

When Rule Breaking in Art Falls Flat: Cultural Tightness Deflates Deviant Artists' Impact

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Previous research in western countries shows that artists whose work deviates from their own previous style (intrapersonal deviance) and other artists' styles (interpersonal deviance) gain greater impact than nondeviant artists (Stamkou et al., 2018). However, aesthetic norms are embedded in cultural contexts that shape the meaning of artist deviance. Deviance is compatible with the ideal of innovation endorsed by loose cultures, yet incongruent with the ideal of conformity prominent in tight cultures. Here we examine how cultural tightness–looseness influences the effect of interpersonal (Studies 1–2) and intrapersonal deviance (Studies 3–4) on various indices of impact, including perceived artist influence, artwork valuation, purchase intention, and recommendation of the artist's work to a museum. Study 1 shows that Italian participants (looser culture) perceived artists who deviated from the motif used by their contemporary artists as more impactful than Chinese participants (tighter culture). Study 2 shows that the looser U.S. communities' response to COVID-19 rules, the more impactful they considered deviant artists. Study 3 shows that U.S. participants low in tightness mindset were more likely to recommend artists who deviated from their previous style to a company than artists who consistently followed a single style. Accordingly, Study 4 shows that U.S. participants high in tightness mindset were more likely to recommend nondeviant over deviant artworks to a museum. Cultural tightness attenuates the effect of deviance on impact by reducing the experience of profound aesthetic emotions (e.g., awe, beauty, interest) in response to deviant artworks (Studies 2–4).

Keywords: cultural tightness, deviance, atypicality, visual art, artist impact

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I have forced myself to contradict myself in order to avoid conforming to my own taste. (Marcel Duchamp, French artist)

Without rules, nothing can be done. (Mencius, Chinese philosopher)

The creation and experience of art have been central to human culture across time and place. For some, art serves as an homage to the past and a means of upholding tradition. For others, it serves as a means of renouncing the customary and challenging the status quo. Is the new, the unconventional, the deviant that stands out at the cradle of true art? Or does this very appraisal render art unsuccessful or even threatening? History suggests that the broader context in which artists create their work weighs heavily on their potential to make an impact (Bullock & Reber, 2013). Groundbreaking painter Kazimir Malevich was banned from making art when Stalin's government

turned against abstract art but enjoyed great success in a postwar Europe that welcomed changing trends. Marcel Duchamp's controversial Readymades gained him international acclaim in the western world, but Ai Weiwei's Readymades created a century later were associated with his confinement and exile by the Chinese authorities. Although historical examples abound, there is a dearth of empirical research on how the cultural context influences deviant artists' perceived impact.

Here we seek to understand how the cultural context—practices, norms, and mindsets upheld by individuals—influences their reactions to artists who deviate from prevailing aesthetic norms. Previous research conducted in Western cultural contexts has demonstrated that deviant artists can gain impact (e.g., Stamkou et al., 2018), but it remains an open question whether deviant artists would be appreciated in contexts with strong social norms that sanction rule-breaking behavior, as captured by the cultural dimension of tightness–looseness (Gelfand et al., 2011). Across four experiments we examine whether differences in cultural tightness measured between countries, communities, and individuals, moderate the effect of artist deviance on artist impact.

How Deviance in Art Begets Impact

Several strands of theorizing and research suggest that people appreciate and reward deviance across art genres. A series of lab

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experiments in the Netherlands and the United States demonstrated that painters who deviated from the kind of art they were making in the past by adopting a new style or motif in their work were credited more for their work than painters who kept reproducing what they were making before. In addition, painters who deviated from their contemporaries' style became more influential, their work was valued more, and viewers were more willing to purchase products depicting their work (Stamkou et al., 2018). These effects were replicated in a museum experiment in Austria in which Monet's impressionist artwork of waterlilies was placed within either a temporary exhibition meant to highlight his revolutionary anticipation of abstraction or a permanent exhibition of other Impressionist pieces that obscured Monet's revolutionary style (Specker et al., 2022). Furthermore, French participants attributed higher aesthetic and market value to a collection of Picasso's paintings that mixed distinct styles than a collection that featured a single style (Sgourev & Althuizen, 2014). Similar trends are found in the music scene. A relevant study employed textual analysis of thousands of songs and categorized lyrics according to themes commonly featured in each genre (e.g., "fiery love" in rock, "street cred" in R&B). Songs whose lyrics were more differentiated from their genres were more popular, suggesting that songs whose content deviated from the norm were more likely to go viral (Berger & Packard, 2018). Likewise, a case study with rap music suggested that rap artists gain more status by first showing a repetition of practices that are understood as legitimate by their audience and then introducing novel artistic content that increases their popularity (Lena & Pachucki, 2013). Deviant form and content in art render an artwork more appealing and the artist more successful.¹

Why does deviance boost an artist's impact? A possible answer is that works that belie a predicted pattern may lead to greater aesthetic pleasure and emotional reactions, as the wavering state of prediction error amplifies the subsequent positive affect of prediction confirmation by means of a contrast effect (Van de Cruys & Wagemans, 2011). Evidence supporting this account comes from research on emotional reactions elicited by deviant music and visual art. For instance, Sloboda (1991) found that marked violations of expectations in music correlate with the feeling of "chills" or "shivers down the spine," which are associated with increases in blood flow in reward- and euphoria-related regions of the brain (e.g., ventral striatum and orbitofrontal cortex; Blood & Zatorre, 2001). Chills or goose bumps are a common physiological marker of awe, the profound emotion we experience in response to novel, vast, or mysterious stimuli and remarkable works of art (Keltner & Haidt, 2003; Stamkou, Brummelman, et al., 2023; Zickfeld et al., 2020). Theories of visual perception, too, suggest that incongruent and unfamiliar stimuli can cause interest (Berlyne, 1970). Indeed, empirical studies show that unfamiliarity, novelty, and unexpectedness, which lie at the core of deviant art, promote interest, the emotion related to attention, exploration, and learning (Graf & Landwehr, 2015; Silvia, 2008). Similarly, Muth et al. (2015) showed that people prefer more ambiguous and novel artworks, because viewers gain greater insights from the elaboration of these artworks as compared to those that are easier to process, thereby increasing liking and curiosity. In all, deviant art may increase an artist's impact by eliciting profound aesthetic emotions, such as awe, wonder, interest, and insight.

Although current findings converge to suggest that artists who employ deviant forms of expression are more likely to gain impact, all of these studies were conducted in Western contexts, and no research has examined how the

cultural context shapes the perception of deviant art. Art appreciation, however, is profoundly shaped by the context in which it is considered, which includes features of the culture and characteristics of the viewer (Becker, 1982; Bullock & Reber, 2013; Pelowski et al., 2017). Here we focus on tightness–looseness, a cultural dimension that describes the strength of social norms and the degree of sanctioning to rule-breaking behavior, as a factor that alters people's reactions to deviant art. Next, we define tightness–looseness and examine how variance in this cultural dimension modulates reactions to deviant art.

Tightness–Looseness: Differences Across Levels of Analysis

Tightness–looseness is part of a complex, multilevel system that comprises distal ecological threats (e.g., resource scarcity, environmental disasters, pathogen prevalence) and proximal psychological affordances that allow individuals to adapt to their environments (e.g., self-monitoring, impulse control, need for structure). Tighter cultures, which tend to have evolved in contexts of high threat, have adapted to value order and predictability, which leads to a reliance on well-learned scripts and patterns to guide behavior that can help coordinate social action to deal with such ecological pressures. Social norms in tight cultures are thus clearly defined, leaving little room for individual improvisation and interpretation. Because upholding social order is important in tight cultures, an "intuitive prosecutor" mindset is more cognitively accessible. Accordingly, individuals in tighter cultures have developed a negative error orientation, which manifests itself as a resistance to change or innovation and readiness to punish norm violators (Mu et al., 2015). On the contrary, loose cultures have weaker norms, afford a wider range of permissible behavior across everyday situations, and create room for improvisation and change. Examples of countries with tight cultures include China and Japan, and loose cultures include the United States and Italy (Gelfand, 2021; Gelfand et al., 2011).

Although cross-national differences in tightness–looseness are well-documented, there is large cultural variation within nations as people's immediate communities, such as their state, province, or city, differ in the degree to which they are exposed to ecological threats (Chua et al., 2019; Harrington & Gelfand, 2014). This makes it possible for loose countries like the United States to have pockets of tight communities (e.g., rural areas are relatively tighter than urban areas). Finally, variation in tightness–looseness is observed at the individual level, too, as people differ in the extent to which they endorse or renounce the cultural tendencies prominent in their culture. Individual mindsets toward rules also vary as a function of socialization and child-rearing practices (Harrington & Gelfand, 2014). Higher levels of situational constraint are significantly related to greater prevention self-guides, such as higher dutifulness, greater self-regulation strength, higher impulse control, higher needs for structure, and higher self-monitoring (Gelfand et al., 2011). This suggests that societal members' psychological characteristics are attuned to and supportive of the degree of constraint versus latitude in the larger cultural context, but there can also be cases of cultural mismatches.

¹ For an overview of research on the aesthetic appeal of deviant, atypical products besides artworks (see Palmer et al., 2013).

