Overview of the Development of the Use of Text in the Visual Arts

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__Abstract:__ Visual art is often substituted for "Graphic arts," a substitution that fundamentally excludes the written word. However, the use of Characters in the creation of visual art has become a common phenomenon, and it is important to understand the development of text in visual art in a more open Eastern and Western art context, with specific analysis of artists' work.

__Keywords:__ Characters, Chinese and Western art, visual art

1. Text and Western Visual Art

1.1. Cubism Art

The early Cubism paintings of the early twentieth century used text as a compositional element of the picture (Figure 1). Beginning in 1911, Cubism artists experimented with new techniques while deconstructing the forms of their painted objects. They included Braque, Picasso, and others who added typography to their paintings, and Braque's "Portuguese" painting, in which some letters appear, was probably the first painting with letters. This is very different from the hand-painted texture of the painting tradition, but rather an industrially produced symbol used in advertising and the press. The depth of the painting space disappears because of this, and all the formative elements are juxtaposed on the plane of the canvas like these words.

Figure 1: Picasso, Clarinet, Bass Flat, Newspaper, Ace of Clubs, 1914, oil on canvas, 81 x 75 cm, Centre Pompidou, Paris

1.2. Dada Art

Dada art, which began to emerge in 1916, often used the function of words in the service of artworks, with words playing a key role in expressing their artistic ideas. For example, Marcel Duchamp, a central figure in Dada, submitted his work "Fountain" for the exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists in New York: he bought a urinal in a ceramic store and sent it directly to the exhibition, nominating it as a fountain, a "fountain" that subverts our aesthetic habits and breaks with our traditional graphic and textual perceptions. This "fountain" subverts our aesthetic habits and breaks our traditional graphic perceptions, and is the artist's so-called "anti-implication" initiative, using words to powerfully express his resistance to traditional culture and art and traditional aesthetic constraints.

1.3. Pop Art

By the 1950s, Pop Art, which explored popular culture and art and was created with a variety of popular consumer products, sprouted. The focus of Pop Art was to convey information to the public, and text, as one of the most direct ways to convey information, appears more often in Pop Art in the form of collage and slogan printing, which are more commonplace and straightforward expressions.

1.4. Conceptual Art

Words are the medium of ideas, and the first forms of expression in conceptual art were closely related to words. Since the mid-1960s, Joseph Kosuth has been creating works based on language as well as works based on photographs. His activities have explored the production and role of language and meaning in art. Joseph Kosuth's One and Three Chairs, 1965 (Figure 2). The work consists of three parts: the physical chair, a photograph of the chair, and the dictionary definition of the word "chair". The physical chair is an objective object that can be reproduced by photography or painting as an illusion - a photograph of a chair. All three ways of perceiving the chair led to a final concept - the conceptual chair (the literal definition of the chair). Through his work, Joseph Kosuth presents the idea of how to transition the visual form of art directly to the conceptual.

Figure 2: Joseph Kosuth, One and Three Chairs, 1965, wooden folding chair, enlarged photograph of the chair and dictionary text on the word "chair," chair 82 x 37.8 x 53 cm, photograph 91.5 x 61.1 cm, text 61 x 76.2 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York City

2. Chinese Characters and Chinese Visual Arts

For traditional Chinese art, which has its origins in poetry and calligraphy, the written word has always been a central element of artistic creation. The specific way in which Chinese characters are written gives them their own aesthetic characteristics, and Calligraphy writing is an art form in its own right. Chinese calligraphy from the pre-Qin, Qin and Han dynasties, the Wei, Jin and North and South dynasties, the Sui and Tang dynasties, the Song and Yuan dynasties, the Ming and Qing dynasties and contemporary calligraphy can be considered as a separate and complete artistic discipline.

2.1. Chinese Characters and Calligraphy

Chinese characters have always been the foundation of calligraphy. The art of calligraphy is often an activity in which the artist expresses inner emotions through the speed of the written Chinese characters, the trajectory of the lines. Calligraphy is considered to be a means for people to express their emotions. The artistic process of calligraphy focuses on rhythm and rhyme, like music that turns characters into something with life. One can perceive subtle emotions through the ebb and flow of the lines of calligraphic characters.

2.2. Chinese Characters and Painting

The relationship between words and images in Chinese painting has evolved from simple illustration to a subtle intertwining and complete integration. The poet Cao Zhi (192-232 A.D.) described the beautiful God of Luo when he first saw her in his "Luo Shen Fu" (fig. 3): Glorious autumn chrysanthemums and luxuriant spring pines. The famous "Luo Shen Fu" scroll (one of the copies is now in the Liaoning Provincial Museum) by Gu Kai Zhi (c. 344-c. 406) is said to illustrate this poetic meaning with a chrysanthemum and a small pine tree to set off the goddess of Luo. The above two examples show

that words seem to be better than painted images. In the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, painters of the early Northern Song dynasty sought to reproduce the "true" landscape, devoting themselves to grand landscapes in order to reflect the "reason", the universal laws of nature. Painters increasingly drew on poetry for inspiration. By the Southern Song period, painters were always trying to illustrate poetic meanings in their works, and depictions of natural "things" were often accompanied by paintings of related verses, with multiple layers of symbolic meanings and related ideas.

