

An analysis of the modeling characteristics of Western painting

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Abstract: This paper sorts out the characteristics of painting in different stages through the analysis of historical and cultural, religious changes and social development in different periods. And it analyzes and summarizes the evolution pattern of western painting modeling, in order to present the characteristics of western painting modeling art in an intuitive, comprehensive and systematic way.

Keywords: Western painting, stylistic features

1. Introduction

The unique natural environment, cultural history, living conditions, social system and scientific development of the West have created a unique national psychology and customs. Painters of different eras have promoted the continuous changes of Western painting modeling through their long-term artistic practice. Western painting style has changed significantly from primitive society, slavery society, feudal society to capitalist society. In the long process of historical evolution, the West has formed mature modeling concepts and expression methods, and created distinctive painting modeling art.

2. Primitive society—The realism of conception

"In short, the earliest works of human beings with certain aesthetic value that we can see today were of great value to the primitive people who 'created' and owned them. The value of those works is not about aesthetic properties, but their practical utilitarian properties." [1] In the long labor practice activities, primitive people gradually became cognizant of the appearance of things and began to consciously depict and present things to satisfy the desires of hunting for survival and genital worship. It is generally believed that the art of painting first emerged from labor practices, image imitation and religious activities. Primitive people had a certain understanding of nature while maintaining their survival and promoting their development. In the process of obtaining self-physical and psychological satisfaction and spiritual needs, "conscious life activities" were formed. Through certain tools, they express what they see and think in certain scenes, express their desire to conquer nature, and portray the image of things in the memory in order to achieve psychological pleasure and satisfaction. The earliest Western painting art originated from the cave paintings in primitive society, represented by the Lascaux cave paintings in northern France and the Altamira cave paintings in southern Spain. Primitive society was in the pre-artistic period of painting. When primitive humans imitated nature and portrayed things, they fully showed the characteristics of realistic modeling of ancient and genuine concepts.

Due to physiological needs, religious psychological needs, survival needs, genital worship and other reasons, primitive people in the long-term practice of painting, so that they have a certain understanding of painting tools and skills. The cave walls depict more hunting scenes, focusing on the depiction of humans and animals that feed on them such as bison, deer, horses, elephants and other animal images. The whole picture is lacking in compositional consciousness, and the shapes are reasonable and well-matched, with the idea of overall modeling. The animals are isolated from each other, complete in image, vivid in posture, and accurate in form. Those paintings focus on the forms of animals with obvious image characteristics. The painting techniques are skillful, both concrete and vivid, wild and exaggerated, intuitively apparent, conceptually realistic, and simply imitating things naturally. The overall style presents simple, rough and vivid realistic. The expression is relatively simple and plain, with the outline as the main expression, supplemented by red, black and yellow auxiliary colors. It has shown a concise and vivid image, with the side of the main expression of the image. And it also shows a form

overlaid on the expression of another image, and slightly different methods of expression. During the Paleolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic periods of primitive society, as human beings became more adaptable to nature and advanced in tools, the animal images in paintings began to decrease and lost their primitive wildness. Cave paintings gradually changed into open-air petroglyphs. And human activities became the main object of expression, but still emphasized the depiction of appearance. The figures were painted in silhouette, with exaggerated limbs and an emphasis on movement. At the same time, there were also petroglyphs in which animals were simplified into abstract symbols.

3. The slave society—accurate realism

Pythagoras, the first aesthetician in early ancient Greece, after long observation, reflection and research concluded that "beauty is harmony, and all things that can be seen in a certain harmonious relationship are beautiful. Pythagoras and his disciples believed that harmony is the coordination and unity of opposites." [2] This idea laid the foundation for the art of painting in this period to take "truth" and "beauty" as the highest ideal of art. And the plastic art focused on finding beauty and revealing beauty from objective objects. The goal was to imitate nature and the formal beauty of "harmony, order, proportion and balance". Therefore, after the primitive society, the slave society systematically formed the tradition of realistic-oriented painting art.

"Greek mythology is not the arsenal of Greek art, but the soil of that. [3] The ancient Greek mythology of "gods and men of the same shape" made the gods have the characteristics of human body and appearance, so that Greek artists dared to shape the gods according to the image of real people. This created good conditions for studying the proportion, structure and shape of the human body. At the same time, the practice of exploring the art of human modeling in ancient Greece reached a mature level. The art of ancient Greece is divided into four periods: Homeric period, ancient style period, classical period and Hellenistic period. The modeling style is a period of gradual transition from geometric pattern decorative style to realistic style. The model pursues symmetry and balance, rationalization and specification. And the art pursues idealized aesthetics. Ancient Rome modeling focuses on public and personal utility and roles in real life. It pursues grand, gorgeous and the most ideal person as the model. It advocates praising real life, focusing on balance and symmetry, harmonious and accurate modeling, overall elegance and solemnity, and expressing body fitness and perfect mind. Especially with the help of science, anatomical proportions, rhythm and rhyme, it makes the modeling harmonious and unified, in line with the logic of natural laws.