How Cultural Tightness Deflates Deviant Artists' Impact

We theorize that cultural differences in tightness–looseness may have implications for how individuals perceive, experience, and react to deviant art. Tightness is associated with greater behavioral constraint and narrower behavioral options across contexts, and should accordingly curtail the degree to which innovative and creative activities, ideas, and commodities are produced, promoted, and valued. In the field of art, breaking the rules, exploring unexpected routes, and taking risks are integral aspects of the innovation process. Deviation from the norms and creativity are intimately connected (Morris & Leung, 2010). A series of experiments showed that participants who were primed with cues representing the concept of deviancy showed greater creative engagement than participants who were primed with conformity cues (Förster et al., 2005).

Indeed, a growing body of research shows that tightness at the country and state levels correlates negatively with creativity and innovation. Using data from a global creative crowdsourcing platform operating in more than 160 countries, Chua et al. (2019) found that individuals from tight cultures are less receptive to foreign creative ideas and less likely to engage in and succeed at foreign creative tasks than individuals from loose cultures. Another study shows that tight U.S. states have a lower number of fine artists (e.g., painters, illustrators, writers) per capita compared with loose states (Harrington & Gelfand, 2014). Likewise, the loosening of American culture over the last 200 years was marked by a creativity-order tradeoff: The less tight U.S. culture would become, the more creative output it produced, as registered in utility patents, trademarks, feature films, and unique baby names, and the less order-enhancing practices it followed (e.g., higher debt, lower school attendance, higher adolescent pregnancy; Jackson et al., 2019). Furthermore, the neural substrates of creativity seem to differ between tight and loose cultures. In a study employing electroencephalography, when detecting norm violations, Chinese participants showed an N400 response over the frontal brain region, which also mediated cultural differences in creativity in a follow-up task (Mu et al., 2015).

Tightness is also negatively related to personality traits that predict creativity, such as high openness to experience, promotion-focused self-regulation, and low cognitive rigidity and need for structure (Gelfand et al., 2011). Whereas people low in openness to experience are more conventional, people high in openness to experience are more creative and more prone to experience profound aesthetic emotions like awe, wonder, the chills, and feeling moved in response to music and visual art (Conner & Silvia, 2015; Nusbaum & Silvia, 2011). Similarly, prevention-focused individuals, who approach tasks with caution, follow instructions, and try to avoid making mistakes, are less creative than promotion-focused individuals, because creativity requires pushing boundaries, taking risks, and breaking rules, behaviors that prevention-focused individuals tend to avoid (Friedman & Förster, 2001). Furthermore, cognitively rigid individuals who show strong resistance to changing their behavior and attitudes are slower to adopt new product innovations than cognitively flexible individuals (Carbon & Schoormans, 2012). Finally, individuals high in need for structure who are predisposed to unambiguous knowledge dislike abstract art more than individuals low in need for structure because the ambiguous and novel patterns of abstract art disrupt meaning extraction (Landau et al., 2006).

Because individuals in tight cultures have been conditioned to react negatively toward actions that depart from an established course or accepted standard, deviation in art may be perceived as a threat, which would diminish the experience of positive aesthetic emotions. Indeed, aesthetic appreciation of objects and events decreases in situations where safety is at stake (see Menninghaus et al., 2019). As we have shown, deviant art may be less common in tight cultures, making it less familiar and understandable. Appraisals of reduced comprehensibility in turn predict lower interest in visual art (Silvia, 2008). Thus, viewers in tight cultures may not understand why the artist made the decision to deviate from a given pattern, which may diminish cognitive engagement with the artwork. In short, the lack of positive and profound emotional reactions may mediate the reduced appreciation of deviant art in tight cultures.

In light of these theoretical and empirical accounts, we propose that individuals in loose cultures may have a greater appetite for artistic products that propose radical change and challenge current norms. By contrast, individuals in tight cultures may be less positively inclined toward deviant art and may value instead art that respects established norms, practices, and traditions.

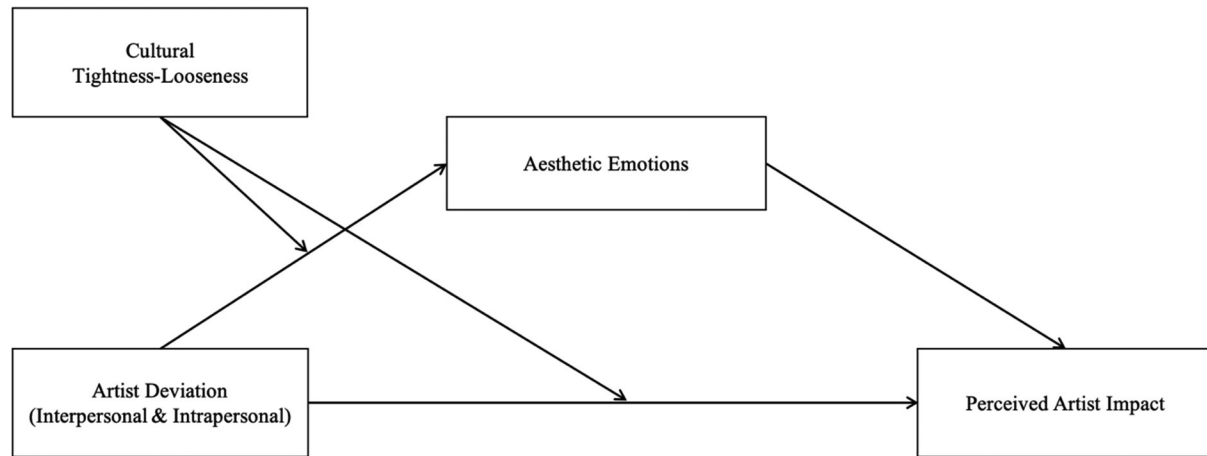
Overview of Hypotheses and Studies

Based on the theorizing above, we hypothesized that the effect of artist deviance on artist impact will be moderated by cultural tightness, such that artists who deviate from the norms they established during their career (intrapersonal deviance) or the norms that their contemporaries have established (interpersonal deviance) will be perceived as relatively more impactful than artists who follow the various types of norms in cultural contexts that are low rather than high on tightness. Furthermore, we hypothesize that individuals in tight cultures will consider deviant artists relatively less impactful because they will find their artworks less evocative of aesthetic emotions. Our theoretical model is visualized in Figure 1.

We conducted four studies to test our theoretical model. We operationalized artist deviance by presenting participants with a focal artwork that followed or deviated from the norm established by its surrounding artworks. Studies 1 and 2 focused on interpersonal deviance (i.e., deviance from the predominant style of one's contemporaries), while Studies 3 and 4 focused on intrapersonal deviance (i.e., deviance from one's own previous style). In Studies 1 and 2, we used the motif of the artwork to manipulate deviance (triangle vs. rectangular), while keeping the style of artworks constant across conditions (i.e., nonrealistic). In Studies 3 and 4, we used the discernible differences between realistic and nonrealistic art to manipulate deviance, given evidence that people consider nonrealistic art more unconventional than realistic art (see Pilot Study 3 in the online supplemental materials and Stamkou et al., 2018). The combination of deviance operationalizations in terms of motif and style allowed us to establish that the effects of artist deviance on impact are not bound to a single aspect of the artwork.

Across studies, we used different ecologically valid operationalizations of artist impact that were informed by prominent definitions in the field of art. Impactful artists are considered influential and talented, produce artworks that are highly valued, receive positive public reviews, and their work features in important cultural institutions (see Schönfeld & Reinstaller, 2007; Stamkou et al., 2018). We assessed the various aspects of impact across studies. Finally, we

Figure 1
Theoretical Model



operationalized cultural tightness at different levels of analysis, such as differences between countries (Study 1), within-country differences in perceived tightness (Study 2), and between-individual differences in tightness mindset (Studies 3 and 4). To our knowledge, this is one of the first tests of how culture influences reactions to deviance in art.

All data, code, and study materials are accessible on the Open Science Framework: <https://osf.io/mgqdh/> (Stamkou, Lin, et al., 2023).

Study 1

Method

Participants

A power analysis demonstrated that 787 participants were needed to detect a small effect size ($f = .10$) in a two-tailed two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with $\alpha = .05$ and power of $.80$. A total of 842 participants ($n = 374$ Italian and $n = 468$ Chinese) took part in the study ($M_{\text{age}} = 27.43$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 10.19$; 467 female, 350 male, and eight non-binary) via social media advertisements.

Procedure and Materials

For Study 1, we adapted an existing experimental paradigm that has previously been used to manipulate interpersonal artist deviance (Stamkou et al., 2018). We added country-level cultural tightness as a moderator thereby creating a 2 (no deviance vs. deviance) \times 2 (culturally loose vs. culturally tight) between-subjects quasi-experimental design. Cultural tightness was manipulated by recruiting participants from a culturally looser country (Italy) and a culturally tighter country (China; Gelfand et al., 2011). Participants from both countries were randomly assigned to one of two artist deviance conditions and were instructed to read a short story about a fictitious country on another planet called “Aratartland” whose inhabitants had been making paintings using triangles for 300 years. Participants were then shown three paintings (composed of colorful triangles) purportedly by three different painters whose work reflected this style.

