

# The Use of Classical Oil Painting Language in Gemmy Woud-Binnendijk's Children's Photography\*

Minghua Hu

South China Institute of Software Engineering, Guangzhou University  
Guangzhou, China 510990

**Abstract**—Photographer Gemmy Woud-Binnendijk combines classical oil painting language with her children's photography to convey her research and application of the composition and color of European classical oil paintings. Through the use of classical oil painting language, her series of children's photography "Nowadays child in the light of the past" presents the characteristics of the most exquisite European classical oil paintings — smooth composition, golden ratio, rational deep and subtle color as well as concise shape and background space.

**Keywords**—children's photography; classical oil painting; composition; color; shape and background space

## I. INTRODUCTION

Gemmy Woud-Binnendijk's children's photography is different from most of the "sweet and interesting" children's photography works that people see in modern photography, focusing on audience participation, across time and space, innovation, and change, which has a distinctive classical oil painting style. Gemmy Woud-Binnendijk's series of children's photography "Nowadays child in the light of the past" show the characteristics of the most exquisite European classical oil paintings - smooth composition, golden ratio, rational deep and subtle color as well as concise shape and background space, and these photographs give people a solemn, quiet, great and rigorous impression like classical oil painting.

## II. THE APPLICATION OF CLASSICAL OIL PAINTING

Regarding the principle of classicism, Michelangelo considered it to be "sense, art, symmetry, balance and stability" [1], which is also the compositional form of classical oil painting. This is because that the classicalist painters at the time advocated eternal and natural rationality, paying attention to the composition form, structure and content of the picture. In classical oil paintings, the ancient artistic ideals and norms are used to express the subject and content of reality. Classical works often express the theme of the artist's era with typical historical events, advocate elegant and sublime themes, apply solemn and simple composition forms, emphasize rational image expression and despise emotions, emphasize sketch and rigorous appearance,

devalue the expression of color and brushstroke, and pursue the balance and integrity of composition [2] to achieve an ancient quiet and grim beauty. When people examine Vinci's "Baptism of Christ", Raphael's "Madonna del Meadow", and Poussin's "Madonna on the Steps" and other classical oil paintings, it can be found that in classical oil paintings, "triangular composition, picture symmetry and the picture's center of gravity moving down" are reflected in the works of these classical oil painters. In Raphael's "Sistine Madonna", the Virgin, the Pope and the Saints form a triangular composition with a solemn, balanced, and simple picture, which shows the gentleness and dignity of the Virgin as well as the greatness of maternal love.

For children's photography, people generally have screen impressions such as "novelty", "naiveness", "liveliness" and "cuteness"; but there is no such impression in these children's photographs of Gemmy Woud-Binnendijk. Photographer Gemmy Woud-Binnendijk, based on the composition, shape, color and shadow of classical oil painting, applied the expression of classical oil painting to the work "Nowadays child in the light of the past", forming a unique classical visual effect of children's photography.

Comparing the works of Gemmy Woud-Binnendijk with classical oil paintings, it can be seen that the composition of Gemmy Woud-Binnendijk is almost identical in composition to classical oil paintings, such as the work "Lotte". When the two works "Lotte" and "The Sistine Madonna" are put together, a striking similarity in the form of the composition of the two can be found: the composition of the triangle, the symmetrical balance of the picture, the main body of the picture is centered, and the center of gravity of the whole picture moves down. Gemmy Woud-Binnendijk's other works such as "meijs-met-konijn" and "Netta" also use the composition of classical oil paintings to give a sense of balance, symmetry and rationality.

The golden ratio is another important principle in the composition of classical oil painting. From the Renaissance, oil painters began to apply the golden ratio to the picture; thus the composition of the picture was perfectly divided, making the form and the picture space more harmonious and unite as a whole. The application of the golden ratio makes the composition of the picture no longer an absolute symmetrical equilibrium, and also makes the picture not so dull and monotonous, so that the classical oil painting works

\*Fund: "Quality Engineering" Construction Project of South China Institute of Software Engineering of Guangzhou University in 2019 (ZYGXK201901).

can show balance, order, and change, forming a harmonious beauty of the picture.

