

Contemporary New Representational Painting: The Application of Material Language—The Fusion of Form, Thought and Medium

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Abstract: This article explores the use of material language in new figurative painting and its relationship with emotional expression. New figurative painting is a context of expressive figurative painting, which has rich forms of language and emotional expression. Material language, as one of the forms of visual language, has unique charm. It demonstrates how artists innovate and expand their painting language in contemporary society. This innovation not only promotes the development of painting art but also expands the creative space for artists. Through analyzing various materials and techniques, this article studies the application of material language and its relationship with emotional expression on the canvas, providing more possibilities for artistic practice.

Keywords: New Figurative Painting, Composite Materials, Form

1. Introduction

Both figurative painting and new figurative painting are characterized by specific objects, but there are differences in context and expression. Figurative painting usually refers to traditional realistic painting, which emphasizes objective reproduction. On the other hand, new figurative painting developed in the context of contemporary society, although it is also a depiction of objective objects, it places more emphasis on expressing the painter's inner feelings and emotions. Under the premise of emphasizing inner feelings, contemporary new figurative painting presents new vitality, with rich and colorful forms of language. Among them, material language, as one of the forms of visual language, has an open and unique charm that is widely used in new figurative painting.

2. The Characteristics of New Representational Painting

New representational painting encompasses a wide range of styles and languages, creating a context for expressive representational painting. Its origin is a critical development that both subverts and establishes the boundaries between abstraction and representation. Although it shares similarities with traditional representational painting, new representational painting is no longer the traditional form of representational art. Its form language is richer and includes the expression of the artist's personal emotions during the creative process. As Cao Xiaou mentioned in his book "Neo-Representationalism": "Returning to representation does not mean returning to traditional visual forms. For representation, it is merely a carrier. In terms of artistic form, representational painting can be said to share certain similarities with the pursuit of 'spiritual likeness' in ancient Chinese painting."^[1]

The approach of new representational painting is a comprehensive choice that combines inheritance and innovation in contemporary society. This choice not only reflects respect for and continuation of traditional painting techniques but also demonstrates the innovation and expansion of painting language by artists in the context of contemporary society. It not only continues the essence of traditional painting but also makes bold attempts in painting language, expression techniques, and creative concepts. This innovation not only promotes the development of painting art but also expands the creative space for artists, allowing them to find a harmonious balance between inheritance and innovation.

The popularity of the new representational painting movement in China clearly meets the needs of our Eastern aesthetic for "vivid spirit and charm." Through observation and depiction of their subjects, painters then contemplate and extract the spirit of their subjects before expressing it through appropriate form language. This is not a realistic reproduction of traditional representational painting. In the form language of painting, material language is an important means of expression. It can be combined with

various materials to create different visual texture effects on the canvas, thereby enhancing the expression of the artist's emotions.

3. The Unique Charm of Material Language

Material language, as an extension of painting, enriches the choices available to painters in terms of artistic media. Since the Renaissance and the subsequent development of oil painting during the Industrial Revolution, traditional media such as oil paint have steadily developed. Later, artists like Klimt incorporated decorative techniques such as mosaic, incorporating materials like gold and silver foil, feathers, etc. into their paintings. Picasso also used "collage" in his still life with a cane chair, integrating printed materials into his artwork. The aesthetic appeal of various materials has gradually been discovered by people. Since the advent of Cubism, materials have been gradually incorporated into traditional painting systems as a supplement. By the 1980s, they entered the Chinese art scene. Artists began to experiment with various new materials and techniques to express their artistic concepts. They explored how to use non-traditional materials and techniques to create new forms and effects of art. In this process, comprehensive material painting gradually developed into an independent art form. In contemporary painting, material language, as a unique expression form, possesses unique texture and experimental qualities that cannot be replaced by other forms of painting.

