

# The Artistic Conception Description of Landscape Painting Sketching

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**Abstract:** Landscape painting sketching, as one of the core practices of traditional Chinese art, essentially captures the integration of nature and nature through the language of brush and ink, and constructs an aesthetic conception of "harmony between man and nature". This article focuses on the artistic conception of landscape painting sketching and explores it from three dimensions: techniques, philosophy, and emotional expression. Firstly, analyze the bidirectional interaction between "learning from nature" and "gaining inspiration from the heart" in landscape painting sketching, pointing out that painters extract the "emptiness" of ink and brush through observing the "reality" of nature, forming a spatial hierarchy where reality and virtuality coexist; Secondly, combining the Taoist concept of "forgetting both the object and the self" and the Confucian concept of "cultivating virtue", this paper elaborates on the spiritual projection of the subject on natural landscapes during the process of sketching, so that the picture transcends superficial imitation and carries humanistic philosophical thoughts; Finally, taking classic sketches from the Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties as an example, this paper argues that the realization of the artistic conception of landscape painting relies on the innovative transformation of "brush and ink following the times", which integrates individual life experiences on the basis of inheriting traditional composition, and elevates natural landscapes into spiritual patterns. Research has shown that the core of the artistic conception of landscape painting sketching lies in the dynamic balance of "depicting the spirit with form". It is not only a practical paradigm of classical Chinese aesthetics, but also provides a dual inspiration for contemporary art creation of "returning to nature" and "introspection spirit".

**Keywords:** landscape painting, sketching, artistic conception generation, the interplay between reality and illusion, brush and ink language

## 1. Introduction

Sketching is an important part of the basic skills of landscape painting, which is crucial for training modeling ability, observation ability, and ink expression ability [1]. To preserve one's mind in the mountains and valleys, it is necessary to go out for sketching for a long time. Sketching is the process by which an author places the natural scenery they see on paper. It can be done in the form of sketches, or in a relatively slow and direct depiction of the scenery. Additionally, it involves capturing the real scene with a camera and then integrating and organizing it in the studio.

The sketch requires a concise and fast speed to record the scene in front of you. It should be more general, simple and not too much business. It mainly records the objects with distinctive characteristics, focusing on collecting materials, or things with local characteristics, such as stilted buildings in western Hunan, caves in the Yellow Soil Plateau, the Taihu Lake Stone in Suzhou, and Ma Tou Wall in Anhui. These structures are not frequently contacted and poorly understood, and they should be highlighted. Of course, research suggests that sketching can also be a relatively complete artwork. Although it is faster, it can accurately depict objects and quickly process various elements in composition and placement, which not only exercises composition skills but also accumulates materials. It is also possible to integrate the constituent elements, such as changes in density, overlapping and interweaving of lines, arrangement and reorganization, combination of circles and shapes, geometric spatial relationships, etc., expressed through points and lines. By slowing down the painting speed slightly and carefully considering, it can be directly changed to ink wash form in the creation. In addition to sketching, directly sketching the scenery on site is the most common method for us to learn landscape painting sketching, which can quickly improve our sketching ability and play a crucial role in landscape painting creation. And using a camera or recording the scenery in one's mind is what the

ancients called "eye recognition and mind recording" (excerpted from Jing Hao's "Record of Brushwork"). It requires the author to deeply observe and analyze the scenery, remember it in mind, and then present it through their own understanding of ink painting and skilled expression techniques in the organizing stage. However, research believes that for us students, this method may conceptualize the picture due to technical problems, insufficient ink and brush skills, and lack of experience, resulting in simplicity and emptiness. Therefore, in a sense, sketching and photo recording methods cannot play a direct role in Chinese landscape painting sketching, and the characteristics of landscape painting cannot be fully reflected. For example, sometimes when I go out to sketch, I am always in a hurry and want to paint more. As the saying goes, I am greedy for more and cannot chew on it. I always rush to make a draft or simply record the size of the object, whether it is a house or a tree. I outline the outline and roughly arrange the position, and then come back to paint according to my own habits. However, that always carries some habits and conventional techniques of conceptualization and symbolization. Although the composition looks like that place, and the positions of houses, trees, streams, etc. are also similar to that place, it always lacks vitality and is monotonous. Either after returning, they lose interest in continuing with the rough outline and remain in an unfinished state, or halfway through the painting, they continue to paint the other half, often losing the most authentic feeling of the scenery and becoming indifferent. So, we should use water and ink to directly depict objects in nature, so as to fully utilize the performance of the brush to express nature, reshape nature, print natural scenery on paper, and better convey the author's own emotions. This is far more authentic than sitting indoors and desperately recalling, just like how a wide-angle camera cannot replicate the feeling observed by the human eye. Although the scenery is the same, what the human eye sees is already emotional and immersive, which is the unity of observing the external world and caring about the author's inner world.

