

Formal Language Analysis of Contemporary Fine-Brush Bird-and-Flower Painting

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ABSTRACT. *Formal language is the foundation of the picture, the interpretation of the creative concept of the work and the unique way of communication between the author and the viewer. Specifically, interpreting contemporary meticulous paintings forms from the perspectives of diverse themes, subjective color expressions, and innovative composition methods has an important enlightening effect on promoting the meticulous painting to be fabulous in the new era.*

KEYWORDS: *fine-brush bird-and-flower painting, creative features, formal language*

1. Introduction

Meticulous painting in each historical period has its own unique artistic style and distinctive picture language. Among them, the formal language of the picture condenses the author's life experience and the spirit of the times, creating a vivid context of the times.

2. Overview of Contemporary Fine-Brush Bird-and-Flower Painting

2.1 Definition of time category

To define the concept of contemporary fine brushwork flower-and-bird painting, we must first define the time division of "Contemporary". In the book *History of Modern Chinese Painting*, Li Zhujin and Wan Qingli made a corresponding division of the three concept "Modern times", "Modern" and "Contemporary". "Modern times" refers to the period from 1840 to 1911; "Modern" refers to the period from 1912 to 1949, that is, the 38 years from the Republic of China to the establishment of the People's Republic of China. "Contemporary" refers to the period of time since the founding of the People's Republic of China. According to this definition, contemporary fine brushwork flower-and-bird painting refers to the artistic style that a new generation of artists have explored the artistic creation of fine brushwork flower-and-bird painting in the context of the current era from 1949 to the present.

2.2 Connotation of formal language

Let us explore the essence of painting from the field of aesthetics. Painting is the expression of truth, kindness and beauty, and it is a self-portrayal and affirmation of the artist's own intelligence, ability, emotion and other aspects. The most striking part of a painting is the sense of form in the picture, that is, how to create a sense of form and how to create a sense of form lies in the use of the formal language of painting. Jiang Yue pointed out in his book *Research on Formal Language of Painting* that formal language is composed of visual morphological elements-points, lines, faces, colors, shapes, bodies, qualities, etc., according to the painter's inner emotions and aesthetic needs. The formation of a certain image and state in the structural relationship is a special way of communicating with the viewer. The most important and the first factor to impress people is the form of the picture. The primary factor to create the form is the application of the painting language, including the composition elements of the form, the composition skills of the work, the modeling, the application of color, the texture of the material used, the psychological feeling of vision, the rule of formal beauty, the scale of proportion, the relationship between black and white and gray, and so on.[1]

2.3 Important thoughts affecting the development of contemporary fine brushwork flower-and-bird painting

From 1985 to 1989, some domestic critics engaged in art research published a large number of European and American avant-garde arts in the China Art Newspaper. This movement was called “85 Trendy Art Movement” by the art world. “85 Trendy Art Movement” has a profound impact on Chinese contemporary art, and many artists' representative works and creative theories have received great attention. After visiting the 6th National Art Exhibition, Mr. Wang Dagen published the article *Also Talking about Innovation of Chinese Painting*. He pointed out in the article that Chinese painting needs to be understood from the scope of the whole painting art, and we should reflect on Chinese painting from the height of the world.[2] This provides inspiration for the creation of contemporary fine brushwork flower-and-bird paintings: if contemporary fine brushwork flower-and-bird paintings want to innovate, they need to have new concepts under the premise of inheriting the tradition. Under the baptism of “85 Trendy Art Movement”, contemporary artists have started artistic creation that highlights self-consciousness on the premise of taking root in tradition. By interpreting the formal language of contemporary fine brushwork flower-and-bird painting, we can realize the influence of this trend of thought.

3. The Formal Language of Contemporary Meticulous Flower and Bird Painting

3.1 Diversified themes

Since the reform and opening up, people have gradually become overwhelmed by the stylized interpersonal communication, the accelerated life rhythm and the increasing pressure of daily life. With the influx of western psychological theories, people begin to examine themselves and try to understand themselves. The theme of painting is also affected by the background of the times and has undergone new changes. On the one hand, artists have improved the traditional theme, and all of the improved traditional themes had the temporal spirit. On the other hand, artists began to pay attention to the available themes around them and explore the deep spiritual connotation conveyed in the materials around them.

