

# Crayon Drawing of *Grandma Van Gogh*

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**Abstract:** *The most primitive farming, the most simple smile, and rural life will always be an inexhaustible source of creative inspiration for painter Chang Xiufeng. Her painting works take the rural natural features as the main theme, and use flat techniques to paint, and have personal characteristics in terms of subject matter, shape, color and composition.*

**Keywords:** *Chang Xiufeng, countryside, crayon painting*

## 1. Introduction

Chang Xiufeng is an ordinary rural old lady in Fangcheng County, Nanyang. She was brought to Guangzhou by her son when she was getting old. She was very unsuitable for urban life and stayed at home every day. Her favorite thing to do is chat with her little granddaughter and tell the story of her hometown to her little granddaughter. When she talked about the hawthorn tree planted in her hometown, no matter how she described it, the little granddaughter couldn't understand what a hawthorn tree was. So she picked up her little granddaughter's crayon and drew a hawthorn tree with red fruit and green leaves on the paper. After she finished drawing, she showed it to her little granddaughter, who immediately understood what a hawthorn tree looked like. Chang Xiufeng originally painted to let his little granddaughter know his hometown, but he became addicted to painting. From painting the hawthorn tree, the old lady created more than 100 works unknowingly. After seeing the painting, my son felt that Chang Xiufeng's work was a bit like the post-impressionist painter Van Gogh's work, so he put her work on the blog. Unexpectedly, Chang Xiufeng's paintings were quickly and widely forwarded by netizens, and she became popular on the Internet. Her paintings are bright, vivid and vivid, similar to Van Gogh's painting style, especially her sunflower, so she is affectionately called "Grandma Van Gogh" and Van Gogh in rural China by netizens. Media outlets in mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and some European countries scrambled to report Chang Xiufeng and her miraculous work. Chang Xiufeng held a solo exhibition in Hong Kong, and was invited twice by Phoenix Satellite TV to have an appointment with Luyu. In the program, Chang Xiufeng said: "I don't understand Van Gogh's "Starry Sky", but Van Gogh's sunflowers are not as good as mine, because sunflowers cannot be placed in vases, and sunflowers will die without water and soil [1]." She He also published two albums, "The World of Grandma Van Gogh" and "Our Countryside". The famous French photographer Claude Rubens has collected her crayon painting "Pomegranate". Rubens said that Grandma Van Gogh, like him, did not show art with machines and pens, but with heart [2]. Many netizens also said that seeing nostalgia in her paintings made people miss their hometown. Even the famous painter Chen Danqing said that she is a fan of Chang Xiufeng. Chen Danqing praised her paintings for their "simple shock and pure spiritual expression. She observes and feels the true meaning of life with pure and flawless eyes [3]."

## 2. Subject matter

In Chang Xiufeng's paintings, various flowers and trees appear the most. There is a wide river in her hometown with a meandering channel and the water is very clear. There are a dozen willow trees on the shore, swaying in the wind. Following a winding path and climbing up the hillside is the village where she lives. An old elm tree towered into the sky, two bean trees were only an arm's length, and the yard was full of yellow leaves. On the left are several newly built brick houses and on the right an old mud house. There are some faded couplets on the earthen walls of the house, and the scene here is very consistent with that depicted in "Grandma Van Gogh's "Old House and Trees in the Jiang Family". The people and objects depicted in her works are basically familiar to the rural people. For example, "Corn and Beans" is the most common crop in the countryside. The corn plants are widely spaced, and

some other crops are usually inserted in the corn field. Therefore, the combination of corn and beans is in line with common sense, exuding a strong local flavor.

Chang Xiufeng likes the flowers and plants he paints the most, especially peonies, lotuses and sunflowers. When someone asked her why she liked to paint these themes, she said: "Peony represents happiness, sunflower represents youth and vitality, and lotus represents purity and nobility." Someone once asked her to paint at a high price, but she refused all of them. Some people say that she is stupid and rich and doesn't know how to earn, and she has no concept of "fame and fortune". Like most old ladies in the countryside, she pursues family happiness and a peaceful life. She paints the rural life that is or has passed away, showing a simple and broad love. She said that the purpose of her painting is to let her granddaughter know more about the place where she lives, and to provide the children with materials for understanding the countryside.

Chang Xiufeng misses his hometown and his friends occasionally go back to the countryside to find inspiration for his own painting creations. Every time she returned to her hometown, she would sit in the village to sketch with her own painting tools, and often one painting would take an afternoon. She said: "I don't know what's going on. Sometimes when I paint, I feel like I can't finish the painting. I want to paint and I want to paint. I feel like I want to paint all the beautiful things in the village [5]." Grandma Chang Xiufeng also tried to paint other things, such as the Great Wall, Yuanmingyuan, high-rise buildings in Guangzhou, or big parks, but these seem to be very reluctant compared to the life in the countryside she painted, showing a weak and unfamiliar expression, obviously This is a reflection of her inability to integrate well with city life.

