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Study of Watercolor Works from Chen Yongjin' s "Journal" Series

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Abstract: The watercolor works "Journal" series of contemporary artist Chen Yongjin are different from traditional watercolor works, which can be viewed as a whole or independently of each other. It is more similar to the artist's small scale and manuscript life notes that express what he sees and feels every day. Based on the study of this series of works, this paper makes a multi-faceted research and discussion on them.

Keywords: Art Style; Watercolor; Chen Yongjin.

1. Brief Introduction of Chen Yongjin

Artist Chen Yongjin, born in 1972 in Wuhan of Hubei Province, graduated from the watercolor major of the Education Department of Hubei Academy of Fine Arts in 1994. In the same year, he worked in Hubei Academy of Fine Arts as the director from work room of creation of oil painting and watercolor. In 2014, he worked in Wuhan Academy of Painting as the director. He is a member of China Artists Association, a member of the Watercolor Art Committee of China Artists Association, a vice chairman of Wuhan Artists Association, and a member of the Watercolor Art Committee of Hubei Artists Association. His works won the "Silver Award" of the 11th National Art Exhibition, the "Excellence Award" of the 12th National Art Exhibition, the Excellence Award of the third and fourth National Youth Art Exhibition, the highest award of the Shanghai International Watercolor Painting Biennale. He participated in the 8th to 12th National Art Exhibition, the 3rd to the 11th National Watercolor Exhibition, the 5th Beijing International Biennale, the China Centennial Watercolor Exhibition and the China Art Exhibition 1997, and held his personal watercolor exhibition in the Paris International Art City. His works have been collected by National Art Museum of China, Shanghai Quanhua Watercolor Art Museum, Lingnan Museum of Fine Art, Shanghai Liu Haisu Art Museum, Hubei Art Museum and other institutions.

2. Style Features of Chen Yongjin's Journal Series Works

2.1. Overview of Painter's Style

Chen Yongjin's watercolor paintings mostly show the characteristics of fresh and elegant. Under the overall picture atmosphere full of freehand connotation and emphasizing the true beauty of the object, he explores different themes. In his early paintings, still life is the main theme. In his paintings, there are many antiques, such as the porcelain of Jizhou Kiln and Hutian kiln, and the pastel ware. His exquisite description of the objects enables the viewer to judge the age of the objects in the painting through the texture and glaze of the objects at the other end of the picture, which is enough to prove that Chen Yongjin is good at observing the things around him, but also has a good grasp of the structure and texture of the objects. After the middle period, Chen Yongjin slowly shifted his creative focus from still life to the surrounding landscape, such as "Scenery to the Right 1", "Sky on the Shelf 1", "Seven Heavy Towers", "Memorial Day", "Hero", etc. These works with woods as the theme were created in five to six years after 2010, and in the later stage, Chen Yongjin deliberately presents flawed stones in the picture, vigorously expressing the imperfection of the stones, which is his attitude to express life. He believes that stones have different forms, scattered in every corner of the forest, like we are in all levels of society, with high and low, gathering and scattering, and separation. During this period, Chen Yongjin brought more thoughts and subjective emotions into his art works. Until now, the artist is still constantly exploring painting. His Diary Series is a painting note that goes beyond daily records, interspersed with thoughts and thoughts in the creation act, which more vividly expresses the spark of thought in the artist's heart. In the series of works show a different face with the past works, more is their own subjective ideas of life, in the picture there is a large area of solid color flat painting or overlapping, with color blocks to construct a rich level, and not a single imitation of a specific image.

