

# The Illustration Expression of Flower and Plants Based on Expressionism Style

Ren Zuoli<sup>1,a,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Academy of Fine Arts, Tsinghua University, Beijing, 100085, China

<sup>a</sup>rzl05@qq.com

\*Corresponding author

**Abstract:** This study aims to explore the application of Expressionism in illustration creation and its impact on viewers' emotional and visual experiences. Through an in-depth analysis of strategies in composition, color use, and form design, this research reveals how illustration, as a form of visual art, effectively conveys deep emotions and ideas. Based on plant photographs collected during the author's study visit to Europe, the study adopts an Expressionist style for visual re-creation, focusing on the expression of the theme "free growth". The findings indicate that carefully planned composition and clever color combinations can significantly guide viewers' visual experiences, creating the desired atmosphere; meanwhile, the subjective distortion and emotional expression techniques of Expressionism add artistic depth and emotional impact to the illustration works. Moreover, through specific creative practices, this research demonstrates that illustration art can not only beautify visual pages but also profoundly reflect the human inner world and social reality, thereby leaving a deep impression on viewers and eliciting positive emotional responses. The outcomes of this study not only provide new perspectives and strategies for the application of Expressionism in illustration creation but also offer valuable references for illustrators to integrate personal style and emotional expression into their works.

**Keywords:** Illustrations; Expressionism; Illustrations to create

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, with the rapid development of the socio-economic landscape, people's pace of life has accelerated, leading to an increasing demand for cultural and artistic content. Illustration, as an important form of visual art, has found widespread application across various industries. Its ability to effectively convey information, enrich textual content, and attract readers' attention, thereby enhancing the efficiency of information reception, has been recognized and valued. Vegetation elements, as one of the commonly used visual elements in illustrations, have become a focal point of research due to their unique aesthetic appeal and ecological significance. This paper aims to explore the application of vegetation in illustrations and its impact on viewers' emotions and cognition. By analyzing the representation techniques and artistic expressions of vegetation elements in modern illustrations, this study reveals their importance and significance in contemporary visual communication.

This research investigates the multiple roles and functions of vegetation in illustrations through the analysis of its historical evolution, stylistic changes, and modern applications. Particularly under the influence of Expressionism, the study examines how exaggerated and transformed depictions of vegetation can express deeper emotions and thematic ideas. A comparative analysis of the development of vegetation illustrations domestically and internationally shows that Western countries have a more mature illustration industry with a diverse range of artistic expressions. Although China has started later, recent years have seen a vigorous development trend, with illustrators beginning to explore more diversified representation techniques and the new possibilities of vegetation illustrations. These explorations not only enrich the connotations of illustration art but also provide new perspectives on the integration of traditional and modern elements.

Employing various research methods such as background analysis, field surveys, and literature review, this study has collected and organized a wealth of information about vegetation, providing rich inspiration and materials for creative work. Building on this foundation, the paper further discusses how innovative combinations of vegetation elements can be integrated into illustration creation from fresh perspectives, aiming to find a balance between tradition and modernity. Through the power of

visual art, it seeks to enhance people's appreciation of environmental and natural beauty. Through practical application, this research hopes to offer new ideas and methods for vegetation illustration creation, enriching the ways and means by which illustrations convey content.

## 2. Illustration and Expressionism

### 2.1 *The Basic Concept of Illustration and Work Analysis*

Illustration is a comprehensive art form that intersects between the disciplines of fine art and design. It encompasses diverse creative techniques and is not limited by materials or mediums, allowing for varied expressive methods that are not bound by stylistic or technical constraints<sup>[1]</sup>. It is an artistic endeavor aimed at visually presenting text, stories, or ideas. While its origins differ from purely artistic movements like Expressionism, it has historically influenced and been influenced by them. Just as Japanese ukiyo-e prints influenced Western art masters, illustrations incorporate characteristics of various artistic movements from different periods. Today, despite the ever-expanding realm of photographic media, the heyday of illustration may seem like a bygone era, yet the vitality of illustration persists [2]. Despite differing interpretations of illustration, largely due to individual backgrounds and visual comprehension, its fundamental function is to visually represent textual content or convey specific ideas. A notable characteristic distinguishing illustration from other fine art works is its often clear commercial objectives and target audience, demonstrating strong visual communicative qualities.