They were then informed about Keo, an artist and inhabitant of Aratartland. Participants in the “no deviance” condition were told that, like his contemporaries, Keo created art using triangles and they were shown one of his paintings that was similar to the works they had previously seen. In contrast, participants in the “deviance” condition were informed that, unlike his contemporaries, Keo created art using squares and were instead shown a painting the motifs of which deviated from works that had been previously shown to them (see Figure 2). Participants then filled in items assessing their perceptions of Keo’s artistic influence, their valuation of his artwork, and their purchase intentions. Lastly, they responded to manipulation check items for perceived artistic deviance and cultural tightness, finishing with items assessing demographics.

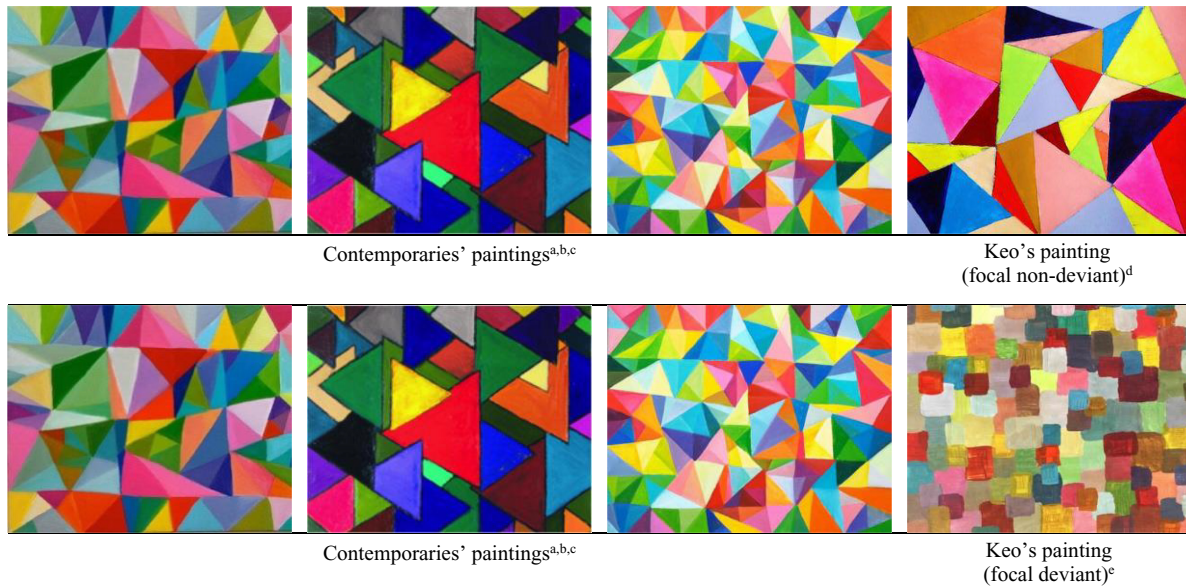
Measures

A full list of the scales used across all four studies can be found in Table S4 in the online supplemental materials. Unless stated otherwise, all measures in Study 1 were rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much*. The manipulation check of perceived artist deviance was measured using three items ($\alpha = .85$). An example item was “I think that Keo’s artwork has a different artistic form compared to the rest of the artworks,” with higher scores reflecting greater perceived deviance. To ensure that the Italian and Chinese samples differed as expected in terms of cultural tightness, we measured country-level tightness using a seven-item scale ($\alpha = .80$) based on a measure by Gelfand et al. (2011). Because the study was carried out during the Covid-19 outbreak, we adapted the cultural tightness scale to fit the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Participants responded to these items using a 6-point bipolar scale with loose and tight answer options at opposite ends (e.g., “To what extent is your country punishing people who deviate from the rules that have been put in place in response to the coronavirus?” with 1 = *not at all punishing people who violate the rules* and 6 = *very much punishing people who violate the rules*). For this scale, higher scores represented greater cultural tightness.

For the dependent variables, we assessed perceived influence using the six-item ($\alpha = .83$) scale previously developed by Stamkou et al. (2018), with an example item being “Keo will influence the future generation of

Figure 2

Artworks Used in the No Deviance (Top Row) and Deviance (Bottom Row) Conditions in Studies 1 and 2



Note. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

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painters.” Art valuation was measured using three items ($\alpha = .72$) with response options in participants’ local currency adjusted for the exchange rate and local purchasing power (e.g., “How much would you be willing to spend on buying a large poster of this artist, depicting this painting?” from 1 = €5 to 7 = €35, in €5 increments in Italy, and from 1 = ¥25 to 7 = ¥175, in ¥25 increments in China). Purchase intention was measured with two items, $r(787) = .60, p < .001$ (e.g., “Would you buy products depicting one of Keo’s artworks?”). Intercorrelations between the three dependent variables were positive, suggesting they all tapped into a common construct, artist impact (see Table S1 in the online supplemental materials for intercorrelations).

We finally measured the extent to which the style of the artworks was familiar within participants’ respective cultures with the item “What do you generally think of painters’ style in Aratartland?” (1 = *unfamiliar*, 7 = *familiar*). We also measured art interest with three items derived from a validated scale (Specker et al., 2020). A sample item is “I am interested in art” (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*; $\alpha = .89$). In this and follow-up studies, we used art familiarity and art interest as control variables to check the robustness of the focal effects.

Results

Descriptive statistics of the manipulation check and main dependent variables are presented per condition in Table 1.

Manipulation Checks

We conducted separate two-way ANOVAs to examine the effects of artist deviance and country on perceived artist deviance and

perceived cultural tightness to establish whether the manipulations were effective and orthogonal. With regard to perceived artist deviance, there was a main effect of artist deviance indicating that participants in the deviance condition perceived greater deviance than those in the no deviance condition, $F(1, 838) = 190.17, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .19$. There was no main effect of cultural tightness, $F(1, 838) = 0.66, p = .416, \eta_p^2 = .001$, but there was an interaction, $F(1, 838) = 59.29, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .07$. Simple main effects analysis indicates that both Italian and Chinese participants perceived deviant artworks to be more deviant than nondeviant artworks, but this effect was stronger in Italy than in China. Given the magnitude of the main effect of artist deviance in comparison to the interaction effect, we concluded that the manipulation of artist deviance was successful.

With regard to cultural tightness, we found a main effect of country, $F(1, 838) = 108.01, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .114$, no main effect of artist deviance, $F(1, 838) = 0.70, p = .402, \eta_p^2 = .001$, and no interaction, $F(1, 838) = 0.07, p = .793, \eta_p^2 = .00$. Chinese participants reported greater cultural tightness in their fellow citizens’ response to the COVID-19 pandemic compared to Italian participants. We, therefore, concluded that our choice of countries to reflect cultural variation in tightness–looseness was reasonable.

Hypothesis Testing

We conducted a series of two-way ANOVAs to test the effects of artist deviance and cultural tightness on perceived influence, valuation, and purchase intention. These analyses were followed by simple effects analyses to inspect interaction effects. The results of these analyses are illustrated in Figure 3.

Table 1*Descriptives of Manipulation Check and Dependent Variables Across Conditions of Artist Deviance and Countries in Study 1*

Country	Artist deviance: no		Artist deviance: yes		Total ^a	
	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	95% CI	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	95% CI	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	95% CI
Perceived artist deviance (manipulation check)						
Italy (culturally loose)	3.15 (1.57)	[2.94, 3.39]	5.40 (1.38)	[5.19, 5.58]	4.30 (1.85)	[4.10, 4.48]
China (culturally tight)	3.88 (1.50)	[3.68, 4.08]	4.51 (1.56)	[4.31, 4.70]	4.20 (1.56)	[4.06, 4.34]
Total ^b	3.56 (1.57)	[3.41, 3.72]	4.91 (1.54)	[4.76, 5.04]	4.24 (1.70)	[4.12, 4.36]
Cultural tightness (manipulation check)						
Italy (culturally loose)	4.18 (0.74)	[4.08, 4.30]	4.74 (0.86)	[4.62, 4.85]	4.15 (0.76)	[4.08, 4.23]
China (culturally tight)	4.77 (0.91)	[4.65, 4.89]	4.74 (0.86)	[4.62, 4.85]	4.75 (0.89)	[4.67, 4.83]
Total ^b	4.51 (0.88)	[4.43, 4.60]	4.46 (0.88)	[4.38, 4.55]	4.48 (0.88)	[4.43, 4.54]
Perceived influence						
Italy (culturally loose)	4.03 (1.27)	[3.84, 4.22]	5.08 (1.14)	[4.92, 5.24]	4.57 (1.32)	[4.42, 4.71]
China (culturally tight)	4.37 (1.19)	[4.22, 4.53]	4.62 (1.12)	[4.48, 4.77]	4.50 (1.16)	[4.39, 4.60]
Total ^b	4.22 (1.23)	[4.09, 4.35]	4.83 (1.16)	[4.72, 4.94]	4.53 (1.23)	[4.44, 4.61]
Art valuation						
Italy (culturally loose)	2.74 (1.12)	[2.58, 2.89]	3.17 (1.04)	[3.03, 3.32]	2.96 (1.10)	[2.84, 3.06]
China (culturally tight)	3.72 (1.32)	[3.55, 3.90]	3.75 (1.20)	[3.59, 3.91]	3.73 (1.26)	[3.62, 3.85]
Total ^b	3.28 (1.33)	[3.16, 3.41]	3.49 (1.16)	[3.38, 3.60]	3.39 (1.25)	[3.30, 3.47]
Purchase intention						
Italy (culturally loose)	2.84 (1.33)	[2.66, 3.04]	3.62 (1.48)	[3.42, 3.82]	3.24 (1.46)	[3.10, 3.39]
China (culturally tight)	3.01 (1.73)	[2.80, 3.23]	3.26 (1.58)	[3.06, 3.47]	3.14 (1.66)	[2.99, 3.29]
Total ^b	2.93 (1.56)	[2.80, 3.08]	3.42 (1.55)	[3.28, 3.57]	3.18 (1.57)	[3.08, 3.28]

Note. $N = 842$. Bootstraps are based on 1,000 samples. CI = confidence interval.

