

Transformation of Artistic Conception -- Analysis of Andrew Gorkovenko's Tea Illustrations

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Abstract. Lots of domestic and western classic works have described the narrative scenes related to "tea". In terms of the paintings which use "tea" as their "pigment", the tea illustrations of a Russian artist, Andrew Gorkovenko, must be mentioned. Tea illustration belongs to a subsidiary branch of contemporary art. That is, the integrated material painting. This artist successfully overcomes the disadvantages of material properties of tea and creates the beauty of picture through artistic ideas. The author rationally analyzes tea illustrations, discovers the artists' main creation cues by combing tea illustrations and some successful commercial packaging design, analyzes the creative ideas and methods and sums up the transformation and generation of artistic conception through contemporary art, which contributes to artistic innovation in the field of art.

Introduction

Andrew Gorkovenko is a contemporary artist from Russia. He gains worldwide reputation through his tea illustrations, which are known as his representative works. While appreciating his art works, Chinese audience often express their curiosity on the identity of this artist. The viewers cannot relate his identity to his works of tea illustration. This article proposes that, this is because that these audiences try to appreciate his works from the perspective of Chinese citizens. That is, the Russian identity of the artist is not consistent with our tea culture. For them, a foreigner who uses tea as painting material is as strange as a foreigner who can speak fluent mandarin in Beijing half a century ago. With these questions, this paper deeply analyzes and discusses the tea illustration of this artist.

The History and Culture of Tea

Being the birthplace of tea, Chinese tea has a history of more than one thousand years. Tea expert Zhu Zizhen put forward that "Bashu Region is the cradle of Chinese tea and tea culture" long ago. Scholars speculate that residents in this area has developed tea processing technology and tea drinking methods in the pre-Qin period through some quotations in a historical record book called *Guang Ya*, which is written by Zhang Ji from Wei Kingdom in Three Kingdoms period. "Picking tea leaves in Jingzhou and Bazhou to make tea cake. If the leaves are old, soaking the tea cake with rice water. While drinking the tea, baking the tea cake first to turn it into red color, then grinding the tea cake and putting the tea in a porcelain container. Pouring in boiling water. Or putting some green onion, ginger or orange to boil with the tea." [1] Tea has stepped into the daily life of Chinese people since ancient times. People from the Southern Song dynasty claimed that there are seven most important daily necessities: fuel, rice, oil, salt, soy, vinegar and tea. This proverb is still in use today, which suggests the importance of tea in traditional Chinese life. As early as the Tang and Song dynasties, the government organized "tea and horse markets" to trade with neighboring countries, included the tea business with Russia. After the Nerchinsk Treaty in the 28th year of the reign of

emperor Kangxi (1689), tea trade between China and Russia began to increase. Especially after Qianlong emperor opening the market of Kyakhata, tea business gradually became the dominant trade between China and Russia. Therefore, tea has entered the life of Russian people for more than three hundred years. [2] [3]

Culture derived from tea includes tea history, tea art, tea play, tea ceremony, tea customs, etc. Today it expands to other fields like tea literature and art, tea set, tea house, and other subjects like the relationship between tea and religion, philosophy, aesthetics, sociology, the history of tea science and tea science education. [4] In ancient times, tea and painting interweaved with each other. A lot of Chinese and western paintings showed the scene of tea drinking from different times. In Tang dynasty, Yan Liben depicted the tea cooking methods and the tea drinking process in his "Xiaoyizuan in Orchid Pavilion" painting. In the Northern Song dynasty, Zhao Jie recreated the grand scene in which the royal family served all ministers with tea in his Wenhuitu painting. The masterpiece of Gu Hong from Southern Tang dynasty, the "Evening Banquet by Han Xiza" (shown in Figure 1 below) also depicted the tea drinking scene. In the picture, the hero in red dress sits in the couch, while the guests scatter around him, sipping tea and listening to the woman left playing music. It showed the leisure life of noble class, and confirmed that tea has tied with qin, chess, calligraphy, painting, poetry and liquor, and become the favorite amusement for scholars. Tea culture can also be found in western oil painting. French painter James Jacques Joseph Tissot also drew the scene of nobles drinking tea in his Picnic in 1876. In his painting, the Lady, Chinese blue and white porcelain tea set can be found. These paintings recorded tea culture in each period, but the Russian artist Andrew Gorkovenko found his way in the relationship between tea and painting. This is totally different from the traditional way. He creates a series of tea illustration. In his works, tea with one thousand years old has become the painting material, and reflected its own charm as an art language.



Figure 1



Figure 2

Andrew Gorkovenko's Tea Illustration

Andrew Gorkovenko was born in Moscow, and studied in Russia's Institute of International Advertising. He is an artist, designer and illustrator. The public get to know him through his tea illustrations. They accept tea illustration in a short time, which is directly related to Andrew's selection of painting language. The artist chooses tea, which is totally different from traditional