It can be said that the requirements for the author to directly sketch the scenery are higher, and they will vary from person to person due to time and location. For example, what do trees look like when the wind blows, what methods should be used for broad-leaved plants in the south, and what expression techniques should be used for fine leaved and coniferous plants in the north? Trees are lush in spring and summer, and plant branches and leaves are sparse in autumn and winter. It is not appropriate to sketch according to one method. Nature is constantly changing and ingenious, and it is impossible to imagine just by thinking. What is needed is feelings. Every hill, every valley, every tree, every stone, every stream, and every water, visually present the fascinating realm, capture the visual impact of objects in the mind, and respect nature while respecting it. Don't be confined to traditional strokes in your own heart, let people control the pen, rather than letting 'brush and ink' To control people's artificial and lines, fully utilize the charm of ink and brush, express emotions and feelings, rather than deliberately and rigidly relying on nature on the painting sheet. Only in this way can we truly vividly and concretely recognize the objective nature in front of us, and improve our ability to think creatively and deeply about objective things. With the improvement of the painter's self-cultivation and rich experience, we will have a better understanding of life, and in turn, it will bring us endless nutrients, allowing us to constantly explore and analyze.

Looking back at the development history of Chinese landscape painting, there are some landscape painters who always neglect landscape sketching and cannot create works of art that can touch readers. Although they have profound literary and artistic cultivation, traditional brushwork skills, and long-term accumulated painting experience, they always feel that they lack liveliness and interest, and blindly work in isolation. Take the "Four Kings" of the Qing Dynasty as an example, their typicality lies in their excessive emphasis on copying ancient people, placing too much emphasis on the brushwork and appearance of a detail of ancient people, always pursuing its origin. Of course, I have no intention of praising or criticizing them here. The imagery of the "Four Kings" always feels immersed in the thoughts of their predecessors. Although the techniques and artistic conception can explain the work clearly, most of them are "borrowed" and cannot escape the constraints of their predecessors. They blindly imitate the past, let alone absorb nutrients from daily life. They rely solely on the layers of mountains, rocks, houses, and trees to break free from the shackles of hollow and boring content. When reading the works of the "Four Kings", I always feel that they are vastly different and cannot distinguish who is who. It is difficult to impress readers in terms of infectiousness, and of course, they are not as good as the "Four Monks" of the same era. The "Four Monks" are all hermits who have become monks for various reasons, but they have been wandering outside for a long time, not influenced by the secular world. They are friends with the mountains and forests, studying the structure and natural style of rocks, and thus summarizing their own painting techniques and brush language, constantly drawing inspiration from nature. Among them, Hongren drew materials from Mount Huangshan Mountain, and became a painter with elegant solitude, which has strong regional characteristics. Shi Tao has many landscape sketches, each with different compositions and expressive

techniques, vivid, rich, and fascinating. All of these are thanks to the observation and perception of nature, as well as Mr. Li Keran, Mr. Fu Baoshi, and others mentioned earlier. They dare to break free from outdated constraints, enter life and nature, and their works are full of vitality and vigor. Therefore, the significance of landscape sketching for the growth and style formation of painters is obvious.

