

On the Reason of Transformation and Aesthetic Value of Sense of Reality in Rembrandt's Oil Paintings

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Abstract—The sense of reality of Rembrandt's oil paintings reflects - that we can find characteristics and rules in three aspects from fineness and magnificence to candidness and simpleness. the reason of transformation of sense of reality and aesthetic value of sense of reality in his works, which can reveal the unique value of the sense of reality in oil paintings. By doing so, can we explain the importance of various application and expression of sense of reality in oil painting creation. Through the research on the sense of reality of Rembrandt's works, we can re-understand the oil painting's language. It is an indispensable method for us to understand the maestro. Meanwhile, to study this subject can make us more comprehensively appreciate and understand the painting essence from maestros. We can draw on the merits and develop our own painting language.

Keywords—*Rembrandt's oil painting; sense; Language guidance*

I. INTRODUCTION

In painting creation, direct depicting the sense of reality of objects aims to express the nature more vividly. However, once artists begin to make the objective nature reappear on canvas, the artists have to consider the objective image's expression on visual aesthetic. Thus, how to express becomes the primary question. To choose and apply the sense of reality is not only for better reappearance of nature, but also representing the artists' aesthetic expectation. Therefore, compared with natural phenomenon, the expression of sense of reality in artistic works is more expressive and appealing. Rembrandt is a representative painter to lay emphasis on the sense of reality to enhance the art expressive force. The sense of reality, whether in reappearance of nature or self feeling expression etc, has function other model elements can not replace with.

II. EMBODIMENT OF SENSE OF REALITY

In Cihai (lexion), the Chinese collocation of "zhi" related to plastic arts is "zhigan" which means: ("modeling term". Through different expressive way, express different features of different objects. Such as copper, iron, bamboo, wood,

porcelain, ceramic and woolen goods etc, which can give people real feelings of softness, hardness, lightness, heaviness, thickness, thinness, coarseness and smoothness.) The oil painting term, for the attachments, coatings, pigments and megilp are different, especially for the different ways and procedures when painting. Using different humidity and thickness megilp, painters can get different sense of reality of polishing, thickness and solidness. (compared with entirety, concrete forms of parts of objectives, such as the specific individual tree's model in a forest.)

In this paper, the sense of reality mainly refers to ① and ② from Cihai, viz each object's characteristic and picture sense of reality. Firstly, Rembrandt's works are divided into two periods with 1640s as the watershed. Taking the time as watershed, this paper conducts a comparative research on the different periods' works.

A. Reappearance of Pomp Reality

Rembrandt's early works are fine and smooth. The depiction is delicate and splendid. In the pictures, the sense of reality of elegant silk, velvet, fur and feather, pearl, gold and silver decorations is shining, resplendent and magnificent. He uses fine technique of drawing to express the real sense of reality of the objects. His description of figures' skin is soft and smooth and clean. Even for the wrinkle-ridden faces of the aged, he also can depict them with full of lustre. He meticulously describes hair in order to highlight the beauty of softness and smoothness.

B. Calling of Lonely Emotion

In the later period of Rembrandt's works, the change of thickness is evident. The skin and texture become coarse and the delicate sense of the picture is on decline. He abandon pursuing reappearance of gorgeous objects. He begins to describe coarse cloth, winkled skin and other simple and plain sense of reality from richness and magnificence to gravity, simpleness, melancholy and solemnness. The later works are not like previous ones to pay attention to objects' real texture. The coarse cloth and silk often take big and

wide stroke to show the total luxury style, especially in the self-portrait. He takes an undisguised attitude to describe his flabby skin and old and grey face with uneven and acnes and erythemas on skin, rosacea, shaggy and messy hair and vicissitudes of life.

