

Naive Way-Thoughts on Portrait Creation

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Abstract: *As a master in fine art in twentieth century, Matisse gave up the completed painting system and techniques during the Renaissance. He drew nourishment from primitive art and Eastern painting, and began to paint in a more direct, naive and simple way. I also try to follow this approach during my painting creation. This article is divided into three parts to explain the naivety in portrait creation. The first part is the original intention of my topic selection and the significance of the research topic; the second part introduces in detail the characteristics and reasons of Matisse's portrait painting; the third part is my creative practice and my thinking in the process.*

Keywords: *Naivety, Matisse, Portrait creation.*

1. Introduction

Renaissance artists' research on the scientific nature of the picture and the beauty and the exquisiteness of the picture have reached a height that is unattainable for later generations. However, the invention of the camera in the 1830s hardly left any market space for purely realistic portrait painting. The First World War and the Second World War made people tired of the fruits of the Industrial Revolution, and people began to rethink the meaning of painting. As an artist who has experienced two world wars, Matisse began to abandon the pursuit of technology and science, and began to paint with the original painting method. He began to shift from the study of light and shadow volume to the study of painting language, and from the exploration of science to the exploration of spirit.

2. The Naivety of Matisse's Portrait

2.1 *The Influence of Eastern Philosophy on Matisse*

Chinese painting emphasizes 'the harmony between man and nature', and believes that the world cannot be grasped by the senses, that is, 'Turn the intentional into the unintentional'. We can grasp the origin of the world only by soul. So China has a painting method of 'preparing a draft by collect varieties of information', this means that through the experiencing the mountains and rivers, travelling, and then describing the object, the author cares more about his own feelings about the object, rather than the visual appearance. The Chinese believe that only those that have been separated and filtered have the power to impact people's souls. At the same time, through the communication between 'nature' and 'self' to express one's artistic and character pursuit, so 'plum, orchid, bamboo, chrysanthemum' will be hailed by the Chinese as the four gentlemen, and this is the fusion of man and nature, and also the result of personality cultivation.

With the exchange of Eastern and Western cultures, Europeans became interested in Eastern philosophical ideas for centuries. The British art historian Sullivan in the 20th century believed that 'the important development of modern Western art has obvious similarities with Eastern painting'. Starting from Impressionism, Western artists gradually realized that art is the work of the artist's soul. It is not straightforward, and requires artists to create "second reality" in pure art. This is very similar to the materialization concept in Eastern philosophy.

For example, Matisse was deeply influenced by Eastern philosophy. He wrote in Matisse on Art: There is an old Chinese saying 'When you paint a tree, you must feel that you are growing with it'. Once, someone told Matisse that his paintings looked like children's drawings. He was very happy about this and replied: This is exactly what I am pursuing. In Matisse's theory of art, there is an article, Looking at Life with Children's Eyes, expounding his observation method of seeing the world with children's eyes. He pointed out that creation begins with watching, and watching itself is a creative activity. The so-called

'seeing the world from the eyes of children' means seeing things without prejudice, which requires courage. He also said in a conversation with Andre Wilde: "One must know how to maintain the freshness in childhood when he or she contacts with things, and must maintain its innocence and simplicity. A person must always be a child in his life, even if he is already an adult, he must derive his power from the existence of objective things, and not let the existence of objective things hinder his imagination." In fact, the reason why the painter brings this feeling to the viewer is the manifestation of the painter's attainment of a fairly high level of accomplishment, which is definitely not something that children's paintings can achieve.

'The wise find joy in water; the benevolent find joy in mountains'. In Matisse's paintings, there is a kind of beautiful, leisurely, and relaxed spirit of a wise man (Figure 1). Matisse has publicly stated that what I dream of is a harmonious, pure, and peaceful art. He avoids disturbing and frustrating subjects. This is an art that is both a businessman and an artist. Like a comfortable chair, it soothes the soul and comforts the tired body. Like Munch and Florida, in the history of art, many artists expressed pain and anxiety. At the beginning, I thought it was related to the life experience of painters. Perhaps these painters experienced a lot of unhappiness in their lives. However, later I discovered that not all painters are like this, because Matisse has also experienced a lot of suffering and pain throughout his life. He is a man who has experienced two world wars. He first came into contact with painting because he was ill and had been lying in the hospital doing nothing, and then his mother bought a box of pigment for him to paint. In his later years, he suffered from bowel cancer, and he couldn't do without a wheelchair, his eyesight was not good, so he couldn't paint. However, he did not complain, but changed his art to another way—he started paper-cutting and collage (Figure 2). An open-minded philosophy of life can be felt from Matisse's life experience and paintings, which is especially like the Chinese poet Su Shi. Matisse was experiencing suffering and used his own art form to construct his suffering, instead of directly painting the suffering itself.

