Differences in Renoir's paintings after his trip from 1881 to 1883: the human body, color and compositions

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Abstract. After the tour from 1881 to 1883, the French Impressionist painter Renoir changed his painting style dramatically, blending Impressionism's decorative and inventive effects with Renaissance-style figures and compositional skills to create a more solid and mature style of personal uniqueness. Although there have been prior studies of Renoir's itinerary and letters on route to this trip, as well as independent assessments of some of his works created after the trip, there are still relatively few reviews of the trip's general influences, therefore this study tries to fill in the gaps. Based on the contents of Renoir's travels and visits, this paper will examine the impact of Renoir's trip on the human body, color, and composition by comparing his paintings completed before and after the trip, particularly the Ball du Moulin de la Galette, Les Baigneuses, and the Umbrella.

Keywords: Ball du Moulin de la Galette, Les Baigneuses, French Impressionist, Renoir.

1. Introduction

Renoir, a French Impressionist painter, journeyed far from Paris, then the heart of Impressionist inspiration, to the French coast and Italy to complete his Renaissance voyage from the fall of 1881 to the spring of 1883. He traveled alone to the sun-drenched coastlines of Provence and Algiers, the cathedral of Milan, Titian's portraits in the Naples Museum, and the murals of Egypt and Pompeii, as well as Raphael's paintings. Although the trip was brief, Renoir's letters to friends and a comparison of his works completed before and after the trip show that the natural scenery and Renaissance works he saw during the trip had a significant influence on his painting style, particularly in the three aspects of his painting: the human body, color, and composition.

Renoir first traveled to the French coast in the early 1880s to enjoy the sun and seascapes, and his letters home were full of praise for the scenery, stating that he was trying to improve his expression of the effects of light and shadow by experimenting with sunlight, as well as hoping to find more sunny beaches and bring back many drafts to Paris. France, on the other hand, entered winter not long after. The Impressionists favored working outside, yet during this period in France, rain and wind, chilly weather, and dim light were insufficient to give Renoir the proper setting. As a result, he elected to travel to Italy, which is much warmer due to the abundant ocean warm currents. One of the main motives for this Renaissance journey was to improve the manner of his figures, in addition to discovering beautifully light. He had already written to critic and collector Theodore Duret, indicating unequivocally that he had no idea if his 1881 Salon portrait Mlles. Cahen d'Anvers was excellent or poor [1]. He complained about Paris to his benefactor, Madame Georges Charpentier, in early 1882, and expressed the hope that his experiences in Italy would help his future work [2].

In the 1860s, at the age of 21, Renoir entered the Academy and studied under the neoOld Master Charles Gleyre [3]. Instead of being a pure imitator of Neoclassicists, he preferred to paint things in rich colors to create illusive scenes and capture the transitory beauty. So, he became close friends with like-minded radical Impressionists like Monet and was deeply influenced by this style.

At this time, he frequently employed the Impressionist style for landscapes like La Grenouillere, with its fuzzy borders and soft hues reflecting the beauty of nature's moments [3, 4]. For figures and portraits, on the other hand, he did not commit to the Impressionist approach, preferring to employ the Impressionists' high brightness and decorative manner while also sometimes imitating parts of the classical tradition's harmonious figure structure and three-dimensionality. As a result, he alternated

between the two styles on occasion, as in the portrait Madame Henriot (1876), where the muscular lines of his figures are blurred and loose, and the color of their skin blends in with the background, so that the figures appear to blend in with the background beneath the picture; and in the portrait Mlles. Anvers (1880), although there is still a tendency to mix the color blocks in places, the contour lines of his figures are much clearer, and the whole portrait is completely independent of the background. This hesitation about the technique of portraiture may be due to his difficulty in balancing his desire for the innovation of Impressionism with his passion for the traditional official salon. However, after he visited Raphael and Renaissance frescoes in Italy, his hesitation was greatly reduced, and his figures were generally more clearly defined and composed in a more classical style thereafter.

Although some sources are compiling the route of Renoir's trip to Italy and the letters exchanged with friends on the way or analyzing some of Renoir's paintings after the trip, there is still a lack of general or universal contrasts between Renoir's creations before and after the trip and the compilation of these changes, especially in the areas of the human body, color, and composition, which changed significantly. Therefore, based on the analysis of the materials depicting this trip and the contrasts of Renoir's paintings of different times, this paper will summarize the changes that are evident in three areas of Renoir's work after this trip: the human body, color, and composition.

