

Image Study of Titian's Discreet Fables under the Horizon of Panofsky's Iconography

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Abstract: Alvin Panofsky is known as the "father of modern iconography" and the founder of the western theory of "iconography" in the 20th century. The theory of art image built by him breaks through the single art analysis mode of formalist aesthetics and integrates into the research concept of humanistic art history, which makes art scholars begin to understand art works from the historical condition. His book "The Meaning of Visual Art" systematically expounds the study of iconography and iconography from the literature research of history, mythology, religion and literature. This paper takes Panofsky's *The Meaning of Visual Art* as a reference, extracts the analysis of the fourth art work in the book, and studies Titian's *The Discreet Allegory* under the horizon of his imagological theory, aiming to reintegrate and sort out Panofsky's analysis of the *Discreet Allegory*. And through the research and analysis of the limitations of the research methods of image science, to provide a new idea for the definition of the application of the research methods of image science.

Keywords: Graphics; Humanism; Image Research; Research Method.

1. Introduction

1.1. The Meaning of Iconography

Iconography, as a method to study art history, originated from Western scholars represented by Panofsky. This research method aims to reveal the social, cultural and historical context of themes and motifs in visual art works. Art iconography abandons the formalistic aesthetic concept and strives to restore the attention of art history and aesthetic research to "content" and "meaning", "concept" and "form". In addition, it emphasizes that the artistic image is an organic unity of concept and form, and only by analyzing the expression form of the image of the work and deeply studying the cultural background such as philosophy, religion, history, theology and literature of its creation era, can the symbol and cultural connotation of the image be deeply explained.

1.2. Iconography and Image Research

In the translator's foreword, Fu Zhiqiang clearly expounds the definitions and differences of imagology and image research. He believes that iconography is a discipline devoted to studying and interpreting the connotation of visual art. In his 1939 book, *Iconographic Studies* (or *Iconographic Studies*), Panofsky proposed three steps to determine the meaning of a work of art: first, identify the basic or natural image; Secondly, the identification of ancillary, conventional and symbolic content; Finally, on the basis of considering the artist's style treatment and philosophical connotation, the above two are analyzed and their meanings are determined comprehensively. Image research focuses on the identification, description and interpretation of the symbol, theme and story of visual art, which has certain limitations and auxiliary, and lays the foundation for imagology. Therefore, iconography emphasizes interpretive connotation, while image research emphasizes descriptive connotation. According to Panofsky, "Iconography is an interpretive study of images."

2. The Analysis Method of Panofsky's Image Theory on Works of Art

2.1. Panofsky's Humanistic Research Principles

In *The Meaning of Visual Art*, Panofsky first introduces humanism from the origin and development of the concept of "humanity", and then compares the humanities with the natural sciences to clarify the boundary between nature and culture. On this basis, he placed humanism under the concept of history, and then explored the categories of time and space. Despite the complexity of the concepts involved, humanism runs through them.

Panofsky regards the *Cautious Allegory*, a painting of the Renaissance, as the embodiment of the cultural spirit of the period, which is his aesthetic criterion for studying artistic images. The difference between humanism and the natural sciences is that the scientist is able to analyze the natural sciences immediately, while the humanist undergoes a comprehensive and subjective mental process: the mental reproduction of these activities, the re-creation of these creations. In fact, it is through this process that the true object of humanism is revealed.

2.2. The Balance between "Concept" and "Form"

Panofsky's research takes "ideas exist before art" as the theoretical premise, and makes a deep discussion on the humanistic theme of Renaissance art. His core concern is the result and content of knowledge contained in ideas, not just the formalization and abstraction of reason. Panofsky's goal is to reveal the consequences of knowledge and to explore how the content of ideas has shaped the artistic and cultural histories of different eras and peoples. He was not satisfied with ideas as a mere means of explanation, but went further and used them as a tool of inquiry. The process of his image interpretation is actually the process of tracing the concept construction art.

His research methods are highly logical and hierarchical.

First of all, from the concept, the art of the Renaissance period is deeply analyzed, and then how the concept affects the creation of art. Then, he further expanded the scope of research, combining concepts with cultural types, philosophy, religion and other categories, and comprehensively sorted out the important role of concepts in the development of art. The advantage of this methodology is that it enables us to have a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the inner laws of artistic creation and the key role of ideas in it.

3. An Analysis of Titian's Discreet Fables under the Theory of Iconography

3.1. The Artistic Style of Titian

3.1.1. Delicate Light and Shadow Expression

Titian was good at using light and shadow to depict emotions, giving his paintings a sense of vividness and depth. The importance of light and shadow in painting is self-evident, it can not only shape the image, but also convey the emotion and inject the soul into the painting.

In Titian's paintings, light and shadow form sharp contrasts and echo each other. He has a keen ability to capture the nuances of light and shadow, and is good at using the influence of light to change colors and create a unique picture atmosphere and effect. Titian skillfully used light in his paintings to make them fluid.

3.1.2. Clever Application of Color

In the field of art, the use of color has always been the focus of artists' exploration and research. Color can not only express emotions, but also shape Spaces to create engaging works of art. In this process, an artist has extremely high requirements for the integrity and independence of color. He firmly believes that through the exquisite collocation of colors, we can complete the unique shaping of space. He advocated using the background to set off the main body and give full play to the potential of the color itself. Titian invented the neutral tone of the warm and cold room. The use of this hue makes the color itself get the ultimate play.