Illustration works can generally be categorized into three types: 1) works serving religious and sovereign purposes; 2) commercial or literary works centered around specific themes; and 3) untitled works created by artists based on their subjective impressions. These categories reflect the transition of illustration from a singular function to diverse expressions, acting not merely as a visual enhancement but as a medium that triggers deep exploration of content. From the murals in Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes, the world's largest and richest Buddhist art sanctuary, to the classic works of Aubrey Beardsley, one of the most important painters in late 19th-century Britain, such as "The Mysterious Rose Garden," illustrations have displayed a wide range of representational techniques and themes<sup>[2]</sup>. Modern artists like Anselm Kiefer and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, through their unique perspectives and the influence of Expressionism, have elevated illustration to new artistic heights. This indicates the blurring lines between illustration and pure art works, as well as the trend of interdisciplinary integration within artistic creation. As an art form, illustration is not only a visual decoration or supplement; it is an important medium capable of independently expressing, narrating stories, and conveying deep-seated ideas. With the advancement of technology and the expanding boundaries of the art world, the value and influence of illustration will continue to be explored and valued.

### 2.2 *Expressionism: Basic Concepts and Analysis of Works*

Expressionism is one of the significant art movements of the 20th century in the Western world, later expanding into a broad cultural trend. In Western painting, Expressionism emphasizes the artist's individuality and emotions, aiming to express inner emotions and experiences through artworks<sup>[3]</sup>. The term was notably employed by the renowned painter Julien Auguste Hervé to distinguish his work from Impressionism, marking a clear departure. Subsequently, a group of German artists innovated upon traditional painting elements such as composition, technique, and color, further enriching the concept and establishing Expressionism as a distinct artistic faction. Chinese masters such as Wu Guanzhong, Zao Wou-Ki, and Wu Guanzhong, despite their diverse backgrounds, are collectively recognized as representatives of Expressionism due to their shared artistic pursuits.

In terms of work analysis, Edvard Munch's creation, such as his famous piece "The Scream" , demonstrates deep psychological struggle and social critique through unique perspectives and intense use of color. His work not only profoundly influenced subsequent Expressionist artists but also explored new forms of artistic expression. Wassily Kandinsky's "Composition VII" illustrates the direct connection between color and emotion, showcasing the phenomenon of synesthesia in art, thereby deepening the understanding of Expressionism's use of color and emotional expression. The impact of Expressionism on illustration creation is evident in various aspects, including composition, color use, form design, and emotional expression. The movement encourages artists to transcend the limits of reality, conveying stronger emotions and viewpoints through exaggeration and transformation, thus rendering illustration works not only as a medium of information transmission but also as powerful

tools for personal emotion and social critique expression, as demonstrated by Riccardo Guasco's papercut style illustrations.

The Expressionist painters active in Germany opposed and disregarded the objective representation of things in favor of questioning and resonating with their own consciousness. They sought to explore the deeper connotations of societal matters and aimed to vigorously manifest and express the personal demands and self-spirit within themselves [4]. This not only enriches the connotation of illustrations but also expands their function and value in art and society. Representative works reveal that Expressionism is not merely an artistic style but also a perspective that profoundly reflects the human inner world and social reality, exerting a lasting impact on subsequent artistic creations.