III. THE REASON OF TRANSFORMATION OF SENSE OF REALITY

A. *The Real Self-observation of Rembrandt*

1) *The change of social environment makes Rembrandt's paintings wash the excessive magnificence*. When Rembrandt was alive, Holland had successfully completed the first bourgeois revolution with booming economy and prosperous culture. The prosperity brought about an huge opportunity to art. Not only were the noble interested in portraiture but also the bourgeoisie became the main force to order their portraits. In 17th century, painting became a rather good seller in Holland. These pictures took daily life as subject whether it is a plate of fruits or a pot which were expected by purchasers to be as vivid as possible. Therefore, painters were pursuing the sense of verisimilitude. Rembrandt's early works were paying more attention to depicting surface sense of verisimilitude. In his paintings, whether it was silk, silver decoration or armour were fine-pointed finish and life-like.

Since 1640s, Rembrandt's living condition had changed. Holland's bourgeois began to plunder colonies in the outside world. Meanwhile, they began to severely exploit people inside the country. The demand of democracy sharply contradicted the bourgeois. Then Rembrandt was not a kind of painter counting on bourgeois. He was affected by democracy and humanism. Thus, he did not pursue natural reappearance of objects, more importantly, and he put his own thought in his creation. He audaciously revealed the contradiction in real life. Meanwhile, he did not cater to vulgar taste from bourgeois, neither gave up his creation principle and painting style. It is to say that the transformation of Rembrandt derived from the change of his inner cultural position and social position. He often depicted some pessimistic figures and paupers', or express people's religious story through sharply dramatic contradiction. He chose non-"beauty" things in life as objects, highlighting on cloth's wrinkle, uneven face of the elderly and civilian's coarse cloth.

2) *The change of life situation making Rembrandt's works accumulating solemnness*. Rembrandt was born in a well-off miller family. In his famous period and his age, he had honor, wealth, happy family. Thus, he was very content with his life and enormously proud of his success. When he was affected by Baroque, his pictures were pursuing magnificence effort. Figures in the pictures mostly in jewelries and fineries. He received orders from various people and used firm and delicate stroke to express people's vivid characters. Applying the delicate method expressed people's garments, jewelries and other luxury ornaments. These painting characteristics catered to bourgeois taste. In this stage, his portrait showed care-free and haughty level or neatly dressed court and ministerlike nobility.

The Night Watch, created in 1642, was a group portrait ordered by Amsterdam Archer Union. Rembrandt well designed the composition with well-proportioned arrangement. And he tried to make everyone seen. However, this masterpiece has surpassed peoples aesthetic ability in that time. Whether the officers or other citizens from Amsterdam could not accept this kind of "disorder" group portrait. Rembrandt at once was ridiculed and deserted. This event brought about bubbling with noise in Amsterdam, resulting in a fact that the previous customers did not give him orders again. His life was in struggle immediately. At the same time, Rembrandt's wife developed pneumonia and died. In the middle of 1640s, his servant girl became his partner and pillar in his later life. But Rembrandt did not have official marriage registration with the servant, so he suffered long-term attack and threat from priests. The church denounced his behaviour as "evil life". Rembrandt then suffered people's abandoning and lost all orders. The he could not live a life. Rembrandt's life experienced the peak of life, career, wealth and fortune to rapid bankruptcy and nobody's caring.

This kind of life's turn made a huge change of Rembrandt's painting career. He made a profound thought on misery life. The thought produced a result that he abandoned the surface luxury elegance and colorful delicacy in his works. His stroke was not that soft and fine. Emotional summary, heavy strokes and repeated overlying strokes emerged in his works. The surface of the picture became coarse, hard, profound, melancholy, blue, obscure and powerful.

The description above is not all we can grasp since the emotional change of the painter is just the direct factor to result in the transformation of sense of reality. The description does not tell us the visual painting factor surpassing directly expressing objects. Rembrandt's vicissitudes of life and social turmoil are the important factors to promote the transformation. And the unique application of painting language also is a key factor to make the sense of reality in his works different from others.

B. *Multi-characteristics of Picture Language Guidance*

The expressive way of oil painting is closely related to sense of reality, which can be reflected on the technical inheritance and innovation and stroke-application by painters.