2.2 Features of Matisse's Portrait Painting

Matisse's paintings have Western characteristics and a strong Eastern feeling at the same time. Appreciating Matisse's sketches (Figure 3) will give people a sense of relaxation and leisure as well as a unique sense of humor. In his later years, he painted some works on paper with ink (Figure 4), and also painted some paintings on tiles. These paintings have a certain similarity with the frescoes in Dunhuang and the Wei and Jin Dynasties (Figure 5). Some of his paintings show traces of cloth, but there is no roughness or feeling of incomplete painting. On the contrary, they are very breathable and relaxed, which is similar to the white space of Chinese paintings.

3. My Portrait Creation

3.1 Painter Who Influenced Me

Chang Yu is my favourite painter who once said that 'There is nothing in my life, I am just a painter. Regarding my work, I don't think there is any need to give any explanation. When viewing my work, you should clearly understand what I want to express... is just a simple concept'. Schopenhauer said that there are two ways of not wanting to keep up with the trend: either before the trend or after the trend. And Chang Yu is a painter not following the trend, which caused him to have almost no reputation during his lifetime. In his paintings, there is a kind of Oriental Zen 'less is more'. When he drew women (Figure 6), kittens, elephants, and puppies, even though the brushwork he used was already very simple, he still tried to reduce its strokes. His paintings often touch me with heartache.

I like Modigliani's shapes, colors, and the sense of form in the paintings, as well as the hollowness and melancholy of the characters in his paintings (Figure 7). Chang's paintings are too weak and slender. If Chang is an unqualified poet, Modigliani is a melancholy prince. His paintings have a sense of solemnity and aristocracy. The shapes of the characters in his paintings, the distribution of geometric shapes, the use of lines, and the relationship between positive and negative shapes are all worthy of my study.

Umehara Ryosaburo's paintings are very clumsy, and they are very bold and old-fashioned. There are many rough and clumsy lines in his paintings, and the shapes are also very interesting. I particularly like (Figure 8) the way of painting clouds

3.2 My learning process

I seem to understand early on that gorgeous techniques are not enough to impress people, but at the same time I haven't found a way of painting that I like. I can't find happiness and sense of accomplishment when I paint, so I almost gave up for a while. Later, in the summer of my sophomore year, I took teacher Li Shijin's sketching class. When I first started the class, it was very painful. I couldn't immerse myself in the details of the pictures and didn't have the courage to abandon them. One day my easel and frame fell into the river due to the wind, and I had to start painting a new picture. In a hurry, I chose a smaller frame. And because of the small frame, I have time to think more about the composition of the picture and adjust the color over and over again. I have always been obsessed with color, and I always adjust the color again and again until I am satisfied. Even though I worked hard, I still hadn't finished the painting. As a result, when I finally handed in the painting at night, I had to hand in a painting that had no volume and was very incomplete in my opinion (Figure 9). However, Teacher Li Shijin said that I have made progress in painting. He said: 'Only when you find your own interest, can the painting you draw move people.' The painting I thought I had not finished is actually complete. This is because the beauty of the scenery itself is already very complete. In a sense, painting is to convey the beauty and emotions that people experience. When the emotions are complete, the painting is complete. Later, when I was drawing a house and a big tree, I made bolder choices. First of all, I spent a long time choosing the scenery I like. Then I thought about the composition, and adjusted each color to the grayscale that I was satisfied with over and over again. Later, this painting became a work I was very satisfied with and this process is an essential and crucial for my development (Figure 10). Through this sketching, I understood that sincerity is a very important quality in painting. I began to face nature very religiously, to observe and feel it, instead of treating a painting with paradox.

However, at that time, my understanding of the picture was only limited to the flatness and color adjustment. Later, I took an oil painting portrait class given by Mr. Zhan He. Because I oversimplified the objects, the characters on the painting were dull and lifeless. Under the guidance of the teacher, I started to carefully observe the shape of the characters, and try to find interesting points on the characters as much as possible, so that the picture naturally becomes interesting (Figure 11). I changed the previous general flat coating into a shape based on my own observation and summary, and started to present my previous knowledge of volume in a flat way. I think this is a transformation of my perception of flatness to abstraction. I learned not only to simply flatten something, but also to try to paint people as plants and at the same time to paint plants as people. This made me immersed in it. Later, I took a lesson in character creation by Teacher Tian. He always encouraged me, never restricted me, and made me paint works that I am very satisfied with. (Figure 12, 13, 14).

