

# Aesthetic Characteristics of Russian Oil Painting Language\*

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**Abstract**—Russian oil painting has its unique artistic characteristics and development courses. Influenced by westernization and local culture, it has both the connotation of Eastern and Western cultures, has strong artistic expression and appeal power, and is in line with the aesthetic requirements of both eastern and western people. The artistic language of Russian oil painting has rich aesthetic characteristics, including figurative realism, decorative nationality, imagery thought and emotion, abstract modernity and so on.

**Keywords:** Russian oil painting, artistic language, aesthetic characteristics

## I. INTRODUCTION

True Russian oil painting was originated in the early 18th century and it has been more than 300 years since its being affected by European oil painting. Russian oil painting and European oil painting are traced to the same origin. Russian oil painting is inherited and developed on the basis of traditional European oil painting. Combined with the historical background, cultural background and social background, Russian oil painting also incorporates localized artistic language, forms an artistic style with unique aesthetic characteristics of the Russian nation, and occupies a unique position in the history of world art. Russian oil painting has both the connotation of Eastern and Western cultures, has strong artistic expression and appeal power, and is in line with the aesthetic requirements of both eastern and western people.

Russian oil painting has its own development courses. In the 18th century, the westernization in Russia promoted the formation and development of Russian oil paintings in cultural forms. The artistic language was figurative and realistic, and the content was mainly based on realistic themes, which deeply reflected the humanistic feelings of Russian national idealists. In the second half of the 19th century, the trend of critical realism emerged, which at the same time impacted the concept of Russian oil painting creation. Realistic oil painting of critical realism became the mainstream and occupied the dominant position. The "Roving exhibition painting school" became the brilliant

peak of Russian critical realist painting during this period. From the 20th century to the present, relative to the aesthetic deviation of western art works, modern and contemporary Russian oil paintings expressed their dedication to beauty. While inheriting the figurative realism adhered to by traditional Russian oil paintings, they also contains painters' imagination and attempts on formal artistic language, forming modern and contemporary oil painting works with strong affinity and appeal power and unique aesthetic characteristics.

The contemporary Russian oil painters' artistic creation thinking generally has humanistic characteristics. They advocate "people-oriented", pay attention to life, advocate human nature and natural way of law, admire the art of beauty, adore fraternity, praise truth, goodness, beauty, criticize false, ugly, evil ... Those are all manifestations of humanistic spirit. For example, from the choice of themes of the painters Melnikov, Sidorov, Yeremyev, Sokolov, Karyuta, and Safkuyev, it can be seen that they generally have a humanistic creative thinking characteristics. They all focus on things that reflect the humanitarian spirit and beauty in real life. The promotion of human nature and the pursuit and appreciation of beauty have been rooted in the hearts of every Russian. Therefore, the creation concept of contemporary Russian oil painters is generally dominated by the humanistic features of beauty in form and content. Contemporary Russian avant-garde artists have generally received academic art education and have deep cultural and artistic deposits so that they intrinsically have strong humanistic spirit although they have advanced artistic thoughts, for example, Ayidan's caring for life. Although the works of Vajanin Popov are mysterious, they always adhere to a praise of beauty and human nature. Humanity makes Russian modern art less cruel, horrible and perverted, but has a profound connotation of humanistic thought.

Russian oil painters' brilliant artistic achievements are closely related to Russian national spirit and national feelings. The Russian nation has a strong sense of homeland. The ideal and romantic national feelings are rooted in the hearts of every Russian. People's strong national pride makes them love the vast land of Russia and the simple people, and worship their country's splendid civilization. In particular, the ideological and emotional love for the national art has made the painter's artistic creation manifest the national spirit everywhere. This national spirit underpins the self-

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confidence of Russian contemporary oil painters in artistic creation, and lays a solid foundation for them to create outstanding works with national artistic flavor. The artistic language of Russian oil painting has rich aesthetic characteristics, including figurative realism, decorative nationality, imagery thought and emotion, abstract modernity and so on.

## II. FIGURATIVE CHARACTERISTIC

Figurative characteristic is the basis of realistic oil painting, and is also the aesthetic basis for constructing the artistic language of Russian realistic oil painting. The continuation and adherence to the traditional figurative and realistic artistic language has formed the inherent characteristics of traditional Russian oil painting. Russian oil painters have created a large number of classic works with rigorous, scientific, and objective modeling language. The "Roving exhibition painting school" and "Socialist realism" make full use of this artistic language to convey a artistic spirit and aesthetic characteristics that push the Russian traditional oil painting to the peak. At present, many artists' creations have abandoned this "backward" language form, which highlights the invaluable nature of figurative and realistic language insisted on by Russian oil paintings.

