

# The Research and Creation of China's Freehand Paintings from the Perspective of Image Aesthetics

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**Abstract:** China's freehand brushwork oil painting is a unique artistic achievement formed by the collision and deep integration of Chinese and Western arts. With the help of oil painting materials, it integrates the spiritual core of China's traditional image aesthetics, and pursues the aesthetic realm of "likeness is better than likeness" and "scene blending" in terms of modeling, color application, and artistic conception creation. As the key category of China's traditional aesthetics, image aesthetics emphasizes the organic unity of "meaning" and "image", advocates conveying infinite spiritual meaning through limited artistic images, and provides deep aesthetic guidance and a practical path for China's freehand oil painting creation. Starting from three dimensions: the origin and transformation of aesthetic spirit, the integration and innovation of creative language, and the expansion and deepening of practical path, this paper deeply explores the concrete presentation and application methods of imagery aesthetics in freehand brushwork oil painting, aiming at revealing the cultural genes and artistic values contained in China's freehand brushwork oil painting, and providing ideas for the inheritance and development of contemporary freehand brushwork oil painting.

**Keywords:** Image aesthetics; China's freehand oil painting; Artistic creation; Aesthetic spirit; Creative language; Practical path

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## 1. Introduction

From birth to development, China's freehand brushwork oil painting has always been closely linked with the traditional aesthetic spirit of China. It not only draws on the advantages of Western oil painting in color expression and texture shaping, but also inherits the spiritual core of China's painting, forming a unique artistic style of "describing the spirit with form" and "setting off the reality with each other." In this art form, the aesthetic view of image plays a vital role, which goes beyond the simple imitation of the external form of objects and guides the creators to integrate subjective feelings, life experiences, and cosmic philosophies into

the picture, so that the works not only have strong visual appeal but also carry profound cultural implications and strong spiritual strength.

The “image” in image aesthetics is not a simple addition of “meaning” and “image”, but a harmonious unity between subject and object, emotion and object, and finite and infinite. This concept is projected into the creation of freehand brushwork oil painting, which is manifested in the generalization and exaggeration in modeling, the subjective use and symbolic expression in color, the blank space and mutual echo in composition, and finally points to the creation of “artistic conception”-allowing viewers to feel a broader spiritual space outside the picture. From the early attempts of Xu Beihong and Lin Fengmian to the integration of Chinese and Western arts, to the diversified practice of freehand brushwork language by contemporary artists, image aesthetics has always been the core clue. Based on this, this paper focuses on the aesthetic view of image and the creative practice of China’s freehand brushwork oil painting, and deeply analyzes the internal connection and fusion path between them, so as to provide theoretical and practical reference for understanding the unique value of this art form.

## 2. The theoretical core of image aesthetics and the artistic echo of freehand brushwork painting

There is a natural correspondence between the spiritual characteristics of image aesthetics and the artistic pursuit of China’s freehand brushwork oil painting, which is not only reflected in the creative concept but also permeates into the concrete artistic expression, forming the basis for their deep integration.

The theoretical core of image aesthetics can be understood from three levels. First, the creative purpose of “setting an image to the best of its meaning.” The Book of Changes puts forward the idea of “building an image to the best of its ability”, emphasizing that the purpose of building an artistic image is to convey the meaning beyond the image itself. The “meaning” here includes not only the emotion and thinking of the creator, but also the general perception of the universal life and social life. As Wang Fuzhi said, “the scene is called two, but it is inseparable from reality”, which is precisely the idea of placing infinite “meaning” in concrete “images”, making works of art a bridge connecting the finite and the infinite. Second, the expression law of “virtual and real.” Image aesthetics holds that “real” (concrete image, pen and ink) and “unreal” (blank space, suggestion, and imagination space) in artistic creation are equally important, and the emptiness and reality depend on each other and transform each other to form a complete aesthetic artistic conception. For example, in China’s landscape paintings, the rocks and trees are “real” and the clouds are “empty.” The mutual contrast between reality and reality not only expands the sense of space in the picture, but also endows the works with vivid vitality. Third, the aesthetic standard of “vivid charm.” “Qi” is the life source of all things in the universe, and “rhyme” is the embodiment of the rhythm of life. Image aesthetics takes “vivid spirit” as the highest realm of art, which requires that works not only be similar in shape, but also convey the inherent vitality and spiritual temperament of things, so as to achieve the effect of “both form and spirit”<sup>[1]</sup>.