4. The feudal society—symbolic realism

During the medieval period between the fall of Western Rome and the Renaissance, which lasted twelve or thirteen centuries, ancient Greek and Roman art continued to play an important role in the history. Painting became a tool in the service of Christianity, mainly serving the rulers. Because Christianity preached asceticism and the idea of the afterlife. They affirmed God, pursued the afterlife, ignored reality, opposed science, and disengage from the real life. This made painting dependent on superficial forms, which led to the restriction of the development of painting's modeling in this period.

The paintings of this period were detached from reality and had a single subject matter, which led to the destruction of the realism proposition. In addition, influenced by the barbarian art tradition of codex illustrations and Byzantine mosaics, the shape of paintings tended to be simplified, and even became pictorial, programmatic, stylized and symbolic. As the great Pope Gregory of the late 6th century A.D. said, "What words can do for the literate, painting can do for the illiterate." This inevitably led painting in the direction of illustrative concepts. Painting in this period was subordinated to the art of architecture, and the forms of painting were mostly frescoes, mosaics and stained glass window paintings. The paintings were mysterious, with flat compositions and programmatic shapes, neglecting the in-depth understanding and depiction of natural things. The content is mostly biblical stories, with the expression and allegorical symbolism being the main focus. It also ignored the storyline and the environment of things and was lack of close connection between things in the picture. The painting style of this period are short of the three-dimensional effect of modeling, which present a flat, slightly rigid feeling. The overall style presents a solemn, serious and simplified modeling. So that the image fully reflects the solid and eternal, solemn and mysterious characteristics, highlighting the supremacy of divine power, and showing the solid religious rights. At the same time, it does not pay attention to the depiction of real space, but emphasizes more on symbolism, focusing on the allegorical symbolism to show the devotion to religion and the veneration of the sacred transcendental religious spirit.

5. Capitalist Society - Figurative Reproduction

5.1. Renaissance to the 1860s and 1870s

During the Renaissance, painters began to pay attention to classical culture. And for a period of time, they still did not get rid of religious mythological themes and expressed their personal worldview with the help of religious mythological themes. Western art, liberated from the feudal rule and Christian bondage of the Middle Ages, held high the banner of humanism, focusing on man and nature itself. It affirmed man's creative ability, and opposed religious asceticism and theocracy. It began to attach importance to real life and express optimistic feelings about life and love of beautiful natural things.

This stage of painting is represented by oil painting, where the painters tend to express secular life and focus on the connection between art and science. They focused on finding laws from science to serve art, and took the initiative to explore and grasp the modeling laws of figurative reproduction of realism. Thus, a comprehensive and mature, systematic and complete realistic painting system was established, which explored how to show three-dimensional real nature on a flat surface. The paintings of this stage are concerned with reality, affirming life and praising life. The modeling is rigorous and accurate, three-dimensional and realistic. Meanwhile the structure is accurate and vivid, and things are modeled close to reality, fully showing the three-dimensional space. The modeling of paintings in this period not only reached the peak of realism in Western painting, but also a new height of human observation of the reality of nature and the concrete presentation of nature. As Fu Lei once said, Leonardo da Vinci, one of the three Renaissance masterpieces, "was the first person to discover the real flesh and the trembling of the skin". [4] The painter attached importance to science as a means, focusing on mastering systematic observation methods and painting techniques based on the science of modeling, light and darkness, color, anatomy, perspective and so on. What's more, they focused on the expression of realistic emotions and aesthetic interests. And, it can be shown that the personal aesthetic ideals and the spirit of the character and the natural life atmosphere of the specific characteristics of things through the realistic effect of painting and the spirit of the subject.

5.2. Impressionism to Post-Impressionism — Tendency to Expression

Impressionist painters began to pay attention to painting itself, no longer satisfied with copying, and opposed the academic aesthetic. Driven by the modern science and technology of optical theory and practice in the 19th century, painting began to break with the stylistic conventions of the classical period and opposed rigid images. They took the initiative to break with the previous rules and regulations, and broke the bondage of the inherent structure. Thus, they broke the laws of scientific concrete reproduction and reworked the shape. Moreover, the painters also advocated direct representation of reality and subjective feelings, and weakened the expression of things political ideological tendencies and storylines.

