

Analysis on the Formal Language of Sha Qi's Oil Painting

Ming Lin

Academy of Fine Arts, Taizhou College of Nanjing Normal University, Taizhou 225300, China

ABSTRACT. *In the first half of the twentieth century, Qi Sha recommended by Xu Beihong to study oil painting in Belgium, and was influenced by European classicism, impressionism, fauvism, expressionism and other styles of painting. Qi Sha has well absorbed the expressions of these Western genres, and carried out natural integration and innovation in his unique artistic life, forming the eye-catching form language of Shashi oil painting. Starting from Qi Sha's life experience and his artistic development, this paper studies the basic formal language of oil paintings during his student years, his explorations after returning to China and breakthroughs in his later years, and analyzes the significance of Qi Sha's oil paintings to the development of modern freehand oil painting in China. .*

KEYWORDS: *Qi sha, Oil painting, Formal language, Expressionism*

1. Introduction

In the early twentieth century, there were a group of painters in China who travelled to Europe, such as Zuoren Wu, Xianguang Lu, Ruinian Li, Qi Sha, etc., whose works had extraordinary qualities. Regrettably, Qi Sha lives alone in a rural farmhouse in Yin County due to a long-term mental illness. He had no intention of attracting the attention of the press, and he did not pose as an innovator. Perhaps, it was precisely because of such mental distress that he was able to break the rules that combining the fictional reality, balance and unification, and other sketching techniques and composition that were widely known in Europe in his early years, and the most precious quality in Chinese art-the spirit of freehand brushwork was finally penetrated into every corner of the picture, making his oil paintings more and more expressive and infectious, becoming a catharsis of color, showing what cannot be copied. This paper aims to discuss the development of the formal language of Qi Sha's unique expressionist oil painting under the inheritance of traditional techniques.

2. The Academic Period When the Real and the False Coexisted

On March 29, 1914, Qi Sha was born in Sha Village, Ji County, Zhejiang

Province. In the early years of Qi Sha's education, Qi Sha's father, Songshou Sha, encouraged Qi Sha to study at Changming Art College, Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts, Hangzhou National Art College and the Art Department of National Central University. Although every time he is an attendant who has not taken an exam, it is also the beginning of Qi Sha's comprehensive new-style art education. When he was an audit to the Central University, Qi Sha was appreciated by Beihong Xu (one of the greater painter in China's history) for his bold use of colors and deep lines. In 1937, when the Anti-Japanese War broke out, Qi Sha was recommended by Beihong Xu to go to the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Belgium to specialize in oil painting.

At the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Dean Bastian taught Qi Sha a technical method: everything is calculated in advance and advanced in a conscious and strict way. Step by step, one by one, until the desired and clearly visible goal is achieved. [1] Thanks to Bastian's guidance, Qi Sha learned in-depth the painting techniques of the Flanders School, and systematically studied European traditional paintings, from which he also absorbed Courbet, an early realist master of Impressionism, and a great romanticist. The painting techniques of the old masters such as Delacroix and Veronese and Rubens, who were taken by Delacroix himself, have initially formed the characteristics of solid modeling, pleasing brushstrokes and warm colors. In Qi Sha's early works, his solid shapes, calm colors, pleasant brushstrokes, and attention to the tranquility of the pictures show that Qi Sha has been well inherited from his mentor Bastien.



Fig.1 Portrait of a Man in



Fig.2 Mother Spinning

The 1938 work “Portrait of a Man in Red” (Illustration 1) is a typical work of Qi Sha exploring traditional forms at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Belgium. Although Qi Sha was very young at the time, under the guidance of his tutor Bastian, Qi Sha was determined to achieve the level of portrait painting of ancient masters. He used the thick painting method of oil painting to naturally surface his skin and clothes in the background color. In traditional realistic oil paintings, the sense of space is an important factor in the evaluation of works. In order to accurately express the space of the picture, Qi Sha uses the unique painting technique of the Western 20th century academic school, that is, under the rigorous composition, through the virtual and real changes of the figure's outline, the three-dimensional shape of the character is conveyed. In the work, the man's bright face, forehead, cheekbones and mandible condensed and accurate brushstrokes express their colors in place, and all colors are used by him to portray three-dimensional shapes. The short and greasy hair on the man's head was brought out by him with a uniform and varied brushstroke, and it naturally echoed the background color. The stains left by every brushstroke in the picture seem to work together to achieve balance. Qi Sha's this picture is full of passion, and the brush strokes reveal a strong tension, which seems to be more interesting than the casual madness after returning home. The “Belgian Landscape” painted in the 1940s is an important work that Qi Sha personally brought back when he returned from Belgium in June 1946. In this work, Qi Sha pursues the low-length profile composed of black and white. The strong and intense sketching relationship allows dark colors to dominate. The dull red and ochre create a kind of melancholy in this picture. Impressive harmony. Qi Sha tried to use the technique full of masculine beauty to convey the poetic melancholy charm through the smallest constituent elements in the oil painting language—points, lines, and planes, showing and expressing various forms, gestures, emotions, and momentum. In this way, the formal beauty in this work is achieved. [2] In the work