The accurate prediction of power load is of great significance for electric power production and the safe operation of the power grid and the national economy [1]. Short-term load forecasting is an important part of an energy management system. The prediction error directly affects the analysis results of subsequent safety checks of the power grid, which is of great significance for dynamic state estimation, load scheduling and cost reduction [2-4]. Traditional prediction methods are based on linear regression, such as the time series method, analysis method and pattern recognition method have defects respectively [5].

2. The skills, features, and styles of Renoir during the trip

2.1. Human Figure: Return to the classics in terms of theme, technique and pose

The majority of Renoir's lifelong figures feature women. Before his trip in 1881, he remained faithful to the Impressionist style, often representing modern, fashionable female figures, using color to express the three-dimensionality and emphasizing the dynamism of the figure through strokes with a clear sense of direction. The figures are naturalistic with lifelike poses. After his trip, he was heavily influenced by the Old Masters, and more frequently chose the traditional subject of the "Bather" with a corresponding focus on deliberately linear composition and distribution, while exploring new applications of color to achieve three-dimensionality [2].

In Madame Henriot (1876), a portrait completed before the trip, Renoir weakens the contour lines and instead uses the contrast between the large bright colors on the figure's torso and the dark colors in the background to emphasize the figure's three-dimensionality and naturalism. Besides, the background color and the color of the figure's skin are adjacent colors, which leads to a loose brushwork in the second half of the picture where the figure, the clothes and the background blend together. However, in Les Baigneuses, created by Renoir in 1887 after the completion of his travels, he follows the tradition of the Old Masters of the Renaissance, from subject matter to technique and poses. This painting focuses on Renoir's quest for new forms of expression after his travels and differs significantly from his pre-travel Impressionist paintings. First, in terms of subject matter, he broke with the same rule of Impressionism that he had previously espoused, "I paint only what I see," and abandoned the fashionable modern woman, no longer indulging in the leisure and entertainment of the bourgeoisie during the rise of capitalism, but opted for the traditional subject of the bathers, returning to a more traditional, even religious, relationship between human and nature. And this time, his paintings include the rare appearance of the full female nude.

Moreover, unlike the loose brushwork in Madame Henriot, the contour lines of the female torso in Les Baigneuses are very clear. Forgoing the distinctly directional and dynamic brushwork that he

had previously been praised for in many of his Impressionist works, Renoir instead hides the brushwork on the torsos in this painting, leaving the nudes smooth and natural. Although Renoir used to show the female nude in his paintings as well, he seldom depicts rich details about the muscles of the nude. Yet in this painting, the details on the female body are also richer than in previous ones, such as the tiny shadows on the ankles and wrists, and the well-defined muscles on the back and abdomen, in contrast to the 1876 portraits of nude women such as Naked Woman in the Sun. This clear and exposed emphasis on the beauty of the human body itself is similar to that of Renaissance works, thus revealing Renoir's recollection of classical elements in Les Baigneuses.

In terms of the poses of the figures, the pose of the two women on the left side in Les Baigneuses, located on the rock, is not natural, especially the dark-haired woman's pose can be said to be very deliberate. It is difficult to maintain this gesture for a long time in a static state. This deliberate pose is precisely what Renoir designed to make the three women work together to form the classical pyramid composition [5]. This is in complete contrast to Renoir's previous impressionistic figures whose poses were often very natural and lifelike.

He once said he wanted the painting to look like a fresco, like Raphael's work [5]. Although there was much criticism of the painting from the audience at the time, Renoir himself expressed his dissatisfaction with the painting in later years. Renoir was indeed committed to adding a classical style to his paintings after his travels, as evidenced by the 19 careful drafts he made on the giant canvas before painting it.

Another typical example is Renoir's Umbrella, completed in 1886; Renoir completed the right half of the painting around 1881 before his travels and then continued with the left half sometime after his travels [6]. Thus, there are two very different styles in this painting, Impressionist and Classical. On the right side, the trajectory of the brush strokes running over the figure is obvious, and the pleats of the features and clothing are mostly indistinguishable due to the loose brushwork. The figures are more naturally posed, with some looking at the landscape and others tending to children. But the pose of the woman on the left in the later finish is somewhat deliberate. She raises the hem of her skirt to meet the viewer in a crowd of people who are focused on their own business. Despite her simple dress, this act made her the main character without a doubt. Even though it can be assumed, based on the dress of the crowd around her, that the weather was cold and heavy coats were commonly worn, Renoir portrays the curves of the woman's body (shoulders, breasts, and waist) and the richness of her pleats. Once upon a time, when Renoir depicted women in clothes, as in Ball du Moulin de la Galette, he would not deliberately accentuate the curves of the human body; the ornate clothes were the focus on the figure's torso. But after this trip, he simplified the decoration of the figures, such as the details of lace, color, and light spots, and instead paid more attention to the curves and proportions of the figures' bodies.

