

A Modern Expression of Primitive Art

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Abstract: Primitive art is the childhood period of human art, representing primitive people's lofty ideals of nature, and its works are the materialized expression of their beliefs. However, in today's unprecedented prosperity of modern painting, few people talk about primitive art, instead, it starts to fade into oblivion. Primitive art is generally considered crude and rough. In fact, many famous modern artists have absorbed nutrients in primitive art, and finally formed a school of their own. Primitive art has a strong ability of recreation. The implantation of primitive elements and the expression of primitivism are the manifestations of original ecological creation concepts that are rare in modern art.

Keywords: Primitive Society; Primitive Art; Modern Expression; Original Ecological Creative Concept

1. Primitive Society

H.A.Taine once said: "To understand a work of art, an artist, or a group of artists, one must correctly imagine the spirit and customs of the era to which they belong."^[1] Primitive art is the epitome of primitive society. This is the final interpretation of primitive art and the most basic element for understanding primitive art.

Bourgeois scholars generally believe that the stage of primitive society does not belong to the category of historical scientific research. It is a "self-state", "non-historical" or "prehistoric period", so it cannot be used as the object of human history research. However, standing at the height of dialectical materialism and historical materialism, Engels once pointed out: "With people, we begin to have history."^[2] From this we can see that human beings and human society came into being together. The history of human society consists of two parts. The first is primitive society, which is the beginning of human society and is a society without words. The recorded history is the history of the struggle between human beings and the natural world. At this time, there was no class, no oppression, no exploitation, and everyone was free and equal. Most of this part of history originated from the excavation of archaeological materials, combined with folklore, ethnography, etc. The materials are supplementary. Secondly, it is a class society. Starting from the slave society, it was a period with written history. But the written history is in the hands of the ruling class, and the history is written based on class interests, with class prejudice. Obviously, the original Social history is truly human history, a history without any class prejudices.

From its prelude to the generation of class society, the primitive age occupies the longest time in human history. However, since there was no written language at that time, unlike the historical documents left over from all later stages of history for reference, the historical materials of the primitive era had their own particularity^[3] We can only synthesize and analyze primitive society through anthropology, archaeology, ethnology, linguistics, history and other disciplines. We also need to obtain materials from them by using dialectical materialism and historical materialism to connect these materials together in order to describe a subjective and relatively objective blueprint for the development of primitive society.

2. Primitive Art

Franz Boas wrote in the preface to Primitive Art: "Aesthetic pleasure is to some extent felt by all members of humanity. However, varied the ideal of beauty may be, the aesthetic beauty is everywhere, and the general character of pleasure is the same. There is no difference between the way appreciating the rough song of the Siberian, the dance of black people, the pantomime of the California Indian, the

stone work of the New Zealander, the carving of the Melanesian, the carving of the Alaska and listen to a song with us, watches an art dance, or looks at decorative art, painting, as well as carving. The very existence of song, dance, painting, and carving among tribes as we know them is a testament to the longing and the human capacity to appreciate them."^[4] He believes that the production of primitive art is due to primitive impulsive. The essence of artistic creation is the desire to create beautiful visions. Primitive people created primitive art out of aesthetic impulse.

According to Malinowski, witchcraft is "the experience of expressing strong emotions through purely subjective images, words, and actions."^[5] Primitive religion is the earliest cosmology of primitive humans, and its emotional characteristics are also very obvious. "In primitive people's opinion, nothing is more social than emotion."^[6] Primitive art comes from witchcraft and religion, with a free and open aesthetic theory. Primitive artists are first and foremost manual. An artist, art is an extension of his manual activities, which means that what he produces is essentially for material application, but also brings spiritual pleasure. He does not create art just for aesthetic pleasure, but the original art works and sculpture, which has an attitude towards human beings and the concentrated emotions of nature, a way to relax the human spirit, to explore one's own soul under the appearance of reality, and to explore life with artistic language. Primitive art's intuitive expression of emotions and the use of human beings to express artistic language are inconsistent with what the spirit of humanism advocates.

Primitive art is a dynamic reflection of the beauty of reality, society, and nature. It is manifested in a unique, vivid, and sensible form. It is a materialized form of people's aesthetic consciousness at that time, a strong humanistic spirit is bred in the works, which is mixed with the worship of nature, reproduction, ancestors and labor.