The artistic features of China’s freehand brushwork oil paintings are in sharp response to the aesthetics of images. In modeling, it breaks through the strict adherence of Western realistic oil paintings to anatomy and perspective, and captures the “spirit” of objects with generalized and concise lines and color blocks, rather than clinging to the accuracy of “shape.” For example, when depicting a character, artists do not deliberately depict the details of the five senses, but convey the mood and character of the character through the priority

of strokes and the contrast of cold and warm colors, so that the image has more spiritual tension between similarity and dissimilarity. In terms of color, it draws lessons from the concept of “coloring with the class” in traditional painting, weakens the authenticity of natural color, and strengthens the emotional symbolic meaning of color. For example, when representing autumn scenery, the yellow of leaves and the blue of the sky can be subjectively adjusted, and the gorgeous or bleak autumn can be conveyed by exaggerated color contrast, so that color can become the direct carrier of emotion. In terms of composition, it absorbs the wisdom of traditional painting and creates artistic conception through the dense layout of the picture and the contrast between reality and illusion. For example, when depicting a still life, the subject image is relatively specific (real), and the background is treated with fuzzy color blocks or blank spaces (Unreal). The contrast between virtual and real not only highlights the subject but also causes the viewer to imagine the space outside the screen, making the artistic conception of the work more profound<sup>[2]</sup>.

### **3. The creative practice path of China's freehand brushwork oil painting from the perspective of image aesthetics.**

#### **3.1. Tracing back to the traditional aesthetic spirit and realizing the transformation from “enlightenment” to “painting”**

To integrate image aesthetics into freehand brushwork oil painting, artists need to deeply understand the spiritual core of traditional aesthetics. Through the study of classical literary theory and painting theory, artists can internalize the concepts of “the combination of meaning and image” and “the combination of reality and reality” into the conscious consciousness when creating, and realize the natural transformation from theoretical perception to picture expression.

Creators can learn nutrients from traditional painting theories such as Lin Quan Gao Zhi, Painting Quotations of Bitter Melon and Monk, experience the exposition of “artistic conception” and “charm”, and turn it into concrete creative ideas. For example, Guo Xi proposed that “the mountain has three distances: from the foot of the mountain to the top of the mountain, it is called high; Looking at the mountain from the front is far-reaching; Looking far away from the mountain is called “Pingyuan.” This pursuit of spatial artistic conception can inspire freehand brushwork oil painting to break through the limitation of focus perspective when composing, and express the level of space through the shade of color and the reality of brushwork, so that the picture is flat but has a far-reaching feeling. When describing the landscape, the bold (reality) of the nearby mountain is represented by thick oil color stacks, and the hazy (Unreal) of the distant mountain is represented by thin pigment smudges. Through the contrast between reality and reality, the artistic conception of “lofty” and “far-reaching” is created, so that viewers can feel the grandeur and ethereal nature of the natural landscape.

At the same time, artists can draw inspiration from traditional poetry and calligraphy, experience the “image” creation method, and integrate it into oil painting creation. For example, the Tang poem “The desert is lonely and the long river sets the yen” conveys the magnificent frontier scenery with concise images. This artistic technique of “less is more” can inspire freehand brushwork oil painting to do subtraction in performance and capture the core features of objects through the simplest brushstrokes and colors. For example, when depicting the wasteland, artists do not depict the trivial details of the surface, but spread it in a large khaki color, embellishing a few vertical strokes to symbolize solitary smoke, and expressing the sunset in a round color block, so that the picture contains rich emotional and imaginative space in simplicity and realizes the artistic conception of “painting in poetry, painting in poetry”<sup>[3]</sup>.

### **3.2. Integrating Chinese and Western creative languages, exploring the symbiosis of oil painting materials and freehand brushwork spirit**

The uniqueness of China's freehand brushwork oil painting lies in the integration of Chinese and Western creative languages. On the basis of fully grasping the characteristics of oil painting materials, the creator should integrate the traditional brushwork and spirit of China to form a unique language with both oil painting texture and oriental charm.

In the application of brush strokes, the strokes such as "center", "side", and "scattered front" of the brush pen can be transformed into the application of an oil painting pen, so that the brush strokes themselves have independent aesthetic value. For example, when sketching lines with a round-headed pen center, artists can learn from the texture of "leak marks" in calligraphy to make the lines calm and powerful, which is suitable for expressing the tenacity of the trunk; When sweeping the canvas with a flat pen, the brush strokes are mottled and smart, which is suitable for expressing the wave light on the water surface or the flow of clouds. At the same time, combined with the thickness of oil painting pigments, the texture of objects is expressed by stacking, scraping, and scraping techniques. For example, when depicting old bark, the body is first shaped with thick paint, and then the traces of different shades are scraped with a scraper to simulate the rough texture of bark. The strength of brushwork and the change of texture jointly convey the vicissitudes and vitality of the old tree. This treatment not only gives full play to the advantages of oil painting materials, but also contains the traditional freehand brushwork.

In the combination of color and texture, artists can learn from the layering of traditional ink painting, and express the richness of color through the thickness and light and dark changes of oil painting pigments. For example, when expressing the snow scene, it is not limited to the monotonous use of white, but a small amount of colors such as blue, purple and yellow are added to the white, and a subtle color level is formed through the superposition of the thickness of pigments: the thick white shows the thick (unreal) snow, and the light blue in Bo Tu shows the cold (real) shadow. The change of color between reality and reality not only shows the texture of snow, but also conveys the quiet artistic conception in winter. This color treatment not only retains the richness of oil painting color but also incorporates the ethereal charm of ink painting, which makes the spirit of "freehand brushwork" gain new expression in oil painting materials <sup>[4]</sup>.