After 1883, the Old Masters represented by Raphael reinforced Renoir's determination to challenge the rules of Impressionism [5]. Although he still retained a degree of Impressionist loose brushwork, he studied traditional techniques to create smooth torsos, paid more attention to the curves and muscular details of the human body, and attempted to achieve a stable Raphael's pyramidal composition by arranging deliberate human poses.

2.2. The Variations in color application

Influenced by the seaside light he saw on his travels and by classical frescoes, Renoir more frequently chose large portions of warm color and explored new ways of expressing three-dimensionality accordingly. He intensified the surreal color style in his paintings, but also studied the traditional style to intensify color contrasts and increase the saturation of colors and the clarity of color block boundaries. After his travels, Renoir's use of color became more daring and surprising, and he did not simply imitate and transport tradition but combined it with modernity to create his original style.

In the 1870s, Renoir's use of color was dominated by harmony and naturalism. The color contrast in his paintings at this time was weak, and the saturation of colors was generally low except for black

and white. Take his famous Impressionist painting the Ball du Moulin de la Galette as an example, he applied cool colors and black on a large scale, while using a small amount of low-saturation warm colors to increase the vividness of the picture, to increase the interest of the picture without letting the strong color contrast break the harmony and balance. In the same painting, Renoir never gave every color a high degree of saturation. However, influenced by the Renaissance and the frescoes of Pompeii, in Les Baigneuses, large areas of cool and warm colors contrast strongly, and almost every color is highly saturated, which makes the whole painting full of strong color contrasts, making the overall style more vivid and visually impactful.

Moreover, influenced by the clarity of the brushwork, the boundaries of the color blocks in Renoir's paintings are much clearer so that the figure and the background no longer blend as in the portrait Madame Henriot, and the two can now be sharply divided.

Simultaneously, in a large number of works after his travels, Renoir had a clear preference for warm colors, especially orange, which he began to apply extensively in his paintings, such as in Bathers (1991) and many of his early 20th century portraits of women [7]. Renoir used a bas-relief-style organization of the picture, having all the entities arranged on a single frontal plane (as in Titian), and then, with some white or silver highlights and lighter colors that also belong to the red family to pose things three-dimensionally [7]. This high-key, aerated look allows Renoir's later works to always be bathed in a warm, seaside-like atmosphere, which is inseparable from his travels to France to explore the coastal light and his diversions to Italy to study the masters. In this way, Renoir accomplished a new expression of three-dimensional forms in the last decades of his life.

3. In between the classic and modern

3.1 Surreal color style

Although Renoir, who is technically classified as an Impressionist painter, cannot be considered a Surrealist artist, the surprising colors he gives to the river in Les Baigneuses transcend reality, thus at least suggesting that Renoir was already experimenting with Surrealism at this time or that he was applying Surrealist techniques of expression although he did not have a strong sense of purpose.

The term Surrealism was coined by the poet Guillaume Apollinaire in 1917 and was later used to describe a new wave in literature and art associated with politics in the post-World War I era. Although indeed, Apollinaire did not give a rigorous definition of surrealism, his understanding encompassed both the effect of expression beyond reality and the involvement of a strong element of surprise [8]. Breton next further explains this theory by arguing that under the conception of the surreal, the image is liberated from the limits of conventional logic and reason, its utilitarian function is suspended, and glimpses of deeper meaning are allowed [8]. Furthermore, Breton establishes a genealogy of painting and argues that the expression of surrealism can be traced back to the Renaissance painters Paolo Uccello and Gustave Moreau, both of whom can be seen based on their works because the subjects are often taken from non-realistic scenes such as myths or dreams, and the paintings often contain unexpected elements, such as demons. This is very much in line with the two characteristics Apollinaire understands.