### 3. Practical Research on "Free Growth" Flora Illustration Creation

#### 3.1 Topic Exploration and Preliminary Planning

The design of illustrations serves as an artistic form to convey information and express creativity through imagery, while skillful use of elements can imbue illustration works with unique historical and cultural connotations, as well as emotional expression [5]. The creation of this series of works stems from a three-month European study abroad experience, during which the diverse exotic vegetation encountered inspired the author to conceive a picture book themed around "Free Growth". This topic aims to delve into the intricate relationships between urban environments and nature, interactions between humans and the natural world, and interpersonal dynamics, all while offering the potential for rich visual and emotional experiences. Through meticulous composition, color, and form changes, the goal is to enhance the emotional resonance and reading experience of viewers, thereby more effectively conveying the essence of the story content and artistic expression.

A set of exceptional illustrations should display a unified yet unique visual language, demanding consistency in overall style and form, and adherence to an internal logic in the choice of brushstrokes and colors. At this stage, I systematically organized and analyzed the collected materials, explored various styles, and experimented with different painting media. This process involved precise definition of vegetation forms, accurate line drawing, and careful planning of the layout of elements within the scene. Preliminary planning established a solid foundation for the illustration creation, aiming to present an audience with a forest adventure that is both realistic and imaginative through the power of art. This endeavor challenges individual creative skills and constitutes an in-depth exploration of illustration art techniques.

#### 3.2 Analysis of Composition and Layout

As a visual representation of textual content, the style and composition of an illustration are directly influenced by the theme of the text. The illustrations in this study are based on plant photographs taken during the study visit. These photos, carefully selected and organized, serve as the basis for the re-creation of flora and plant varieties. Particularly, the exotic vegetation typical of Southern France, displaying characteristics of Expressionism with bold compositional techniques and bright, fashionable colors, aligns closely with the thematic requirements of the chosen topic.

In the specific environmental conditions of Southern France, the growth forms and colors of various plants have undergone significant changes. For instance, succulents and aloe plants exhibit orange-red edges on their leaves due to intense sunlight; cacti, typically challenging to bloom, are shown fully flowered, providing a wealth of visual material and creative inspiration. As illustrated in Figure 1, from left to right are: Golden Barrel Cactus, Cactus, Sixam Pointer, Variegated Agave, and Snake Plant.



Figure 1: The various types of vegetation in the town of Èze in Southern France

Through the aforementioned analysis, this study aims to explore the setting and compositional strategies of illustrations under the influence of Expressionism through meticulous material collection and re-creation efforts. It endeavors to not only maintain visual aesthetics but also fully convey the deep themes and emotions embedded in the text. This process constitutes an in-depth exploration of illustrative art techniques and provides a new perspective and methodological foundation for future research and creation in related fields.

In the process of illustration creation, the setting of composition is usually the primary consideration, as it directly affects the viewer's visual experience. To intricately cultivate the atmosphere of the vegetation scene, the composition of the illustrations in this study is developed on three levels: initially, the drawing of large scenes highlights the lushness of the vegetation and the overall atmosphere; subsequently, the depiction of mid-scenes focuses on showcasing the diversity of plant species; and finally, the close-up detail portrayal emphasizes the specific characteristics of certain plants (Figure 2).

In terms of brushwork and form, this study prefers to use more relaxed strokes and natural shapes to achieve the fluidity of the overall picture. At the same time, by reimagining the materials from actual photographs, including adjustments to form, addition of structures, and color processing, this study aims to enrich the visual layers of the picture and enhance the expressiveness of the artwork. Furthermore, due to regional differences and environmental factors, the shape and color of plants exhibit significant variations in different areas, such as succulents and aloe vera changing color due to intense sunlight, and cacti blooming unusually in non-native environments. These phenomena provide a richer source of creative inspiration for the color and composition design of the images.



