

From “Literati” Art to “Digital” Art-Exploring the Convergence of Different Art Forms through a Poly-Artistic Approach

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Abstract: In the context of global pluralistic development, the trend of convergence among different art forms has become one of the most prominent characteristics in today’s cultural and artistic fields. From the cultural phenomenon of “poetry-painting integration” during the Warring States period to the current “synthesis of arts” in digital art, these developments reflect the mutual influence, complementarity, and cross-pollination among diverse artistic forms, resulting in a shared evolution of artistic expression. The fusion of multiple art forms is bound to propel the advancement of the cultural and artistic landscape, continuously enriching the expressive power of artworks and deepening their conceptual resonance.

Keywords: Pluralistic art forms; Poly-artistic approach; Literati music; Literati painting; Literati poetry; Artistic convergence; Traditional culture; Contemporary art; Digital art

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1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of globalization, the convergence and dialogue between cultures and arts have deepened significantly. Cultural and artistic expressions from different regions and ethnic groups no longer develop in isolation but instead collide, learn from, and integrate ^[1]. Artists actively draw upon symbols, themes, techniques, and philosophical ideas from diverse cultural traditions to create highly innovative works of art. For instance, the fusion of Western realism and Eastern impressionism has given rise to artistic expressions that embody both the tangible solidity of the West and the spiritual resonance of the East. Similarly, the incorporation of ancient Asian totems into modern fashion design has become a striking trend in today’s fashion industry. Such integration of diverse cultures and pluralistic art forms not only enriches the expressive techniques and conceptual depth of artworks but also promotes the dissemination and development of multicultural art. Furthermore, it contributes to the construction of a more vibrant and diverse global cultural landscape ^[2].

2. Literary art

The trend of convergence among pluralistic art forms is one of the most prominent features in today's cultural and artistic landscape. As early as the pre-Qin period over two millennia ago, the fusion of diverse art forms had already begun to emerge. The cultural phenomenon of "poetry-painting integration" appeared as far back as the Warring States period. During this time, poetry, music, and painting interpenetrated within the framework of ritual and musical culture, though this convergence was largely functional and lacked the proactive, self-aware integration characteristic of later "literati art."

The Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties marked a crucial phase in the development of "literati art." It was during this era that the four arts of the qin (music), qi (chess), shu (calligraphy), and hua (painting) began to be discussed together, with different art forms learning from and inspiring one another. "Literati art" thus entered a stage of synthetic development ^[3].

By the Tang and Song dynasties, the fusion of poetry, calligraphy, painting, and music deepened further, representing the flourishing period of "literati art." Wang Wei of the Tang Dynasty, known as the "Poet-Buddha" and "Patriarch of the Southern School," emphasized the concept of "common origin of poetry and painting," infusing poetic sentiment into his paintings. Su Shi later praised Wang Wei's works as "a mutual fusion of poetry and painting." During the Song and Yuan periods, Su Shi proposed the theory that "poetry and painting share the same principles." Literati of the Southern Song began inscribing poems directly onto paintings, making calligraphy an integral component of the pictorial composition. Simultaneously, the Song Dynasty's philosophical notion of "expressing the Dao through art" further propelled the integration of artistic forms.

In the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, the synthetic nature of "literati art" became even more pronounced ^[4]. Representative literati such as Ni Zan and Huang Gongwang combined poetry, calligraphy, painting, and seals into a fixed paradigm. While music did not manifest as an independent form in these works, it was evoked through descriptions of sound in poetry or depictions of musical scenes in painting. The infinite artistic conception conveyed by music came to be regarded as an essential inner cultivation for the refined literati, fully integrated into the holistic expression of "literati art."

The integration of music, painting, and poetry in "literati art" represents a distinctive fusion of artistic forms within traditional Chinese culture, reflecting the unique aesthetic pursuits and spiritual realm of the literati class ^[5]. This convergence of different art forms is not merely a superficial combination but rather an emotional and artistic realm where "poetry resides within painting, music within painting, and poetry within music," shaped by shared cultural foundations and philosophical influences.

With in literati music, the Guqin (Chinese zither) represents its very essence and stands as a prime example of the seamless integration of music, painting, and poetry. As the foremost of the "Four Arts of the Chinese Scholar"—qin (music), qi (chess), shu (calligraphy), and hua (painting)—Guqin compositions often carry the profound intellectual and emotional depth characteristic of the literati tradition. The instrument's tone is subtle, pure, and translucent, and many pieces are directly inspired by classical poetry or historical narratives. For example, Three Repetitions of the Yangguan Tune (Yangguan Sandie), one of the ten most renowned Guqin compositions in China, is based on the Tang dynasty poet Wang Wei's farewell poem

"Seeing Off Yuan Er on a Mission to Anxi" ^[6]. Through its deeply moving melody, the piece masterfully conveys the sorrow of parting and the desolate imagery captured in the lines:

"I urge you to drink one more cup of wine;

West of the Yangguan Pass, you will find no more friends."