“Mother Spinning” (Illustration 2) in 1947, Qi Sha used the unique chiaroscuro in oil painting to obtain the skeletal structure of the mother's head in the condensed color blocks and the changes in the edge line of the virtual reality. perfectly revealed, strong and charming. Qi Sha painted the wooden wall behind her mother's body into a deep reddish brown, and used the light-receiving surfaces of the two columns in the background to break the flattened background color, and the somber gray green and gray blue loomed on the ground. The mysterious rusticity shows the deep breath that is difficult to describe in the old oriental house. The circles outlined by the faintly and intermittently visible white yarn trembling lines finally cleverly connect the breath of the rectangular composition.

In 1946, Qi Sha returned to China, and Beihong Xu immediately hired him as the professor of Beiping Art College. Due to a lingering mental illness, Qi Sha never took office. Mental illness cast a thick shadow over Qi Sha's life. He never had any contact with the outside world, and was once considered by the art world as “this person passed away.” But the long-term dormancy did not reduce Qi Sha's love for art. In his hometown of Sha Village, he worked silently for more than 30 springs and autumns. In fact, Qi Sha had a keen observation of realist painting art from the beginning, but the feelings of literati and his love for all the impressive and magnificent works eventually led him to the more explicit formal language of brutalism and expressionism. Yiqing Zhang pointed out in his article “Untiring Volunteer-Qi Sha's Early Art History” that compared with the freedom and indulgence of another art peak in his later years, some commentators have compared Qi Sha's works from the 30s to the 40s with “Dance with shackles” , showing that he has cautiously absorbed modern art trends in his explorations during this period, but he has never deviated from the techniques and norms of realism. [3]

3. A Period of Balanced and Unified Schema Exploration

On May 18, 1983, the “Qi Sha Painting Exhibition” co-sponsored by Zhejiang Provincial Museum, Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts and Zhejiang Branch of Chinese Artists Association was held in Hangzhou. Menghai Sha and Zuoren Wu entitled the exhibition. The works in the exhibition present the precious sketches and creations of Qi Sha when he was studying abroad in Belgium in the 1940s. Since this exhibition, Qi Sha has finally returned to the art world.



Fig.3 Flowing Water in Front of the Village

In the West, Frye, a scholar who studies the handwriting of Cezanne's works, once pointed out: The art treasures accumulated and passed down by human beings are all works with unique formal structures. Brushstrokes, composition, and texture are important elements in the formal language of Qi Sha's oil painting at this stage. The rich appeal they convey in the works is a bridge between Qi Sha's works and the audience. Qi Sha pursues an elegant indulgence through rich brushstrokes, ordered composition and texture of the picture. The emergence of these uniquely personal oil painting language has an important connection with the days when he was dormant in his hometown Sha Village after returning to China. The lack of painting materials forced him to use watercolor and ink painting tools to create manuscripts. With the accumulation of these works on paper, Qi Sha's exploration of the formal language of oil painting became more radical around 1980. In the series of works during this period, the thick coating method became thinner and thinner, the layers became richer and richer, and sometimes even evolved into a liquid-like state, and he even wanted to give up as much as possible the gel-like paint layer that he obtained during the Royal Academy of Fine Arts following Bastian's strong and consistent painting method, so as to realize his synthesis more directly, making the picture become more and more flat, without modification and repetition, and without the need to use numerous layers of paint. In fact, Qi Sha's synthesis seems to be more firmly grasped by his imagination. He was trying hard to break from the composition to the color, and the picture produces a change that is more difficult to capture. At the same time, the texture of the picture presented under the straightforward brushstrokes is also presented in his works as the unique formal language of Qi Sha's oil paintings. The creation and "Flowing Water in Front of the Village" (Illustration 3) in the late 1980s is a model of Qi Sha's oil painting landscape during this period. This painting has the vivid colors and architectural sense of Cezanne's still life. The writing-like brushstrokes of the works are getting looser and more flexible, and the flat space in the foreground is interrupted by the ridge and running water. Qi Sha uses these lines to locate the bushes, houses, and nearby horses in front of the picture, all of which show the cross movement of the color

