

Analysis of Monet's "Water Lilies" Based on E.H.Gombrich's Theory of Iconology

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ABSTRACT

E.H.Gombrich is an important successor and critic of iconology theory. He not only affirmed Wolfgang K.H.Panofsky's iconology theory, but also creatively proposed his own theory. The article is based on E.H.Gombrich's iconology theory. It analyzes the impressionist painter Claude Monet's "Water Lilies" theoretically, and understands the historical situation and ideological meaning of Monet when he created "Water Lilies".

Keywords: E.H.Gombrich, iconology theory, Claude Monet, "Water Lilies"

1.MONET PAINTING STYLE

At the beginning of the 20th century, Monet's "Water Lilies" group paintings can be described as a large-scale immortal work in his later years. From the perspective of its overall picture layout and painting style, it is full of abstract meaning and freehand artistic conception. Today, when we look at the "Water Lilies" group paintings again, we will find that although they are all painted water lilies, the forms, light perception, and color perception are different, and the overall picture layout is also different. Let's look at his painting style again. Compared with classical paintings, Monet's use of color is bolder, which makes the painting appear in a brand-new appearance; in the form of expression of the picture, he got rid of the regular and smooth texture of the past and switched to using it. The "rough", passionate texture of the picture, linear brushstrokes can be seen everywhere. The first feature of Monet's painting is to keenly capture the visual effect of light on the color change of the object; the second feature is to break the traditional depiction of the light and dark sides of the object and adopt the method of improving purity; the third The characteristic is to magnify the contrast between warm and cold colors on the surface of the object (see Figure 1). It can be seen that Monet is well-deserved as the first "Master of Impressionism" to use outdoor light to express the instantaneous changes of natural scenery under the sun. Cezanne is making such an evaluation of Monet: "Monet is only a human being. It's just the eyes—but what kind of eyes are they!" [1] It can be seen that because all the content of the objects that Monet saw was removed from

the mind, let nature state everything by itself, which is in contrast to iconography The importance of emphasizing the motif is closely related. The article analyzes Monet's "Water Lilies" from the perspective of Gombrich's iconography theory. First, it explains the development of iconology theory, and then elaborates Gombrich's criticism of Panofsky's iconology theory. Gombrich's iconography theory summarizes three ways to analyze artistic works, namely typology, historical situation reconstruction, and image representation. The article will make a scientific and rational interpretation of Monet's "Water Lilies" from these three points.



Figure 1 Monet 'Water Lilies' 1899
<https://www.etsy.com/listing/155511380/the-water-lily-pond-1899-claude-monet?>

2.ANALYZE 'WATER LILIES' WITH GOMBRICH'S IMAGE THEORY

2.1The Development of Image Theory

At the beginning of the 20th century, modern iconography was founded by the German art historian

Warburg, who advocated placing works of art in the historical context of the times to explain the relationship between the meaning of the artist's works of art and the spirit of the times and beliefs. Thus, a connection was established; afterwards, Warburg's iconographic theory was systematically discussed by Panofsky, who critically borrowed from the theories of Wolflin, Liegel, and Cassirer, and combined it with German classics. The pioneer of hermeneutics Friedrich Astor proposed three levels of textual interpretation and proposed three levels of iconology. However, many scholars have questioned Panofsky's iconographic theory, believing that its theory does not guarantee the objectivity of the interpretation of images of works of art. These scholars include German art historian Bechman, British art history professor Barn, Peecht et al. Among them, Gombrich is the most powerful critic. He has important value in revising the methods and theories of iconology. He not only affirmed the value of iconology, but also creatively proposed the types of works. Positioning and reconstruction of the plan advocates finding the author's creative intention in the historical context of the restoration of the work, so as to interpret the meaning of the work, which is exactly the opposite of the "reconstruction of meaning" advocated by Panofsky.

2.2 Gombrich's Criticism of Panofsky's Theory of Iconology

Panowski's interpretation of works of art is divided into three levels. The first level is pre-iconographic description, focusing on natural themes and understanding objects and events; the second level is iconographic analysis, focusing on conventional themes. The interpreter is required to have a certain knowledge reserve; the third level is iconographic analysis, that is, the analysis of the inner meaning or content of artistic works [2]. In Gombrich's view, Panofsky's theory of iconology originated from theology, which overly mystifies iconography and is full of assumptions and conjectures. Therefore, Gombrich criticized its three levels.

