

Exploring the “Image and Temperament” of Contemporary Figure Paintings

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Abstract: As one of the core propositions in the creation of Chinese paintings, the expression of “Image and temperament” not only runs through the development of traditional paintings, but also takes on a new significance in the creation of contemporary art. This paper will take “Image and temperament” as an entry point for an in-depth analysis of contemporary Figure Painting, exploring how Figure painters reinterpret this traditional proposition in terms of brush and ink language, form construction and spiritual expression in the context of contemporary culture and society. At the same time, this paper will also reveal the innovative understanding of the connotation of “Image and temperament” by contemporary figure painters, analyze its concrete embodiment in artistic concepts and technical practices, and how these changes respond to the diverse needs of contemporary art and the profound changes in the cultural context.

Keywords: Contemporary, Image and temperament, figure paintings.

1. Introduction

In today's era of globalization, internationalization and informatization, Chinese painting is experiencing unprecedented changes and development. From the content of expression, formal language to the use of materials, the artistic expression of Chinese painting has become more and more rich and varied, and the horizon of creativity and artistic form has been constantly expanding, resulting in a new situation of eclecticism, innovation and breakthrough. After more than a century of impact and agitation by foreign literary and artistic ideas, Chinese painting has gradually absorbed and borrowed a variety of artistic concepts, styles and methods of expression, giving it unprecedented vitality. This change not only responded to the doubts of many artists about the development of Chinese painting during the “85th New Wave” period, and reshaped the cultural confidence of the national art, but also injected vigorous vitality into the creation and development of Chinese painting in the contemporary era, and became an important manifestation of Chinese culture in the global art arena.

The open environment of contemporary art contrasts sharply with the closed nature of traditional art in the past, making it inevitable for Chinese painting to be influenced by more and more foreign thoughts and trends. Especially in the field of figure painting, the trend of diversification has become more and more significant, and figure painting is no longer limited to the traditional theme and modeling relationship, but is more concerned with the innovative exploration of artistic language and the pursuit of a new style of expression. This trend, in the context of the new era, has become the wind vane of contemporary art creation, promoting the development of artistic expression and artistic concepts in the direction of diversification and individualization. This transformation is not only reflected in the expansion of thematic content, but also in the artists' bold attempts and integration of materials, techniques and concepts. For example, many figure painters combine traditional ink and brush techniques with the abstract expression of Western modern art, opening up a whole new path of artistic expression. It is in this artistic environment that Chinese

painting gradually breaks through the limitations of homogenization and modeling, and enters a stage of diversified development that is compatible with tradition and modernity, and fuses the East and the West.

In this paper, we will take “Image and temperament” as an entry point to analyze the concrete embodiment of this concept and its internal logic in contemporary realistic figure painting. Through a systematic categorization of contemporary realistic figure painting, we will study the innovations and formal characteristics of its artistic language, and how these changes respond to the needs of cultural diversity and social pluralism in the artistic context of the new era. Through the perspective of “Image and temperament”, this paper not only hopes to reveal the main trends in the development of contemporary realistic figure painting, but also seeks to explore how this painting discipline can, in the context of the new era, bring about lasting artistic vitality and cultural charm through inheritance and breakthroughs in tradition.

2. Contemporary Concept

“Contemporary” is both a definition of time and a symbol of cultural transformation. In time, “contemporary” usually refers to the period from the end of the 20th century to the 21st century, which is accompanied by rapid socio-economic transformation and emancipation of ideas. 1978 reform and opening up opened the prelude to the modernization of art, and the “85 New Wave” art movement further promoted the diversified exploration of art, and entered into a new era. The reform and opening up in 1978 opened the prelude to the modernization of art, and the “85 New Wave” art movement further promoted the diversified exploration of art.

The cultural connotation of “contemporaneity” not only points to realistic concern and social criticism, but also focuses on individualized expression and diversified exploration. Contemporary figure painting is no longer satisfied with the traditional narrative, but pays more attention to the complex relationship between human beings and society, and between individuals and the times. Artists express individual emotions and thoughts by deconstructing traditional symbols and innovating artistic language. At the

same time, cross-cultural exchanges and the use of multiple media have enriched the forms of figure painting, from traditional ink and brush to comprehensive materials, to cross-border art attempts, all of which reflect the exploratory spirit of contemporary art.

