The Image Behind the Image

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Abstract. This paper examines the rise of "New Painting" (新绘画) in post-millennium China, positioning it as a critical evolution beyond historical movements like Scar Art (伤痕艺术), the '85 New Wave (85新潮), and Political Pop (政治波普). Rather than a unified style or manifesto, New Painting embodies a radical subjectivity—a conscious departure from technical fetishism toward deeply personal visual languages that resist commodification and categorization. Its emergence signals a paradigm shift: where preceding movements engaged collective trauma or political critique through codified symbols, New Painting privileges the artist's interior landscape. Artists like Li Qing (李青) and Zhang Zhaoying (张钊瀛) exemplify this transition—their canvases operate as psychological arenas where cultural memory collides with contemporary fragmentation.

Keywords: New Painting, Subjectivity, Visual Experience, Anti-Categorization, Image Reconstruction.

1 Introduction

The art of painting has come to this day, not only for painting itself, but for the need of visual experience. In recent years, we have paid close attention to the latest art media, and art has shown a diversified trend. Each creative technique is closely related to the author's ideological changes. Especially influenced by "scar art","85 trend of thought", and "playfulness" and "political pop" in the early 1990s, art thoughts have been liberated. Painting becomes more and more personal and [1] subjective. The characteristics of new painting are also the same. The "new" in the concept of "new painting" put forward by Lv Peng points to the characteristics that are different from other artists 'personal style and painting language. The most important characteristic of "new painting" is that it is very personal, and the "new" here is not a certain genre or a movement in the traditional sense, nor a revolution that denies the past. It is the continuation and innovation of the "new painting" that began in the 1990s, which is also the reason why the "new painting" cannot be simply classified by language style and expression technique.

What the new painting presents is rich, abandoning stylized and fixed thinking, constantly liberating, and pursuing "new". In today's age of information explosion, art practitioners are eager to innovate and create works through more technological means and the most advanced art media. But this is not the reason why we abandon traditional

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A. Y. M. A. Islam et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the 2025 4th International Conference on Science Education and Art Appreciation (SEAA 2025)*, Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 952,
https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-452-5_48

painting, the material persistence of pigments and canvas retains irreplaceable haptic intelligence in digital saturation [2], but also because there are more choices and possibilities, in today's context,"new painting" is more precious, hoping to empathize with the audience through this visual phenomenon.

Recently, exhibitions on the theme of "new paintings" have been held in succession throughout the country. Chengdu City Art Museum "Image Shock-80, 90 China New Painting" exhibition artists received everyone's continuous attention, this batch of "new painting" practitioners, there are many excellent and unique artists, such as Zhang Zhaoying, Li Qing, Meng Xiaoyang... they are constantly being opened, constantly liberated "new painting" this road, try to move forward, in this picture image explosion era continue to put on painting.

2 The Persistence Behind Banter

Some artists are faithful to the construction of their own image field in the process of creation. The "new" construction of images in their works stems from a conditioned reflex or an output method of self-generation. And did not emphasize painting technology, painting means, painting media and other art is summarized as "new", more attention to individual things, individual logic in the "new". And instead of discussing art itself as modernist and metaphysical, it's about discovering and selecting new images, exploring ways and possibilities of generating images. Zhang Zhaoying's painting creation is like this. His paintings are good at appropriation and reconstruction of images, and enter into creation through entertainment. These images are either from the news, or from popular ads, or from anywhere.(As show in Figure 1) He reorganized these images to form a new painting scene and a new image world. Sociologist Irving. Goffman put forward "role theory" and "pseudo-drama" theory, which provided Zhang Zhaoying with thinking decoding for his creation. The scenes, stories, and emotions in the work are constructed by the artist himself from different starting points, meeting and meeting "performances, banter, society, magazines, pictures, etc." (As show in Figure2)Hope conveys to the viewer that anyone can confirm what the real world looks like based on everything in front of them?

Every artist's artistic language will have distinct personal characteristics. What kind of language is chosen will present what kind of picture. This was especially true for Meng Xiaoyang. His silence is designed to separate sound from echo, and his work has a palpable but indescribable sense of silence and sadness linked to his childhood experiences. For the use of images, he often refers to old photographs. His works are closely related to his own era and the background of the times. There is a special preference for old things, and he places what he sees and thinks in an emotional atmosphere, which is related to some memory deep in the artist himself. The artist's self-description states: "My initial work referred to old photographs, and the sense of time in the photos made me want to bring my past and future fantasies into it. The tone in my memory is deep, where there are vast plains and warm yards. The times and us are amazing. I'm not sure which is the better time, past, present, or future." Therefore, his works often appear in his hometown yard, artist's grandmother, people's park... Immerse yourself in the artist's

work, as if time had frozen. Under the rich colors and brush strokes, the details of the characters 'faces are hidden without exception, only the vague outline is retained. In this moment of solidification, the audience meets the artist's childhood((As show in Figure 3) (As show in Figure 4)

Fig. 1. Elevator in Budapest, Oil on canvas, Winner 9, Oil on canvas,150x180cm, 250×180CM, 2014-2022

Fig. 2. Elevator in Budapest, Oil on canvas, 150×180cm, 2022.