The paintings of this period intentionally blurred, generalized and exaggerated the effects of the picture, and weakened the shaping of detailed forms. Painters began to actively try to explore and create their own perception of "nature" and thus express the true nature they sensed in their own minds. This is a key step from concrete reproduction to emotional expression, but it does not completely abandon the way of reproducing objects and concrete realistic modeling. Therefore, it still has a clear formalist tendency. Impressionism focused more on the variation of color, emphasizing the shaping of shapes with color, and they no longer attached as much importance to the shaping of volume as it had since the Renaissance. The edges of things in painting tend to be weaker and blurred. Post-Impressionism places more emphasis on the expression of feelings and the subjective feelings of the author. The shapes are simple or spontaneous, and the overall tendency is toward sensuality. The forms of paintings tend to be flat, decorative and symbolic, which is more conducive to the expression of the painter's subjective feelings. Cézanne, the "father of modern art" of this period, believed that "painting does not mean blindly copying reality, it means seeking the harmony of various relationships." At the same time, he also pointed out that "all objects in the world can be summarized as spheres, cylinders and cones". The painters represented by Cézanne created new shapes, began to pay attention to the inner structure of objects, the intuition of the picture, and composition of the whole picture. Van Gogh, a contemporary of Cézanne, showed his extreme excitement and ecstasy when painting, saying that "painting is not the correct reproduction of what we see with the naked eye, but how to regenerate the shapes in our own minds according to our own needs." This distances the shape of expressive painting from the shape of reproductive painting, which distorts, exaggerates and deforms real forms in order to express the pure spirit and feelings of human beings. However, at this point, painting was still not completely separated

from the objective object and did not completely escape from the imitation of natural objects.

5.3. *Modern and contemporary - Multiple presentations*

With the end of the post-impressionist period, the rapid development of the Western capitalist social revolution and the further advancement of social differentiation, people's understanding of the world has undergone important changes. At the same time, the development of science and technology and society made people start to think radically. This also drove major changes in art, with various artistic trends emerging and the boundaries of art expanding. Painters actively joined them in an anti-traditional and re-creative role. Their attention turned to the exploration of art, science, philosophy and aesthetics. They began to take a self-centered approach and actively explore in the direction of breaking with tradition. Painters took the initiative to discover problems, ask questions, study problems, and constantly innovate and explore, thus creating a new craze for various forms of expression. And it also laid a good foundation for the development of visual arts. In contemporary times, with the further development of science and technology, visual art has also further developed. Painters have developed in various aspects such as aesthetics, art, science, philosophy and even ideology. They gradually pursue to explore various new art forms, theoretical trends, technical expressions and spiritual release, shuttling through various new artistic trends.

Painters of this period were generally ashamed of imitating and copying, and proud of exploring new situations. They emphasized the expression of emotions through the presentation of forms, thus making deep changes to the art of painting. Painters took the initiative to abandon the traditional concept of scientific concrete reproduction of things and the law of modeling, as well as the concept of form, and completely got rid of the bondage of concrete things' forms and abandoned the thinking of three-dimensionality. Painting in general showed flatness and simplicity. And the painters began to attach importance to the composition of the picture, exploring and innovating in the form, or borrowing the concept of modeling from other national cultures and arts. Not only that, they also attach importance to the expression of spirit, thinking and ideas, as well as visual impact. The overall shape of the painting is more casual, which further brings into play the initiative of the painter, thus showing infinite possibilities for the creation of art, and creating good conditions for the emergence of various artistic schools and aesthetic concepts. In contemporary times, painters are not limited to painting, they can be artists in other fields and thinkers. Painting can be realistic, figurative, expressive, abstract and so on. Painting can also be a stage or a part of the expression of an art work. The means of presentation and the ways and means of expressing ideas are richer in painting, and the transmission of ideas and the release of emotions are more flexible. What is certain is that the prosperous development of art will bring painting to a broader space.

6. Conclusion

To be sure, the history of Western painting has been fast and slow, sometimes progressing and sometimes retreating, but the overall development of painting modeling in the long history of development has shown conceptual realism, accurate realism, symbolic realism, figurative reproduction, tendency to expression, multiple presentation and other development history. When people study Western painting, they should regularly carry out comparison, through the comparison of different times and different nationalities' painting shapes. Only by further understanding the unique concept of western painting and aesthetic consciousness can they learn the evolution of western painting in a comprehensive and systematic way. Thus, they can actively promote the practice of art creation and draw inspiration for the better nutrition of Western painting art and the development of China's painting modeling art.

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