for meaning-making. In inner art, emotions are not regarded as fleeting reactions but as raw material refined through an inner process and transformed into artistic expression. In this way, emotions serve as a driving force for creativity, but only when they are organized within a reflective and imaginative framework. In the psychology of creativity, imagination is recognized as the ability to combine, transform, and rearrange mental elements. Mechanisms such as free association, daydreaming, and fantasy allow the individual to move beyond fixed patterns of thought, enabling novel connections and creative insights [8].

In this sense, inner art is a domain in which imagination operates actively, recombining lived experiences, emotions, and mental images in novel ways. This process serves as a prerequisite for artistic innovation and a break from stereotypical repetition. Alongside the unconscious and imagination, self-awareness also plays a decisive role in creativity. Humanistic psychology, particularly in approaches emphasizing self-actualization, views creativity as part of realizing one's inner potential. Self-awareness enables the artist to recognize, guide, and give meaning to their inner currents. Within the framework of inner art, self-awareness does not imply complete control over the creative process but rather the ability to engage in a dialogue with the inner world and maintain a balance between intuition and evaluation. A review of perspectives in the psychology of creativity shows that artistic creativity has deep roots in the inner processes of the human mind. The unconscious, emotions, imagination, and self-awareness each play a role in the formation of creative ideas [18]. The concept of inner art seeks to understand these factors within an integrated framework, demonstrating that artistic creation is the result of the dynamic interaction of these elements within the artist's inner realm. From this perspective, inner art bridges the psychology of creativity and art theory, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the human creative process.

## **6 | The Interaction of the Inner World and External Reality in Artistic Creation**

One of the fundamental challenges in art theories is explaining the relationship between the artist's inner world and external reality. Some approaches, emphasizing social, historical, and material factors, have viewed art as a response to external conditions, while others, focusing on individual subjectivity, risk reducing art to a purely personal and isolated experience. The concept of inner art, as explained in previous chapters, provides a theoretical framework for moving beyond this dichotomy and understanding artistic creation as the result of the dynamic interaction between the inner world and external reality. The artist's inner world encompasses a collection of lived experiences, memories, emotions, imaginations, and unconscious layers that have developed over the course of the individual's life [14]. This inner world is not a passive space but an active field for processing and interpreting reality. External experiences become raw material for artistic creation only when filtered through the artist's inner world. In this sense, what is manifested in the artwork is not a direct representation of external reality, but rather a reality internalized and imbued with meaning. Conversely, external reality, including social, cultural, historical, and environmental conditions, plays an undeniable role in shaping art. However, this role should not be reduced to a linear or mechanical relationship. Rather than

directly determining the artwork's content, external reality serves as a stimulus, a context, and a horizon of meaning. Inner art serves as an intermediary in this process, through which external elements are selected, reinterpreted, and transformed, ultimately manifesting in a creative form. One key mechanism in the interaction between the inner and outer worlds is internalization. In this process, external experiences are actively integrated into the artist's mental and emotional structures. Internalization is not a passive absorption; it involves interpretation, reorganization, and even resistance to external reality. Inner art can be understood as the outcome of this process, a domain in which external reality is transformed into a personal yet meaningful experience. The artwork represents the intersection of the inner world and external reality. At this stage, what has developed within the inner realm takes form in material, shape, language, or image. This external manifestation is always accompanied by the limitations and possibilities of the objective world limitations inherent in tools, media, and aesthetic rules, and possibilities that enable the work to communicate with others. Thus, the artwork is neither a complete reflection of the inner world nor a mere representation of external reality; it is the result of a creative negotiation between these two realms. The concept of inner art helps to move beyond the classical mind/object dichotomy. Within this framework, the artist's mind is not separate from the world, nor does the world enter the artwork in a raw, unmediated form. Artistic creation is a process in which inner experience and external reality mutually shape one another. This perspective aligns with contemporary phenomenological and psychological approaches, which view humans as beings-in-the-world and understand creativity as arising from this relationship.

In summary, inner art plays a mediating role in the process of artistic creation, rooted on the one hand in the artist's inner experiences and processes, and on the other hand in external realities and cultural and social contexts. This mediation allows the artwork to retain both individual authenticity and the capacity for meaning and communication with others. In this way, inner art can be seen as the key to understanding how the human mental world is linked to the objective world, a connection that underlies artistic creativity [14].