Russian oil painting emphasizes that the artist should have profound artistic competencies and strong expression ability. The artist must accurately grasp the understanding of life, nature, and art. At the same time, scientific and rigorous sketching and color modeling capabilities are the basis of figurative and realistic language expression. Respecting the image, vividly portraying, possessing connotation, and conveying emotions make the traditional Russian oil painting have unique aesthetic characteristics.

"The Boat Tracker on the Volga" (1873) is a masterpiece of critical realist oil painting created by the touring painter Ilya Yefimovich Repin. The super strong figurative and realistic language of the picture depicts a long and narrow tracker team, where trackers in tattered clothes are pulling the cargo ship and marches forward heavily on the deserted sand beach with severe sunshine. There are eleven trackers, divided into three groups. Each image comes from sketching. Their age, character, experience, physical strength, spirit, and temperament are different. And those characteristics are fully reflected in the picture and unified in the theme.

Wet Meadow (1872) is a natural realistic work created by contemporary painter Fyodor Alexandrovich Vasilyev. The artist strives to express the special state that nature often has after summer thunderstorms on the canvas figuratively. In the painting, after being baptized by rainstorm, the wet flowers and grass still fall to the ground, and the sunlight that squeezed the dark clouds makes the wet meadow sparkle.

## III. DECORATIVE CHARACTERISTIC

Decorative artistic language is the materialization product of Russian national spirit, which makes the Russian oil painting art have distinctive national characteristics and unique aesthetic characteristics. Russian ancient iconic

paintings and Russian folk life utensils and costumes inspire the creation of Russian oil painters and provide rich nutrition for artistic creation.

The strong decorative modeling language and the strong, saturated and gorgeous national decorative colors shown in the picture well solve the space, shape, color and other problems in the paintings created by Russian oil painters. The use of decorative artistic language is a leapfrog in the expression language of traditional Russian oil painting, which makes Russian oil painting both adheres to tradition and has the modernity of decoration, enriches the formal language of modern Russian oil paintings, enhances new aesthetic feelings and also makes Russian oil paintings have distinct national characteristics.

"Still Life" is the work of contemporary painter Oleg Yeremyev. The shape is vivid and precise, and the changes of brush strokes are used to stack oil paint and create rich textures. The work absorbs the colors of Russian folk art, and achieves decorative artistic effects in the juxtaposition and complementation of colors.

## IV. IMAGERY CHARACTERISTIC

Imagination is a commonly used way of language expression in Chinese painting. The painter gets subjective and objective characteristics of the expression object integrated and created into artistic work with rich forms, full of emotions and profound artistic conception. On the basis of drawing and absorbing some language expression methods of Chinese freehand drawing, some modern and contemporary Russian painters combine Russian traditional grasp of image, process the picture with "image", and gradually ignore the scientific grasp of space and form in traditional modeling to express emotions and create artistic conception.

In terms of techniques, it is similar to the "sketching" in Chinese paintings. It attaches importance to the expression of the language ontology and emphasizes the true beauty of lines, colors, textures, etc., so that Russian oil painting break the restrictions of traditional pattern and is not restricted by the traditional stylization. This way further improves the style of oil painting works, enhances the ideology and emotion expression and increases the charm of oil painting works.

"A Walk in the Forest" is a masterpiece among contemporary artist Andrei Melnikov's landscape paintings. In this painting, the painter reproduces the poetic artistic conception when people are together with the nature in a cool cyan color. Mottled sunshine is in the deep of the woods, making the whole picture look elegant and light.

## V. ABSTRACTIVE CHARACTERISTIC

Abstractive characteristic is the rich and extended expression of artistic language in modern Russian oil painting. Among modern and contemporary Russian oil painters, there are some modernist artists. Their creative styles have no boundaries. They incorporate philosophical

speculativeness on the basis of absorbing the language elements of traditional Russian oil paintings. At the same time, they also absorb the form of the art language of modern art oil paintings in the world and create new "Russian" abstractive expressionist oil painting.