### **3.3. Expand the theme and artistic conception so that images grow naturally in contemporary life**

Image aesthetics is not limited to the reproduction of traditional themes, but also needs to find new "image" carriers in contemporary life, and through the artistic treatment of daily scenes and life experiences, the artistic conception of freehand brushwork oil painting resonates with contemporary people's emotions.

In the choice of theme, artists can break through the limitations of traditional landscapes, flowers, and birds, and cast their perspective on contemporary life scenes such as urban street scenes, rural corners, and ordinary people, from which they can dig out "images" with spiritual connotations. For example, when depicting the old lanes in the city, artists do not deliberately depict the details of the building, but convey the tranquility of the old lanes and the precipitation of the years with loose brushstrokes and warm colors through mottled walls, oblique sunlight, weeds in the corner and other elements, so that the daily scene becomes an "image" bearing nostalgic feelings. When expressing characters, artists focus on ordinary people's life moments-street vendors' shouting, old people's chatting in the park, and students' meditation under the lamp. By capturing these moments, artists

omit minor details with freehand brushwork, highlight the characters' demeanor and emotions, and make ordinary characters become the epitome of the spirit of the times.

In the creation of artistic conception, artists can combine the emotional needs of contemporary people and give "image" a new connotation of the times <sup>[5]</sup>. For example, when expressing the relationship between man and nature, it is no longer limited to the "seclusion" feelings of traditional landscapes, but through depicting the vegetation in urban parks, the growth of potted plants on balconies and other scenes, with delicate brushwork and fresh colors, it conveys modern people's closeness and yearning for nature, so that "natural images" can form a dialogue with urban life. When expressing the theme of life, artists can describe the natural phenomena such as falling leaves and germination of seeds, and convey our thoughts on the life cycle with symbolic techniques and rhythmic strokes, so that the artistic conception of the works is rooted in the traditional philosophy of life and close to the spiritual needs of contemporary people.

### **3.4. Return to the creative tradition of "nature from outside, heart from inside" and realize the blending of mind and matter**

Image aesthetics emphasizes that creation is a process of "observing", "feeling" and "understanding", and the creation of freehand brushwork oil painting also needs to follow this tradition, integrating subjective feelings into the observation of nature and life, and finally realizing the creative state of "blending mind and matter", making the work the crystallization of dialogue between mind and object.

"Nature by foreign teachers" requires creators to go deep into nature and life and capture the "charm" of objects with keen perception. This is not a simple sketch, but an emotional observation. When walking in the mountains, not only record the shape of the mountain, but also feel the majestic or beautiful mountain; When one stops on the street, one should not only observe people's movements, but also understand people's emotions. This observation will accumulate a large number of "image" materials, such as the hazy peaks in the morning fog, the moist leaves in the rain, and the warmth of the wall in the sunset. These vivid feelings will become the emotional tone of creation and guide the use of brushstrokes and colors. For example, after observing the trees in autumn, what may be left in my mind is not the specific tree shape, but the mottled light and shadow formed by the sunlight through the leaves and the swaying rhythm of the leaves in the autumn wind. These feelings will make the brushwork more agile and the colors warmer when creating, and let the picture naturally convey the vitality and poetry of autumn.

On the other hand, "getting the heart from the middle" emphasizes the inner refining and sublimation on the basis of observation, and transforms the external image into the inner "image" <sup>[6]</sup>. Creators can screen and summarize the observed images by sketching, taking notes, memorizing, and so on, keeping the most touching parts and weakening the minor details. For example, when one sees grass growing in a crevice, one can ignore the specific number of leaves and focus on the tenacity and upward growth of the grass stem. Through exaggerated lines and bright color contrast, the grass becomes a symbol of vitality. This transformation from "object image" to "image" is the embodiment of the concept of "getting carried away" in image aesthetics, which makes the image in the work not realistic, but more touching to the viewer's heart.

## **4. Conclusion**

The aesthetic view of image provides a profound cultural foundation and artistic guidance for the creation of

China's freehand brushwork oil paintings, which enables China's freehand brushwork oil paintings to absorb western oil painting techniques, while always maintaining the spiritual characteristics of oriental art and creating a unique artistic conception in the dialectical unity of "form and spirit", "unreal and real" and "emotion and scenery." From the tracing of traditional aesthetic spirit to the integration of Chinese and Western creative languages, from the expansion of theme and artistic conception to the return of creative state, every practical path points to the core pursuit of "setting up an image to express one's feelings", making China's freehand oil painting an important carrier to convey the national cultural spirit and express contemporary people's feelings.

This fusion is not a simple copy of tradition, but a creative transformation of imagery aesthetics from a contemporary perspective, which not only enriches the expression dimension of oil painting, but also promotes the contemporary inheritance of China's traditional aesthetics. In the future, with the deepening of the creator's aesthetic understanding of images and the continuous exploration of artistic language, China's freehand brushwork oil paintings will surely blossom into a more unique artistic brilliance in the "innovation" and contribute artistic achievements with China style to the world art treasure house.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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