

# Postmodernism

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Postmodernism encompasses a variety of artistic, cultural, and philosophical movements. It emerged in the mid-20th century as a skeptical response to modernism, emphasizing the instability of meaning, rejection of universal truths, and critique of grand narratives. While its definition varies across disciplines, it commonly involves skepticism toward established norms, blending of styles, and attention to the socially constructed nature of knowledge and reality. The term began to acquire its current range of meanings in literary criticism and architectural theory during the 1950s–1960s. In opposition to modernism's alleged self-seriousness, postmodernism is characterized by its playful use of eclectic styles and performative irony, among other features. Critics claim it supplants moral, political, and aesthetic ideals with mere style and spectacle. In the 1990s, "postmodernism" came to denote a general – and, in general, celebratory – response to cultural pluralism. Proponents align themselves with feminism, multiculturalism, and postcolonialism. Building upon poststructural theory, postmodern thought defined itself by the rejection of any single, foundational historical narrative. This called into question the legitimacy of the Enlightenment account of progress and rationality. Critics allege that its premises lead to a nihilistic form of relativism. In this sense, it has become a term of abuse in popular culture. Historically, it arose alongside industrialization, globalization, and cultural upheaval, with early uses in art and literature evolving into philosophical and social theory through figures like Lyotard, Derrida, Foucault, Baudrillard, and Jameson. In practice, postmodernism manifests in arts, architecture, literature, music, dance, theater, fashion, marketing, and academic fields by embracing plurality, pastiche, reflexivity, and relativism. Although some argue postmodernism has waned, its influence persists in contemporary culture, now sometimes transitioning into so-called post-postmodern or reconstructive movements.