Guqin performance emphasizes "resonance beyond the strings" and "meaning beyond the notes," pursuing

a realm where expression is limited but implication is boundless, a concept highly aligned with the subtle, suggestive quality of classical Chinese poetry, where meaning often lies beyond the literal words. A Guqin performer's interpretation is not merely about playing the notes; rather, it involves using the three primary tonal qualities of the instrument, harmonics, open-string tones, and stopped-note sounds, to paint the scenes described in the poetry and to express the emotions intended by the poet ^[7].

In literati painting, particularly in landscape painting (ink wash painting), the influence of literati poetry is palpable, while also embodying the rhythmic quality of music. Literati painting emphasizes “freehand brushwork” (xieyi) over mere formal likeness, requiring that each brushstroke carry a sense of rhythm and dynamic force. The composition of the painting balances solid and void, using “Blank space” (liubai) to create an evocative atmosphere within the work. Meanwhile, literati poetry strives to express the richest meaning with the fewest words, often concealing emotions behind concrete imagery, such as the “moon,” which frequently symbolizes longing, or “fallen leaves,” which often allude to desolation and farewell ^[8].

This shared pursuit of “artistic conception” (yijing) connects painting and poetry deeply. Many literati painters were also poets. When painting, they often drew inspiration from poetic themes or inscribed poems directly onto the work, allowing painting and poetry to complement each other and jointly convey the essence of the artwork. For example, *Autumn Clearing over a Fishing Village*, painted by the Yuan dynasty artist Ni Zan at the age of 55, embodies this harmony. The painting is elegant and ethereal, featuring a few withered trees standing upright like noble gentleman ^[9]. The pale, gently rippling lake and the distant, undulating hills are arranged in a serene composition, devoid of human traces, birdsong, or floral fragrance. This tranquil and minimalist scene exudes a Zen-like quality that resonates with the tonal subtlety of the Guqin.

In this work, the varying thickness and layering of brushstrokes resemble the rhythm in music; the alternation of forceful and gentle, swift and slow strokes mirrors the cadence and pauses in a melody; and the interplay of light and dark, wet and dry ink echoes the dynamics of musical intensity. To appreciate a literati painting is to almost “hear” the flow of music within it and to empathize with its silent resonance.

Literati poetry serves as a vital bridge connecting literati music and literati painting. Distinguished from folk poetry, literati poetry is characterized by its refined language, rich emotions, and profound intellectual depth, offering an expansive creative space for both musical composition and pictorial conception.

Lines such as:

“Sweet laurel blooms fall unenjoyed;
Vague hills dissolve into the night void.
The moonrise startles birds to sing;
Their twitters fill the dale with spring.”
(Wang Wei, *The Dale of Singing Birds*)

And:

“Sitting among bamboos alone,
I play my zither and chant long into the night.
In the deep woods where I’m unknown,
Only the bright moon comes to shine upon me.”
(Wang Wei, *Bamboo Hut*)

Exemplify how poetic language captures visual imagery with precision. The vividness of such descriptions creates a powerful visual impact, naturally inspiring painters to transform words into lifelike scenes ^[10].

Simultaneously, the tonal foundation of classical Chinese poetry relies on a system of level and oblique

tones, arranged in alternating patterns. This structure produces rhythmic cadences akin to modal shifts in music, lending the verses a melodic beauty that is easily sung or recited. When set to music or accompanied by instruments during recitation, poetry can express its conceptual depth more directly and intensely.

In composing poetry, literati often infused their sensory experiences of music and painting, depicting scenes of listening to the qin, admiring the moon, creating paintings, or contemplating landscapes. By articulating the emotional resonance evoked by music and the visual impressions inspired by painting, they demonstrated poetry's role as a connective thread in the fusion of artistic forms.

The phenomenon of integrating "music," "painting," and "poetry" into a unified artistic expression finds its core in the coherence of Chinese literati aesthetics and spiritual pursuits^[11]. Rooted in the philosophical concept of "Unity of Man and Nature," particularly the Confucian concept of "Achieved through music; Recreation in the arts", as well as Taoism (a Chinese philosophy based on Lao-tzu's teachings), longing for "Nature," "Temperament," and "Ethereal," this artistic unity transcends mere technique.