## 7 | Applications of Inner Art in Art Education

Recognizing the concept of inner art has important implications for art education. Conventional art education systems often focus on technical skills, reproduction of styles, and conformity to external standards. While these components are necessary, an exclusive emphasis on them can weaken individual creativity and overlook students' inner realm [19]. The concept of inner art provides an opportunity to rethink the goals, methods, and content of art education. One fundamental application of inner art in teaching is the cultivation of students' inner awareness. This awareness includes the ability to observe and understand one's own emotions, imagination, and mental experiences. Within this framework, art education is not limited to the transmission of knowledge and technical skills but also creates a space for reflection, self-understanding, and inner dialogue. Such an approach can foster conscious and authentic creativity. Inner art emphasizes the importance of active imagination and lived experience in the learning process. Rather than restricting students to predetermined patterns, art education can encourage personal expression by engaging with memory, emotion, and inner observation. This approach not only strengthens creativity but also fosters a deeper connection between the student and the artwork. Applying inner art in art education does not negate the teaching of technique; rather, it requires creating a dynamic balance between technical skills and the cultivation of the inner realm. In this framework, technique becomes a tool for manifesting inner experience rather than the ultimate goal of education. This perspective can enhance the professional quality of artistic works while preventing art education from becoming a purely mechanical process. Embracing inner art as a foundational principle of art education has implications beyond the classroom. It can inform the design of interdisciplinary curricula, the application of findings from the psychology of creativity, and attention to individual differences among students. Moreover, it shifts art education from a model of imitation to one grounded in discovery and creation.

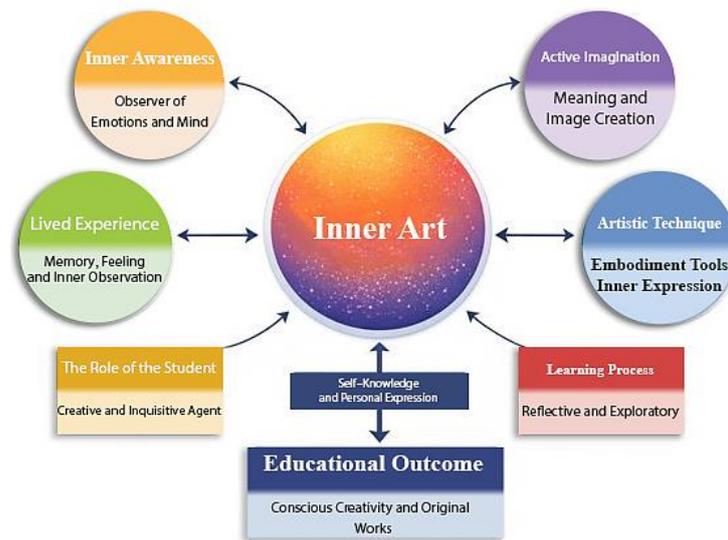


Fig. 1. Conceptual model of art education based on inner art.

## 8 | Conclusion

This study aimed to clarify the concept of inner art and examine its role in artistic creativity. A review of perspectives from the philosophy of art, psychology of creativity, and aesthetic theories revealed that, although the human inner realm has always played a role in the formation of art, in many prevailing theories, this role has been addressed in a scattered and incoherent manner and seldom recognized as an independent foundation. The article argued that inner art constitutes a dynamic domain of mental, emotional, imaginative, and unconscious experiences, which, in continuous interaction with external reality, gives rise to artistic creation. Within this framework, creativity is not merely a reaction to external stimuli but the result of a complex dialogue between the artist's inner world and external contexts. Inner art serves as the mediator of this dialogue, providing a source of meaning, innovation, and individual identity in the artwork. The findings suggest that recognizing inner art can redefine human creativity, enrich theoretical studies of art, and inspire innovative approaches to art education. Emphasizing the cultivation of inner awareness, imagination, and lived experience alongside technical training enables the emergence of authentic, student-centered creativity. Ultimately, attention to inner art not only deepens our understanding of the artistic creation process but also opens new horizons for future research in art, psychology, and education.

### Suggestions for future research

Future studies can employ qualitative methods—such as grounded theory or phenomenology to identify the components of inner art and develop a conceptual model explaining its role in artistic creativity, which can then be applied in educational settings. Conducting in-depth interviews with artists across various disciplines (painting, music, theater, digital arts, etc.) could provide a deeper understanding of the inner mechanisms of creativity and the role of inner art in the moment of creation. This approach may open new avenues for integrating the concept of inner art with theories such as the Jungian unconscious, flow, or transformative creativity to analyze the creative process more comprehensively. Comparative studies could also examine how the place of inner art is defined and cultivated across different cultures or educational systems, and what impact this has on the nature of artistic creativity. Overall, by introducing the concept of inner art, the present study provides a theoretical foundation that can support future empirical, interdisciplinary, and applied research. Addressing the gaps identified here will not only enrich theoretical studies in art but also potentially transform educational approaches and deepen our understanding of human creativity.

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## Data Availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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