Since there is no writing in the primitive society, painting is the writing of the primitive society. In primitive petroglyphs and cave paintings, we find that most of their artistic expression exists in the form of documentary and narrative. Primitive art is not art for the sake of art. For example, in a large number of artworks of life and tools, in order to catch birds, they paint vivid bird images. This is mainly to achieve the production of life or a higher realm of consciousness to form the idea of artistic beauty and purpose. According to Gombrich, "One thing is quite clear: No one would go all the way down into the terrible depths of the subterranean world just to decorate such an inaccessible place. And, except for the cave of Lascaux with the exception of some of the paintings in Lascaux, the drawings are seldom clearly distributed on the ceiling and walls of the cave. Instead, they are sometimes drawn or inscribed one after the other, with no apparent order. For these, recently, the most reasonable explanation of this phenomenon is still that it is the oldest vestige of that common belief in the power of pictures. A spear or a stone axe beats it hard, and the real beast bows its head and catches it."^[7] This shows that, many original pictures have a certain sense of practicality. The essential feature of primitive art is the reflection of objective reality, which is the essence and feature.

3. Modern Expression

Primitive art presupposes primitiveness. Looking at the history of Chinese and foreign art, you will find that although primitive art is "primitive", it has many followers. Many famous painters and theorists in modern times have strongly advocated primitivism. They draw nourishment from it, and even believe that primitivism in the natural state is the direction of modern art development. For example, Gottfried Semper published "Style in Technical and Artistic Composition" in 1861. His theory is twofold: he deduces art from the requirements of the first purely practical defensive measures, so it seems that the works later appeared to meet artistic and practical needs. Secondly, he found in all the arts certain schemas which, though constantly shifting and diversifying, existed in these arts, which held themselves in basic schemas or "types" origin. The forms of those schemas or "types" are derived from the most basic elementary technical considerations of art.^[8] Here, Semper goes so far as to put all architecture decorative elements and artistic symbols in the development of form are seen as originating in body decoration and related primitive trades.

With the development of modern art, the forms of painting are intricate. In many modern paintings, primitivist thinking is implanted into the works, making the pictures primitive and destructive, and more likely to resonate. Painters often combine their lives with art completely simplifies to express the real self, or to show the most primitive natural state. This is the case with the famous post-impressionist painter Gauguin. He once said in a letter to his family that "You will always find nourishment in primitive art, but I doubt you can find it in the art of mature civilization", which is enough to prove

Gauguin's Success and original art are inextricably linked. Achille Delaroche once described him as a painter of primitive essences, one who "Loved them and had their simplicity and their allusion to the divine and their somewhat clumsy and raw simplicity" The most obvious and direct influence of primitive art on Gauguin's works can be seen in a certain number of his carvings and woodcuts, in which he used the same decorative schema as Marquesas' wood and bone carvings. Marquesas decoration is mainly found on decorative club heads and plinths, but also, in smaller forms, on fan handles, earplugs and crowns. It consists almost entirely of squatting or half-sitting figures. In painting, he subtly integrates his attitude towards primitiveness into the picture, in his most famous painting "Who are we?" Where do we come from? Where are we going? (Figure 1), it can be seen that the whole picture creates a "natural state", which makes us unanimously associate it with primitiveness. He explores primitiveness and his Faith, he constantly and proudly paints himself as a "savage".^[9] This also makes his works occupy an important place in all studies of the influence of primitives on modern painting.



Figure 1: Paul Gauguin "Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going?"

The Fauvism represented by Henri Matisse was different from Gauguin in its expression of primitive art. Fauvism does not directly borrow the original subject matter, nor does it directly imitate the original form. The general theme is a nude bathing in a landscape, a scene that is neither new nor original. Aside from the method of sketching and the expression of color, treatments are done that make it unlike any traditional art. The image is not simply placed in the landscape environment as an activity place, but it maintains the characteristics of people and is completely different from it. They are blended into the landscape by this method and become a part of the landscape. For example, in Matisse's "Dance" (Figure 2), the figures are simplified and the lines are rough and incomplete. The method of flat painting is mainly used, and the color contrast is large. The blue of the background and the orange of the body are drawn in sharp contrasting colors and abandoned the principle of strict perspective in the West. This near-primitive expression method and childlike simple expression made Fauvism leave a brilliant achievement in the history of art.

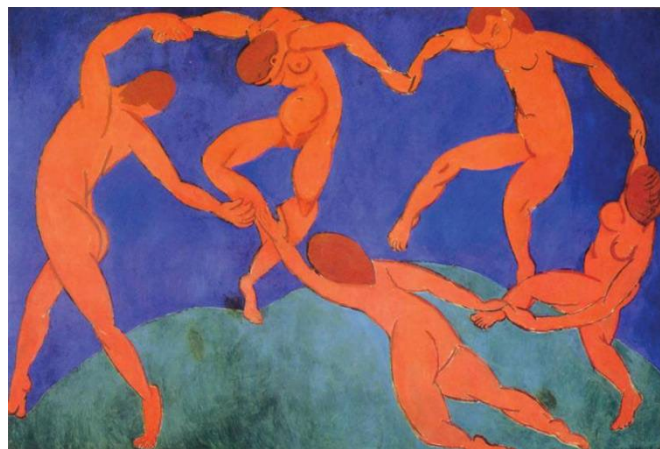


Figure 2: Henri Matisse "Dance"