The distinctive feature of comprehensive material painting lies in its diversity of materials and freedom of techniques. It breaks through the limitations of materials and techniques in traditional painting, fusing different materials and techniques together to create a unique artistic effect. Comprehensive material painting can utilize a wide range of materials. For example, in traditional oil painting, apart from using oil paint, artists can also combine watercolor, acrylic, metal, wood, etc. These materials can also be used individually, creating different textures and visual effects that are difficult to achieve in traditional painting. At the same time, the techniques of comprehensive material painting are also highly flexible. Artists can choose appropriate techniques according to their creative needs and artistic concepts, such as rubbing, scraping, pasting, firing, etc.

In new representational painting, representation serves as the main body of the painting but the creative techniques are relatively free. The role of material application in the creation process of new representational painting also varies. Some artists first prepare the canvas or paper/wooden board by treating it with different materials to create a suitable texture for the following painting process. This creates an appropriate texture for the subsequent modeling process. It is worth noting that this method where materials play a dominant role requires painters to have a good grasp of material properties and a creative divergent mindset. Other artists first layout the overall composition considering composition and form, then apply materials at appropriate positions where material characteristics are needed, serving as an extension or supplement to the artwork. For example, applying sandstone or other materials to objects that need to convey a rough texture or creating unique textures by overlapping different mediums such as water-oil separation or combining acrylic with oil pastels based on the needs of the artwork.

In conclusion, comprehensive material painting is an open and uniquely charming art form that is widely used in new representational painting. It creates unique artistic effects by utilizing various materials and techniques to convey artists' thoughts and emotions.

4. The application form of comprehensive materials in new figurative painting

The application of mixed media in new figurative painting is mainly reflected in the breakthrough of traditional oil painting techniques and aesthetic concepts. The techniques used are also diverse, such as collage, mixed media, graffiti, etc. These new expression methods and material applications greatly expand the traditional figurative painting aesthetic concepts and techniques.

Firstly, the challenge of mixed media to figurative painting lies in the breakthrough of traditional painting techniques. Traditional figurative painting usually uses traditional painting tools such as oil paint, watercolor, pencils, and traditional painting materials such as canvas, paper, etc. Mixed media breaks these traditions by using various materials and techniques to create, such as acrylic paint, oil pastels, colored chalk, etc. Some painters even use non-painting materials such as sand, mud, fibers, etc. To create textures and patterns. In addition, some painters will apply digital technology to painting, for example, using computer software to create patterns or images, then printing these patterns or images out and combining them with traditional painting materials.

Secondly, the new figurative mixed media painting breaks through the traditional figurative aesthetic concept. The aesthetic concept of traditional figurative painting usually focuses on the authenticity of the painting and the expression of details. The application of new figurative aesthetic concept in mixed media painting pays more attention to the overall appeal of the picture, the texture of the material and the expression of the picture's texture. This application of new figurative aesthetic concept makes the expressive power of mixed media painting more abundant and diversified.

Finally, the application of mixed media in new figurative painting expands the possibilities of artistic expression. Mixed media painting expands the possibilities of artistic expression by using different materials and techniques to create, making the expressive power of figurative painting more abundant and diverse, and providing artists with more creative space and possibilities.

The possibility and inclusiveness of materials are very strong. When talking about the application of mixed media in new figurative painting, we can think of some shocking works. The content of his creation comes from history and poetry. He is Anselm Kiefer. His works are often huge in scale, and the theme of his paintings is closely related to his living environment background. The picture conveys a grand and melancholy emotion, with a symbolic meaning of thinking. The use of mixed media in Kiefer's works is very rich, including natural materials, artificial materials, sometimes directly taking "ready-made" objects to shape, expressing the weightiness of the picture. The materials used include corrosive lead, broken glass, discarded iron blocks, plant stalks, etc. It can be very diverse and even complex. Everyone can have different feelings when facing his paintings, and his pictures do not deny any explanation (As is shown in Figure 1). His picture is heavy, closer to installation art. The application of materials makes his work have lasting attraction and shocking effects.