blocks in each area of the picture. Through these movements, Qi Sha hopes to draw the visual center of the picture to the different shades of yellow and green lines and colors on top of the picture. At the end, these lines and colors can jump out of the bright sky outside the picture. It is true that few landscape paintings can be so moving. Qi Sha uses this form of composition in this work only to show his attention to the primary and secondary relationship of the complex composition system. The grass and trees here and the open green space are abundant with the sense of sunshine and fresh natural breath. The artificial traces such as houses and paths are almost obscured by colors and brushstrokes. Qi Sha's love for life and nature is all reflected in this work through rich layers and rigorous structure of painting language. In the work "Guoqing Temple Gardener", Qi Sha's creative intention to highlight the planar structure and form composition is becoming more and more obvious. The volume of the figure painting is constantly weakened, and the outline seems to be continually adjusted. Qi Sha uses his free and easy brushstrokes to write his favorite red, brown and white on the screen. Obviously, Qi Sha has gone from being an authentic academic in his early years to post-impressionism and expressionism. Perhaps he was dissatisfied with the "expressiveness" of his early works, because as early as when he was studying in Belgium, he used a squeegee to show portraits of people, and he had already revealed the extraordinary qualities of expressionism which is different from those of his contemporary painters, such as Wu Zuoren, Lu Xianguang, Li Ruinian, etc., who all studied abroad, and are very different from his later style. In fact, the formal language of Qi Sha's works can neither be commented on the style of other contemporary painters in a certain period, nor can it be judged on the basis of his later unique style of painting. On the contrary, Qi Sha's works have gradually revealed his own unique painting terms. Against the background of these painting languages, Qi Sha's oil paintings have more and more personal style characteristics.

Entering the 1990s, Qi Sha entered a state of "decay years reform". During this period, he began to pursue the simplicity and saturation of the colors of the pictures, and began to use heavy paint to express an abstract rhythm. In his oil painting landscapes painted between 1994 and 1995, Qi Sha completely abandoned the accuracy of light, shadow and color, as well as the exaggeration of conventional composition and technique, and returned to fully breaking the traditional concept of modeling and composition. The transcendent state of creation goals is to take advantage of the power of the picture through brushstrokes and color intuition to create a splendid artistic scene. "A Scenery in a Small Town" is Qi Sha's 1995 sketch work. The rectangular composition is pushed far and wide in this work. In fact, there is no way to show the full charm of the original work. The unconventional paths and creeks converge in a splayed shape at the center point, which outlines a solid structure composed of two pairs of symmetrical triangles that are dark, showing Qi Sha's solid and confident artistic skills and excellent ability to insight into the order of objects. If compared with his landscape paintings of the 1980s, Qi Sha's work is more relaxed, the surface of the painting is also more free, the structure of the painting is more solid, the colors are more general, and the atmosphere of the picture is more ethereal and cheerful. Qi Sha has long ceased to capture in nature to accurately express the objective world as in the past, but actively

accepts the hints of changes in the natural world. He always chose to leave a lot of blank space on the white canvas, and there will be more “fei bai” (a style of calligraphy characterized by hollow strokes) between brush strokes. but the continuity in the picture has not been destroyed at all.

4. The Expressionist Period



Fig. 4 A Self-portrait of Qi Sha

Around 1995, Qi Sha's oil painting art once again showed a new stage. Like the early Chinese oil painter Dayu Wu, Qi Sha's latest works may have reached the level of pursuing pure abstraction through the language of color, reaching the freedom of “Tao is invisible but achievable”. [4] In order to return the form of the painting to a more enthusiastic and simple state, he used a lot of pure colors in the oil paintings in this period, and the painting also showed an unprecedented overall and hotness. At this time, the objects and spaces expressed in Qi Sha's paintings have been translated into abstract elements of oil paint, and there has been a more enthusiastic return in the works than that in his youth. Of course, the style at this time has been deeply influenced and corrected by these years of experience. It is less rigid and arbitrary, without the presumptuous provocation of the scraper, but a new passionate rhythm has appeared, and the colors have become fanatical and yet gorgeous again. Qi Sha has dealt with a bunch of clearer picture blocks and boundaries more and more chaotically, and the original general use of color has become more and more simple. Qi Sha at this time seems to have lost the ability to shape a specific image. Tianmin Gao described in the article “Reading Qi Sha's Paintings” that after the 1990s, many of his works, such as “The Garden of Eden”, “Hibiscus in Black Pottery”, “Rose in a Blue Bottle”, are free dyeing but vividly alive, and it has the charm of “the stroke is broken but the meaning is connected” in Chinese painting. His works have reached a new level of purity and spirituality, and their transcendent purity and spirituality are close to Van Gogh, and this level of state is unattainable by ordinary painters. [5] A