Whether it is the understated harmony of music, the vivid subtlety of painting, or the profound imagery of poetry, all converge toward a realm that rises above the mundane, embraces nature, and seeks inner tranquility and intellectual freedom. For the literati, mastering the qin, chess, calligraphy, and painting was not merely an artistic endeavor but a way to integrate art into daily life and express personal emotions. Through the fusion of music, painting, and poetry, emotions found their home, aesthetics were nourished, and personal character was refined.

By channeling their reflections on all things in the universe into artistic creation, Chinese literati achieved a deep, multifaceted synthesis of music, painting, and poetry. This synthesis not only holds immense artistic value but also carries the wisdom and philosophical insights of ancient sages. It stands as a luminous pearl in the treasure trove of traditional Chinese culture, radiating a unique and enduring charm.

3. Contemporary art

Today, enhancing the expressive power, emotional impact, and intellectual depth of artworks, along with a profound understanding of the organic integration of various art forms, has become an inevitable trend in the development of the contemporary art field. Breaking down the barriers between different art forms and facilitating cross-disciplinary collision and fusion allows audiences to experience entirely new aesthetic encounters with artworks.

In the realm of visual arts, the combination of painting and sculpture is increasingly prevalent. Spanish painter Pablo Picasso introduced the collage technique into modern art creation, fundamentally transforming the boundaries of painting. For instance, in works such as *Guitar and Bottle, Glass, and Violin*, he assembled fragments of everyday objects through collage, creating a three-dimensional spatial quality in the painting akin to that of sculpture. Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama, on the other hand, employs visual symbols like polka dots, net patterns, and mirror installations to merge painting, sculpture, and other art forms, crafting captivating and fantastical spaces. This creative philosophy is particularly prominent in her *Infinity Mirror Rooms* series, where viewers transition from passive appreciation to active participation, indulging in an immersive artistic experience^[12].

In the domain of audiovisual fusion, opera emerges as a magnificent art form. Opera tightly integrates music, drama, poetry, dance, stage design, and other art forms, engaging the audience's emotional world comprehensively and multi-dimensionally through dramatic narratives, emotionally rich musical melodies, and

spectacular stage presentations. Modern musicals build upon the foundation of opera, incorporating popular elements such as pop music and jazz, thereby appealing even more to younger audiences. For example, the classic musical *Cats*, directed by the renowned British director Trevor Nunn, and Andrew Lloyd Webber's *The Phantom of the Opera* exemplify the integration of diverse art forms in theatrical performance art. With their gripping plots, enchanting music, and dazzling stage effects, including costumes, sets, and lighting, these works stand as exemplary models of synthesizing different art forms.

Looking now at the integration of literature and cinematic art, this combination not only provides an abundant source of material for film creation but also allows literary works to be transformed through the lens of cinema into visible, tangible, and vivid three-dimensional imagery. For instance, in the film *Roman Holiday*, directed by William Wyler, the use of a long take in the "farewell" scene conveys complex emotions that are difficult to express fully through words alone. Similarly, the film adaptation of contemporary Japanese author Haruki Murakami's novel *Norwegian Wood* extends and deepens, through its visual language, the sense of loneliness, confusion, and melancholy that permeates the original text.

4. Digital art

With the rapid advancement of science and technology, digital art has become an accelerator for the integration of diverse art forms. Digital technology merges music, dance, theater, literature, and other artistic disciplines within virtual spaces ^[13]. By combining computer graphics, imagery, sound, interactive installations, and more, it enables audiences to synchronize and interact with artworks through physical movements, voice commands, and other methods, gaining insight into the origins and creative processes behind the works. For instance, in some immersive digital art exhibitions, 360-degree panoramic projections and other scientific techniques are integrated with surround sound systems, allowing audiences to engage in active and meaningful interaction with the artworks. This not only expands the expressive methods of artistic creation but also enhances the sensory experience of the viewers.

5. Conclusion

In summary, from ancient times to the present, whether in China or on the global stage of art, the fusion of different artistic forms is essentially a free-flowing expression of human creativity and a continuous expansion of artistic aesthetics. This integration not only provides artists with an infinite source of inspiration, a broad creative space, and diverse means of expression but also offers audiences a richer, more colorful, multi-dimensional, and engaging sense of aesthetic pleasure. Through the interplay of diverse art forms, they influence, complement, and draw from one another, making artistic works glow with even greater brilliance. Together, they drive the innovation and progress of culture and art, ensuring that culture and art remain vibrant and full of boundless possibilities amid the currents of evolving times. Such fusion does not negate traditional artistic forms but rather builds on their essence with courageous innovation, allowing traditional art forms to be reborn and radiate renewed vitality.

Disclosure statement

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