Figure 3: Gu Kaizhi, "Luo Shen Fu" (Song copy), partial, Three Kingdoms period, ink and color on silk, cm. 27.1 × 572.8, in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing

2.3. Chinese Characters and Craft

Chinese characters belong to pictographs, which have the characteristics of pattern and decoration. The structure of Chinese characters embodies rhythmic beauty, which is consistent with becoming a decorative pattern, and various decorative embellishments are needed in crafts. Therefore, the images of characters are widely applied into decorative patterns, forming a unique decorative technique. For example, the seals of the palace, embroidered couplets, folk paper-cutting, and traditional costumes (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Warring States mirror with mountain characters, Warring States, 13.9 cm in diameter, 127 g, The National Palace Museum, Beijing

The appearance of characters on clothing and costumes was determined by the structural form of ancient traditional clothing, the costume process, and the symbolic characteristics of the Chinese character tree and imagery. The real appearance of characters on clothing and costumes began during the Qin and Han dynasties, when the evolution of Chinese characters had matured and their role was mainly for blessing and decoration.

The auspicious script pattern is the use of script as the decorative content of silk patterns, which is also a feature of Chinese brocade (Figure 5). The Chinese characters in the art of paper-cutting, which

fully embodies the patterned nature of the font structure, become beautifully decorated by interspersing graphic patterns that have symbolic auspicious meanings. Fu, Lu, Shou, and Xi are commonly used Chinese characters in paper-cutting art. The character "Fu" in the figure below (Figure 6), which means "five blessings", consists of a combination of peony, a pomegranate, a lotus and a fish, which represent the combination of yin and yang, and a Yuanbao, which symbolizes wealth.
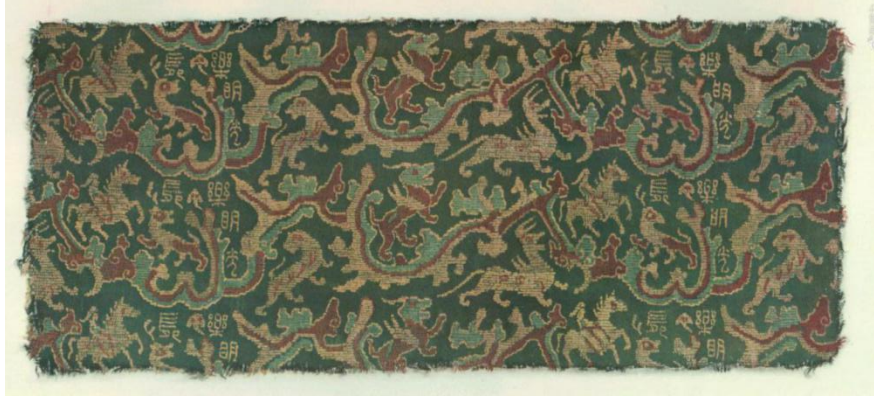

Figure 5: Han Dynasty "Changle Mingguang" brocade, Han Dynasty, cm. 30 × 42.5, Beijing Costume Institute, National Costume Museum, Beijing
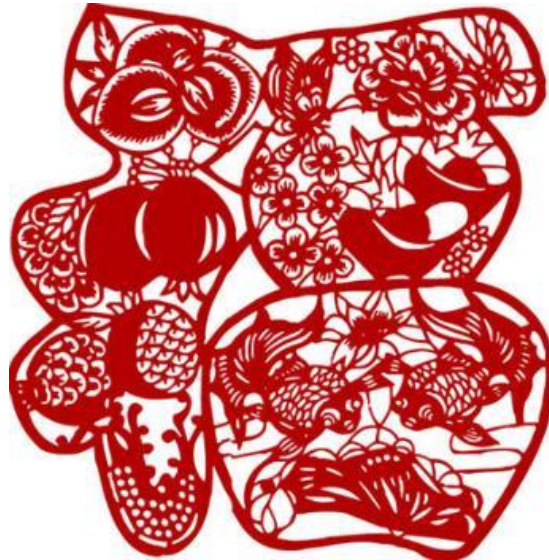

Figure 6: Traditional paper-cutting "Fu"

2.4. Chinese Characters and Architecture

The traditional Chinese gardens with their mountains, water, buildings, flowers and trees vary in height and retreat, pursuing spatial tension and relaxation like the Chinese calligraphic art. Chinese garden planting is deeply influenced by the landscape poetry of the past generations. The Chinese character element is one of the important design elements in traditional Chinese gardens. Its artistic expression is in the form of Chinese calligraphy and Chinese character graphics.