Self-portrait of Qi Sha completed in 1994 (see illustration 4) can illustrate this point well. Black once confused Renoir, but in the end he called it the “Queen of Color”. In this self-portrait, Qi Sha used black for the first time in the dark parts of the skin of the characters, and these blacks, in the works of post-impressionist painters, usually only appear in the dark parts of the clothes and the hair, eyebrows, eyes and other parts of the characters. Qi Sha, through his clumsy pens refined from his proficiency, brought black to every corner of the picture, making the “Queen of Color” exude silver-like luster color unmatched by other colors on the face of the character and the background canvas. [6] In the work “Snow Scenery” created in 1995, Qi Sha directly applied thick oil paint on the canvas with a good background color. The purity of the color reached incredible saturation, giving people a kind of intense desperation, as if reached a certain abstract system of modeling rhythm. At first glance at this painting, the rich colors and sharp and short lines make people think it is an abstract painting, but upon closer inspection, it seems that the dancing snow and the out-of-season red flowers and greens can be distinguished. The trees compete with each other. Here, the decomposition of the picture has reached an incredible level. Various volumes are disintegrated by Qi Sha and scattered in every corner of the canvas, so that at first glance, there does not seem to be any tangible image, which makes the beauty born out of all this obvious chaos, Qi Sha has naturally transitioned from post-impressionism to modernism. Perhaps it is in this type of work that Qi Sha has opened up his extraordinary imagination, completely breaking the shackles of volume and objects, and his tendency to let brushstrokes and colors move freely on the canvas, and go seek the abstract realm of picture modeling and rhythm. In this regard, Qi Sha seems to have an interesting balance with Cézanne, the master of post-impressionism. In fact, they are all living in isolation, although Cezanne at this moment is already an epoch-making master, and Qi Sha may also be enshrined in art history. Although they have different personalities, they have a lofty belief in art and absolute loyalty and absolutism to art, and they have drawn extremely similar curves in their respective lives. After arduous efforts in oil painting creation in their youth, middle age, and old age, they finally found a way to a position based on a passionate study of real life. In the final stage of Qi Sha's life, he fully trusted his perceptual and intuitive movement, and it seemed that there was a return of enthusiasm and passion from his youth. Under such a new eager rhythm and new brilliant and loud colors, Qi Sha's work presents a unique art form exclusively existed in the East. After removing the presumptuous and arbitrary details of the early years, his work is definitely no longer his whim, because as far as the work itself is concerned, what comes to Qi Sha's mind is not only his own emotional experience, but how to perfectly present the most essential features of the art work with his own work- special form. At this time, Qi Sha's art is no longer a pure impression or mere imitation of nature, but re-refining, re-condensing, re-organizing and re-adjusting. It is almost a self-sufficient body that always maintains a certain relationship with nature. Being isolated from nature is the key to the final presentation of Qi Sha's work.

5. Conclusion

As is known by all, Qi Sha's is not well recognized in my country's art education circles because his works are too advanced. In Qi Sha's early years, he could get enough flowers and applause by his painstakingly learned traditional skills, but he did not stop and satisfied by his temporary achievement. What this article wants to demonstrate is that Qi Sha, as an oil painter who studied in Belgium in China in the 20th century, dedicated his life to art perfectly through self-restraining romance and impulse, so that he could even give up the recognition of the world, which gave him the piety to go through fire and water for this belief. It is precisely because of his tenacity that Qi Sha in his later years finally integrated form, texture, color relationship, and aesthetic laws in his oil paintings, and he melted the oriental quality of his youth-freehand spirit into every corner of his work, forming a unique Sha expressionism oil painting style. [7] It is precisely because Qi Sha succeeded in presenting such an oil painting formal language that he was called a representative figure of Chinese modern expressionist oil painting

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