In the long river of Western art history, we can see elements of primitivism more or less looming in the artists of overseas Chinese Society, the Blue Knight, Cubism, abstract painting, surrealism and other genres, and the Blue Knight for the first time children's art appears exactly on par with the

original. For although Bridge Society has been influenced by children's artistic techniques, only this time we find for the first time an appreciation of its nature and why it is so important to modern artists. An article by Kandinsky in *The Blue Rider* explains this:

"The child, besides his faculties of tracing outward appearances, has the power to place eternal inner truths in the form in which they can be most powerfully expressed. The child has a great unconscious power which expresses itself here and makes the child. The artist's work reaches the same high (and often higher) level as that of an adult. The artist who resembles a child in many things during his life is able to have an inner harmony of things more easily than others."^[10]

Although the children's art imitation ability is a bit weak, but he has a huge unconscious power to express himself, making children's art reach the same level as adults, and the same is true for primitive art. It expresses itself in a simple way, which has a strong sense of modern art, like a driving force. Primitive art is not the cause of any of the "primitive" qualities that may be found in modern art. They are like catalyst, helping artist to reciprocate the nature of their pursuit.

E. T. Hamy of Paris, France, once said: "From the point of view of artistic conception, as from every other point of view, the uncivilized are real children. They paint, scribble and imitate like children."^[11] He believes that there is no race that has absolutely no works of art. All people are capable of creating works of art, no matter how humble those creations may be. Here, uncivilized people refer to primitive people. In modern times, all people who have no foundation in art modeling can also be called uncivilized people. They paint and create works as much as children. Children's art, like primitive art, has the characteristics of "uncivilized", which is rough and has no modeling foundation, and it happens to be able to express their own feelings without modification, resulting in a unique "feeling" naturalistic state of the works. They can create for art.

According to Darwin's theory of evolution, the development of art is regarded as a part of natural evolution, and the art of the uncivilized is considered to be its lowest form of its artistic development. It can be known that the uncivilized obtain creative materials and expressive techniques from primitive art and draw like "children". The works they create should be full of unique "feeling" of naturalism. They are rough and without modeling foundation but can express their own feelings without embellishment, which seems to show the highest state of art in ignorance.

Similarly, facing the problem of primitiveness in art, Gombrich's "Preference for Primitiveness-A History of Taste in Western Art and Literature" pays attention to the reverse development of the trend of taste: too much naturalism leads art toward becoming crude, toward clumsy, toward innocence, toward exoticism, or in other words, toward primitiveness and toward retro.^[12] He tries to find the reason for the preference for primitiveness in the process of artistic development and expounds the reasons why artists love primitiveness in the process of artistic development, and provides a unique development path for modern art.

Through the analysis of the above cases (combined with Gombrich's perspective), it can be seen that: Primitive art has played a vital role in the development of art, and has created a large number of famous painters. Through the reference of primitive art, painters absorb nutrients so that they can extract excellent expressions. And through their own refinement and the embodiment of life values, painters can create excellent works. It has been certified that uncivilized people can create works with the highest artistic realm through "primitive" specific materials and methods and adding the most primitive processing.

4. Conclusion

For the public, primitive art is still vaguely related to crude materials and simplicity. Since modern art also seems to strive for simplicity and unpretentiousness, the intentions and results of the two are often confused. Through demonstrating and analyzing the historical connection between primitive art and modern art and the important influence of primitive art on modern art, modern artists love primitive art, but they are not imitating. To a certain extent, sharing common purposes is an active reflection of the beauty of reality, society, and nature, and it is presented in a unique, vivid, and sensible form, which breeds a strong humanistic spirit.

Today, with the continuous development of modern art, primitive art is being largely ignored by art historians, who are no longer able to speak of it by the terms they are used to. Modern artists are often inspired by their own original ideals. In the practical research of many theorists and artists, it can be found that the excavation of original elements and original themes can create many works of art that

symbolize civilization. The reconstruction and continuation of original art is in line with the law of discovery of human civilization and the direction of artistic development.

In the era of globalization, people's pace of life is accelerating, but the time for aesthetic appreciation is less and less. The emergence of "original ecology" brought back people trapped in the complicated society, and the original ecological art made it possible for people to get close to nature and feel the original charm. The original ecological art concept thus showed its unique charm. The concept of original ecological art means that when creating art, the original, simple and natural characteristics are given full play, and the created artworks are more in line with the wishes of the working people and show the beauty and harmony of "nature"^[13] Bringing the original ecological art concept into art creation is undoubtedly the original ecological creative concept. Absorbing nutrients from primitive art is actually the expression of the original ecological creative concept. Admiring the modern expression of primitive art is an affirmation of primitive culture, and it is also a manifestation of cultural diversity in a modern context. It can make people trapped in a complex society regain the value orientation of loving nature.

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