^a Average descriptives of artist deviance conditions. ^b Average descriptives of tightness/looseness conditions.

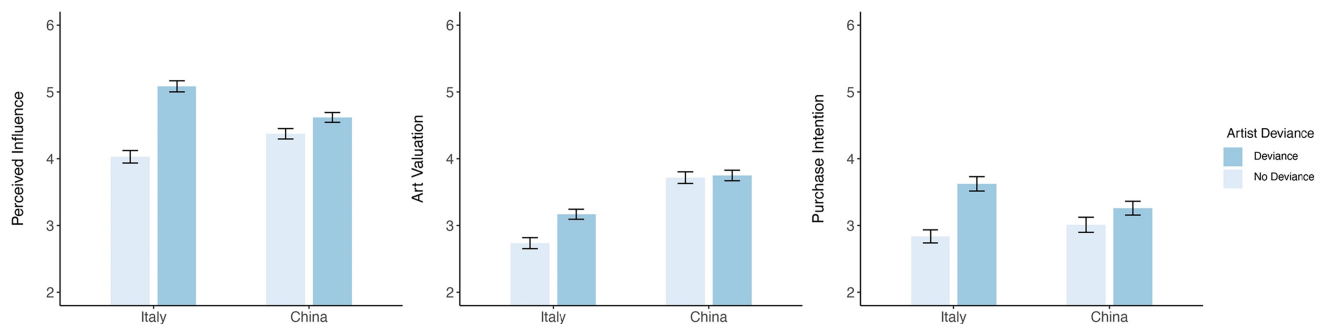
Results regarding perceived influence showed a main effect of artist deviance, $F(1, 838) = 63.15, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .070$, no main effect of cultural tightness, $F(1, 838) = 0.55, p = .458, \eta_p^2 = .00$, and the expected interaction effect, $F(1, 838) = 24.52, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .03$. Probing these effects showed that participants in the deviance condition perceived Keo as being more influential than participants in the nondeviance condition, but this difference was more pronounced for Italian, $B = -0.53, SE = .06, t(838) = -8.65, p < .001$, than Chinese participants, $B = -0.12, SE = .05, t(838) = -2.25, p = .025$.

Results regarding valuation showed a main effect of artist deviance, $F(1, 838) = 8.02, p = .005, \eta_p^2 = .01$, a main effect of cultural tightness, $F(1, 838) = 90.39, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .10$, and the predicted interaction effect, $F(1, 838) = 5.95, p = .015, \eta_p^2 = .01$. Probing the interaction showed that, whereas Italian participants in the deviance condition valued Keo's work higher than those in the nondeviance condition, $B = -0.22, SE = .06, t(838) = -3.54, p < .001$,

there was no difference between the valuation of deviant and nondeviant art among Chinese participants, $B = -0.02, SE = .05, t(838) = -0.29, p = .769$.

Results regarding purchase intention also showed a main effect of artist deviance, $F(1, 838) = 23.15, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .03$, a main effect of cultural tightness, $F(1, 838) = 0.78, p = .377, \eta_p^2 = .00$, and the predicted interaction effect, $F(1, 838) = 6.25, p = .013, \eta_p^2 = .01$. Breaking down the interaction shows that Italian participants in the deviance condition exhibited greater purchasing intent than those in the no deviance condition, $B = -0.39, SE = .08, t(838) = -4.90, p < .001$, but Chinese participants' purchase intentions did not differ as a function of artist deviance, $B = -0.12, SE = .07, t(838) = -1.74, p = .083$.

As a robustness check, we repeated our main analyses while statistically controlling for style familiarity and art interest to rule them out as possible confounds. Doing so did not change the size or direction of the effects of artist deviance and country on any of the

Figure 3*Artist Impact as a Function of Artist Deviance and Country in Study 1*

Note. $N = 842$. Error bars denote *SEs*. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

dependent variables. The results of this analysis are reported in the [online supplemental materials](#) (see [Tables S4 and S5](#) for all studies).

Discussion

Study 1 provided initial support for our theoretical model by showing that individuals' tendency to see deviant artists as impactful differed in countries that varied on cultural tightness/looseness. Specifically, culturally loose Italian participants perceived impact in deviant (than nondeviant) artists—a pattern that was less pronounced or completely absent among culturally tight Chinese participants. Having demonstrated the influence of cross-country variability on perceptions of artistic impact, in Study 2, we sought to build on these findings by investigating the extent to which individuals' perception of deviant artists would vary based on within country variation in tightness/looseness. In addition, we set out to develop a better understanding of the psychological processes that underlie this effect by measuring participants' emotional responses to deviant artworks.

Study 2

Method

Participants

The expected effect size of Study 2 was based on the average interaction effect size observed in Study 1 across the three dependent variables. A power analysis suggested that to detect an effect size of $f^2 = .016$ in a multiple regression analysis with $\alpha = .05$ and power of .80, we would need 606 participants. Six hundred and one participants based in the United States ($M_{\text{age}} = 34.63$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 13.07$; 310 female, 277 male, and 14 nonbinary) were recruited via Prolific to take part in the study.

Procedure and Materials

Study 2 used the same artworks and similar procedure as Study 1, with participants being randomly assigned to either a “no deviance” or “deviance” condition. However, there were two notable differences

made to the design. Instead of selecting participants from countries that differed in cultural tightness, we measured within-country variance in endorsement of cultural tightness values in participants' immediate community. In addition, we assessed participants aesthetic emotions in response to Keo's artwork. Thus, Study 2 employed a between-subjects experimental design with individual-level cultural tightness as a continuous moderator and aesthetic emotions as mediators.

Measures

We used the same measures for artist deviance (manipulation check), perceived influence, art valuation, and purchase intention as in Study 1. Intercorrelations between the three dependent variables are presented in [Table S1 in the online supplemental materials](#). These again show that variables were highly correlated, providing evidence they are alternative operationalizations of artist impact.

To assess within-culture variability we used the seven-item scale on compliance with covid-19 restrictions that we originally used as a tightness/looseness manipulation check in Study 1 to function as a measure of within-country differences in cultural tightness/looseness ($\alpha = .70$). A sample item is “To what extent is your community developing strict rules in response to the coronavirus?” We assessed aesthetic emotions using seven items drawn from a scale by [Schindler et al. \(2017\)](#). Participants were asked the question “How does Keo's artwork make you feel?” followed by seven emotion items (feeling moved, awe, beauty, fascination, interest, intellectual challenge, and meaning; $\alpha = .93$), to which they could respond on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*).

Results

Descriptive statistics of the manipulation check and main dependent variables are presented per condition in [Table 2](#).

Manipulation Check

An independent *t*-test showed that participants in the artist deviance condition perceived Keo's artwork to be more deviant than those in the

Table 2

Descriptives of Manipulation Check, Moderator, Mediator, and Dependent Variables Across Conditions of Artist Deviance in Studies 2 and 3

Outcome variable	Artist deviance: no		Artist deviance: yes		Total ^a	
	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	95% CI	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	95% CI	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	95% CI
Study 2						
Perceived artist deviance (manipulation check)	3.31 (1.72)	[3.11, 3.51]	5.51 (1.30)	[5.37, 5.66]	4.40 (1.88)	[4.25, 4.54]
Cultural tightness (moderator)	3.20 (0.79)	[3.11, 3.29]	3.23 (0.76)	[3.14, 3.32]	3.22 (0.78)	[3.15, 3.28]
Aesthetic emotions (mediator)	2.95 (1.35)	[2.81, 3.09]	3.09 (1.45)	[2.93, 3.26]	3.02 (1.40)	[2.90, 3.13]
Perceived influence	3.88 (1.35)	[3.72, 4.04]	5.14 (1.24)	[4.99, 5.28]	4.50 (1.44)	[4.37, 4.62]
Art valuation	3.12 (1.20)	[2.98, 3.27]	3.33 (1.23)	[3.19, 3.48]	3.23 (1.22)	[3.13, 3.33]
Purchase intention	2.79 (1.57)	[2.61, 2.98]	3.25 (1.68)	[3.07, 3.46]	3.02 (1.64)	[2.89, 3.16]
Study 3						
Perceived artist deviance (manipulation check)	2.81 (1.45)	[2.60, 3.00]	6.51 (0.76)	[6.40, 6.61]	4.68 (2.18)	[4.45, 4.89]
Tightness/looseness mindset (moderator)	3.92 (0.44)	[3.85, 3.98]	3.89 (0.46)	[3.82, 3.95]	3.90 (0.45)	[3.86, 3.95]
Aesthetic emotions (mediator)	3.72 (1.51)	[3.51, 3.95]	3.70 (1.64)	[3.48, 3.93]	3.71 (1.57)	[3.56, 3.87]
Perceived influence	3.93 (1.37)	[3.75, 4.12]	4.03 (1.37)	[3.84, 4.21]	3.98 (1.37)	[3.85, 4.10]
Artist talent	5.12 (1.44)	[4.91, 5.33]	5.31 (1.34)	[5.12, 5.51]	5.22 (1.39)	[5.09, 5.36]
Star rating	3.27 (1.07)	[3.12, 3.43]	3.38 (1.05)	[3.24, 3.53]	3.32 (1.06)	[3.22, 3.43]

Note. $N = 601$ in Study 2 and $N = 400$ in Study 3. Bootstraps are based on 1,000 samples. CI = confidence interval.