Therefore, this work by Les Baigneuses is analyzed accordingly. First, the river in the painting is filled with incredibly bright yellows and purples, and the lawn grows with vivid blues, yellows, and greens. In contrast to Seurat's pointillism, pointillism is the desire to explore the "scientific and objective" relationship between light and color by allowing two tiny blocks of color adjacent to each other to interact with each other, thus enhancing the overall saturation of color. Moreover, because the color blocks of pointillism are so small, even if the colors of two adjacent blocks are different, they will tend to blend when viewed from a distance. This color theory and exploration of the spectrum was popular among the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist painters of the time [9]. Unlike Renoir's Les Baigneuses, however, the color blocks in the river are larger and the river is highly saturated with a pair of complementary colors, so the strong contrast makes the visual effect much stronger than in Pointillism. Even the colors in the river do not come from the reflection of the plants

on the shore, but almost entirely from the author's creativity and imagination. This is in line with the surrealist characteristics elaborated by Apollinaire and Beron.

In addition, the composition of the painting itself is very surrealist. This is because the background on the left side of the painting is in the classical style with clear lines, while the right side is entirely in the impressionist style with loose brushwork. This stylistic split in the same painting is unprecedented among the Impressionists. It is a dream-like expression with a strong element of surprise that transcends reality; it is Renoir's creative experimentation after embracing the characteristics of the classical style and blending them with his specialization in the impressionistic style. After his return from Italy, Renoir's works also show that he was not willing to be a mere imitator, but was trying to fuse the characteristics of both classical and modern styles to form his unique expression. It is these two styles that are intertwined in Renoir's experiments to form a surrealist tendency. After his travels, Renoir, influenced by seaside landscapes and Old Masters, used warm colors to create a new expression about three-dimensionality, and with an experimental purpose developed a personal style with surrealist characteristics in color and composition.

3.2 Composition: High attention to linear composition and group distribution

While Renoir focused on Impressionist paintings, Renoir's compositions were not deliberately. He insisted, like most Impressionists, that "I paint only what I see," so the compositions are very natural and close to real-life scenes. For example, the famous group portrait Ball du Moulin de la Galette is unfocused. However, after studying the classical works, he preferred a composition that had been deliberately arranged by human beings.

In Les Baigneuses, however, he applied Raphael's classic arrangement for the three foreground nudes: the composition is essentially pyramidal in the pose, with the interior based on a pair or trio of figures [5]. In Ball du Moulin de la Galette, the interaction between the different figures is more casual, closer to the cluttered and free social scene of life [10]. In Les Baigneuses, however, Renoir can maintain a linear relationship between the three main characters in the foreground. The blonde in the center, at the highest point, has her shoulders and cloak tilted toward the left side of the picture, a diagonal line that echoes the arm of the brunette on the left side of the picture slanting toward the left side of the picture for support, forming the left side of the pyramid. For the bottom side of the pyramid, Renoir has the brunette in a semi-reclining position, with her palms, hips, and legs stretched out to the right of the brunette in a straight line. The brunette on the right, with her back to the viewer, has her entire body slightly rotated to the left side of the picture, and the curve of her back corresponds with the arm of the blonde at the highest point stretching to the right side of the picture, forming the right side of the pyramid. This deliberately linear relationship is a classical style that Renoir deliberately maintained after nineteen attempts.

In addition to the figures, there is an interweaving of the two styles in the structure of the painting's background. For the landscape on the left, he applied a fresco-like version of the classical style with clear lines and bright colors, as he had noticed when observing classical frescoes, which applied little color variety but slightly more saturated colors and brighter tones. For the background on the right, he used the impressionist style of loose lines, light and blended colors. This layout is more like a breakthrough attempt of Renoir's style after learning the advantages of classical style, and he is trying to fuse impressionism and classical style into a new and original expression.

4. Conclusions

In summary, based on the contrasts and analysis of the above paintings, it is evident that the coastal landscapes and Renaissance works from the 1881-1883 travels did have an important influence on Renoir's subsequent paintings. Through his observations of coastal nature and experiments with painting, Renoir still retained and enhanced the impressionistic haziness, hallucinatory light and shadow effects, and saturation of color in his detailed brushwork and depiction of the landscape. By observing and imitating the classical paintings and frescoes of the Renaissance, Renoir's human

bodies are more sharply defined, fuller in volume, and closer in physique and style to the classical tradition. The composition also pays more attention to the sense of nature brought by perspective. This trip allowed Renoir to refine his experiments with fusing Impressionist and Classical traditions, strengthening his original style rather than becoming a mere imitator of Impressionism or the Renaissance.

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