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An analysis of the inspiration of cubist painting on contemporary graphic design

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Abstract: Cubism is a movement and genre in the history of modern Western art and the most important movement in contemporary art. From Cézanne's three-dimensional vision to the practice of artists such as Picasso, the trend has been for everything to be three-dimensional. This was an exploration of so-called 'real' forms, symbolising a new way of being in a new era. There is an inseparable relationship between painting and design, which manifests itself in various forms in different fields of art.This paper contributes to an understanding of the historical background of Cubist painting, analyses and summarises the characteristics of Cubist painting, and interprets Cubist paintings by explaining the principles of Cubist composition in graphic design. It will also discuss the inspiration of Cubist painting for contemporary graphic design in terms of design forms, design methods and design styles, as evidenced by numerous works and examples.

Keywords: Cubism; Contemporary Graphic Design; Principle of composition; Painting.

1. The emergence of cubist painting

1.1. Background to the formation of cubist painting

The invention of the camera led to the rapid rise in popularity of the art of photography, and this ability to record images quickly and accurately had a major impact on painting at the time. In response, various schools of art emerged and many new ideas were introduced. Various schools of art emerged, such as Cubism, Fauvism and Impressionism, which emerged in France under the influence of African sculpture. The artistic approach of generalising the human figure into geometric figures was the source of Cubism, which was also influenced by African sculpture.

Similarly, Cubism was influenced in its formation by the Post-Impressionist painters Cézanne, Gauguin and Van Gogh. 1905 saw the formation of the Fauvists in Paris by Matisse and Vlamanc, a more radical approach to painting that emphasised a more raw and realistic sensibility than traditional painting, with more absurd and exaggerated brushstrokes and colours. Expressionism in the same period period, painting became a means of liberating nature and expressing oneself freely.

1.2. The history of cubist painting

Cubist painting was a high point in the history of modern Western painting, following Fauvism and Expressionism. All of these schools of painting are known for their critique and transmission of traditional concepts of painting and their complete reversal of traditional methods of colour representation. However, in contrast to these three, Cubist painting should be seen more as a revolution in traditional formal expression. This is because, in contrast to other modern genres, it fundamentally changed traditional ways of thinking and expressing painting.

As the main genre of Western art in the 20th century, Cubist painting was probably the most avant-garde movement in the art world at the time, beginning in 1904 and reaching its peak between 1907 and 1914. The birthplace of Cubist painting was the French art capital of Paris, where artists such as Picasso and Braque began their extraordinary artistic journeys. By abandoning traditional painting at the same time, Cubism established itself as a modern principle of painting, providing the basis for artistic reform and innovation.

Picasso's painting The Maid of Avignon is one of the most important representatives of Cubist painting. It was from this painting that another important exponent, Braque, began painting in the Cubist style, represented by The House at Le Stac. Marked by his international reputation, versatile temperament and passion for his work, Picasso painted for 70 years, producing some 1,800 paintings, 30,000 prints and 7,000 drawings during his lifetime, which had a positive and significant impact on subsequent generations. His work shares the precision, meticulousness and distinctive, poetic language of his master contemporaries, Cézanne, and it is the critical commentary on his work that has made him a household name.

1.3. The theoretical basis of cubist painting

Schopenhauer and Nietzsche are leading figures of voluntarism who have made important contributions to the emergence and development of humanist thought in contemporary Western philosophy. Schopenhauer and Nietzsche share similarities and differences in their analyses and interpretations of the will to life and the will to power, intuition, truth and value, and ethical thinking. Schopenhauer spoke of the pain of human existence, the burden of life, a silent cry of pessimism, while Nietzsche imagined superhuman pleasures, the lure of power, an optimistic hymn. They are similar in that they both bid farewell to the world of divinity and reveal the dawn of humanity.

The ideas of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche inspired modernist thought. The liberation of emotion and nature led to a freer and more creative approach to art. Inspired by philosophical ideas against reason and authority, Cubism was a rebellious variant that focused more on people's subjective feelings and made this artistic claim with the paintbrush.