Figure 2: Preliminary Rendering of Foreground and Background Line Drafts

In the initial composition setting, aside from focusing on the lush and strikingly contrasted vegetation as the main subject, consideration was also given to incorporating figures and certain architectural details as a means to enhance the atmosphere and embellish the scene, aiming to add interest to the visual presentation. However, while these additional elements enriched the imagery, they somewhat diluted the purity of the thematic expression of the work. To strengthen the thematic expression of the image, enhance the vividness of color contrast, and make the emotional conveyance more direct, it was decided to remove figures and architectural elements from the scene. This decision was made to concentrate on the meticulous control of plant forms and the intense collision of color contrasts. By simplifying the elements within the image, a purer representation of natural beauty was achieved. This approach not only highlighted the visual impact of the plant elements but also strengthened the emotional significance of the work, embodying the concept of "less is more" in artistic creation. This creative experience underscores the importance of precise compositional choices and element adjustments in visual art, effectively guiding viewers to experience and understand the core theme the artist wishes to express.

### **3.3 Practical Creation of "Free Growth" Floral and Plant Illustrations**

In the process of illustration creation, the composition and color strategy significantly influence the viewer's visual experience and reading rhythm. This section is divided into the following key points for detailed elucidation.

#### **3.3.1 Composition Form**

The inspiration for the composition comes from the observed growth forms of flora and plants, which display loose, singular, or balanced distributions in nature. By differentiating and magnifying certain characteristics of these natural forms, this study aims to enrich the visual layers of the image, allowing for the magnification of individual floral parts to highlight details and enable viewers to more deeply appreciate the uniqueness of plants (Figure 3).



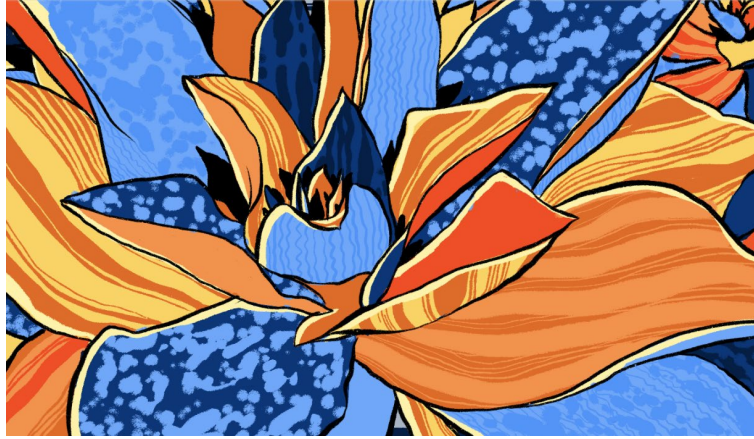


Figure 3: "Free Growth"

### 3.3.2 Use of Color

The selection and application of colors are contingent upon the author's personal feelings and the concepts they wish to convey. Employing color strategies such as contrasting and complementary colors aims to provide viewers with a pleasurable visual experience on one hand and, on the other, to create a new way of depicting plants with varying brightness, saturation, and color combinations, imparting a modern visual impact to the image (Figure 4).

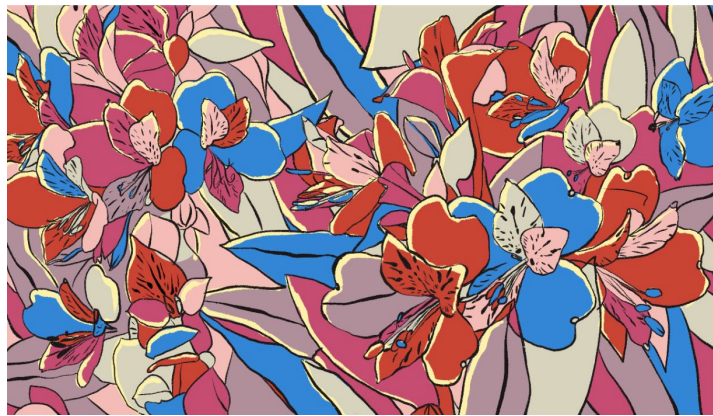


Figure 4: "Free Growth"

### 3.3.3 Form

The illustration works extensively utilize the depiction method of lines and shapes, employing exaggerated and dynamic lines to make plant forms more exaggerated. The flexibility of the lines showcases the natural, free, and vibrant state of plant growth, further enhancing the vitality of the image (Figure 5).