^a Average descriptives of artist deviance conditions.

nondeviance condition, $t(562.79) = -17.71$, $p < .001$, $d = -1.44$, thereby suggesting that the manipulation of artist deviance was successful.

Hypothesis Testing

Moderation. For each of the three dependent variables, we conducted moderation analyses with cultural tightness centered on its mean and artist deviance dummy coded (PROCESS, Model 1; Hayes, 2017). Inferential statistics for the results of the moderation analyses appear in Table 3. Across the three dependent variables, there were significant main effects of artist deviance and cultural tightness, which were qualified by an interaction effect.

We probed the interactions by conducting simple slopes analyses at ± 1 SD from the mean of cultural tightness (Figure 4). As can be seen in the top row of Figure 4, participants who were low on perceived tightness considered the deviant artist to be more influential, $B = 1.65$, $SE = .15$, $t(597) = 11.16$, $p < .001$, 95% confidence interval (CI) [1.36, 1.94], more valuable, $B = 0.53$, $SE = .14$, $t(597) = 3.78$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.25, 0.80], and were more willing to purchase products featuring the artist's work, $B = 0.90$, $SE = .19$, $t(597) = 4.82$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.53, 1.26]. However, high cultural tightness participants' tendency to view the deviant artist as more influential was less pronounced, $B = 0.85$, $SE = .15$, $t(597) = 5.76$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.56, 1.14], and they showed no difference between deviance conditions in terms of valuation, $B = -0.11$, $SE = .14$, $t(597) = -0.82$, $p = .415$, 95% CI [-0.39, 0.16], and purchase intention, $B = 0.03$, $SE = .19$, $t(597) = 0.16$, $p = .870$, 95% CI [-0.33, 0.40].

Moderated Mediation. We then set out to determine the extent to which our previously identified interaction effects could be explained by differences in experiences of aesthetic emotions. We conducted a series of moderated mediation analyses using PROCESS Model 8. We assessed the indirect effects at low and high levels of perceived cultural tightness (± 1 SD) by computing 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals based on 10,000 bootstrap samples for each of the three dependent variables.

As seen in Table 4, the analyses on all three outcome variables provided evidence for moderated mediation through aesthetic emotions. Specifically, the indirect effects through aesthetic emotions were positive and significant at low levels of perceived tightness (respective confidence intervals did not contain zero), while they were not significant at high levels of perceived tightness (confidence intervals

contained zero). These findings suggest that participants who scored relatively low on perceived cultural tightness would view deviant artists as more impactful because they would experience more profound aesthetic emotions in response to deviant artworks.

Discussion

Study 2 replicated and extended the findings of Study 1 by showing that within-country differences in tightness mitigate the effect of artist deviance on impact and uncovering the underlying mechanism of this effect. Individuals who lived in loose communities experienced stronger aesthetic emotions in response to deviant art, which in turn made the artist appear more impactful.

In both Studies 1 and 2, we examined interpersonal deviance, whereby the focal artist's work differed stylistically from that of his contemporaries. However, in the following studies, we applied an alternative conceptualization of deviance to further attest to the robustness of our theory. Specifically, we examined intrapersonal deviance, whereby the focal artist's work deviated from their own (earlier) work, as research shows that artists who deviate from their earlier style are often viewed as being more impactful than those who choose to follow a single style throughout their career (Stamkou et al., 2018).

In addition, while tightness/looseness can vary as a state in response to a plethora of exogenous factors, so too can it manifest itself as a trait, with individual differences in tightness/looseness resembling more stable personality differences between individuals (Gelfand et al., 2011). We therefore shift our focus in Studies 3 and 4 from the country and community levels to the individual level by assessing individuals' tightness/looseness mindset as a moderator of their responses to deviant works of art. Lastly, one could also argue that a limitation of our previous studies was the use of highly stylized paintings, which allowed maximizing experimental control over the manipulation of artistic deviance. In the following studies, we remedied this by utilizing real artworks, thereby enhancing the external validity of our findings.

Study 3

Method

Participants

The expected effect size of Study 3 was based on Study 2's observed interaction effect size for perceived influence, which we

Table 3

Inferential Statistics for the Effects of Artist Deviance and Tightness on Artist Impact in Studies 2 and 3

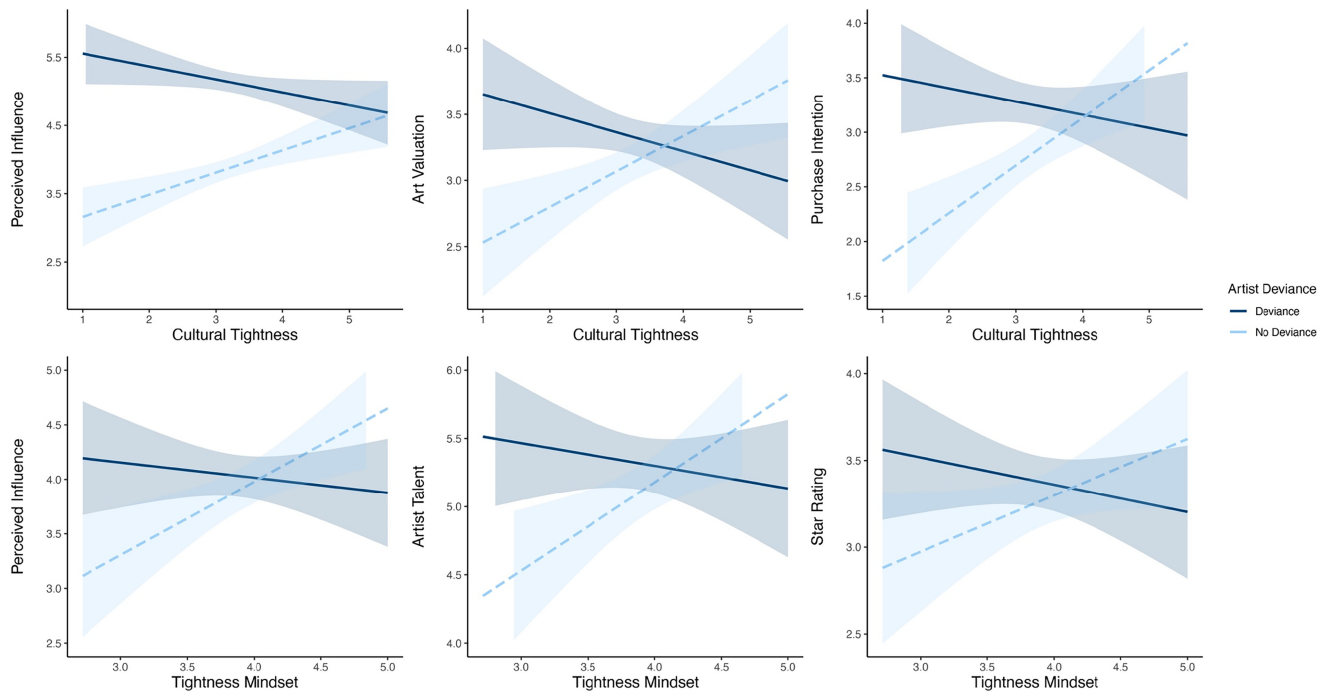
Artist impact	Artistic deviance				Tightness ^a				Artistic Deviance \times Tightness ^a			
	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	95% CI	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	95% CI	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	95% CI	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Study 2												
Perceived influence	1.25 (.10)	[1.05, 1.46]	11.97	<.001	0.32 (.09)	[0.14, 0.50]	3.46	<.001	-0.52 (.13)	[-0.78, -0.25]	-3.82	<.001
Art valuation	0.21 (.10)	[0.01, 0.40]	2.10	.036	0.27 (.09)	[0.09, 0.44]	3.03	.003	-0.41 (.13)	[-0.67, -0.16]	-3.25	.001
Purchase intention	0.46 (.13)	[0.21, 0.72]	3.53	<.001	0.43 (.12)	[0.20, 0.66]	3.71	<.001	-0.56 (.17)	[-0.89, -0.23]	-3.29	.001
Study 3												
Perceived influence	0.10 (.14)	[-0.17, 0.36]	0.71	.477	0.65 (.22)	[0.22, 1.09]	2.97	.003	-0.79 (.30)	[-1.39, -0.20]	-2.62	.009
Artist talent	0.20 (.14)	[-0.08, 0.46]	1.40	.161	0.66 (.22)	[0.22, 1.10]	2.94	.004	-0.81 (.31)	[-1.41, -0.21]	-2.64	.009
Star rating	0.10 (.11)	[-0.11, 0.30]	0.91	.362	0.11 (.17)	[-0.02, 0.65]	1.84	.067	-0.46 (.23)	[-0.02, -0.00]	-1.98	.049

Note. $N = 601$ in Study 2 and $N = 400$ in Study 3. Artist deviance was dummy-coded (0 = no deviance, 1 = deviance), and tightness was centered at its mean. Significant interaction effects were probed at ± 1 SD from the mean of tightness. CI = confidence interval.

