

# Appreciation and Analysis of Ma Yuan's "White Roses"

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**Abstract:** The political and cultural background of the Song Dynasty provided fertile soil for the development of meticulous flower and bird painting, which made the art of flower and bird painting in my country reach its historical peak. As one of the four great masters of the Southern Song Dynasty, Ma Yuan left behind many valuable landscape paintings and flower and bird paintings for future generations. "White Rose" is a meticulous painting of flowers and birds by Ma Yuan, which embodies the characteristics of Song painting's meticulous and deliberately seeking truth from life. This paper will analyze the "White Rose" from the aspects of shape, color, space layout, etc., and try to explore the creative methods and expression techniques of the Southern Song Academy's style painters."

**Keywords:** Ma Yuan, fine brushwork flowers and birds, white roses

## 1. Introduction

The Song Dynasty sketches reached a peak in the history of Chinese painting, and the academy-style flower-and-bird paintings left behind a lot of fine works that have been handed down to future generations. In the flower and bird paintings of the academy, the sketches of flowers and birds occupy the main position, and the flower and bird paintings are developing rapidly in the form of sketches. Ma Yuan is a master painter in the Southern Song Dynasty. Born into a family of painters, he is good at landscapes, figures and flowers and birds. Because when painting, I like small corners and corners, and the world calls it "horse corners". He and three other painters from the Academy of Painting, Li Tang, Liu Songnian and Xia Gui, are known as the "Four Schools of the Southern Song Dynasty" in the history of painting [1]. He is good at landscape painting, especially "Treading a Song", "Drawing Alone in the Cold River" and "Meishixi Mall" are his masterpieces. In addition, there are many flower-and-bird paintings by Ma Yuan, and "White Rose" is one of them, with the signature "Ma Yuan" on the painting. But he painted flowers alone, but very few. The five white roses in this painting are graceful and graceful, which can be called the direct descendants of Xuanhe Painting Academy.



Figure 1: "White Rose" Ma Yuan, Southern Song Dynasty

## 2. “White Rose”

“White Rose” is a sketch of flowers and birds by Ma Yuan in the Southern Song Dynasty. It is painted with fine brushwork on silk, 26.2 cm in length and 25.6 cm in width, and adopts the method of breaking branches. In the whole painting, five huge roses are painted, surrounded by green branches and leaves, which are lush and dazzling. Five blooming white roses are distributed on both sides of the main branch from near to far, making the picture look more balanced. The painter outlines the shape of the flower with a line pen, smudges the petals with white Chinese painting paint, and paints the branches and leaves with green. The trunk of the flower branches stretches from the lower right to the upper left. Although the whole picture only shows white roses and branches and leaves, under Ma Yuan’s ingenious arrangement, it appears to be full of vitality. In the lower right corner of the whole picture, there is Ma Yuan’s inscription, and the inscription is “Ma Yuan” and the seal of the Qianjian collection.

## 3. Outline with pen and brush to describe God in shape

“Art comes from life”, and the experience of nature and life is the source of artistic creation. The flower and bird painters of the two academies observe flowers and birds meticulously, pursue realism and precision, and pay attention to poetic expression. As recorded in “Xuanhe Paintings”, “Zhao Miaoyu is good at painting tigers, not only in its shape, but also in a wonderful rhythm. Although it is full of qi and loses its shape, although he has business, he often looks like a dog [2].” Sketching is the foundation of painting. In Chinese painting, sketching emphasizes “depicting the spirit with the shape”, not only focusing on the shape of the object, but also focusing on its spirit. The establishment of the Song Dynasty Painting Academy provided a good humanistic environment for the creation of flower and bird paintings. As a painter in the Southern Song Dynasty, Ma Yuan had enough time and sufficient conditions to concentrate on observing the flowers and trees in the four seasons, birds, animals, birds and fish in the royal garden. growth characteristics. In the process of sketching, the painter’s depiction of real things is the result of continuous refinement and summarization. It does not mean that when you see what things look like, they draw them as they look. They do not just show the original appearance, but through their own experience. Summarize it in the form of expression on the screen. Li Lai’s “De Yuzhai Paintings” commented on Xu Xi’s “Crane and Bamboo Picture”: “Recently, when painters made feathers, they focused on sparse and detailed work. Although one feather looks similar, the body may not be complete. The complex and sparse rendering, the distribution of various colors, and the reflection of the belt, the true state of the business, all have it, and it can’t be like this unless it is wonderful [3].” This comment is intended to advocate that when sketching from life, attention should be paid to the business and real state of objects to achieve the realm of creating wonderful nature.