3. The Concept of Image and Temperament

In traditional Chinese painting theory, the first to put forward the concept of “Image and temperament” was Jing Hao's “Record of Brushwork”, in which he wrote: “The one who resembles, obtains his form, but leaves out his qi. The real one, the temperament is all in full bloom, where the gas is transmitted to Hua, left behind in the elephant, the death of the elephant.” To this effect: the realistic depiction of objective objects, only to achieve the likeness, but can not show the objective object of the chi. If you want a painting to be real, both “qi” and “quality” must be fully expressed. If one wants to express the divine qi, but only paints beautifully and neglects its original image, then the real appearance of the objective object will be distorted.”

In the above, the concept of “Image and temperament” is horizontally divided into two parts: “form” and “quality”. “Form” is the shape of an object, which can also be called a visual outline, and is intuitively visible to the naked eye, for example, the posture of a pine tree, the dynamics of a person in motion, a table with a top and four legs, and so on, all of which are referred to as ‘form’. However, “quality” is a relatively abstract existence in the object, which can not be visualized with the naked eye, but is an intrinsic characteristic of the object. For example, the simplicity of a miner, the innocence of a child, the majesty of a statue of Buddha, and so on, all refer to “quality”. From here, we can see that the “quality of form” is commonly referred to as the external image of the object and the internal temperament of the object.

Therefore, whether in culture or art, the concept of “Image and temperament” is related to the human image, which is related to the intuitive meaning of words, but any external “form” will be associated with the internal “quality”. But any external “form” is associated with an internal “quality”. This is the case for the figure in reality, and also for the figure painting in art. The artist's pursuit of “Image and temperament” is not only for the purpose of shaping the appearance, but also for the expression of the inner temperament. This factor is paid more and more attention to in contemporary figure painting, and many seemingly personalized modeling and brush and ink language, which reflects the demand for the integration of internal and external temperament.

4. Contemporary Figure Painting's “Image and temperament” Type

The connotation of art always needs to be presented through the external form, which is not only the creative language of the artist, but also an important medium for the viewer to understand the work of art. In contemporary realistic figure painting, from traditional ink and brush language to modern comprehensive media, from figurative representation to abstract expression, each form contains the artist's unique interpretation of the inner spiritual temperament. Therefore, it is one of the important paths to interpret contemporary realistic figure painting to explore the inner spiritual temperament of the artworks through the external form.

From the perspective of understanding “Image and temperament”, contemporary realistic figure paintings can be broadly categorized into the following three types:

4.1. Traditional modeling types that emphasize the expression of temperament

In contemporary realistic figure painting, there is a category of painters whose works of art are essentially the inheritance and development of traditional literati painting, and their pursuit of “Image and temperament” is roughly the same as that of the ancients, which is to focus on the expression of the character's external image and internal temperament, and to pay more attention to the performance of the temperament in figure painting. In the process of their creation, their concepts and techniques in painting are not very different from the traditional ones, and they maintain a high degree of consistency with the traditional ones in terms of aesthetic concepts. Although they have more or less come into contact with the Western concept of realistic modeling, and even have a good grasp of Western realistic expression techniques, they hardly have too much intuitive expression of realistic techniques on the screen. It is not easy for them to follow their heart, not to follow the trend, not to follow the crowd, and to stick to the traditional realistic figure painting in the noisy society.

For example, contemporary figure painter Li Xueming's figure paintings are distinctly characterized by traditional literati painting. In terms of modeling techniques, his traditional “calligraphy into the painting” of realistic features, the character of the performance of the lines generalized and concise, but not conceptual, the image of the realism is still very clear, on the basis of this modeling, without losing the brush and ink to simplify, in order to pursue the “exquisite ink and ink” modern sense, the virtual and the physical. On the basis of this modeling, the brush and ink are simplified to pursue a modern sense of “fine brushwork and ink subtlety”, and the reality is generous and appropriate, and the character's “shape” is shaped by simple brushwork in the lines, thus creating a poetic scene in the picture and conveying a spiritual world with a cultural flavor.