1) *Rich techniques showing the truth of sense of reality*. As early as 1631, the Baroque art was exposed to Rembrandt and he absorbed strong light-and-shade contrast from Caravaggio. And his painting technique inherited previous ones. The effect of his picture showed smooth, neat, fine, delicate and thin applied. In his later works, he applied the unusual impasto. He used so thick pigment in the main bright part in light that the uneven texture seems rather changeable and other parts used very thin touch. Thus, there was strong comparison between the thick and the thin. And he made contour line fade away in the background according to how much bright the light is and how much light exists. Then, the whole picture seemed like in a flickering light with vibration. This kind of impasto is his unique technique to express the

light to create the sense of reality of the object. The method could result in sense of reality and spatial effect. It was easy for Rembrandt to modify if he used the impasto and it made the painting process more flexible and rich. His canvas underlying technique made a decisive function to the final effect. Firstly, he applied and accumulated the pigments like embossing in order to show the uneven strokes. After overlapping with white-lead binding agent, the strokes still remained clean and clear. When the underlying layer was dry, he overlapped the picture with relatively special oiling agent mixed with thin dark brown pigment in order to make the oiling agent seated in the seams of stroke texture of uneven color lump. Then he removed part of pigmented glaze in the high part of the stroke or removed it after drying. There were only relatively more colors in the seams. He overlapped these "color scale" in order to shape shadow, which could enhance the sense of third dimension and surprising gold stone feeling. Since the glaze layers were limited, it was clear to see the underlying strokes which seemed strong and stable. Then the real expression of the sense of reality was enhanced.

2) *Unique stroke technique manifesting lingering charm of the sense of reality.* The expressive way of Rembrandt's stroke was increasingly apparent in his later works. This rich stroke technique enhanced the expressive force of the sense of reality.

Rembrandt's special stroke technique to mould the sense of reality of objects is a kind of dry brush stroke after polishing. He uses thick strokes in the main bright part in light. After polishing, he uses dry brush in the main part and applies thin polishing on other parts, which makes the whole picture seems in a flickering light with vibration. Rembrandt often uses hard brush in order to make the impasto colors overlapping and the strokes are clear. The stroke of impasto is an appropriate way to express the sense of reality. This kind of stroke is especially suited for depicting the thick and solid objects. Rembrandt's strokes are bold, unconstrained and summarized. In terms of strokes, there are dry, sweeping, kneading, obscure and polishing strokes in Chinese ink painting. Rembrandt's stroke is different from Rubens' width and evenness, and from Hals's shortness and straightforwardness. Rembrandt often uses overlapping strokes to deal with his picture. In the transparent and overlapping procedure, he attaches importance to the strength of stroke.

IV. THE AESTHETIC VALUE OF SENSE OF REALITY IN REMBRANDT'S OIL PAINTINGS

Arnheim believes that "expressive nature in fact depends on consciousness patterns itself and brain's visual area's response to these patterns". The expression of sense of reality of Rembrandt's oil paintings undoubtedly is enhancing the works' expression in consciousness patterns. And the application of sense of reality concretely represents the painter's aesthetic pursuit of highlighting rational spirit and pursuing reappearance of nature. Therefore, the sense of reality has unique visual aesthetic function in oil paintings and it displays special aesthetic function in Rembrandt's oil paintings.

A. Deepening of Sense of Reality and Subject

In the expression of theme painting, applying sense of reality to emphasize works' profound connotation is a smart art treatment method. The full use of sense of reality makes the visual scheme of works get more profound connotation and the expressive force of works is enhanced accordingly.

B. The Expression of Sense of Reality and Feeling

Different sense of reality could result in different picture effects, affecting audience's visual mind. That is to say, consciously recreation of sense of reality becomes art language of painters' subjective feelings and mind and is the most special factor to create an excellent painting work.

V. CONCLUSION

Whether the painter could deal with the sense of reality appropriately directly affects whether the expression of oil painting art is wonderful or not. We can prove this point from Rembrandt's works. The message in Rembrandt's paintings, in terms of sense of reality, far surpasses the level of pure technique and light and shadow expression, which enlightens us to explore the profound connotation through paintings and to be exposed to nature and life around. This makes us believe that the master applying of a single painting language can bring what a big faith supporting to audience. It is the unspeakable faith that promotes us progress gradually.

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