2.2. "Journal" Series of Work Style Classification

The artist uses small paper and is not limited to the medium of watercolor. Instead, he paints with materials readily available, such as watercolor, pen and acrylic paints, and does not exclude the use of other materials. This kind of small manuscript is a kind of record, similar to reading notes. It may be an idea that comes to mind suddenly, or an interesting situation on the road, or a paragraph of favorite text, or even something on wechat that can attract enough attention, the artist will record it in this way, which is his accumulated habit. Through the observation of Chen Yongjin's "Journal" series of works, we can classify the works into three categories, which can be roughly divided into three categories: real scenes in real life, illusory imaginings in the mind and symbol combinations of unprovoked elements. Since 2015, this work has been going on, and it may never end. Three categories are included in the 60 "Anti-epidemic Journals" painted at the beginning of the outbreak in Wuhan in 2020.

The first category is the reproduction of real scenes in real life, which is also a frequent theme in his Journals series, because real life and environment are important sources of

artists' creation. Without real life, artists cannot create excellent works of art. For example, the picture below (FIG. 1) looks like a candle that is slowly burning, but it actually has its own story behind it. It was drawn in 2020, the day Chen Yongjin's teacher Liu Shouxiang died. That day was February 13, he woke up at 5 a.m. then lit a small candlestick he brought back from Europe many years ago, took photos, and received the news of his teacher's death before 7 o 'clock. After learning the news, his heart was infinitely sad. At that time, the epidemic was confined at home and could do nothing. On February 19, he began to joined the community voluntary service, slowly diluting some of his sad emotions. Later, he took out this photo again and drew this small painting. Including the picture (Figure 2), we can see that it is the period of Wuhan epidemic lockdown, there is no trace of life, only the life filled with cold atmosphere under the fence blockade. What his felt during his experience in the community will also inspire his paintings and reveal them in the works. As shown in FIG. 3, there will be no characters with wings in our life. This is the fantasy in the minds of the second type of artists. Is it a demon? Was it a person? Only the creator knows. The same is true of the figure (Figure 4), the large clumps and dots above under the yellow background, perhaps referring to the virus of resentment in the mind. The third type is the symbolic combination of unprovoked elements, which forms its own set of narrative methods like visual coding, which implies the passage of time and sensitivity to things, reminding the viewer all the time: What you see is actually the expression, and the spirituality behind it is the key to the artist's visual narration. As shown in the figure (FIG. 5), there is a striking white icon on the purple background, and a white box contains an arrow that is about to emerge. Another example is the picture (Figure 6), it looks unclear so the combination, like a beautiful landscape forced into a few round symbol elements, but you carefully taste, whether it is the picture composition, level or color collocation are in line with the artistic aesthetic, and like this category of creative works, we need to understand the connotation of the picture from the spiritual level.



Fig 1. A slow-burning candle



Fig 2. Volunteering in the community amid the COVID-19 pandemic



Fig 3. The second kind of artist fantasizes about winged cats



Fig 4. The artist's visual narrative (a)

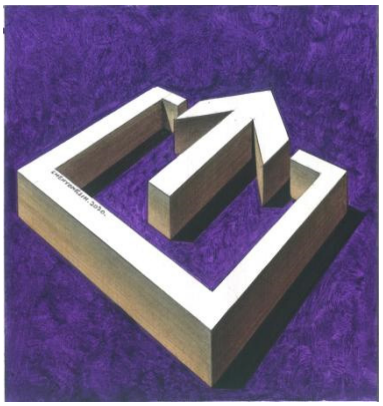


Fig 5. The artist's visual narrative (b)



Fig 6. The artist's visual narrative (c)

3. Reasons for the Formation of Chen Yongjin' s Watercolor Paintings Style

An artist's artistic style is produced by the combination of

nature and nurture. The absence of any link will have a change on the formation of his later style. Every person is a unique and special existence in this world, an independent individual with his own unique temperament. Meanwhile, the formation of an artist's style is a long-term process of continuous exploration, painstaking accumulation and gradual formation. From the subjective reasons, such as their own talent, diligence, choice, cultivation, aesthetic sentiment, interest, etc. Meanwhile, from an objective point of view. Artists are essentially human beings, so that people cannot fail to have a subtle influence on the social environment, national culture and regional characteristics, and their growth environment, learning experience, teachers' inspiration, work experience, etc. are all reflected in their own creative works. And influence the formation of an artist's style. All the works of the artist's "Journal" series are influenced by these reasons.