## **2. The artistic conception of landscape sketching**

Artistic conception is a specialized discipline that emphasizes the transmission of artistic conception in various forms such as music, poetry, calligraphy, and painting[2]. Through artistic conception, people can create a deep space of imagination and infinite charm. In landscape painting, when depicting real objects, we should inject and render our own emotions, and have an emotional tendency. When we draw mountains, we put all our emotions on the mountain; When we are drawing trees, immerse ourselves in the trees; When we draw water, we should be filled with emotions and express our personal thoughts and preferences.

The aesthetic criteria of landscape painting are also about the interpretation of "artistic conception". "Intent" belongs to subjective things, while "environment" is an objective attribute of nature. The combination of the two is the "artistic conception", which is the unity of subjectivity and objectivity, emotion and reality. Throughout history, masters of landscape painting have meticulously carved and refined the artistic conception, reproducing objective things artistically and imbuing them with subjective spiritual connotations. By observing nature, these connotations are implemented in specific objective depictions, and mastering its laws to showcase the beauty of brushwork, artistic conception, and nature. For landscape painting, the author believes that going into natural landscapes and opening one's heart, what you experience is not just a kind of sexual excitement, but a kind of worship, a gratitude for life, and a reverence for ink painting. It can not only tolerate your inner confusion and pain, but also dissolve this pain. You can find comfort in the landscape, and landscape painting sketching is precisely expressing this reverence for nature and comfort for life. After all, this form of seeking is to sublimate wisdom from mountains, rivers, and pavilions, and make people pure and confident. We integrate our thinking with nature by grasping the artistic conception of observation, transforming it into the landscape in the author's heart, forgetting things and ourselves, forgetting the unity of heaven and man.

When we sit on the landscape and sketch, that state itself is a poetic and picturesque scene. What you shout out to the mountain, it will respond to you. What we see in our eyes is not the mountain, water, or pavilions, but ourselves. We reflect our inner selves and comfort ourselves in a quiet way, just like the mountain and water give us a rebound in our hearts, without modification, just for the "artistic conception" and "emotion" of "sketching". These are the illusions that arise when painters embrace nature, and they are also the true emotions and feelings written in the mountains and waters, forgetting about the mountains and waters and seeking infinite tension. People who paint can better let go of emotions, solemnity, and turbidity when facing mountains, waters, and nature. They can express their love for mountains, waters, and abandon the mundane world. Of course, only the mountains inevitably lack a bit of poetic charm, and the tranquility of the mountains would be dull without the dynamic embellishment of water; Only water is obviously not artistic enough, and the flow of water cannot show its spirituality without the obstruction of mountains. It's best to be surrounded by mountains and rivers, hidden within them, with elegant strokes and ink, improvising on the scenery, and unifying meaning and environment.

## **3. Understanding the artistic conception of landscape painting sketching methods**

### **3.1 Choose scenery**

Chinese landscape painting is based on "scattered perspective", while Western "focal perspective" is based on the concept of near large and far small [3]. "Scattered perspective" does not allow the painter to stay in one place and observe from multiple angles according to the needs of the painting. The range observed by the eyes is not limited, even if some areas are obscured by objects and cannot be seen, individual angles can be changed cleverly to avoid objects that obstruct the foreground. Walking and moving should be flexible, organizing the objects seen from different perspectives in the same plane space and piecing together details into a whole; Secondly, Western landscape painting mostly adopts the direct "taking principle" of the scenery, which is generally realistic. Some paintings are realistic, and some are even photorealistic, meticulous, while Chinese landscape painting adopts

freehand brushwork, which uses the method of virtual reality, black and white correspondence, and vivid expression. Of course, it may not be the same as the real, but it makes people feel that it is real, and it is a kind of real expression rather than reproduction.