^aTightness stands for cultural tightness in Study 2 and tightness-looseness mindset in Study 3.

Figure 4

Artist Impact as a Function of Artist Deviance and Cultural Tightness in Study 2 (Top Row) and Tightness Mindset in Study 3 (Bottom Row)



Note. $N = 601$ in Study 2 and $N = 400$ in Study 3. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

also measured in Study 3. A power analysis showed that to detect an effect size of $f^2 = .025$ in a multiple regression analysis with $\alpha = .05$ and power of .80, we would need 389 participants. Four hundred participants based in the United States ($M_{\text{age}} = 43.37$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 14.47$; 200 female, 199 male, and one nonbinary) were recruited via Prolific.

Procedure and Materials

Since we planned to use new experimental stimuli in Study 3, we first conducted a pilot study to validate the artworks, the results of which are reported in the [online supplemental materials](#) (see Study 3 Pilot).

In the main study, participants read a scenario about a fictitious organization, Quality Consultants, which was seeking to commission a painter to create an artwork for their entrance hall. They learned that some artists had sent in their portfolio and that they would be asked to provide their opinion on the work of one of the candidates named J.B. (in reality, all artworks were made by Gustav Klimt). Participants were informed that J.B.'s portfolio consisted of four paintings, the first three of which were made in an earlier stage of his career, with the fourth piece being his latest work. As shown in [Figure 5](#), participants randomly assigned to the nondeviance condition were shown a fourth painting that did not deviate stylistically from its predecessors. In contrast, those in the deviance condition were shown a painting that did. Participants were asked to evaluate J.B. as an artist.

Next, participants filled in items assessing aesthetic emotions, perceived influence, and artist talent, and they were asked to give the artwork a rating out of five stars. They moved on to a manipulation check of perceived deviance and the measures of tightness/looseness mindset, art interest, art familiarity, and demographics.

Measures

We used the same measures of perceived deviance (manipulation check; $\alpha = .97$), aesthetic emotions ($\alpha = .95$), and perceived influence ($\alpha = .93$) as in the previous studies. We assessed perceptions of artist talent using the item "I think that J.B. has talent" (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*) and measured participants' rating of his work by asking "How many stars would you give J.B. as an artist?" on a 1-to-5-star scale. Intercorrelations between the three dependent variables are presented in [Table S1 in the online supplemental materials](#) and again show that they were positively correlated, indicating their semantic similarity.

Tightness/looseness mindset was measured through personality traits that describe the propensity to conform: dutifulness, self-monitoring, self-control, and need for structure. We used 14 items from [Gelfand et al. \(2011; \$\alpha = .77\$ \)](#) that were rated along 5-point Likert scales (1 = *very inaccurate*, 5 = *very accurate*), with higher scores reflecting greater tightness. Sample items are "I am very careful to avoid making mistakes," "I follow directions," "I stick to the rules," and "I hate to change my plans at the last minute."

Art interest was measured with the same items as in previous studies ($\alpha = .94$). Art familiarity was measured with the item "Have you seen any of J.B.'s artworks before?" which was answered with a "yes" or "no."

Results

Descriptive statistics of the manipulation check and main dependent variables are presented per condition in [Table 2](#).

Table 4
Indirect Effects of Artist Deviance on Artist Impact Variables Through Aesthetic Emotions at Low and High Levels of Tightness in Studies 2 and 3

Artist impact	Indirect effect (SE)	95% CI ^a
Study 2		
Perceived influence		
Low cultural tightness ^b	0.21 (.07)	[0.06, 0.34]
High cultural tightness ^b	−0.10 (.07)	[−0.24, 0.04]
Index of moderated mediation	−0.19 (.07)	[−0.33, −0.06]
Art valuation		
Low cultural tightness ^b	0.22 (.07)	[0.07, 0.36]
High cultural tightness ^b	−0.10 (.08)	[−0.25, 0.05]
Index of moderated mediation	−0.21 (.08)	[−0.34, 0.07]
Purchase intention		
Low cultural tightness ^b	0.39 (.13)	[0.12, 0.64]
High cultural tightness ^b	−0.18 (.14)	[−0.43, 0.09]
Index of moderated mediation	−0.36 (.12)	[−0.60, −0.11]
Study 3		
Perceived influence		
Low tightness/looseness mindset ^b	0.20 (.13)	[−0.05, 0.45]
High tightness/looseness mindset ^b	−0.22 (.14)	[−0.49, 0.06]
Index of moderated mediation	−0.47 (.21)	[−0.89, −0.05]
Artist talent		
Low tightness/looseness mindset ^b	0.20 (.13)	[−0.04, 0.45]
High tightness/looseness mindset ^b	−0.22 (.14)	[−0.49, 0.06]
Index of moderated mediation	−0.46 (.21)	[−0.87, −0.06]
Star rating		
Low tightness/looseness mindset ^b	0.16 (.10)	[−0.03, 0.37]
High tightness/looseness mindset ^b	−0.18 (.11)	[−0.40, 0.05]
Index of moderated mediation	−0.37 (.17)	[−0.71, −0.05]

Note. $N = 601$ in Study 2 and $N = 400$ in Study 3. CI = confidence interval.

^aNinety-five percent bias-corrected confidence intervals based on 10,000 bootstrap samples. ^bTightness/looseness was mean-centered, with higher and lower levels computed at ± 1 SD from the mean.

Manipulation Check

An independent t -test showed that participants in the deviance condition perceived J.B.'s artwork to be more deviant than those in the nondeviance condition, $t(305.44) = -31.46$, $p < .001$, $d = -3.15$, thereby indicating that our manipulation was successful.

Hypotheses Testing

Moderation. For each of the three dependent variables, we again conducted moderation analyses with tightness/looseness mindset being mean-centered and artist deviance dummy coded (PROCESS, Model 1). Inferential statistics for the results of the moderation analyses appear in Table 3. Across the three dependent variables, there was no main effect of artist deviance, but there was a significant main effect of tightness mindset, which was qualified by an interaction with artist deviance.

We probed the interactions by conducting simple slopes analyses at ± 1 SD from the mean of cultural tightness mindsets (Figure 4). As can be seen in the bottom row of Figure 4, participants who were low on tightness mindset considered the deviant artist to be more influential, $B = 0.45$, $SE = .19$, $t(396) = 2.36$, $p = .019$, 95% CI [0.08, 0.83], more talented, $B = 0.56$, $SE = .20$, $t(396) = 2.86$, $p = .005$, 95% CI [0.17, 0.94], and gave a higher star rating, $B = 0.30$, $SE = .15$, $t(396) = 2.04$, $p = .042$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.60]. However, participants high on tightness mindset showed no difference between deviance conditions in

terms of perceived influence, $B = -0.26$, $SE = .19$, $t(396) = -1.36$, $p = .176$, 95% CI [−0.64, 0.12], perceived talent, $B = -0.17$, $SE = .20$, $t(396) = -0.88$, $p = .380$, 95% CI [−0.55, 0.21], and star rating, $B = -0.11$, $SE = .15$, $t(396) = -0.76$, $p = .450$, 95% CI [−0.41, 0.18].

Moderated Mediation. We once again set out to determine the extent to which the previously identified moderation pattern could be explained by differences in participants' experienced aesthetic emotions. We conducted a series of moderated mediation analyses using PROCESS Model 8. We assessed the indirect effects at low and high levels of tightness/looseness mindset (± 1 SD) by computing 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals based on 10,000 bootstrap samples for each of our three dependent variables, the results of which are presented in Table 4.

For all three dependent variables, there was evidence for moderated mediation through aesthetic emotions. The indirect effects through aesthetic emotions were in the predicted direction for all three dependent variables (positive for low levels of tightness and negative for high levels of tightness), but they did not reach significance. Although not conclusive, these findings suggest that the tendency to view deviant artists as impactful in tight rather than loose cultures can be explained by individuals' experience of more profound aesthetic emotions.

Discussion

Study 3 findings echoed those of our previous studies by showing that the tendency to perceive deviant (as opposed to nondeviant) artists as having more impact is one that only occurs among individuals

Figure 5

Artworks Used in the No Deviance (Top Row) and Deviance (Bottom Row) Conditions in Study 3



Note. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

^a *Wikiart.org*, by Gustav Klimt, 1901 (<https://www.wikiart.org/en/gustav-klimt/fir-forest-i>). In the public domain. ^b *Wikiart.org*, by Gustav Klimt, 1901 (<https://www.wikiart.org/en/gustav-klimt/pine-forest-ii>). In the public domain. ^c *Wikiart.org*, by Gustav Klimt, 1902 (<https://www.wikiart.org/en/gustav-klimt/beechn-grove-i>). In the public domain. ^d *Wikiart.org*, by Gustav Klimt, 1909 (<https://www.wikiart.org/en/gustav-klimt/the-tree-of-life-stoclet-frieze> (detail)). In the public domain.

with culturally loose mindsets (as opposed to tight mindsets). However, Study 3 provided additional insights by demonstrating that the effect extends beyond interpersonal deviance to intrapersonal deviance, as well as from country- to individual-level differences in tightness/looseness, as captured by individuals' mindset.