Later, I took the class given by Teacher Sun Gang, and he taught us painting step by step. This made me understand the importance of the language of painting and the character of the painting. The important thing about the painting is not the technique but the language, and the quality of the painting depends largely on the artist's own quality and cultivation (Figure 15). At the same time, I discovered a problem in my painting. Due to my inadequate observation and insufficient generalization ability, I would make a painting too decorative, because my previous habit was to simplify something and always I want to paint well at a time, so that the colors and shapes are somewhat stuffless. He taught us to paint repeatedly. Through this kind of repetition and adjustment, the picture will slowly become more attractive. After learning this method, it makes me bolder when I paint because I understand every color I paint on the canvas. Every shape is important. Even if it is covered up in the end, it is still useful. Even if my painting is finally presented in a simple form, thinking outside the picture and constantly adjusting and destroying is a complex Process (Figure 16). In fact, when we draw every object, we are drawing ourselves. Through painting over and over, repeatedly destroying, thinking, and adjusting, naturally what you want to express is condensed on the screen. As the German poet Heine wrote: 'When people talk about things like apocalypse and inspiration there, I work as meticulously as a jeweler strikes a lock'. In many cases, what an artist needs is this persistent and simple heart.

4. My creative process and reflection

When I started to create portraits, I drew some drafts and character sketches (Figure 17). The sketch is to quickly grasp the feeling of the object (pictures 18 and 19), and the draft is to better grasp the big relationship of the picture. At the beginning, I didn't like drawing sketches at all, thinking that sketching was very boring and dull. Later, after seeing some landscape paintings by Mi Fu and Bada Shanren, I suddenly wondered, isn't this a Chinese sketch? They even abandoned the use of color, leaving only black,

white and gray in the picture. However, with such a simple material, so many changes can be drawn to make the picture so interesting. So I started to look at the sketch again, picked up the pencil again, and drew a few pictures seriously and without prejudice. I found that after abandoning the color in the picture, I had to think about the use of black, white and gray, modeling, and lines. This forced me to take the details more seriously. When I am immersed in a sketch, I will find that adjusting the relationship between black, white and gray is as interesting as adjusting a piece of color. By adjusting the gray relationship of the picture, a painting will be richer. Through the adjustment and selection of each shape, it will make this shape more appropriate in the picture, and the processing of the thickness, length, and urgency of the line will make the picture more refined.

After I drew a few sketches, I started to draw a few smaller-sized figures. I have to say that those paintings were relatively unsuccessful works. In order to avoid the sense of study of the works, I chose a more complicated background, and later found that the pictures were quite messy. I began to look through the albums of some painters. Among them, many portraits painted by David Hockney in his later years gave me some inspiration. His background and colors are very simple and simple but have a strong visual impact. So I learned not to be entangled in the difference between creation and study, and boldly simplified the background. I wanted to unify the subject through continuous repetition, just like my favorite painters Morandi and Modigliani, tirelessly repeating the same subject. I hope that by repeating the subject of portrait painting, I can have a more in-depth study of a thing. I can have new experiences and gains with each painting. When one day my portraits have formed a certain number, I will put them together to form a momentum through the number, and at the same time they have their own independent appearance and the difference. When I officially started a painting, I first used a large brush to draw the background quickly. I was always in a good mood. The picture at this time was always relaxed, and at the same time I could grasp the feeling of the character itself. I really like the hearty feeling of the characters relaxing at this time. After that, I will fall into a situation where I want to paint but dare not paint. On the one hand, I want to make the picture more in-depth, with more details and more attractive places, on the other hand, I am afraid of destroying the ease of the picture. So I put it there. I go to the studio every day and look at the painting every day. I think through watching and thinking like this, maybe I can know how to change it. After a few days, I became more confident and relaxed when I started painting again. The finished work may still have many deficiencies and immaturities, but I have gained new experience from this painting (Figure 20, twenty one). When creation, I follow a simple and naive way, even without any skills. Most of the time I paint according to my own feelings and nature, which is through flat painting. This makes my paintings present a natural, fresh and poetic feeling. At the same time, I know that a simple form will require greater control over the form and color of the picture, which is what I lack. I hope that in my future studies, I can continuously improve my artistic literacy and become more sensitive and insightful. The form of the picture is simple but the pattern is not simple.

5. Conclusion

Painting system and techniques were completed given up during the Renaissance by Matisse. Instead, he drew nourishment from primitive art and Eastern painting, and began to paint in a more direct, naive and simple way. This approach was applied during my painting creation. This article explains the naivety in portrait creation, including the original intention of topic selection, characteristics and reasons of Matisse's portrait painting and my creative practice and thinking in the process.

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