Specifically, contemporary artists are not limited to expressing the elegance of literati with traditional flowers, plants, fish and insects. Influenced by Western still life paintings, contemporary painters have also begun to explore still life themes. In the related works, the static objects no longer appear in the background of the picture, but become the main body of the picture.

For example, the picture of Gao Qian's work “White Porcelain Bottle”: The white porcelain bottle is placed on a delicate table, the composition is centered, and the color uses low-light gray tones to make the picture look delicate and elegant. This kind of theme is obviously different from Western still life paintings, which makes objects live in the present, reaching the “vibrant and vivid” in the six methods of Chinese painting.

Another example is Hang Chunhui's “Dangerous Game” which draws a bear into the painting, boldly reducing the color of the picture to black and white, giving a depressed feeling. The theme of innocence, coupled with depressing color emotions, creates a lot of imagination.

The above examples are sufficient to illustrate that the themes of still life in this period are strongly metaphorical. These objects, which are close to the life of contemporary painters, as picture elements, convey the personal feelings of the creators, and by virtue of their characteristics of the times, they are more likely to resonate with viewers.

3.2 Subjective color expression

Painting as a kind of visual art, “shape” and “color” are two important factors. Color has strong emotion in the picture, and can bear the artist's emotions and dominate the atmosphere of the whole picture.

The importance of color to meticulous flower-and-bird painting can be seen from the color theories that have been passed down till now, such as “Water is used to adjust the multilevel shade and dryness of ink.” and “Color the images in the painting by category.”

In *The Preface to Landscape Painting*, Zong Bing of the Southern Dynasty put forward the saying. “When painting, we must observe the shape and color of the object, and truly reflect the characteristics of the landscape image.”[3] This inspired the painter to create according to the inherent color of the object. However, due to the impact of multiculturalism on contemporary art, the traditional color concept has undergone some changes.

The traditional meticulous flower-and-bird painting emphasizes the original saturation of color and lacks the

transition between color and color, but color presents rich visual effects with the changes of lightness, purity and hue in combination and overlap. Western colors rely on gray tones to present intermediate colors, thus creating a light and shadow relationship. After absorbing the relationship between light and shadow, the new meticulous flower-and-bird painting improved the coloring method of traditional meticulous flower-and-bird painting. For example, Qin Ai's "Treasure Box" series of paintings—"Treasure Box of Chang'e" uses gray tones to create a relationship between light and shadow, so that light and shadow hit the wooden box and the rabbit on the wooden box. Rabbits use extremely bright colors, while wooden boxes use dark colors. Color contrast is used to highlight the central subject. The four corners of the screen are deepened in color but without losing the sense of transparency. In this way, the entire picture has a tendency to be overtime, giving viewers an experience of traveling through time and space. In another example, the work "Pandora of Treasure Box" still uses gray tones, which makes the picture very stable. The addition of blue to the work adds a calm and rational look to the picture. The light and shadow relationship created in the picture gives the subjective sense of deliberate placement of the picture, which can more strongly convey the artist's own emotions.