painting material, to create his painting. When drawing pictures, Andrew grinds tea into granules first, then paints the picture through a method which is similar to create crayon drawings (Figure 2). Tea is not as easy control as traditional materials. That is because the uniqueness of tea. Compared with pencil, the classic sketch material, tea has a number of limitations. Even after grinning, the texture of tea powder cannot be as smooth and equally fined as lead particles; in color gradation, tea is not easy to control; in details, the gray color of tea make it unable to fade out with gradual changes; while in colors, it is far less gloss than oil paintings, and there are only several colors of tea: green, black and some natural yellow petals. Thus, the artist needs to overcome these shortcomings and take advantages of the unique charm of tea. The drawings of tea illustrations make requests on artist's artistic accomplishment and observation ability. Andrew's tea illustration belongs to realism painting which combines the painting language of sketch and monochrome. It can be seen from his paintings that he chooses different kinds of tea according to the subjects of paintings. For example, he used green tea to paint the Great Wall-- the typical symbol of Chinese nation (Figure 3); while the black tea was used to paint a classic scene of coconut forest on the beach in Sri Lanka (Figure 4). According to the sizes of different tea particles, the tea powder was orderly piled to achieve the effect of gradual changes in monochromatic sketch. If we appreciate his works from visual perspective, though the particles are not as fine as pencil, and further details cannot be fully represented, the beauty of painting is not reduced at all. That is also the advantage of tea: the inherent texture.



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

Andrew's choice on painting material is successful, but it is his cooperation with the international tea brand "Trip Tea" that really gives him popularity. The promotion of tea brand enables his tea illustration known to the public (Figure 5). The artist combines tea illustration with the package design of tea. The package of commodity has multiple functions such as protection and publicity. The popularity of tea brand laid a good foundation for tea illustration. It is also a powerful extension of tea illustration. [5] [6] Analyzing this cooperation from artistic perspective, this combination enriched the single chain of tea illustration, and developed the ontology of painting. Without the intervention of packing, tea illustration is only a work of art. Its innovation can be based only on the composite

materials of contemporary arts, namely the material language conversion. There are a lot of art works which use materials like tea instead of traditional painting materials. For example, artist James Haggerty used pins to draw a poster of Star Wars; artist Jane Perkins put together buttons to create the figure of Marilyn Monroe (shown in figure 6 below); Malaysia architect Kangyi used sixty-four thousand of pairs of chopsticks to produce the portrait of Jackie Chen (Figure 7). While, the conversion of material can only show artists' unremitting exploration in art creation; the audience cannot interpret more meanings from these pictures. So before Andrew, tea illustration only provides one single interpretation to audience. Tea illustration combines business, paintings and packages of tea to form a interlocking chain. The artist skillfully uses the same language of tea to build three identities of painting, designing and production. The construction among these triple identities is the core of contemporary art, the conception.



Figure 6



Figure7

The Transformation of Artistic Conception

Poet Chen Zhirou from Song dynasty said in his Stone Bridge, "I come, but I do not think or listen to the sound. Chatting and drinking tea, then Zen is in my cup." Zen and tea suit each other, and benefit by associating together. Zen can be better understood through tea, while tea can improve its artistic conception through Zen. [7] [8] Then, the concept of "Zen tea" was built. It created a pure conception which can only be felt by heart. Painters also pay attention to artistic conception. Master of traditional Chinese painting, Li Keran once said, "the artistic conception is the soul of landscape painting". Painters express the scenery in their heart through their brushes; viewers understand the painters' world by their eyes. Andrew's tea painting creates multiple artistic conceptions. They are not Zen from tea as commodity, or the appearance expressed by the picture. It is the tea conception which guides the audience to create their own artistic conception in mind when they drink tea. Under the guidance of the ideas expressed from the work, consumers can construct the picture of artistic conception in taste level, visual level and psychological level. This is the transformation of artistic conception in contemporary art.

Andrew's tea illustration is a cross - disciplinary artistic practice. But its core idea is consistent with the creative methods of contemporary art. In the classic work "the one chair and three chairs" created by a conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth, the relationships among physical objects, illusion and concept are explored through the presentation of a real chair, the photos of real chairs and the definition of chair. [9] The trinity concept is reflected in this work through the presentation of a real object, the physical representation of object (photos), and the representation of the object. The "chair" is shown from three aspects: touch, vision, and psychology at the same time, but the viewers would not misunderstand through the whole process. Andrew's tea illustration has the same effect. In his works, the same material of tea has multiple identities: painting, designing, production and so on. The audience can feel the tea through multiple feelings such as sight, touch, taste and psychology. In this series of activities, consumers taste the tea and their life.

The conception in tea illustration generated from ideas. The clearer the image is, the less creative will the audience be. Pure painting image offers intuitive cognition, but it also limits the viewers' creativity. "Trip Tea" brand found its position in consumer culture, which is quite different from traditional Chinese tea ceremony. In modern society, it is difficult for citizens to enter the "Zen tea" conception through drinking the tea which is processed as business fast food. After combining with tea illustration, the transformation of conception opens customers' imagination. Even if they cannot meditate when drink tea, they can follow the artist's mind and create a freer world. Tea also achieves its transformation and generation in artistic conception through the changes among multiple identities: painting, designing and production.

Conclusion

None art work can be absolutely perfect, as well as the tea illustrations. In perspective of art, while the product packaging improves artistic value, which is one of the features of tea, it also negatively impacts its cost. Art and commerce are the two respects. How to balance them requires the artists' wisdom. All in all, Andrew's tea illustrations are beyond languages. The artistic beauty he brings people is beyond of country borders. Tea illustrations are just the beginning. Tea and art will inevitably produce more inspirations. Being the birthplace of tea, China is more suitable to develop the tea illustrations, which is another contribution of tea in the development of public aesthetics.

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