Figure 1: Anselm Kiefer, "Dein Haus ritt die finstere Welle", 2006

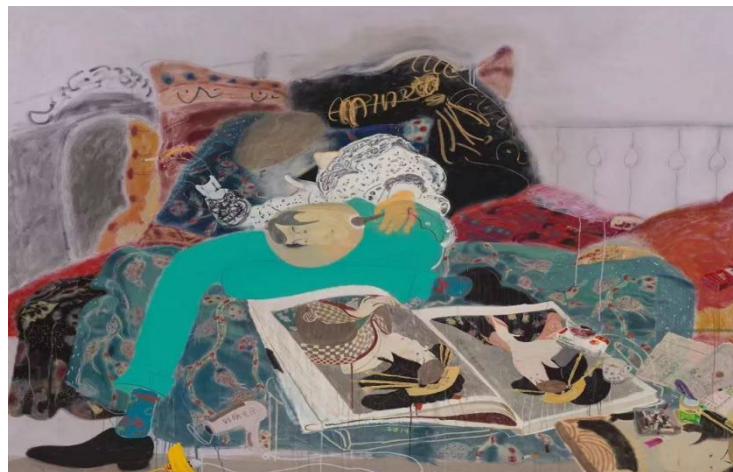


Figure 2: Wang Yuping, "Mengyang, Ukiyo-e", 2019

Of course, mixed media painting is not necessarily the more materials used, the better it is. Nor is it necessary to pile up many materials on the picture to form a complex texture in order to create a grand narrative. The real emotions of an artist cannot be separated from their own culture, history, personality and personal experiences. In addition to creating a heavy texture to create a complex environment and momentum in new figurative painting, mixed media can also be appropriately "left blank" to create a simple childlike feeling, some small happiness in life. In Wang Yuping's paintings which mostly focus on urban themes, there is a sense of traditional "literati painting". The combination of acrylic and oil pastel does not use complex materials, but the overall atmosphere of the picture is loose and harmonious.

This material collocation not only enriches the texture of the picture but also has a rare "naive feeling", which comes from the line drawing of oil pastel. The contrast between lines and color blocks makes the picture vivid and rhythmic(as is shown in Figure 2). Although there is no grand narrative and historical sense, it reveals true emotions in the picture, as if it is the real feeling that each of us is experiencing in our ordinary life, which is touching.

5. The Form and Expression of Materials

The application of materials provides us with new possibilities, just as Eastern philosophy sees it, "Art content and form are one, form is the way of existence, content is the existence of the way; a work, what the senses can touch is the form, what the spirit can touch is the content."^[2] If we overemphasize the form and ignore the content of the work, it may become empty and shallow, lacking substantive expression and meaning. Moreover, if we focus too much on form and techniques, it may make the work lose emotion and humanity, unable to generate empathy and emotional connection with the audience. The application of materials enhances the expressive power of the painting, but what the painting wants to express is the content at the core.

In artistic creation, the form should serve to express the content, rather than a decoration or simply a display of techniques. We should think deeply about the theme, meaning, and value of the work to ensure that the form and content complement each other. Express your emotional experience.

In new representational painting, under the premise of emphasizing the soul in abstraction, the new representational painting art's emphasis on "spiritual" expression is self-evident. In new representational painting, there is an extremely important artist who uses materials to express emotions. He uses a large number of different materials, but he handles them skillfully. "From the perspective of painting language, Kiefer does not deliberately describe or replicate nature, but follows the norms of modern art. That is, art is an independent artistic event, so we cannot make such associations from Kiefer's works of concrete appearance as traditional realistic paintings do ... And through Kiefer's creation, we can believe that representative art forms can also handle any subject matter, even the most complex emotions deep inside."^[1] In Kiefer's works, we feel the emotions conveyed by the material, and straw is no longer simply a straw, it has been given a new definition. The texture brought by materials cannot be replaced by other media.

6. The Challenge of Composite Materials to New Representational Painting

The use of materials also brings new challenges to contemporary new representational painting. Although new representational painting is a kind of representational painting, it is not the reproduction of scenes or objects, but through the creator's observation and processing of the present, it pays more attention to the expression of the inner world and emotions. New representational painting also has stronger experimentality and innovation, constantly trying new techniques and forms in expression methods. Of course, creation is not only "learning more every day", only pursuing the accumulation of techniques, but also learning to "reduce knowledge every day", the growth of painting thinking and the selection of the picture. Therefore, in the creation of new representational composite materials, form, thought and medium are all indispensable.