In the pre-iconography stage, Gombrich opposed viewing images as a direct copy of reality, but instead emphasized the "viewer's duty". In *Art and Illusion*, he proposed that "seeing" depends on "knowledge". And the imitation ability that people who appreciate works of art must possess is called "projection", which means that the viewer's interpretation of works of art is based on the correspondence between the images stored in their hearts and the reproduced objects. In the iconographic stage, Gombrich opposed the over-interpretation of psychoanalysis and the over-interpretation of the symbolic meaning of works of art. In his view, iconography must start from the study of customs and conventions, not from the study of symbolism[3] The

artist's creation is based on the relationship between the image and the subject matter. Therefore, classic documents can be used to construct the historical context and creative intention of the artist's artistic creation. In the iconology stage, contrary to Panofsky's use of comprehensive methods to dig out the subconscious connotation behind the author's creation, Gombrich insisted on rationally explaining the true connotation of works of art. Although an image has multiple expressive meanings, the most important The main purpose is to determine and reconstruct the most appropriate meaning, so that the rationalization of logical relations becomes an important criterion for judging the validity of interpretation [4], which is to use logical reasoning to grasp the experience of images.

It can be seen that Gombrich's correction of iconography has got rid of the imprisonment of Panofsky's metaphysics. Starting from pragmatism, he believes that the interpretation of the meaning of a work of art is closely related to the artist's creative intentions, historical background, and personal use. Relevant, using common sense, viewership, situational construction and other methods to discover the author's creative intentions. Based on Gombrich's theory, the author will analyze the author's intention of Monet's "Water Lilies" series of paintings and the profound meaning of the works from the following three points, namely, typology, historical situation reconstruction, and image expression.

2.3 Gombrich's Image Theory

2.3.1 Typology

Gombrich quoted the literary critic E.D. Hirsch's hermeneutic point of view to standardize the interpretation of iconology. The rule is to determine the type or genre of the work. The core of Hirsch's thinking is "respect the original intent of the work and regard it as the best meaning, that is, the most reasonable interpretation standard" [5]. Only in a specific context can the interpretation of the work have meaning. Therefore, Kampt Richie believes that the interpretation of art works is first to determine its type or subject matter. Monet is a typical representative of the Impressionist painters, as well as the initiator and organizer of the Impressionist movement. From the perspective of composition, the impressionist painters emphasize the instantaneity and examine objects from a new perspective. In the composition, the picture is arbitrarily cropped according to the artist himself. Cut at will, as can be seen from Monet's "Water Lilies" series of paintings, and the same theme is not the same in the composition of the picture. There are round composition, square composition, and rectangular composition. The picture includes all Nihonbashi, water lilies, and trees. There are also those that only depict water lilies. From the perspective of light and color, he has been pursuing the

expression of light and color all his life, getting rid of the creative way of expressing three-dimensional space with light and dark tones used by classical painters, and creating the light-dark relationship and light of expressing space by color. In fact, Impressionists mainly study conditional color in color, and conditional color involves inherent color, which is the "true color" mentioned by Leonardo in his painting theory [6]. However, there are The difference is that the eyes of the impressionist painters selectively distinguish colors when creating, trying to capture the instantaneous color of the object, that is, the change in the color of the object brought by the external environment, the spatial distance, and the surrounding things. "Water Lilies" is a masterpiece of Monet's later years and is one of the typical representatives of his impressionist series. It fully embodies Monet's pursuit of light and color and the transmission of momentary impressions. The colors in the picture follow the theme of the picture. Chennai's emotions are constantly changing. In order to express the beauty of water lilies under natural light, Monet uses the juxtaposition of colors to directly harmonize the paintings with primary colors on the canvas. Before the painting, people feel as if they are in a water lily pond and feel the beauty of blurry and hazy light. From the perspective of brushstrokes, Impressionists are very unique in painting techniques and the use of brushstrokes. They not only need to understand the brushstrokes, but also the relationship between the brushstrokes. Therefore, the viewer must fully mobilize his memory of the visible world in the hope that it Projected into the mosaic pattern composed of stippling paintings in front of him, it creates a visual shock[1]. In "Water Lilies", Monet uses bold and wild brushstrokes to express the misty misty feeling on the water surface. The smooth brushstrokes express the calm water surface, and the curved brushstrokes express the ripples formed around the water lilies. On the whole, Monet's brushstrokes are random but there is no obvious outline. The intersecting brushstrokes combine the two-dimensional abstract expression with The three-dimensional visual illusions are perfectly combined to form a strong visual tension. From the perspective of modeling, Impressionist painting pays attention to the flatness of modeling, which forms a strong contrast with the thick and round shape in classical paintings. In addition, Impressionism is relatively subtle when dealing with modeling contours, which makes the boundary between objects more blurred, and at the same time, it also uses Color expresses the shape of objects. Under Monet's brush, the shape of the water lily no longer has a specific shape, breaking through the inherent constraints. It is not a simple description of the objective shape of the water lily, but the water lily is used to convey the artist's "intention". "In the whole picture, water lilies have been flooded with clouds, trees, and flowers reflecting on the water.