3.1.3. The Religious Nature of the Subject Matter

Titian's works reflect profound religious feelings, and his painting's unique pursuit of form is ahead of his time. The power of Titian's painting is not limited to the transmission of visual impression, but also lies in the deep emotional experience and spiritual reproduction contained in visual elements. Therefore, the religious characteristics of his works can be fully displayed, and the spiritual appeal of color is far more than that of Impressionist paintings. The reason why Titian paintings are deeply rooted in people's hearts is not only the color, but also the true, sublime and pious love of God that it conveys. Art and religion have become two major paths for people to transcend reality and reach the realm of fanaticism.

3.2. Image Element Analysis

3.2.1. The Space-time System of Elements

The picture in *The Parable of Caution* presents three stages of life: a profile portrait of an old man on the left, a portrait of a middle-aged man on the front, and a profile portrait of a young man facing the left. They symbolize youth, middle age and old age in the journey of life, and also represent the three forms of existence of time: past, present and future. Furthermore, these three forms of time are related to the three

comprehensive psychological functions of the virtue of prudence: memory, which emphasizes learning from the past; Rational, in order to judge and act in the present moment; Anticipate and prepare for the future.

The juxtaposition of the three forms of time with the three mental functions of memory, reason, and foresight, then subordinating them to the concept of caution, embodies a classical tradition. Even in a world in which Christian theology places prudence as the primary virtue, this tradition has remained alive and well.

3.2.2. The Source of Animal Image

A dog, a lion and a Wolf are depicted at the bottom of the picture. The image of the heads of three animals appearing under the heads of humans has a very complicated history. First appearing in the Hellenistic period, Serrapis was a god worshipped in Egypt, whose throne had the image of a Wolf, lion, and dog entwined by snakes. In the early 5th century AD, the great Roman naturalist Maclobius tried to prove that Serapis, like Apollo in ancient Greece and Rome, was a form of the sun god in different cultures, created by the movement of the sun and determining time. He believed that the serpent on the throne represented time, and that between the past and the future, the present was the most important time. [4] The lion, in his position as king of beasts, represents the present; Wolves, as nocturnal animals, haunt the night consumed by darkness, taking away the memory of the past and representing the past; The dog is a symbol of the future, looking forward to the light. The snake entwined the three animals together, showing that the past affects the present, which in turn affects the future, and the three stages are closely linked.

It starts with determining the symbolic meaning of the animal, and then connects it with the connotation of the work, and finds relevant materials that can connect the two, so as to determine the deep information that the artist wants to convey. The symbolic conventions of animal images may sometimes be different from the meaning that artists want to clarify for their own needs, and the author's own intention may also be different from the meaning given by later researchers.

3.3. Emotional Expression under Form and Subject Matter

With the exception of this work by Titian, no artist has used the three-headed animal symbol of Egyptian origin in his portraits. The wolves, lions and dogs of the past, present and future will be matched with the portraits of youth, middle age and old age, thus highlighting the value of time more clearly and demonstrating its unique artistic creativity. When this work was created, the artist was in his late eighties, and it is generally believed that the old figure in the painting is Titian himself, the middle-aged man is his son, and the young man on the left is Titian's beloved apprentice. The association of the image of youth to old age with the three-headed animal may be intended to convey the idea that time is merciless, from young to old, and ultimately cannot escape the fate of the end of life. The consideration of the value of life is also significantly reflected in the above-mentioned Three Stages of Human Beings.

People in their twilight years often reflect on their lives, and Titian, in his eighties, after reviewing his life, warned posterity with a "prudent fable", emphasizing that everything has a causal relationship. Titian lived in an era of social change in his later years. The impact of Protestantism on Christianity and the religious reform within Christianity had

a profound impact on people's spiritual life at that time. At the same time, Venice's economic trade was gradually declining, and the deaths caused by the plague were even more painful. In this context, Titian gives his works more connotation and contemplation. With the change of the surrounding environment and times, as well as the death of relatives and friends, although Titian's spirit and mind have always remained vibrant, it is still difficult to shake off the sense of helplessness common to older people.

4. The Limitation of Panofsky's Iconographic Research Method in the Interpretation of Artistic Works

There are some limitations in the research method of iconography, which focuses on literature and dominant characteristics, which makes it difficult to adapt to the painting intended to dissolve the literary meaning of images. Under the background of flourishing visual culture, the dilemma facing iconology. When faced with expressionist works of abstract art such as Pollock, Kandinsky and Mondrian, it is often difficult to interpret the metaphors behind these images. Therefore, in this context, because the image is separated from the cultural system composed of literature, religion, philosophy, etc., it is difficult for researchers to go deep into the analysis stage of the image, and then it is difficult to enter the interpretation level of the image science, so it is difficult to use the image science method to explain.

5. Conclusion

Since its birth, the research method of iconography has

become an important branch in the research field of western art history. It provides a convenient way to study art history, so that the discipline of art history can be independent, no longer just a subsidiary of the humanities. After an in-depth analysis of Titian's Prudent Allegory, the author deeply felt the landmark significance of the theory of iconography at that time. Although there are still many mysteries to be solved in this theory, it is still an effective means to deal with image problems. Therefore, the researchers should keep an objective attitude when applying the research method of iconology, inherit and innovate it, so that the theory of iconology can play a greater role in solving the problems and challenges facing the reality.

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