3.1. Objective Reasons for the Formation of Chen Yongjin's Painting Style

Objectively, from the perspective of his growth environment. Chen Yongjin as a native of Wuhan, Hubei Province, so the artistc works is not difficult to reveal the regional charm of Chu culture in watercolor of Hubei. In addition, some elders in his family, such as his father, brother and sister-in-law, are all engaged in art work. Since his childhood, the artistic atmosphere around him, and his family members have imperceptible guidance for Chen Yongjin to enter the door of art. In terms of learning experience, Chen Yongjin studied in Hubei Academy of Fine Arts. Around 1993, the academic atmosphere of Hubei Academy of Fine Arts was very active, and there were a group of teachers who were very influential throughout the country. Chen Yongjin was a young student at that time, and the teachers carried out their own duties to the students, teaching and solving doubts, and helping the students gain more knowledge during the school. At the same time, he realized to practice and innovate constantly in the study, so in his junior and senior years, he was already thinking about the problem of the way of creation, and constantly looking for new ways of style in his writing. On the other hand, he was inspired by his teachers. Chen Yongjin said that Liu Shouxiang and Shang Yang were the two people who had a great influence on him on his artistic path. Mr Liu shouxiang was the class teacher who students not only learn his painting techniques, but also learn his lofty character. Mr Liu will patiently teach students in all aspects, even after graduation, will use their own ability to help and encourage students. Mr. Shang Yang was his father’s colleague of Chen Yongjin, and also the elder who watched him grow up.Mr Shang's development and growth in painting are mature, so Chen Yongjin has been absorbing and learning from his theory. At the same time, when he communicated with Mr Shang, he said something that could really touch his artistic creation and judgment guidance. So that, it affected Chen Yongjin's future artistic creation, such as the "Journal" series of works. Finally, in terms of work experience, Chen Yongjin went to Hubei Academy of Fine Arts after graduating from Hubei Academy of Fine Arts in 1994. After nearly 20 years, he was transferred to Wuhan Academy of Painting. Since 2020, he has been the director of Wuhan Art Museum. The rich work experience enables the artist to have wonderful experience in life, profound understanding of life, artistic accomplishment and cultural accomplishment, which helps his painting to move towards his inner yearning and want to express, and more subjective creation goals, rather than stagnating in the simple description of real things.

3.2. The Subjective Reasons for the Formation of Chen Yongjin's Painting Style

Subjectively, the formation of an artist's style is inseparable from his own diligence. Whether in college or after graduation, Chen Yongjin has been constantly exploring some related continuous work, and has been working towards a certain direction. First, through a lot of creation and the accumulation of time, Chen Yongjin has gradually matured his painting techniques and methods. He thinks about how to perfect his artistic creation techniques. He spends time to read the works of domestic and foreign artists who more professional, conducts systematic research on the painting methods of their works, and visits some local artists who are respected by his own heart. Then, through the exchange of words and pictures that he gained some precious information and inspiration, which played a favorable role in promoting the ideology and aesthetics. When he was inspired, he would pick up the only painting medium around him and record it on small drawing paper. With unremitting superposition and finishing day after day, he has accumulated a lot of small drafts as creative materials. Secondly, the artist's choice of life or artistic path also plays a significant role in his future artistic creation. At the beginning, he chose to paint a large number of beautiful and fresh still life and scenery. Later, through his own progress and aesthetic improvement, he chose a certain object as the main theme of his creation, such as Taihu Stone. Interspersed with a series of journals with strong subjective colors. The color change of the picture is also the subjective choice of the artist. The strokes are bold, the colors are subjective, and the solid colors with high saturation are superimposed in the picture. The lines in the painting seem to be dancing, and the picture has a sense of rhythm like musical notes. The painter has mastered the use of water well. Later, with more people and a wider range of contacts, his aesthetic ability was improved, which made Chen Yongjin start to think about how to express more connotation behind the picture as much as possible, so as to sublimate the meaning of the work. The "Journal" series is infinitely close to the painter's "bamboo in the heart", watching the composition, lines and colors of the picture, and the works formed are not pointing to some specific objective things, but looking for simple interesting things, which is also his own pursuit of beauty.