2.3.2 Historical Context Reconstruction

In Gombrich's view, art is produced in a specific historical context. To make a reasonable explanation of the value of an artist's work of art, it is necessary to construct the social background of the age of the artist. He believes that the interpretation of the work of art The historical situation should not be based on the original code, but the reconstruction of the historical situation. The historical situation mentioned here is clearly different from Panofsky's "historical reconstruction". The former is a plan composed of provable evidence, while the latter is the large framework of ideology [5], Gombrich's reconstruction of historical situations has a rigorous logical structure and is mutually corroborative. From the perspective of the social background, in 1879, with the Franco-Prussian War and the establishment of the Paris Commune, political events had an important impact on artistic life. It is not until the second half of the 19th century that industrial progress made France present a modern look. And the impressionist painters Rivers, bridges, and vehicles are moved to the screen to depict the beautiful landscape of industrialization at that time. In addition, the advent of the camera in the 19th century helped people discover the unique angle of view of the landscape, which also provided a new perspective observation angle for the impressionist painters; at the same time, the development of the World Expo brought the Japanese garden into Monet's field of vision. In 1893, he established his own "water garden". In the same year, chemist Eugène Schaeffler published a new theory of optical colors, which provided new inspiration for the impressionist painters' consideration of light and color. Combining these factors, the large-scale "Water Lily" decorative painting created by Monet breaks the three-dimensional perspective [7], and incorporates a large number of oriental cultural elements, such as the decoration and flatness of Japanese prints. It is worth mentioning that in 1914, Monet and his friends and Clemenceau agreed to donate large decorative paintings of water lilies to the country, and built a third large studio in the courtyard, which was finally signed with the country in 1922 The contract to donate a large decorative painting of water lilies[8]. Therefore, during this period, Monet's intention to create the painting "Water Lilies" was very clear. The image of water lilies was used to metaphor the never-ending process of rebirth, highlighting the bright future of the country At the same time, I also hope to leave a peaceful and peaceful world to the chaotic successors of the 20th century.

2.3.3 Image Performance

In terms of image performance, Gombrich put forward "artistic moments and movements" in his "Images and Eyes: Restudy of the Psychology of Picture Reproduction", which is the same as Monet's "Water Lilies" in the pursuit of light and shadow. The changes

coincide. In Gombrich's view, the real image should and only be shown on the actual object we see in an instant. The moment the artist captures the object, he perfectly composes the state of the object, the composition of the picture, the light and shadow. The changes are revealed in order to reflect the beautiful and peaceful picture presented by the created object at the "point of time". This instant picture freeze actually has a certain sense of movement. Everything is in motion. By intercepting one of the pictures To indirectly show the movement of objects in time and space. In addition, Gombrich's theory of image reproduction explains "mirrors and maps", that is, the painter uses his "eyes of innocence" to expand the scene he sees before his eyes[9], and excludes external disturbances. In the picture, the purpose of this is to expect the viewer to take a few steps back to appreciate the painting, so as to experience the different feelings brought by the light, and to stimulate the viewer's resonance. Monet's "Water Lilies" series of paintings show the different states of water lilies by capturing water lilies at different times of the day to show the dynamics of water lilies and convey the concept of endless life. Monet's "Water Lilies" is from the original picture Including Nihonbashi, catkins, clouds in the sky, and water lilies, until the later stage, I only focus on expressing water lilies, reducing unnecessary elements in the picture as much as possible to attract viewers' attention to the theme of water lilies.

3.CONCLUSION

In the past, the analysis of Monet's "Water Lilies" either only focused on the use of colors, artistic conception, and the author's "freehand brushwork", or the analysis of "Water Lilies" was too mysterious using Panowski's iconographic theory. And few people analyze the historical scenes and real motives of Monet's creation of the "Water Lilies" series from a rational perspective. The core of Gombrich's iconography theory lies in not only applying iconography to the level of cultural significance, but also And also pay attention to the rationality of logical interpretation. However, the analysis of a painting does not stop at using a single theory to analyze it comprehensively, but selectively accepts it critically. The appearance of any theory has its value.

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