Fig. 3. Tao Ranting 2017 200×300cm Oil on canvas.

Fig. 4. Chronology 2001x50cm 2021 Oil on canvas; mutual destruction but the same interest.

Some artists draw in reserved and deep language, some are bold and avant-garde, while others are full of fun. It is Li Qing's consistent creative idea to change the way of recording this era in a "fun" way. Create new shining points in repetition, and each repetition, the power will continue to be superimposed in the new work, constantly confirming each other. "There's a picture in the picture" is a framed picture, one picture covered by another, and they talk to each other. Artist Li Qing said in an interview: "This is especially true for" Mutual Destruction and the Same Image ". The audience will compare the changes between the two paintings before and after pasting, as well as the similarities and differences between the two paintings. (As show in Figure5)They will constantly compare and discover the differences in images in a group of works. This is also very similar to the viewing states we need to switch between different "screens" today." The series of "mutual destruction and the same image" seems more like two paintings "painting themselves" to each other. Just after painting, when the paint is not dry, Li Qing will put the two paintings face to face with each other, like rubbing together. After separation, there are two works. Two are "destroyed" works, forming a subtle temperament in space.

The works of these practitioners of "new painting" are full of contradictions and tensions, and we hope that this group can be seen more clearly. Times are changing, which is destined to change the observation angle of artists, but what can be sure to remain unchanged is that everyone is still thinking, reflecting, and everyone still loves painting. Through this exhibition of "Shock of Image-80,90 China New Painting," it is also demonstrated that perhaps what we need in this era is not only avant-garde art, but also this kind of art returning to images. This is the "new" pursued by the new painting group_the pursuit of "individual" artistic tension; the uniqueness and uncertainty of youth; tearing, opposition, reorganization... The art of painting has been impacted since

its development, but we always believe that painting will not decline. People still need to paint, images still shock, we still move.

Fig. 5. Images of Mutual Undoing and Unity·Two Actors 2 photos, variable size + oil on canvas 150×100cm×2 2017.

3 Conclusion

In response to the "death of painting," "revitalizing the medium through a tripartite revolution: radical subjectivity, material reclamation, and dialectical tradition—this is the way to defy the presumed "death of painting." Where digital technology is in danger of decreasing the amount of images to algorithmic commodities, artists such as Li Qing (Images of Mutual Undoing and Unity) as the palimpsests of cultural criticism—that is, the way to depict the "reality"—are created and deconstructed in a [3] media saturation era. Zhang Zhaoying uses the term "appropriation" of news pieces (Winner) extends Goffman's role theory into painterly practice, interrogating performative identities through collaged visual syntax [4]. This insistence on human agency goes beyond the stylistic originality; it also underpins the painting's resurgence in terms of its ability to encode trauma, memory, and ambiguity, which in turn causes the complexity of digital media.

Material innovation is becoming political opposition. In the process of creating archeological strata of urbanization that is alienating the results of painting (the so-called "portrait studies—roadblocks)—into PVC composites (Cui Xinming). Two types of cycling, Fu Meijun s labor-intensive acrylic stratifications (a two type of cycl) reclaim slowness as a rebellion against the immediate digital use of information [5]. Even the July 18 (2020) of Sun Xiaowei s miniature, whose cracked earth pigments memorialize the 1976 Tangshan–earthquake—proposes the original ability of a pigment to produce historical wounds that are not included in photographic documents.

Crucially, tradition is neither fetishized nor discarded but weaponized. Zeng Yang's post-industrial grays(South of the Three Pure Ones Hall)reanimate Daoist spatial philosophy to critique contemporary disenchantment, while Meng Xiaoyang's muted, photo-derived scenes (The Bank of the River) freeze temporal flux into psychological landscapes where"past and future fantasies coalesce" (artist statement).This dialectical

engagement manifests Lü Peng's vision of New Painting as a"return to origin through-departure"—where ink-wash sensibilities hybridize with abstraction to forge glocal visual grammars.

New painting has the most dramatic effect because of the contradiction of time: this is the result of a process that is both a coping mechanism for digital fragmentation, a sense of identity, a lack of continuity in the past, and an increase in current. Through the privileging of the hand's tremor; these authors convert the canvas of the pixels to a point of contention, which is in the case of classification, materiality is opposed by dematerialization, and cultural memory is rewritten to contemporaryity by the way that they are subject to the distortion of classification by those who oppose the process of classifying the object with the use of the power of its own, which is why they are so privileged to use the term "sim tremor; this is the product of subjectivity, which defies classification.

Acknowledgments

A third level heading in 9-point font size at the end of the paper is used for general acknowledgments, for example: This study was funded by X (grant number Y).

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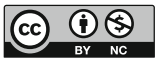
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