Generally speaking, this group of artists, represented by Li Xueming, are the inheritors and developers of traditional realistic figure painting, inheriting the traditional realistic figure painting's understanding and pursuit of “form”, and developing the techniques of ink and brushwork and the means of creating a mood. In contemporary times, the field in which painters live is very different from that of traditional painters, and it is difficult for contemporary painters to empathize with traditional painters, so the pursuit of “Image and temperament” in traditional Figure Painting, which focuses on the expression of the character's temperament, exists in contemporary times, but it is not the mainstream of the existence of the traditional Figure Painting.

4.2. Realistic modeling type that focuses on the shape and texture

The inheritance and development of modern realistic figure painting is a typical type in the diversified branches of contemporary realistic figure painting. Western realistic figure painters often have a strong advantage in shaping the volume and material of the figure, and this way of painting often makes the painters pay more attention to the external characteristics of the objective objects, on the basis of which they then consider the inner temperament of the figure.

The works of these painters pursue a slightly different “shape and quality” from the traditional ones. The meaning of “shape” is still the external image of the figure, only more specific and in-depth than the traditional ones, while the meaning of “quality” is inclined to the texture. The meaning of “quality” favors texture, i.e., the objective material of things, and then pursues the inner temperament of the characters on this basis. These works are mainly based on the image and material of the objective characters as the main starting point, and then consider reflecting the spiritual temperament of the characters.

It is easy to see from Mr. Jiang Yong'an's works that he pays particular attention to the shaping of the head and hands, highlighting the form and texture of the figure through a strong contrast between reality and falsehood. Although the modeling of this work is quite realistic, it is not scientifically realistic in the traditional sense; these images are exaggerated and distorted on the basis of the structure in order to emphasize the mental state of the characters. From the details of the characters' faces and hands, you can intuitively feel the meticulous modeling and rough skin texture, which is due to the study and research of the Western scientific realistic modeling. His works are not only full of the volume and texture of Western-style realism, but also have the spirit of writing pursued by traditional painting. The overall tone of the brush and ink in the picture is more inclined to the expression of ink flavor under the premise of expressing the figure and texture, showing the infinite variations of ink and wash in the subtleties.

Contemporary realistic figure painting, represented by Jiang Yong'an, inherits the scientific and rigorous nature of Western realistic modeling, and also incorporates the artistic pursuit of “writing God with form” in traditional Chinese painting. Through the comprehensive grasp of “Image and temperament”, these works not only present amazing artistic charm visually, but also trigger profound cultural and emotional resonance in the viewers on the spiritual level, providing a new direction and possibility for the contemporary development of Chinese figure painting.

4.3. Reconstruction of “form” and “spirit” in the context of diversified times

In contemporary times, there is another type of figure painting that draws its nourishment from primitive art (pottery and oracle bones, African primitive sculpture, etc.), folk art, Western and Japanese art, and even other disciplines, and explores new forms of brush and ink language on the basis of traditional figure painting. This way of painting is very close to the modern art in the world, and also breaks through the pursuit of “form and spirit” in traditional figure painting. They often absorb the image or techniques of traditional painting, and apply various art techniques and concepts from home and abroad to change the focus of art from expressing the “form” of the depicted object to expressing the inner world of the self. It contains the spirit and philosophical meaning of the times, and belongs to a kind of “form quality” sublimated on the basis of tradition.

From Mr. Shi Hu's figure paintings, we can find that he has made use of the basic images and lines in the murals of the Lascaux Cave Cliff Cave, integrating the elements of the human body into the very rough lines, and combining them to form a symbolic picture of the human body paintings. In addition to the majestic tension of the lines he borrowed, there is also the barbaric power of prehistoric art, which has a

strong sense of dynamism and vitality in the painter's heart. It is from the spirit of primitive art, the lines in these pictures and this mural have a considerable visual impact, the lines reveal the kind of life at the beginning of the barbaric tenacity and the spirit of primitive art coincides with the primitive art, which is precisely for the primitive paintings absorbed and fusion of the external manifestations.

Through the expression of lines with great individuality and tension, we can interpret his own unique pursuit of art and spiritual trust. That is to say, the subject of the brush and ink is no longer the human body in the picture, but the form of the painter's own purely subjective consciousness, where the “form” and “spirit” of the brush and ink have undergone a subversive change, and the two have been basically separated, which are mainly referred to as They refer to the external image of the figure shown on the screen, and the purely subjective sentiment of the painter, which is carried by the brush and ink.