Most of the photographs in Gemmy Woud-Binnendijk are also golden-scaled, such as the works "Isis", "sjuulke-bont", "Netta", "Fenna", "jasmijn-met-eendjes", and it can be seen that these works clearly adopt the same golden section ratio as the classical oil painting: the character is at 0.618 in the horizontal direction of the picture. For this reason, the photography of Gemmy Woud-Binnendijk also gives a kind of aesthetic feeling of tranquility, harmony and unity.

### III. DEEP AND SUBTLE COLOR EXPRESSION

From the medieval icon painting to the masterpiece of the "Three Masters" of the Renaissance, classical oil painting has a feeling of "rationality, rigor and order rules"; its color expression is also "rational color" [3]. "Classical oil painting emphasizes the clear expression of the contour of the picture, and the color is constrained by the structure of the body and merged on the shape. Especially in portrait paintings, each partial color block of a character is bounded by the shape of the character". [4] Classical oil painting emphasizes fine sketching, subtle shades of light and shade and sketch characteristics in color processing with little contrast between warm and cold colors; color is usually only used as a sketching aid. Therefore, classical oil paintings impress the audience with stories, characters and rigorous sketch relationships, rather than brilliant colors and brushstrokes.

Regarding the position of color in that period in painting, Kant said in his book "Judging of Judgment", "Composition in painting and sculpture is the key... The color that adds beauty to the sketch is part of the composition. In its own way, color can add a kind of vitality to the picture people observe, but color itself can't make paintings beautiful. [5] That is to say, in Kant's view, color is not a key element and determinant of painting, but only a part "adding luster" to the composition and at best, it is only the embellishment of the composition of the picture; the position of color in the oil painting at that time can be seen.

In the color system of classical oil painting before the middle of the 19th century, the shaping of the image of oil painting was basically based on the inherent color. The shape of the object image and the relationship between the various shapes are mainly expressed by the contrast of different hues and the brightness of the same hues. There is almost no contrast between warm and cold colors, and many pictures are filled with the dark side of the dark brown tones and the outline of the body. In the paintings of classical oil painting masters, the "stable, great, mysterious black, and red, green, blue, and earthy colors added by black as the base color can be seen. The comprehensive modulation of these colors makes the hue and brightness of classical oil paintings more stable and harmonious, making the picture of classical oil paintings seem deep and subtle [6].

In portrait photography, color has an important place. Photographs often use color to express themes, such as expressing happiness, enthusiasm, desire, danger, etc. in red. The audience can feel the photographer's thoughts through the color of the photographic works, and the color can bring

warm, cold and refreshing feelings to the audience. Color language has different vicarious function for photographers to express character temperament and theme of the work [7]. For example, in the French fashion photographer Cyril Lagel portrait photography, the model is designed to have a red lip color, exaggerated eye shadow; with beautiful fashion clothes, the jump and bright color contrast in the picture attracts audiences' eyes. It can be seen that when the color language is used to the extreme, it can be said to be a success; in the photography works of Gemmy Woud-Binnendijk, the color language is not the most important expression of the picture.

In the photography work of Gemmy Woud-Binnendijk, the photographer inherits the treatment of classical oil painting colors. In her works such as "Irene", "Isis", and "Jamie", there are no lively and vivid colors that are common in children's photography. The colors of these images are strictly controlled by photographers, and photographers create the "smooth, atmospheric and full of mystery" sense that classical oil paintings have for people. The pictures of the children's photography series of "Nowadays child in the light of the past" are designed to be very unified and full of rationality and rigor; the photographer emphasizes more about the composition, paying attention to the expression of simple personal image and expression of the model and weakening the color performance of the picture with light and shadow shape. On the basis of highlighting the tone of the overall picture, these photographic works almost have no contrast between warm and cold colors, reflecting more of the sketch language. And at this moment, just like Kant once said, the color is "serving the composition". For example, the background color of the work "Irene" uses the reddish-yellow color of the field gray, the blue color of the girl's clothes is reduced in brightness and saturation, and the white feather ornaments are not so glamorous; the whole picture is calm and the brightness is slightly lower. The picture is covered with subtle warm gray and cool colors. It only maintains a certain range of brightness on the light-receiving surface and the background of characters, making the whole work seem very calm. In the work "Jamie", most of the picture is surrounded by black, but there are relatively bright colors in the forehead, face, neck, chest and dolls. The hue of the picture is not much changed and contrasted, plus the girl's bowing posture, showing the deep and sad look of the girl.