2. Characteristics of cubist painting

2.1. Special perspectives

When painting forms a three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional plane, it demonstrates that Cubist painting rejects traditional concepts of painting, such as emotion, expression, shading and perspective, and pursues creativity in two-dimensional space. Picasso's late Cubist painting The Girl in Front of the Mirror uses forms that emphasise the subject, representing the figure in a language with a geometric and rigorous structure and a two-dimensional plane. Another characteristic of Cubist painting is its rejection of traditional static viewing techniques, emphasising the need to view objects from different angles and to analyse their geometric shapes. They then deconstruct all the elements that make up the object, rearrange the fragmented elements and combine them to create works that depict the object from different angles.

2.2. Geometric colour blocks

Spheres, cones and cylinders are commonly used in Cubist painting to represent the shapes of objects. For example, Braque's early work The House at Lestak uses this representation to show trees and houses as geometrically elongated, connected objects. This allows spatial distances to be compressed in the picture, with objects such as houses being depicted as compressed blocks and expressed in different blocks of colour. The work uses two-dimensional planes to show the three-dimensional spatial effect between them, and the scene is depicted geometrically.

2.3. Rhythmic dynamics

Rather than looking at things from a single angle, cubism looks at the forms of objects from different angles at the same time, showing and depicting the elements that make up an object by disrupting the geometric forms. Cubism cuts, displaces and reorganises geometric forms to show the internal structure of elements and forms from different angles, which also requires a high degree of rhythm in the displayed image. Picasso's Guernica, for example, has a rich sense of rhythm in its images, showing many details of mannerisms and movement. These abstract elements are reintegrated according to the creator's creativity, i.e. a multi-dimensional perspective is used to show the elements in a unified state. Similarly, the geometric tendency to deconstruct and rearrange images at different levels is a combination of these two features and is the driving force behind Cubist painting.

3. Cubist Painting and Contemporary Graphic Design

3.1. Composition principles of cubist painting in contemporary graphic design

(1) Sense of volume

By applying the principles of cubist painting to deform natural objects, the artist creates a three-dimensional effect in two dimensions. It is characterised by the subdivision of the plane into smaller and smaller parts and the blurring of turning angles, thus reducing the monotony of the lines and the certainty of the image, giving it a virtual sense of volume.

(2) Sense of space

The so-called flat three-dimensional space refers to the expression of the shape of a virtual three-dimensional space on a flat surface, using the principle of perspective and the alternation of light and dark colours to create a virtual spatial environment. In contemporary graphic design creation, the creation of three-dimensional configurations and a sense of space is achieved through the use of three-dimensional modelling software, but it is also possible to use planar support software to express the three-dimensional structure of space in terms of light and dark and colour. The former refers to the physical space in a three-dimensional composition, i.e. space defined by presence, while the latter refers to the virtual space in a three-dimensional composition, i.e. space that does not physically exist but can be perceived.

In contemporary graphic design, the perception of space is also shaped by the design principle of perspective, which is near and large, but far and small. Measured by the position of the viewer, the closer the polygons in an image are to the viewer, the larger their area is, and the further away they are, the smaller their area is. For example, the water surface is reduced to a large number of polygons, but in the former there is no contrast in size between the elements of the geometric blocks and no sense of space, whereas in the latter there is a contrast in size between the main elements of the triangle, creating a visual sense of space on the surface of the sea based on the perspective relationship between near and large, and far and small.

3.2. The inspiration of cubist painting for contemporary graphic design

3.2.1. Design Forms

(1) Stylistic approach

Two-dimensional graphic representation requires a rethinking of the different elements that make up an image, combining and transforming them organically according to the ultimate purpose of the work. In doing so, Cubist painting implicitly shows us a new, multidimensional form of art, a process of creating expressive works of art on a two-dimensional plane. The character of two-dimensional space is in a sense deceptive, and the supposed deceptiveness is the result of the optical illusion, which in some cases is both welcome and can be seen as an aesthetic necessity.

The later period of cubist painting is most representative of the representation of images through collage. In Picasso's 1913 painting The Violin, the natural textures of various real-life materials are used and their forms are freely combined. In this painting, the wood, strings and textured paper leaves are carefully arranged by the artist like notes in music, creating a strong and beautiful sound, while the effect of the flat materials adorning the painting is visually evocative and the decorative effect of the flat materials in the painting visually resonates with the viewer.