Chinese calligraphy in traditional gardens often specifically in the form of inscriptions, couplets, plaques, screens and other forms of literary and artistic expression, is an important element in the appreciation of garden and forestry. The plaques in landscape garden architecture express the thoughts and feelings of the garden maker and aesthetic cultivation. Such as Chengde summer resort on the main gate of the Li Gate with Manchu, Meng, Chinese, Tibetan, five kinds of words engraved on the door is the Qianlong Emperor ordered people to build. (Figure 7) The inscriptions on the plaques in the Humble Administrator's Garden are not only timeless, but also wonderful calligraphy, seal script, official script, regular script, line, cursive, all the bodies are available, the pen and ink interest of famous artists of the past generations can be sought. The southwest side of Hearing Rain Pavilion is Jiashi Pavilion, and the couplet reads "Mountain and water have clear sound", and the background is green bamboo and Taihu

Lake rocks, and the green bamboo in Jiashi Pavilion is all green, no matter in spring, summer, autumn or winter, the rain falls on different plants, and with the different mentality of people listening to the rain, you can hear the sound of rain with different interests, and the realm is wonderful, and the plaque and couplet echo each other with the building to produce aesthetic effect from the finishing.

The design elements are extracted from Chinese characters and created into Chinese character graphics as decorative elements, which are very beautiful patterns. Most of the texts are auspicious words, such as "Eternal Life" (Figure 8), "Luck and Rich" and other such texts for decoration. For example, the earliest text eaves tile in the Western Han Dynasty used text as an architectural genre, cleverly using text as decorative content to breathe life into the solidified building. The emergence of text eaves tile is a major innovation in the Western Han Dynasty, with epoch-making significance: it created a combination of Chinese characters and architecture, highlighting the humanistic color of architecture, opening up the humanistic landscape of architecture, becoming one of the crystallization points of classical architecture in China, and marking the art of eaves tile towards its heyday and pinnacle. After the Eastern Han Dynasty, the text eaves tile tended to decline.

Figure 7: Plaque on the Li Zhengmen Gate of the Chengde Summer Palace, Chengde

Figure 8: Changle Weiyang-Text Eaves Tile, Han Dynasty, pottery, 17.5 cm in diameter, 1.1 kg in weight, Shaanxi Historical Museum

2.5. Chinese Characters and Conceptual Art

Since 1985, Chinese contemporary art has also continued to explore the use of text, and leading Chinese artists such as Xu Bing, Gu Wenda, and Qiu Zhijie have kept text as a central element in their artworks. Xu Bing's Birds Fly (Figure 9): A text taken from the dictionary explanation of "bird" is placed on the floor of the exhibition hall, which reads, "Bird (niǎo), a class of vertebrates, warm-blooded and oviparous, breathes with its lungs, has feathers all over its body, can walk on its hind limbs, generally

turns its forelimbs into wings, and can fly." With this text as the starting point, the word "bird" began to take off, hanging in the air more than 500 "birds" made of different calligraphic styles, from simplified to traditional, regular, official, seal script, until the ancient pictographs of "bird", fly from the ground to the window. The work "Birds Fly" is an interesting contrast to Joseph Kosuth's One and Three Chairs (Figure 2), the latter juxtaposes the physical chair, the photo of the chair, and the dictionary definition of the word "chair," while Xu Bing restores a conceptual bird to a shaped bird.

Accordingly, the relationship between Chinese characters and visual art is closer than the relationship between words and visual art in Western contexts. This is because English does not have a direct visual connection to the objects it describes as Chinese characters do.
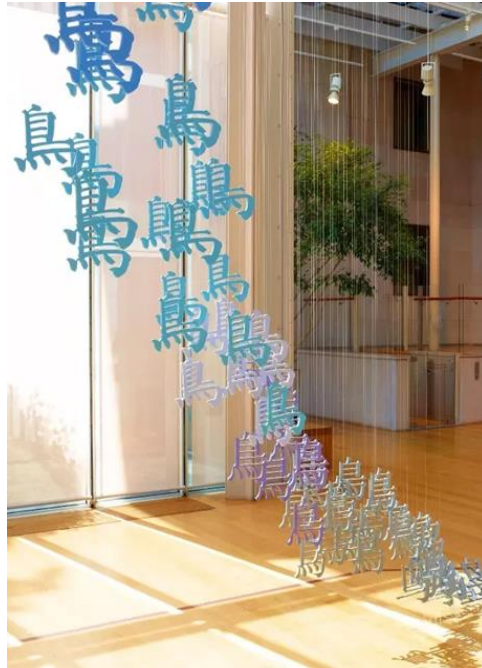

Figure 9: Xu Bing, Birds Fly, 2011, mixed media installation, plastic, laser lettering, spray paint, The Morgan Library-Museum, New York

3. Conclusion

In today's visual art, which is more focused on pursuing and emphasizing philosophical and conceptual aspects, words inevitably appear as an artistic medium. The text is no longer an interpretive relationship that guides the description of a work of art, but is itself a work of art; words and symbols become part of the work, and art is not only viewed visually, but also added to reading and understanding. Although text is not the dominant artistic medium in visual art, it carries a unique cultural nature that blends better with the visual artwork to form a distinctive visual effect. While using text, we should also pay attention to the anchoring function of textual information, and be wary of pursuing "concepts" for excessive interpretation and reliance on text, resulting in certain limited viewing effects.

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