In the creative process, the choice of materials is not the more complex and diverse, the better. The texture and form formed in the picture need to be repeatedly experimented according to the needs of the picture, in order to form an expression that conforms to personal emotional imagery, at the same time explore the aesthetic sense of the material itself, pay attention to the material itself. Through the study and experimentation of different forms of material language, it find the appropriate material language needed for the creation process, so that the overall picture is harmonious and vivid.

The choice of different materials forms the texture and shape in the picture needs to be repeatedly experimented according to the needs of the picture, in order to form an expression that conforms to personal emotional imagery, at the same time explore the aesthetic sense of the material itself, pay attention to the material itself. Clear emotional goals can be felt when viewing a work about what emotion or theme it conveys. And choosing appropriate materials is the key to maintaining consistency in creation. If it is to express warmth and comfort, it may choose soft and smooth materials; if it is to express tension and anxiety, it may choose sharp and irregular materials; if it is to express simplicity and nostalgia, it may choose rough and delicate materials. Therefore, when using mixed media in artwork, it is crucial for artists to ensure that the choice of materials aligns with the emotions conveyed in the piece.

At the same time, consider the symbolic meaning of materials. Some materials may have specific symbols in culture or psychology, ensure that the selected materials do not produce confusion or contradiction, but help deepen your emotional expression. Using clay may give people a simple and nostalgic feeling, while metal may bring a sense of solidity and coldness, fabrics may bring a sense of softness and delicacy.

Different textures and layers can convey different emotions. This requires flexible use and handling of materials in selection and processing so that they can better integrate into the picture. This requires artists to have a proficient mastery of materials and creative use.

Material painting has a certain randomness, which is not only a challenge but also a surprise. The use of composite materials is an experimental process, through continuous trial and repeated practice, find suitable material combinations and processing methods for emotional expression. Practice is the best way to hone skills and discover innovation.

7. The significance of combining new representational painting with composite materials.

The combination of new representational painting and composite materials has significant meaning in the development of art. With the diversification of art, various painting languages from different materials and genres are intermingling, and the collision between Eastern and Western cultures is constantly generating new sparks. The development of technology and intelligence brings new possibilities and challenges. [3]It is particularly important to maintain the painting nature in works. Painting nature emphasizes the handcrafted traces left by the painter during the painting process, which can allow the audience to feel the painter's strokes and artistic style. Composite materials have a high degree of plasticity in new representational painting, and it is an important form of language. With its unique texture and visual effects, it cannot be ignored in contemporary painting.

In addition to the expression of techniques and details, painting nature also includes the conveyance of emotions and artistic conception. The conveyance of artistic conception is "the art of painting is to skillfully use the relativity of time existence to reflect permanence in transience." [2]Everyone's experience of time is different; some people feel that time passes quickly, while others feel that time passes slowly, which is closely related to everyone's perspective when observing things. During the creation of a work, it contains the creator's thoughts and the form language of the picture, which is the moment the creator wants to present to the viewer. Through some techniques, methods, emotions, etc., the passage of time, changes over the years, or a fleeting eternity can be reflected in the picture. Material language is an important way to express painting nature. It uses different brushes, pigments, and other materials to combine and arrange elements such as composition elements, colors, lines, and textures in the picture to convey the artist's intentions and express the painting nature of the work.

The application of composite material painting to new representational painting mainly manifests in breaking through traditional painting techniques and aesthetic concepts, expanding the possibilities of artistic expression, and combining art forms, ideas, and media. This new form of art application makes the expressive power of new representational painting more abundant and diverse, while also providing artists with more creative space and possibilities.

8. Conclusion

The application of composite materials in new figurative painting is an important phenomenon in contemporary art. It not only enriches the forms of expression and language characteristics of figurative painting, but also reflects the diversity and interdisciplinary nature of contemporary painting. At the same time, this application also provides us with a window to understand contemporary art, demonstrating the exploration and practice of artists between inheritance and innovation.

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