(2) Spatial treatment

Unlike the discontinuity of natural space, the spatial structure of the plane coexists with the space of real objects. To express the characteristics of the spatial depth of an image, graphic design outlines spatial depth as infinite spatial depth, definite spatial depth, weak spatial depth and pure flat space. From these spatial depth characteristics, we are free to choose according to our design needs and intentions. In doing so, we are sometimes faced with the question of how many levels of representational space a painting can be divided into. This simplification forces us to simplify the reality of the complex depth of space that we described earlier as flat. In graphic design, the image plane is often divided into two or three planes in order to emphasise the subjective nature of the image and make the visual focus more easily recognisable,

which is often used in the design of corporate logos.

3.2.2. Design methods

(1) Interspersed

Cubism is based on a multifaceted approach to perspective, interweaving elements of different colours from the same image to create a specific visual effect. Italian illustrator Cardo Guasco's cultural posters have a similar artistic concept and include various elements in the image, such as coffee, gondolas, beaches and scenes of Italian architecture in Venice on the water. The designers have analysed the canvas from different perspectives and used simple graphic symbols to group elements that are representative of the national identity. This makes the posters more thematically Italian, more dynamic and visually aesthetic, creating a unique aesthetic symbol that can achieve the effect of promoting representative national symbols and reinforcing cultural extension.

(2) Superimposition

In the principles of composition in Cubism, geometric shapes made up of different blocks of colour are superimposed on a single painting to create a visual effect. In Picasso's paintings of the Composite Cubist period, he concentrated more on the shapes of objects, making a strong contrast between the geometric shapes and the warm and cold colours in the picture. Graphic designer Kazumitsu Tanaka took a similar approach when designing the poster, cleverly combining a modern mood with an appropriate traditional ethnic flavour. In the design of the poster, the designer uses a unique visual symbolic language expressed by an overlapping geometric colour composition. This is not only visually pleasing, but also removes linguistic boundaries in order to convey as quickly as possible what the cultural poster is trying to convey.

(3) Interlacing

In Cubism, the internal structure of elements and the geometry of different angles can be revealed by breaking down, moving and rearranging geometric shapes. Italian illustrator Cardo Guasco's cultural posters, created with the Eiffel Tower in Paris as a backdrop, use a simple graphic language to create a dynamic pictorial effect. It overcomes the laws of perspective and the physical structure of real space to show the cultural identity of the area from different perspectives and angles. He selects elements that are symbolic of the local culture and then geometrically manipulates these elements in the poster production process to quickly convey their cultural significance. At the same time, the multiple perspectives that transcend the laws of physics make the poster images visually striking and recognisable.

3.2.3. Design styles

(1) Minimalist style

Minimalism as we know it is a style that goes deep into the pursuit of the essential features of an object, which are highly summarised and distilled. Whereas Minimalism is not the same as Minimalism, the difference between Minimalism and Minimalism lies in the degree. "Extreme" means "ultimate" and can be described as a style of design that takes simplicity to the extreme, an extremely pure art. This is not the case with minimalism, which is not the extreme of simplicity, but rather focuses on the "human being".

(2) Technological style

The feeling that cubist painting is meant to convey resonates in some way with modern digital computing technology's, such as the technological feel of digital symbols and the rigour of industrial products, which can give their design a different looking and abstract feel. In recent years, 'flat design' has gradually replaced anthropomorphism in interaction design, for example in user interface design and web design. The cubist principle of composition also fits this bill, with connected dots, clean lines and irregular geometric blocks that seem to convey a subtext of technology and communication.

(3) Future retro style

Inspired by cubist painting, a style has emerged that uses polygons as a basic element and has a creative way of conveying visual information, similar to a continuation of the nostalgic trend in computer games and digital art. Like the pixel style, it chooses to pay homage to the past while going back to the past and the future and finding an aesthetic balance in the midst of change. In Matthew Lyon's work, simple geometric shapes, rough materials and very atmospheric lighting are used and the result is a display of a futuristic retro-style design artwork that embodies a sense of mid-century design.

4. Summary

Cubism marked the beginning of modern graphic design research, breaking away from traditional forms of expression and using rational thought to interpret artistic images. It formed the basis for the development of graphic design in terms of expression and compositional elements by analysing, reconstructing and synthesising specific objects, and laid a solid foundation for later design movements. It is the most important movement in contemporary art and has provided inspiration for modern graphic design in terms of design form, method and style.

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