3.3 Innovative composition method

(1) Geometric Image Segmentation

Points, lines and faces are the basic elements of geometry. Looking at points, lines, and faces from the way of movement, we can find that lines are formed by point motions and surfaces are formed by line motions; where intersections of surfaces and surfaces become lines, where intersections of lines and lines become points. From the point of view of painting, the geometric shape is formed by image-forming concrete objects in real life and then blending into the picture to compose the composition. Among them, points, lines, and faces become the basic elements of the formal language that make up the picture. The traditional meticulous paintings of flowers and birds emphasize the use of lines. Contemporary artists use western rational artistic thinking and combine geometric composition in composition, breaking through the visual expression of simple freehand brushwork in traditional painting and giving the pictures a new sense of form. In a nutshell, there are two forms of geometric expression in contemporary fine brushwork flower-and-bird painting: one is to divide the picture with geometric shapes; the other is to use geometric shapes to reshape the objects. Both of these methods can effectively enhance the sense of form. In the paintings of contemporary meticulous painter Mr. Chen Lin, geometric composition forms are more common. For example, the work "Changshen • Sleeping Duck" uses corridors and walls in the composition to divide the picture into multiple geometric spaces. The main objects in the picture are all in a triangular frame, which increases the stability of the picture. At the same time, the author divided the picture geometrically, placing the three ducks in three spaces and of different sizes, creating a sense of depth for the picture.[4]

Chen Lin used this simple geometric figure to replace the specific characteristics of the object image, which reflects Mr. Chen Lin's exploration and experiment on the geometric composition of the fine brushwork flower-and-bird painting.

(2) Spatial Interaction

Western surrealist paintings that rely on Freud's psychoanalytic theory often use spatial interaction to compose pictures. Specifically, western surrealist painting attempts to combine dreams with reality, combining all the images that will not appear together in reality according to subjective images, creating a visual language that transcends reality. This combination of images processed subjectively by artists has mysterious and grotesque visual effects. Contemporary meticulous painter Mr. Chen Lin often uses spatial interactive composition to integrate ancient and modern, Chinese and foreign themes into a picture, and puts these highly contrasting elements in the same picture, so that tradition and modern, eastern and western cultures collide into different picture feelings. Take Chen Lin's "Travel Notes" series as an example. These works are full of elements of the times: faucets, glass windows, bicycles, tables, modern buildings, etc. In Chen Lin's works, in addition to presenting modern images, he often uses the creative technique of replacement. For example, the characters in the "Portrait of Giovanni Arnofini Couple" are all replaced by cranes, and the personalized cranes are depicted dynamically, which is very vivid. Mr. Chen Lin interprets the inheritance of tradition and the thinking of aesthetic expression in contemporary society with such formal language, conveying strong metaphor characteristics.

3. The Enlightenment of Contemporary Fine-Brush Bird-and-Flower Painting Formal Language on Artistic Creation

In the long development process of Chinese flower-and-bird painting, many painters have explored and tried, reformed and innovated it. Due to the deep-rooted traditional culture and feudal ideas, some of the creators have relatively single aesthetic and creative consciousness, and the composition of related works always upholds the basic principles of so-called “formation rate” and “three-line interspersed”, which also makes the themes of Chinese flower-and-bird paintings not unique and novel enough. The ordinary person's psychology also has genes for seeking new things and differences, but the artist's mentality of seeking new things and differences is stronger than that of the ordinary person. As a result, artists have become leaders in changing aesthetic tastes, and paintings with abnormal aesthetic tastes are gradually recognized and appreciated by everyone.[5] Regarding the issue of the inheritance and development of Chinese painting, Mr. Wu Yaohua mentioned: “The pursuit of formal language of Chinese painting is essentially concerned with the vitality of this artistic program of Chinese painting on the basis of a multicultural era.[6]” Through analyzing the formal language of contemporary Chinese flower-and-bird painting, it is found that the formal language of contemporary meticulous flower-and-bird painting not only conveys the personal feelings and aesthetic interests of contemporary artists, but also shows the exquisite and delicate techniques of Chinese meticulous painting. This unremitting exploration of art has created a wider space for the development of contemporary meticulous flower-and-bird painting. As the author, I believe that the development and innovation of Chinese painting need to absorb nutrition in the current era background. However, excessive pursuit of the present tends to forget the tradition, and the created images will lose the profound cultural heritage of the Chinese nation. As the contemporary meticulous painter Gao Qian said, the inheritance of tradition is temperamental. While inheriting traditions in the creation of Chinese paintings, combining with the background of the times and absorbing multiple cultures are the key step for the contemporary meticulous flower-and-bird painting to be fabulous in the new era.

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