The lines of gongbi painting also play a vital role in the whole gongbi painting. The development of gongbi flower and bird painting to the Song Dynasty of the Five Dynasties, Huang Quan, Xu Xi, Cui Bai, Zhao Chang and other painters not only enriched the performance of gongbi flower and bird painting, but also in-depth exploration of the “line” in the fine brush painting of flowers and birds was carried out. In the Five Dynasties period, the meticulous painting of flowers and birds has appeared in various forms such as “hook and fill method”, “outline method” and “boneless method”. The aesthetic requirements for lines have also been improved, and the theories of “cone painting sand”, “folding hairpin strands”, and “house leak marks” have been proposed. The use of lines in meticulous flower-and-bird painting developed in the Song Dynasty was more expressive, and it also had the characteristics of writing, which connected painting with the spirit and gave life to the painting objects. Judging from the line changes in “White Rose”, straight lines, curved lines and oblique lines are applied between the leaves, and the scattered and overlapping lines enrich the space of the entire composition. At first glance, it is a straight branch, the curve is the cross distribution of the flowers, and the diagonal line is that the entire white rose extends from the lower right to the upper left. The thick lines of the branches are combined with the thin lines of the petals. The thick lines are vigorous and powerful, the thin lines are lively and meticulous, and the thick, dense, horizontal and vertical lines form a visual rhythm. The real feeling of the lines and the integration of the dry and wet shades of the ink color of hooking, streaking, chapping and dyeing enhance the texture of the lines.

“White Roses” expresses a sense of unity in thought, and the branches and leaves in the painting contrast with the flowers. When drawing the branches and leaves of the white rose, I use lines of different thicknesses to outline, the thickness is even, and the shades show regular changes. The outline

of the white rose flower is to use precise, meticulous, tight and smooth lines to fully shape the posture of the flower and give the white rose life. Ma Yuan's "White Rose Picture" captures these characteristics, depicting the fresh, elegant, soft and gorgeous appearance of the white rose in its prime, which is extremely expressive.

#### **4. Color rendering, suitable shades**

The flower-and-bird painting of the Song Dynasty Academy of Painting has made some innovations on the basis of inheriting the tradition of "outlining and filling in color and rich in purpose"[4] in the Five Dynasties. The painting style of the Southern Song Dynasty became "concise and comprehensive", focusing on sketching and composition forms. In order to highlight the bold interception of the main body of the picture, a large area of blank was used to create a simple and elegant style, which is more poetic and picturesque, such as Ma Yuan's "White Rose".

White roses belong to the Rosaceae family, erect shrubs, light, and have strong vitality. There are often unequal hook-shaped prickles on the branchlets, and the leaves are small and sparse, with 5 or 7 pieces; the shape of the leaves is broadly oval or ovate. The flowers are white and arranged in corymbs. The petals are single and double, and they are fragrant.

From the aspect of color, Ma Yuan used the contrasting relationship of colors. The whole painting is dominated by warm tones, with white, green and ochre on the base of yellow silk. The color combination is soft and gives the viewer a warm feeling. The five white roses in the painting are huge, luxuriant and dazzling. In order to highlight the flowers, the flower heads of the front flowers are pressed against the leaves, and the leaves are slightly heavier than the flowers. Ma Yuan smudges the petals with white powder, the branches and leaves with different shades of green, and then smudges the branches with ochre and ink. The layers of smudges, the softness of white and yellow, the interweaving of green and ochre, and the control of the basic adjustment of the picture in warm tones, it can be seen that the painter has a warm and positive attitude in his heart.