In Study 4, we extend our findings by using a more ecologically valid measure of artist impact, which assesses whether participants would consider deviant artworks worthy of being exhibited in a museum. In addition, we set out to replicate the underlying process driving this effect by measuring experienced aesthetic emotions in response to deviant art.

Study 4

Method

Participants

The required sample size of Study 4 was based on the observed effect size of the interaction effect on perceived influence in Study 3. A power analysis showed that to detect an effect size of $f^2 = .023$ with $\alpha = .05$ and power of .80, we would need 422 participants. We recruited 400 U.S.-based participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 40.82$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 14.49$; 200 female, 200 male) via Prolific based on available resources.









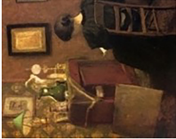



Procedure and Materials

Participants were presented with a scenario about Springfield Art Museum and learned that it was planning an upcoming exhibition which would showcase the work of nine visual artists who had each submitted two artworks (18 in total) to be considered for the exhibition. The museum was said to be interested in gathering opinions on the artworks to help them determine which piece by each artist should be selected to be on display.

Participants were presented with nine pairs of artworks, each made by the same artist. We selected pairs of artworks that depicted the same theme and were made by the same artist, yet they differed stylistically, in that one of the two deviated from the depiction of reality (i.e., abstract style) and the other was a veridical representation of reality (i.e., realistic style; see Table 5). We asked participants to indicate per pair which piece they would recommend being on display.

After selecting their preferred artworks, participants moved on to items assessing their tightness/looseness mindset. Lastly, they were presented with each artwork again, in random order, and they were asked to report on the aesthetic emotions they experienced in response to the piece as well as their perceptions of artistic deviance, which we used as a manipulation check. Finally, they responded to items measuring art interest, art familiarity, and demographics.

Table 5
Perceived Deviance of Artworks in the No Deviance and Deviance Conditions in Study 4

Pair	Artist	No deviance condition		Deviance condition	
		Artwork	Title	Deviant	Title
1	Salvador Dalí		<i>Figure at a Window</i> ^a		<i>Woman With a Head of Roses</i> ^b
2	Willem De Kooning		<i>Still Life</i> ^c		<i>Still Life With Eggs and Potatoes</i> ^d
3	Willem De Kooning		<i>Portrait of Elaine</i> ^e		<i>Charcoal Drawing</i> ^f
4	Friedensreich Hundertwasser		<i>Portrait of My Mother</i> ^g		<i>Mourning Schiele</i> ^h
5	Henri Matisse		<i>Woman Reading</i> ⁱ		<i>Still Life With Gourds</i> ^j
6	Henri Matisse		<i>Still Life With Black Knife</i> ^k		<i>Still Life After de Heem's 'La Desserte'</i> ^l

Perceived deviance M (SD)

1.78 (0.97)

2.04 (0.98)

2.27 (1.01)

2.17 (1.06)

2.01 (1.00)

2.03 (0.97)

5.74 (1.17)

4.61 (1.28)

6.01 (1.11)



5.71 (1.11)

5.33 (1.17)

2.45 (0.75)

(table continues)

Table 5 (continued)

Pair	Artist	No deviance condition			Deviance condition		
		Artwork	Title	Perceived deviance M (SD)	Deviant	Title	Perceived deviance M (SD)
7	Piet Mondriaan		<i>Self-Portrait</i> ^m	2.46 (1.04)		<i>Self-Portrait</i> ⁿ	5.09 (1.26)
8	Pablo Picasso		<i>Jacqueline Rocque</i> ^o	2.50 (1.09)		<i>Jacqueline With Crossed Hands</i> ^p	5.35 (1.17)
9	Pablo Picasso		<i>Bull (Plate III)</i> ^q	2.99 (1.21)		<i>Bull (Plate VII)</i> ^r	5.11 (1.24)

Note. All means of perceived deviance between the deviance and no deviance conditions differ from each other. See the online article for the color version of this table.

^a *Figure at a Window*, 1925, © Salvador Dalí, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, c/o Pictoright Amsterdam 2023 (<https://www.wikiart.org/en/salvador-dali/figure-at-a-window>). Reprinted with permission.
^b *Woman With a Head of Roses*, 1935, © Salvador Dalí, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, c/o Pictoright Amsterdam 2023 (<https://www.wikiart.org/en/salvador-dali/woman-with-a-head-of-roses>). Reprinted with permission.
^c © Willem De Kooning, *Still Life*, 1916, c/o Pictoright Amsterdam 2023 (https://www.dekooning.org/the-artists/artworks/painings/no-title-still-life-c-1916_1916#1). Reprinted with permission.
^d © Willem De Kooning, *Still Life With Eggs and Potatoes*, 1928, c/o Pictoright Amsterdam 2023 (<https://www.pinterest.es/pin/421016265140748640>). Reprinted with permission.
^e © Willem De Kooning, *Portrait of Elaine*, 1940–1941, c/o Pictoright Amsterdam 2023 (https://origin.dekooning.org/the-artists/artworks/drawings/portrait-of-elaine-1940-41_1940#19). Reprinted with permission.
^f © Willem De Kooning, *Charcoal Drawing*, 1970–1980, c/o Pictoright Amsterdam 2023 (<https://www.gazette-drouot.com/en/lots/21091667-willem-dekooning-charcoal-drawing>). Reprinted with permission.
^g © Friedensreich Hundertwasser, *Portrait of My Mother*, 1948, c/o Pictoright Amsterdam 2023 (https://hundertwasser.com/en/early-works/29_jw136_portrait_meiner-mutter_952). Reprinted with permission.
^h © Friedensreich Hundertwasser, *Mourning Schiele*, 1965, c/o Pictoright Amsterdam 2023 (<https://www.wikiart.org/en/friedensreich-hundertwasser/622-mourning-schiele-1965>). Reprinted with permission.
ⁱ Henri Matisse, *Woman Reading*, 1894 (<https://www.wikiart.org/en/henri-matisse/woman-reading-1894>). In the public domain.
^j Henri Matisse, *Still Life With Gourds*, 1916 (<https://www.wikiart.org/en/henri-matisse/still-life-with-gourds-1916>). In the public domain.
^k Henri Matisse, *Still Life After de Heem's 'La Desserte'*, 1915 (<https://www.wikiart.org/en/henri-matisse/still-life-after-de-heem-s-la-desserte-1915>). In the public domain.
^l Henri Matisse, *Still Life With Black Knife*, 1896 (<https://www.wikiart.org/en/henri-matisse/still-life-with-black-knives-1896>). In the public domain.
^m Piet Mondriaan, *Self-Portrait*, 1918 (<https://www.wikiart.org/en/piet-mondriaan/self-portrait-1918>). In the public domain.
ⁿ Piet Mondriaan, *Self-Portrait*, 1942 (<https://www.pubhlist.com/w/28410>). In the public domain.
^o © Pablo Picasso, *Jacqueline With Crossed Hands*, 1954, c/o Pictoright Amsterdam 2023 (<https://www.wikiart.org/en/pablo-picasso/portrait-of-jacqueline-roque-with-her-hands-crossed-1954>). Reprinted with permission.
^p © Pablo Picasso, *Jacqueline With Crossed Hands*, 1954, c/o Pictoright Amsterdam 2023 (<https://www.wikiart.org/en/pablo-picasso/portrait-of-jacqueline-roque-with-her-hands-crossed-1954>). Reprinted with permission.
^q © Pablo Picasso, *Bull (Plate III)*, 1945, c/o Pictoright Amsterdam 2023 (<https://www.wikiart.org/en/pablo-picasso/bull-plate-iii-1945>). Reprinted with permission.
^r © Pablo Picasso, *Bull (Plate VII)*, 1945, c/o Pictoright Amsterdam 2023 (<https://www.wikiart.org/en/pablo-picasso/bull-plate-vii-1945>). Reprinted with permission.

Measures

Participants' tightness/looseness mindset ($\alpha = .79$) was measured using the same scale as in Study 3. Given that participants had to rate each of the 18 artworks on both the manipulation check and aesthetic emotion items, we decided to reduce the number of items to minimize fatigue. The manipulation check for artistic deviance included two items, which were combined into one scale. An example item is "To what extent does this artwork deviate from representing real-world objects and people?" We measured self-reported aesthetic emotions with the items "How awe-inspiring do you find this artwork?" and "How interesting do you find this artwork?" which were combined into one scale ($r = .76, p < .001$). Responses to all items were recorded on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). We measured art interest with the same scale as in previous studies ($\alpha = .93$) and art familiarity by presenting participants with all 18 artworks and asking them to select the ones they had seen before participating in our study.

Results

Manipulation Check

Nine independent *t*-tests comparing each pair of artworks showed that participants consistently rated the abstract artwork as more deviant than the representative one (all $ps < .001$). We therefore concluded that our manipulation of artistic deviance was successful (see Table 5).