4. The Influence of Chen Yongjin on the Contemporary Watercolor Art in China

Chen Yongjin is one of the representatives of contemporary watercolor painters in Hubei province. He plays a connecting role in the development of watercolor painting. On the one hand, he inherits the painting technique and aesthetic connotation of his teacher, and on the other hand, he pays attention to innovation in the creation process.

4.1. Innovation in Color Matching and Painting Techniques

Watercolor painting, which originated in England, is a way of painting with water and transparent pigments. It has a different visual experience from Chinese art, so that people can easily distinguish the difference between Chinese painting and Western painting. However, artist Chen Yongjin has deliberately managed to produce watercolor works that

are closer to the Chinese aesthetic in terms of color matching. In the Stone series, Chen considers a criterion in Chinese stone appreciation that black stone is the noblest stone. This criterion is linked to Chinese ink painting. As a result, when it is processed in a detailed way, it can adopt the realistic technique of Western painting in the shape, but it is artificially processed into black and white in the color matching, which makes any viewer feel that this painting is an Oriental painting when he watches it. As an eastern artist, we must flow the blood and spirit of the East in our bones. In the innovation of techniques, we will find that Chen Yongjin's art works are different from those of the old watercolor artists in the past. The artists of the previous generation in their works are more about the careful depiction of objects, whether it is landscape painting or still life painting, with meticulous and smooth brushstrokes. However, Chen Yongjin's current creation has abandoned the early depiction of objects, but added his own emotions, feelings, imagination and fantasy. Yes, the brushwork is more free. In the "Journal" series, you will find that there are a lot of messy strokes, but the artist's overall and local processing is very comfortable, although broken, but also a whole, will not affect the level of the overall picture.

4.2. Innovative Ideas for Painting Creation

Throughout the watercolor works of Chen Yongjin in different periods, each stage can bring us new inspiration, the most important is his innovative spirit. The artistic creation in the early period has obviously appeared different faces from today. In the early still life series, he wanted to show viewers his observation ability to capture objects sensitively and skilled painting techniques, while now he added irrational or perceptual ideas to his works. In his creative process, Chen Yongjin has the courage to try, dare to take risks, constantly practice, and try to break through the chains of himself. The transformation of the subject matter and content of his paintings, the variety of his expression techniques, as well as his serious creative attitude and innovative spirit are all obvious to us. They inspire contemporary young watercolor painters to go forward and pursue the inner spiritual world. Let the art emit unique light.

5. Summary

Hegel's aesthetic philosophy holds that "beauty is the perceptual manifestation of ideas", art is not only a tool for emotional expression and aesthetic enjoyment, but also a kind of exploration and expression of human spirit and social culture, which is the expression and display of absolute spirit. Only through the unity of reason and sensibility, freedom and necessity, can the highest realm of art be reached. The connotation of Chen Yongjin's art coincides with Hegel's aesthetic theory. In life and practice, Chen Yongjin has laid his own brand with the external reality society, and then transformed his "inner" concept into "external" reality. He said in the interview that "painting needs to pay attention to the truth behind the appearance", which is the truth of the real world and the truth of the heart. What does the real meaning behind this work mean? What kind of thoughts and emotions does the author want to express? At the same time, Chen Yongjin also has different views on the understanding of watercolor painting. He believes that "watercolor is a kind of material, not a conclusion or a result, but the result is everyone's art", which also benefits me a lot.

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