Chang Xiufeng's paintings reveal the kind of simple, natural and sincere feelings, and do not pursue fame and fortune. Her paintings do not have the points, lines, tones, and perspective of professional painters, but they are very realistic. The flowers, birds, trees, mountain villages and rivers in her paintings are also her friends for many years. Those flowers and plants that have been forgotten by others are all installed in Chang Xiufeng's heart. Her paintings convey a love of rural life and labor, which are rare for professional painters.

### 3. Color

Chang Xiufeng's paintings are strongly subjective in form, color and composition. In terms of color, Chang Xiufeng often uses solid colors. Because she has not studied painting systematically and has not received professional guidance, she has no concept of primary colors, secondary colors, and complex colors, and the particularity of crayon materials also limits the mixing of colors. Therefore, Chang Xiufeng uses his favorite festive colors or subjective colors, and adopts the method of flat painting, so that the picture effect has the characteristics of strong contrast and bright colors.



Figure 1: Pomegranate and hawthorn in autumn

The colors in Chang Xiufeng's paintings are very expressive. She painted "Pomegranate and Hawthorn in Autumn" for her little granddaughter (Fig. 1) with pure, natural and vivid colors. She doesn't know how to distinguish between warm and cool shades of color, red is red and green is green. She said: "This hawthorn tree is sturdy. In summer, the leaves are green and green, and in autumn there will be many red hawthorn fruits [6]." Therefore, she uses the expression technique of exaggerated color purity to create. For example, she uses pure red or vermilion to express the sun, and lake blue to express the sea; she also dares to use contrasting colors and high-purity primary colors to enhance the brightness of the picture, forming a rough, bright, simple and warm color style.

As a folk painter, Chang Xiufeng likes to use simple red, yellow, blue and green in her paintings to express the countryside in her eyes, such as: golden corn, green vegetables, purple sweet potatoes, big red peony flowers, Bright orange oranges and more. The inherent color purity of these objects is high, and the color contrast is strong, forming an intuitive, bright and fresh picture effect. "Ripe Sunflowers" uses bold colors. The emerald green leaves and bright yellow petals of the sunflowers set the vivid tone of the picture. The two ripe sunflowers have strong colors. The color contrast of the whole painting is strong, the visual impact is great, and they reflect each other, which is gorgeous and not ordinary. In Chang Xiufeng's work "Yuanmingyuan in the Eyes of an Old Lady", she changed her attitude towards color and used strong contrasting colors. Only a few small flowers use yellow, and the whole is a melancholy blue tone. Chang Xiufeng paints with the simplest colors for the most direct expression, with strong and simple feelings.

#### 4. Composition

Chinese painting pays attention to the relationship between density and density. There must be a sense of rhythm in gathering and separation, and there are many composition methods. Western painting pays attention to the compositional rules of triangles. These "Grandma Van Gogh" may not understand or explain them at all, but in her paintings, they unconsciously use these rules and pay attention to formal beauty.



Figure 2: Autumn in my hometown

From the perspective of composition, Chang Xiufeng sometimes uses a "bird's eye view" composition method in order to express images seen from different angles in one painting. Her paintings reflect the flatness and decoration of folk art, drawing images seen from multiple viewpoints in one painting. The structure of the picture is complete and dense. The pictures created by this plane composition method have a large capacity, especially when painting relatively large scenes, if you want to express the painted objects more comprehensively, you will use this "bird's eye view" composition method. "Autumn in My Hometown" (figure 2) is an example, a free-spirited and bold "bird's-eye view" composition, she migrates things seen from different angles into one picture until the painting is full, thus solving different viewpoints, different time, different space, this kind of composition method that breaks time and space has a strong decorative effect.

## 5. Technique

Chang Xiufeng's paintings are mainly crayons, and some of his paintings also use colored lead and gouache. She also innovated her own unique techniques, such as scraping smooth lines with a toothpick, and using decorative paint to spread on the canvas to create a snow effect. These effects make up for the detailed performance that crayons cannot draw, and also reflect the requirements of folk painting to tend to the overall effect. From the perspective of painting techniques, Chang Xiufeng's method of painting is to "paint whatever you look like". She hardly talks about the principles and techniques of painting, and she can also get unexpected results. Her works are mostly flat, and the objects in her paintings rarely have a three-dimensional sense. Most of her works are directly painted with crayons, and there are also some works that are filled with color. In some of her works, the base color is first painted, and then the lines are drawn according to the needs, such as "Growing Sunflowers"; there are also works such as "Corn and Beans", in which toothpicks, oil painting knives or other simple tools are used to describe the texture on the base color. Or leaf veins, forming a special mechanism to enrich the picture.

## 6. Style

Chang Xiufeng's works belong to realism, and her modeling is simple and generalized, moderately exaggerated, and abstractly beautified. Chang Xiufeng lived in an unfamiliar metropolis after getting old, away from her beloved hometown. She used a brush to describe various things in her hometown, which comforted her thoughts and feelings. When the works spread on the Internet, it resonated with the wandering children in other places to miss their hometown.

## 7. Conclusion

The picture of "Grandma Van Gogh" is simple, natural and intuitive, and it can vividly express the innermost things. Her works contain a lot of homesickness and love for their hometown, which evokes wandering wanderers' memories of childhood, parents and hometown. "Grandma Van Gogh" and her paintings brought warmth and touch to the people who met them.

## References

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