Chinese landscape painting also emphasizes the authenticity of objective scenery in sketching, and then depicts it. Of course, the subjective consciousness and thinking of the scenery are also more important, emphasizing the role of the author's own emotions. When sketching, do not immediately sit down and start writing as soon as you see something, but should first take a walk and look around, such as painting a mountain, a waterfall, a water outlet, or a house. You should first look at it from different angles, understand the characteristics of the house, see which angle is more beautiful, which angle is easier to express more, analyze the characteristics of the object, see what attributes it has, and then find the most suitable angle to paint from. After selecting the right scenery, subjectively unify objective objects with one's own ideas, and cannot rely solely on brush techniques. That is not enough. We need to take care of each other, reorganize the various elements we see, and make them the language of art, so that the objective scenery can serve the artistic conception and stimulate the inspiration for painting. The meaning of 'meaning comes before the pen' is to write about 'meaning' and use 'pen'. The combination of 'pen' and 'meaning' should be highly unified, requiring the extraction of brush and ink from daily life to create an 'artistic conception', which can then be implemented on rice paper, making the meaning in the heart a consistent pulse and tone. This way, the original object will have more vitality, its beauty will become more intense, and the expression of mountains and waters will be clearer. This expression is the spiritual energy endowed by the author's meaning in the heart, which truly has charm and the practical significance of Zhang Cong's argument.

The selection, analysis, interpretation, and brewing of scenery from "creation" to "heart source", the calm and patient painting, and the skillful "realization", finally expressed in the form of brush and ink, are what we landscape painting students should pursue. If the scenery selection is not good, even with more effort and time, it may not achieve the expected effect. The picture will also appear rigid and dull, and the taste will be like chewing wax when reading, and it will not be vivid anymore.

### ***3.2 Observing the big from the small***

The simple literal meaning of 'seeing the big from the small' refers to seeing the whole through a small part. The concept of 'seeing the big from the small' reflects the inherent ideas of traditional Chinese culture, whether in painting, literature, art, or other fields. Just like the poet Tao Yuanming who lived in seclusion in the mountains and forests, in such a remote and desolate environment with extreme lack of material life, he lived alone in a thatched cottage, enjoying poverty and simplicity, and devoted himself to the countryside. His indifferent, pure, natural, and extraordinary temperament was influenced by traditional literati thought, carrying great ambitions. Although his living space was not large or magnificent, he leisurely saw the "southern mountain in his heart", which was incredibly broad and atmospheric. This is the sublimation of inner realm, poets and literati landscape painters are the same. The idea of seeing the big through the small also has specific aesthetic standards and expression methods in landscape painting. It is not as rich and colorful as Western painting art, and it is precisely this introverted "seeing the big through the small" that demonstrates its profound artistic value.

From the perspective of the painting itself, "viewing the big from the small" is an important observation method in landscape painting sketching. It is not a specific painting technique, but a visual principle. From ancient times to the present, it has continued to run through the entire history of landscape painting development. Since the development of landscape painting in the Five Dynasties and Northern Song Dynasties, panoramic landscape painting has dominated with relatively large scales. However, in the Southern Song Dynasty, the form of small-scale landscape painting began to emerge. In the same era as panoramic landscape painting, many painters shifted their focus and focus to depicting fragments and details. A few trees, one or two thatched cottages, a small bridge, etc. were correspondingly reduced in visual expression, which required painters to further summarize their painting styles. Just like Ma Yuan and Xia Gui, they fully utilized the half and half corner landscape form, making it very intuitive to see whose works they were. This has also become the root of the continuation of small-scale landscape painting in later generations. Let's take Ni Zan as an example. His paintings mainly feature strong ancient pine and old trees, ranging from as few as two or three to as many as six or seven. There are always only branches, few leaves, or a few strokes, which always give people a feeling of coldness and desolation. Coupled with a thatched cottage, these have become the painting characteristics of Yunlinzi. They have been passed down to this day. In the wilderness, one acre and three fen of land, a distant mountain, and emptiness and loneliness, he places his inner self in the painting pavilion. The pavilion is small, with a sense of sadness, but also calm and steady. Their

hearts are broad and vast, capable of accommodating heaven and earth. There are also those flower and bird painters who usually only paint a few branches or one or two flowers, cherishing ink like gold. The more they omit, the more they summarize. With just a few strokes, they can create the feeling of a cluster of orchids. These "phoenix eyes" and "broken phoenix eyes" were refined and summarized by ancient people, not to pursue the thousands of flowers seen in the real eye, but to see the lush greenery from one or two flowers. They pursue their spiritual value, which is a model of observing the big picture from a small perspective. These refined patterns require the author to cut the whole to reflect their inner world, convey the overall poetic and artistic atmosphere through detail fragments, and also give readers enough room for imagination.