Hypothesis Testing

We tested our main hypothesis by regressing deviant art preference on tightness/looseness mindset. A multilevel binomial regression with painting preferences nested within participants showed that culturally tight participants were less likely to recommend the deviant paintings, $OR = .59$ (95% CI [0.44, 0.79]), $SE = .09$, $Z = -3.51$, $p < .001$ (see Figure 6).

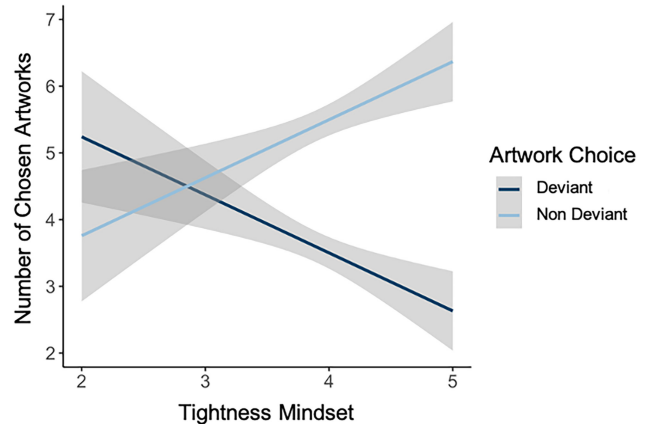
Next, we aimed to establish whether the effect of tightness/looseness mindset on preference for deviant artworks was mediated by participants' self-reported aesthetic emotions. We conducted a multilevel mediation analysis to test the mediating role of aesthetic emotions in the relationship between tight mindsets and preference for deviant art. Results show that the mediation was significant, $b = -0.05$, 95% CI [-0.08, -0.03], $p < .001$. This suggests that the effect of participants' tightness/looseness mindset on their preferences for deviant (as opposed to nondeviant) art could be explained by their aesthetic emotional responses to the deviant artworks.

Discussion

Like all previous studies, Study 4 revealed cultural variation in individuals' tendency to perceive deviant artists as more impactful. When viewing a pair of artworks by the same artist, individuals with a tighter mindset were more likely to spontaneously recommend pieces that did not deviate from the representation of reality, whereas individuals with a looser mindset tended to recommend depictions that did. In addition, our findings again showed that these differences were driven by the aesthetic emotions that people felt, with culturally loose individuals experiencing greater awe and interest when exposed to deviant artworks, which in turn increased their preference for these artworks.

Figure 6

Choice of Deviant and Nondeviant Artworks as a Function of Tightness Mindset in Study 4



Note. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

General Discussion

The cultural context in which an artwork is embedded constitutes an integral aspect of the artwork. Becker (1982), for example, argued that art is a collective action, whereby an interconnected network of social actors (suppliers, dealers, critics, and consumers) and their cultural belief systems "produce" a work of art together with the artist. Our research examined how cultural tightness—a key aspect of culture that binds these actors together within a system—influenced the potential of deviant artists to gain impact across four studies. Results consistently show that artists whose work deviates from their own previous style (intrapersonal deviance) and other artists' styles (interpersonal deviance) gain greater impact than nondeviant artists, as long as their work is evaluated in loose cultural contexts. On the contrary, in tighter cultural contexts, which have been omitted in much similar research, deviant artists may not be considered more impactful than nondeviant artists. What is more, the moderating effect of cultural tightness was observed when comparing countries that differed in cultural tightness (China vs. Italy), individuals who perceived their immediate communities to differ in cultural tightness, and individuals with different tightness mindsets. These effects generalized across several aspects of artist impact, from perceiving deviant artists as influential and talented to valuing their work higher and giving them a more positive public review or advocating for their work to be included in a museum collection.

Interestingly, our studies illustrate that looseness is consistently associated with preferences for deviant versus nondeviant art. However, most of our results show no consistent preference for nondeviant over deviant art under conditions of high tightness. One possible explanation for the lack of this preference reversal is that our studies might have been a conservative test because most of our stimuli included only visual innovations that were devoid of any cultural content, such as the geometric shapes and trees we used in Studies 1–3. Art that challenges prevalent cultural values or the normative status quo might have led to stronger reactions in tight cultures and a clear preference for nondeviant artworks. The results of Study 4 provide suggestive evidence for this account, as the stimuli of that study involved direct affronts to human subjects (e.g., abstract portraits)

and the results showed a clear preference for the nondeviant artworks among participants high in tightness mindset. More generally, these findings suggest that what is “deviant” needs to be theorized and measured in studies of art, music, and other cultural artifacts in more nuanced ways that capture both the formative and semantic aspects of deviance.

The current findings have important theoretical implications for the psychology of art and aesthetics. For many Western theorists, it is deviance or the phenomenon whereby we see something new, question our conceptions, and transform our worldviews that provide art’s ontological definition (Rank, 1989; Trilling, 1973). Berlyne (1974), for instance, considered novelty, uncertainty, and indefiniteness, or what he termed “collative properties,” the goals of art interaction. Previous findings have empirically supported this claim (e.g., Berger & Packard, 2018; Stamkou et al., 2018). Our research extends these findings by showing that deviance in art enhances an artist’s impact, yet this effect is culturally contingent. In tight cultures, predictability and consistency in art may be as important as novelty. Interestingly, our research shows that the effect of culture is carried by the emotions we feel in response to the artworks. Individuals in tight cultures are less likely to experience awe and wonder or interest and cognitive stimulation when they encounter artworks that deviate from prevalent aesthetic norms, which renders the interaction with the art less pleasurable and the artist less impactful. Culture seems to affect our most intuitive responses to art (Stamkou, 2022).

Our findings are therefore also important for cultural psychology. Art may be a window into studying how cultural norms and values become reinforced. Cultural values shape the lens through which people view the world, thereby influencing fundamental psychological processes. People in turn shape culture by creating artifacts, such as visual art, music, and literature, that reflect and reinforce their cultural values (Shweder, 1991). It would be important to examine how the influence of culture on perceptions of visual art may restrict or permit different forms of art production, that may in turn reinforce prevalent cultural values. Cultural psychology has largely ignored art’s role in maintaining cultural systems. Future research could shed further light on how cultural values and cultural products like artworks make each other up.

It is also interesting to examine processes of change and innovation in tight cultures. Our findings suggest that change may happen at slower rates in tight cultures. Indeed, computational models show that it takes longer for new norms to change in tighter populations, but once they hit a tipping point, they develop even faster than in looser populations (De et al., 2017). The explosion of contemporary and avant-garde art scenes in China, Japan, and other Eastern countries provides suggestive evidence for this. Further research on the evolution of art movements in tight and loose cultures is clearly needed.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study is not without caveats and suggestions for future research. One of the strengths of the current research was that artworks were carefully selected to maximize the effect of deviance. This allowed testing the causal effect of deviance and increased the internal validity of the findings. However, research studying the impact of deviant art in real-world settings would increase external validity. Future studies could examine, for instance, the effect of cultural tightness on deviant artists’ impact using archival censorship data and naturalistic indices of impact (e.g., film ratings) on the field.

Another limitation of our studies is that operationalizations of cultural tightness rely on preexisting cultural groups or measurements of cultural orientation, thereby precluding strong causal inferences about the effects of cultural tightness. However, the inclusion of different operationalizations of tightness, including country of origin, perception of tight norms, and personality traits, strengthens the likelihood that the effects we observed are due to tightness rather than alternative variables. Future research could explore the causal effects of cultural tightness on artist perceptions by priming ecological threat—the distal antecedent of cultural tightness (Stamkou et al., 2022).

Furthermore, we note that art expertise can significantly influence the aesthetic evaluation of deviant artists. Our measures of art interest and familiarity, while indicative, may not encapsulate the full spectrum of expertise that individuals bring into their evaluations. Similarly, while nationality was taken into account to represent cultural contexts, we acknowledge that ethnicity can offer additional nuanced insights into individual and collective art perceptions. Ethnic backgrounds can carry with them unique traditions, histories, and values that can interplay with individual reactions to deviant art. Future research would benefit from including a more comprehensive measure of art expertise and taking into account the rich tapestry of ethnic backgrounds, even within a given nationality, to offer a more holistic understanding of the dynamics at play.

Finally, it would be important to study how the ideals of tradition versus innovation in the arts are institutionalized and transmitted throughout society. Art schools, funding institutions, and art venues play an important role in establishing dominant trends in art production. Future studies could examine, for instance, art school curricula or evaluation criteria used by funding agencies to understand how the values of tradition and innovation are prioritized, transmitted, and reproduced across key stakeholders in the cultural market.

Conclusion

Our findings shed light on the intricate interplay between cultural tightness–looseness and perceptions of artistic deviance, unveiling distinctive aesthetic preferences deeply rooted in cultural norms. The allure of change, represented by artists who diverge from conventional paths, is perceived differently across cultural spectra. Whereas loose cultures embrace the unpredictability of deviance, tighter cultures resonate more with consistent artistic narratives. This underscores the profound influence of cultural values on our aesthetic emotions and preferences, from the awe inspired by a groundbreaking masterpiece to the comfort found in familiar artistry. These findings provide compelling evidence that our perceptions of art are as much a reflection of cultural values as they are of individual taste. As we continue to navigate an increasingly interconnected world, understanding these cultural nuances becomes paramount. Thus, this research not only contributes to the academic discourse about cross-cultural aesthetics but also holds broader implications for global art communities, institutions, and markets.

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