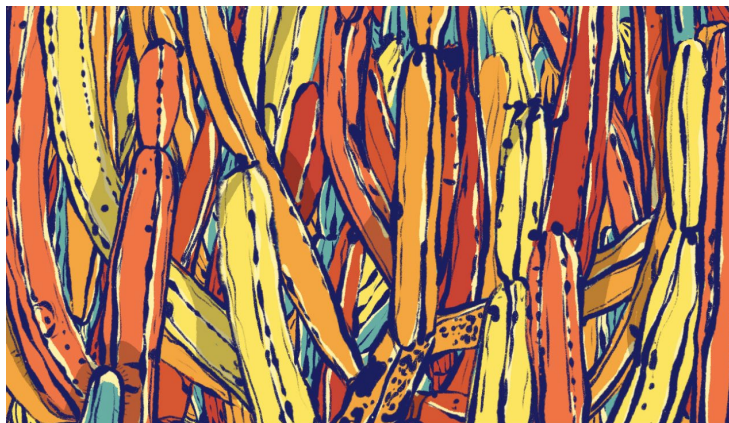


Figure 5: "Free Growth"

### 3.3.4 Ideational Expression of the Image

Unlike the early Expressionist works that often focused on the expression of negative emotions, this study's works concentrate on conveying the positive aspects of life, such as the vitality of plants, the inclusiveness of the environment, and the richness of the world's colors, with the hope of inspiring viewers to recognize and feel the beauty of life. This subjective and personalized emotional expression reflects the author's profound understanding of the ideational quality of the image (Figure 6).



Figure 6: "Free Growth"

### 3.3.5 Impact on Viewers' Feelings

Through meticulous composition, form, and color design, the illustrations in this study aim to convey an optimistic mood and vigorous vitality. It is expected that viewers, upon appreciating these works, will experience a positive resonance within, feeling the beauty of the environment and life, thereby generating a positive emotional experience (Figure 7).



Figure 7: "Free Growth"

## 4. Conclusion

This study, by exploring the application of Expressionist style in illustration creation, has revealed the significance of composition, color usage, and form design in conveying emotions and ideas. Through in-depth research on the plant theme and innovative visual expressions, it demonstrates how artistic treatment can guide the viewer's visual experience and create the desired emotional atmosphere. The "Free Growth" project practice not only underscores the importance of color and composition in artistic creation for the presentation of images but also showcases the unique value of different art movements in enhancing viewer emotions. Applying Expressionism's subjective distortion and abstraction to the art of illustration not only enriches the expressive forms of visual art but also deepens the illustrative works' capacity for emotional and intellectual conveyance. It provides illustrators with

new perspectives and creative strategies, offering fresh approaches for integrating personal style and emotional expression into their works.

### References

- [1] Zou Keyin. *Illustration narrative construction of regional cultural visual turn* [J]. *Art Observation*, 2023 (12):80-81.
- [2] Taki. H. *Centennial tide of illustration history* [J]. *Collection*, 2013(14):16-23.
- [3] Zhao Xinlei, Zhao Xinbei. *Research on the embodiment and application of expressionism in Western painting art* [J]. *Beauty and Times (China)*, 2023(07):93-95. DOI:10.16129/j.cnki.mysdz.2023.07.035.
- [4] Guo Ting. *The art form of German Expressionism* [J]. *Drama House*, 2018(10):144.
- [5] Li Yanyan, Du Yueting, Zhang Lijun. *Application of Chinese traditional culture in illustration design* [J]. *Shanghai Packaging*, 2023(09):52-54. DOI:10.19446/j.cnki.1005-9423.2023.09.017.