Starting from a certain perspective, a certain part, or a certain object, the author skillfully manages to express their unique aesthetic and emotions in the description of these very limited objects. Another thing is an accurate tone. Although the objects are fewer, the picture is smaller, and the focus feels closer, as if it is right in front of them, the picture is much more exquisite, and the specific situation expressed by the author is more vivid and distinct. Although there may not be much writing, the meaning is profound and long-lasting; Although there may not be many elements in the picture, one can see the exquisite brushwork and ink quality. Winning with less is worth ten with one. Returning to the present, when we sketch through the mirror, we should focus on specific, situational, and distinctive objects within limited time and conditions. We should not choose too large scenes to paint, as choosing too many or too large often leads to incomplete interpretation and a lack of experience in taking care of all aspects of the picture properly, resulting in a lack of refinement and visual appeal. Instead, we should focus more on small scenes, such as a tree, a stone, a bridge, and a person like Ma and Xia, or a cool pavilion in Yunlinzi. Moreover, landscape techniques should also focus on tree and stone techniques, such as tree and stone techniques, where each tree and stone can be used. We can explore the methods and rules of "brush and ink" in the learning process, which are nothing more than "hook", "crack", "wipe", "dot", "dye", as well as the dry wet thick light brush and ink method, using limited energy to fully utilize the characteristics of brush and ink, and expressing these objects as vividly as possible. We master personal writing skills, summarize common patterns, make analogies, and gradually enhance the entire scene, allowing readers to fully imagine after reading. We construct the appearance and profound poetry of the entire scene through detailed local descriptions, or explore the characteristics, momentum, and power of the entire mountain range through the texture of certain rocks, stone walls, edges, and patterns. How to handle these parts, how to make the combination of dry and wet better, how to make the changes in ink color richer and lighter, and how to guide readers to make the directionality clearer, these are the things that should be done in sketching. What needs to be considered during the process is that only by handling it properly can we see the big from the small. Only by seeing a mountain from a stone, associating several trees from a tree, and drawing a great realm from a small scenery, can the author express their vast inner world and the mind that connects to the universe and heaven. In this way, no matter how the content of the topic and the size of the chosen scenery change, it will only present a variety on the surface and innovate in form, while the rules of brush and ink and aesthetic principles will not change. The spiritual connotation of "sketching", "freehand brushwork" and "photography" will also not change. Therefore, the concept of "seeing the big from the small" is essential in sketching, and its flexible application can make it profound in thought.

#### 4. Conclusion

In the artistic practice of landscape painting sketching, "artistic conception" has always been the core proposition that runs through creation and aesthetics. Through the deconstruction and reconstruction of traditional brush and ink language, this article argues that landscape sketching is not simply a natural imitation, but a spiritual expression based on the philosophy of "unity of heaven and man". Painters use the observation method of "learning from nature" to transform natural objects into carriers of mental images, and construct aesthetic spaces that transcend time and space in the composition of the interplay between reality and virtuality. This artistic practice not only reflects the Taoist attitude of "clarifying and observing the Tao", but also coincides with the Zen's experience of "instant eternity" of enlightenment. In the contemporary context, the pursuit of artistic conception in landscape painting presents new possibilities: the intervention of digital media breaks the boundaries of traditional media, and the rise of ecological aesthetics endows the "heart of forests and springs" with new dimensions of interpretation. Through artistic creation, the resonance between individual life and the spirit of the universe is achieved, and the poetic questioning of the essence of existence is completed through the wandering of ink and brush. This artistic wisdom that spans thousands of years

not only provides theoretical support for the Eastern aesthetic system, but also offers enlightening paths for contemporary art creation on how to balance technological rationality and humanistic spirit.

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