#### **5. Spatial layout, combining dynamic and static**

The white roses in Ma Yuan's "White Roses" have their own postures. The five roses have different postures and are displayed in the most beautiful posture. The completeness of the objects in the whole picture has flowers, leaves, and light. In the picture, the petals have a clear and clear general direction, some are facing the sun, and some are backlit. There are obvious changes in the ups and downs of the petals, some blooming and some shrinking. Partial enhancements were made to the roses, focusing on painting a few large roses, which made people's eyes shine. The five flowers are occluded in the picture, and the focus is on the front large flower with a small flower next to it. There is a flower on the top of this big flower that is slightly biased, and the flowers at the back are all covered by leaves, and how many branches and leaves each flower is equipped with is also quite elegant. The direction of the leaves is also different, whether it is left or right, basically the direction of each bunch of leaves is different. The branches and leaves under the flower head stretch out, hold the flower head firmly, prevent the flower head from falling down, and make the flower branch tend to balance. Ma Yuan fully considered the density relationship between flowers and leaves. The two fuller flower heads on the left side of "White Rose" are only matched with a few leaves, while the two small flowers in the lower right corner are made with very dense leaves. Occluded to fill the sense of weightlessness in the lower right corner. Contemporary painter Su Baijun once said, "If entities and spaces are only natural arrangements and lists in life, the entire schema lacks a sense of composition, and can only reflect objects in a dull manner without touching artistic power [5]."

From the perspective of spatial comparison, the whole picture can be roughly divided into three parts in terms of area, the first part is the yellow of the background, the second part is the white of the rose, and the third part is the green of the leaves. Ma Yuan only used the three colors of yellow, white and green to show the graceful appearance of five roses, a scene full of vitality. The two roses located in the lower right corner of the whole picture are relatively small, and the distance is relatively far; the three roses that go from the lower right corner to the upper left corner are the roses occupying the largest area in the whole picture, in terms of distance. The distance between the three flowers is also relatively close, and the leaves are also a little less than the whole picture, which is closer to the center of the picture. The third flower from the bottom to the top is in full bloom, which is different from the flower hidden behind the leaves. The two flowers are open and closed, forming a contrast, which

makes the whole picture look more harmonious. The five flowers are distributed on the left and right sides of the branches, and not all of them are distributed on one side. The author adopts such a composition to give the picture a sense of balance.

As a painting, “White Rose” appears to be static, but in fact the artist painted a moving scene. The branch with the big flower head on the front, which is mainly depicted, bends from the right to the left, which seems to be static; the rose flower head slowly presses down the branch, which shows the posture of the rose flower. The combination of movement and stillness shows the natural posture of roses crawling around.

Ma Yuan’s “White Roses” adopts the diagonal composition form. Five flowers of different sizes are distributed on the left and right sides of the branches, which can best achieve a balanced state on both sides, reflecting energy and dynamics. Through this form of composition, the painter depicts the movement of roses in this way, and reflects the vibrant sense of life of things.

The ancients said: “If the meaning is strange, it is strange; if the meaning is high, it is high; if the meaning is far, it is far; if the meaning is deep, it is deep; if the meaning is ancient, it is ancient [6]; Song people like to sketch in nature. They use a calm mental state to feel the feelings and emotions brought by nature, and express them with simple and flexible techniques. The subtlety of Song painting is that the painter integrates his true feelings into the creation of flower and bird paintings, giving life and vitality to the paintings, and making the paintings last forever.

## 6. Conclusion

The agility of Ma Yuan’s painting brush is not only due to his keen observation and ability to grasp the beauty of nature, but more importantly, his precise modeling ability and composition ability. He can not only describe the shape of the white rose just right, but also vividly reproduce its graceful appearance, making the picture full of vigor and interest. “White Rose” is one of the few flower-and-bird paintings by Ma Yuan, which embodies the style of the Southern Song Academy’s style of body painting, and is also one of the sketch paintings in the Song Dynasty. Song painting is the crystallization of the long-term artistic practice of the people of the Song Dynasty. It embodies the ancient aesthetics of our country and provides aesthetic experience for the artistic creation of contemporary painters. Therefore, we can not only learn the brush and ink skills and expression methods of Song people’s flowers and birds from Song painting, but also learn the artistic concept and creation rules of Song people’s painting creation, and improve their aesthetics.

Hegel once said: “The strength of an artist’s creative ability depends not only on the imagination of the object of expression, but as a practitioner, his creative ability also depends on the understanding and control of tools and materials. When he not only has rich psychological imagination but also has exquisite physical manipulation, it is possible to create high-quality works of art [7].” Many modern artists take Song painting as an aesthetic reference, understand Song painting in their sketch creation, absorb ancient methods and adapt for their own use, and become a means of expressing emotions. The painters are rooted in tradition, learn the vivid expression of objects, learn and absorb the modeling techniques and concepts of foreign cultures, constantly enrich the language of painting, strive to strengthen the exploration of expression techniques, and create a new look of flower and bird paintings.

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