### IV. CONCISE SHAPE AND BACKGROUND SPACE

Classical oil painting pays attention to image modeling as simple and general as sculpture. The neoclassical oil painting master Ingres believed that the more concise the line and shape, the more beautiful and attractive paintings will be [8]. Ingres's oil paintings internalize the lines into the shape of the picture, and the whole picture presents a concise rhythm.

In the works of Gemmy Woud-Binnendijk, the principles of "simplified aesthetics of lines and shapes" are also followed, which are reflected in works such as "Netta" and "Irene". In "Netta", it can be seen that photographers processed the images extremely succinctly. Under the triangular composition, the child's pure image is outlined

with clear and concise outlines and shapes. There are no complicated lines, exaggerated shapes, colorful colors, decorative backgrounds, props and numerous elements in the picture; there even are no extra places for the wrinkles of the clothes. At the 3/4 side angle, only a little vitality is added through the girl's eyes and the bird in the girl's hands; everything seems so concise, following the classical rhythm of the classical oil painting, giving a more realistic sense of existence to people.

Classical oil painting usually has two ways to deal with the background space of the picture. One is a flat background color without a brushstroke, and the other is a miniature long-distance landscape image. With the advent of the elimination point perspective of the Renaissance paintings, the background of the works at that time began to focus on the far-reaching and realistic scenery; coupled with the changes in the composition of the work itself, the whole picture formed the effect of the fictional three-dimensional space. In Gemmy Woud-Binnendijk's works, she also applied this background expression. For example, in "Netta", the background of the portraits in the picture uses a reduced large-distance landscape image, a small distant view space and subtle cloud changes, so that the foreground image of the figure is maximized. These landscapes can be well coordinated with the characters in the foreground to form a picture with a storyline; this also makes the whole picture space more transparent and far-reaching.

## V. CONCLUSION

Since the development of photography, portrait photography has become more diverse from its original realistic style, and photographers have increasingly relied on digital technology to make their own works. Under the over-emphasis on digital and beautiful visual effects, the images of some photographic works become formalistic, and the content of the works appears to be very hollow. What's more, some photographers echoes the needs of customers, and their works seem to be exaggerated and vulgar. Although commercial portrait photography has strong economic attributes, it can still obtain nutrients from various styles of painting art. Some photographers combine traditional painting techniques with modern photography, such as the Chinese photographer Sun Jun. He combines Chinese traditional elaborate-style painting techniques with photography to perfectly blend classical elements with characters and create a "new literati painting photography". Gemmy Woud-Binnendijk's "Nowadays child in the light of the past" is a children's photography work, but it uses the expression of classical oil painting: smooth composition, golden ratio, rational deep and subtle color as well as concise shape and background space. Through the use of classical oil painting language, Gemmy Woud-Binnendijk's children's photography works show noble beauty and sense of style of classical oil painting in forms and artistic conception, which can be said to be the perfect reference for modern photography to the traditional painting language.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Yang Chunling. The Role of Color Language in Emotional Expression in Oil Painting Creation [J]. Youthful Days. 2013,(06):78-79. (in Chinese)
- [2] Liang Jin. Interpretation of "Classical Art" [J]. Literary Life, Wenhai Yiyuan. 2015, (3): 63. (in Chinese)
- [3] Bao Yuwei. The Color System of Western Classical Painting [J]. Art Education. 2016, (01): 161. (in Chinese)
- [4] Wang Jun, Hu Minghua. Analysis of the Fusion of Classicism and Surrealism Factors in Yuri Shwedoff CG Art Works [J]. Popular Literature and Art. 2017, (20): 70-71. (in Chinese)
- [5] Chu Hongru. Analysis of Classical Painting Style [J]. Popular Literature. 2011, (22): 30. (in Chinese)
- [6] Wang Jun, Hu Minghua. Analysis of the Fusion of Classicism and Surrealism Factors in Yuri Shwedoff CG Art Works [J]. Popular Literature and Art. 2017, (20): 70-71. (in Chinese)
- [7] Song Yanli. Research on the Application of Color Language in Commercial Portrait Photography [J]. Beauty & Times (I).2014,(11):117-119. (in Chinese)
- [8] Huang Caixia. Analysis of the Application of the Midline of Ingres's Paintings [J]. Jiannan Literature. 2013, (2): 180. (in Chinese)