

The effect of familiarity and novelty on preference of paintings modulated by complexity and categories

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Familiarity and novelty are fundamental, competing factors influencing preference (Fantz, 1964; Zajonc, 1968). It has been suggested that the effect of familiarity and novelty on preference judgments is modulated by complexity (Berlyne, 1970). Also shown was that the relative influence of familiarity and novelty are distinguishable for preference of different object categories; familiar faces are preferred whereas novel scenes are preferred (Park et al., 2010). Here, we investigated preference of paintings in terms of familiarity/novelty, complexity, and painting categories. 96 painting images were selected for each of the three categories including portrait, landscape, and abstract paintings, which were then divided into high- and low-complexity paintings. Participants were engaged in a sequential preference-judgement task in which a pair of paintings from the same category were presented side by side and participants judged which of the two they preferred and how much (7-point Likert scale between -3 and 3). A painting with median preference was repeatedly presented throughout a block of 15 trials, but always paired with a new painting in a randomized lateral arrangement (Park et al., 2010). The results showed statistically significant main effects of complexity and categories. Participants preferred novel painting to repeated (familiar) one for the paintings with relatively high complexity. Also, participants tended to prefer familiar paintings for the portrait category, whereas they preferred novel paintings for the abstract category. Further analysis revealed participants' preference for familiar paintings with low complexity in portraits whereas novel paintings with high complexity in landscapes. For abstract paintings, novel ones were preferred regardless of complexity, the results of which was more evident in participants with little experience in art. These results suggest that the object category-specific preference is replicated for artistic paintings, which is modulated by complexity in a distinguishable fashion among different categories of paintings.

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