After various explorations and attempts, Russian modernist artists have harmonized the forms of multiple artistic languages into the picture, emphasize the abstract composition of points, lines, faces and colors in the picture, and use a holistic artistic conception to simplify and generalize the content to be expressed, creating a new art form with strong visual aesthetic feeling. These avant-garde abstract artistic languages are also used to express the artist's individual artistic claims.

"Bathing the Red Horse" (1912) is a work of contemporary painter Kuzma Petrov Vodkin. This painting borrows the knight image popular in Russian folklore. The characters and horses are all placed in one abstract space. The allegorical and symbolic meaning contained in the paintings makes the audience have many associations. Drawing on the traditions of ancient Russian painting, the painting creates a monumental and generalized image and shows a unified picture composed of red, yellow, and blue colors.

#### VI. IMAGINARY PAINTING LANGUAGE

Imagination is a way of artistic expression in Chinese painting and means that the objects expressed in drawing it should be integrated with the subjective emotions to create an artistic image with artistic conception, charm and feeling. Russia's territory spans Europe and Asia continent plates, so that its art is also affected by Asian art dominated by China while being affected by European art. Imaginative painting language with oriental colors often appears in Russian works. Some modern Russian realistic oil painters absorb certain characteristics of Chinese freehand paintings, deal with the picture in a more imagery manner, ignore the pursuit of space and volume in traditional western oil painting modeling, and create a style of picture full of artistic conception. In terms of technique, Chinese freehand painting adopts free expressive techniques, with strong sense of improvisation and scene, and pays special attention to the mood of "sketching" painting. In terms of artistic conception, Russian paintings like to learn from the way of emotional expressions in of Chinese literati paintings, with lyric, poetic, detached, aesthetic, and profound feelings. Melnikov highly praises the freehand painting in Chinese paintings. Especially in his later artistic creations, he clearly fell in love with the imagery painting language. The techniques (pointing, dying, rubbing) of his oil paintings are free and easy, and the artistic conception of his picture is long-lasting and detached and full of oriental temperament.

#### VII. THE ARTISTIC LANGUAGE BETWEEN FIGURATIVE AND ABSTRACTIVE CHARACTERISTICS

The contemporary avant-garde artists in Russia all have deep modeling skills. However, in order to express

subjective ideas more prominently, they generally choose the creation method combining figurative painting language and abstractive painting language. This is the unique feature of the artistic characteristics of contemporary Russian oil painters. They do not completely abandon the advantages of traditional art of Russian oil painting, but just cleverly get the advantages integrated into the abstractive painting language and expressions, making the avant-garde concepts and forms of expression not conceptual and hollow. The artistic language of Kurakov, Aidan, Valodya Popov and other painters is a continuation and development of the cubist, abstract art, supremacist, and constructivist artistic languages. Some of them, such as Aidan, put aside the influence of objective and natural factors, and summarized the image into pure and abstract points, lines, and surface geometry to arrange the picture, and boldly flattened and decorated the image. This is an abstract processing method for expressive artistic language. At the same time, her works are unforgettable and have a lasting aftertaste, because the painter's simple and abstract pictures have also maintained intriguing images and connotations. It is a clever fusion of figurative and abstractive artistic languages. What deserves admiration is that contemporary Russian avant-garde oil painters actively explored and courageously innovated in the process of learning from his predecessors, and finally refined the language features of modern art with a distinctive personality and native appearance of Russia.

#### VIII. PICTURE DESIGN

Before drawing the final draft, Russian oil painters will repeatedly consider the relationship between the various painting elements in it, such as the relationships between graphics, and between light and dark of objects, the mutual connection and independence between color blocks, and so on. After generalization and summarization, the color blocks are designed on the picture in forms of point, line, and face. Through careful picture layout, the combination of color blocks achieves high-quality visual aesthetic feeling. Finally, the details are repeatedly processed and dealt with. The exploration of this artistic language model lays the theoretical and practical foundation for the transformation of contemporary Russian oil paintings. The composition and design of picture has become one of the greatest artistic features of contemporary Russian oil painters.

#### IX. CONCLUSION

For Chinese people, the artistic language described in Russian oil paintings always brings a familiar closeness with oriental cultural characteristics and caters to the aesthetic tastes of Chinese people toward Western paintings. This is also the reason why Russian oil paintings are always kept fresh in China. Russian oil painters are neither dazzled by the blind reformation of the West, nor constrained by the dogmatic academism. Their rational reformation and development has promoted Russian oil painting possessing vigorous vitality. Facing the worldwide wave of art, Russian oil painting has found its place.

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