All our speculations about the interpretation of paintings stem from the phenomenon of artistic reconstruction, which allows you to draw the meaning of the original theme in a familiar image. That is to say, in the image expressed by the painter, more subjective consciousness is added, and we often say that this is the spiritual will of the painter, which comes from the painter's personality and habits. In contemporary art, the best interpretation of this kind of art is already the specificity of “Image and temperament”, and if we want to really get the answer to this kind of art, we not only need to know the language of painting, but also more importantly, we need to explore the inner world of the artist.

This kind of artists have already been able to integrate various artistic concepts and forms of expression and express them with their own unique and personalized ink and brush language after they have experienced many aspects of inquiry and thinking. Because this kind of painting thinking is a kind of care for the inner self, this kind of painters can be said to be rare, and their paintings are more subjective than the works of the previous two kinds of painters, more free in expression, and they can even paint without the constraints of painting materials.

5. Conclusion

To summarize, contemporary realistic figure painting shows a rich variety of development paths in the understanding and pursuit of “Image and temperament”, and these different artistic orientations not only continue the traditional spirit of Chinese painting, but also infuse it with diversified connotations of the new era. As a whole, the exploration of “Image and temperament” in contemporary realistic figure painting can be broadly categorized into three types.

Firstly, there is a group of painters who are based on traditional brush and ink techniques, with “quality” as the main focus and “form” as a supplement. These painters attach great importance to the uniqueness of the language of brush and ink in their creations, skillfully combining the external image of the figure with the internal temperament through the richness and variety of lines, the layering of ink colors, and the rhythm of the strokes of the brush. Their artistic practice follows the traditional aesthetic concept of “writing God with form”, and through the tension and rhythm of the brush and ink, they show the depth of the character's spiritual temperament. These works often have a strong literati quality, focusing on simplicity and subtlety in form, emphasizing the

creation of the atmosphere and the beauty of the brush and ink, reflecting the artistic pursuit of “form is not restricted to quality, but the charm of the gods”.

Secondly, a group of painters influenced by the Western concept of scientific realism incorporated realistic modeling language on the basis of traditional brush and ink techniques. This integration makes their works pay more attention to the image and texture of objective objects, and enhances the realism and visual impact of the picture through the delicate depiction of light and shadow, volume and material. However, these painters did not stop at purely realistic reproduction, but further pursued the expression of the spiritual temperament of the characters on this basis. Through the combination of realistic techniques and ink and brushwork, they integrate traditional and modern aesthetic concepts, presenting an artistic style that is both realistic and rich in meaning. With the gradual broadening of the artists' horizons, the constraints of this concept of realism gradually weakened, and the picture gradually shifted from objective reproduction to more subjective expression, and the creative style also developed in the direction of individualization, liberalization and diversification.

Finally, there is also a category of painters who, on the basis of absorbing a variety of artistic concepts and forms of expression, realized a brand-new breakthrough in the pursuit of “Image and temperament”. These painters no longer adhere to the restrictions of the traditional category of “Image and temperament”, but use the external image of the object as a carrier to manifest their pure spiritual world. In other words, they use ink and brush to write the external image with purely subjective ideology, and the language of ink and brush is not only a technical means, but also a medium to express the painter's inner feelings and thoughts. In their works, the depiction of objective objects has been relegated to a secondary position, and replaced by the artist's self-spiritual home constructed through artistic language. This way of creation reflects the artist's subversion and innovation of traditional aesthetic concepts, and is also the inevitable result of the elevated thinking in the context of contemporary diversified art. In these works, the viewer no longer only sees the reproduction or expression of the painter's external objects, but enters into the depths of his heart and feels a unique spiritual universe constructed by art.

Generally speaking, the above three paths of exploration of “Image and temperament” in contemporary figure painting are both independent of each other and intertwined with each other, jointly promoting the diversified development of this art field. Whether it is the adherence to and expansion of the

traditional language of brush and ink, the integration and innovation of the Western concept of realism, or the pursuit of pure self-expression, all of them highlight the richness and possibilities of contemporary Figure Painting in terms of artistic form and spiritual connotation. This diversified development pattern not only broadens the artistic boundaries of Chinese painting, but also injects a strong impetus for its new vitality in the contemporary context.

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