

On the Feasibility of Incorporating Comprehensive Materials in the Teaching of Watercolour Painting in Chinese Universities

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Abstract: Since the 20th century, human art has gradually transformed into contemporary forms and comprehensive painting has started to emerge. As such, the teaching of watercolour painting should not strictly adhere to rules; colleges and universities also need to adapt their teaching method of watercolour painting according to the changes in the ideology of today's society. With the development of contemporary watercolour art, new achievements in the art of teachers and the feasibility of comprehensive materials to expand watercolour painting have become the focus of contemporary watercolour teaching in Chinese universities.

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1 Current teaching method of watercolour painting in Chinese universities

Since its introduction and reform, colleges and universities across China have begun to attach importance to the development of art majors, prompting the need to establish a standardized teaching method of watercolour painting. The objective of teaching watercolour painting is to allow students to become proficient in the basic theories of fine arts and watercolour painting techniques. It is necessary to train not only advanced artists but also beginner artists in the development of watercolour painting. However, teaching watercolour painting in colleges and

universities now face the following problems.

Firstly, the current teaching method of watercolour painting in China is not ideal due to the talent gap between the younger and older teachers in the teaching team. The shortage of young watercolour talents and teachers has weakened the dynamic development of watercolour painting.

Secondly, the current rate of revising the teaching method of watercolour painting in China is lagging behind the rapid development of art. Several colleges and universities in China neither explain nor expand on the changes in contemporary art materials, techniques and concepts. Instead, it continues to use the traditional classroom teaching method, which is to train students' watercolour techniques through sketching and copying. This teaching method in China has led to a new batch of watercolour painting students who produce works that follow the traditional style but with contemporary themes and without passion.

In contemporary China, the development of any field is inseparable from innovation. If the traditional teaching model is only applied, it is impossible to train watercolour painting talents in the field of contemporary Chinese culture and spirit. Art schools should incorporate more lessons in contemporary art concepts and techniques, expand the techniques of traditional watercolours and allow students to fully explore their creativity. Teachers play an important role in this process - they should properly guide and help develop their students' creativity.

Thirdly, the contradiction between the traditional teaching method and the ideology of today's society has led to the stagnation of artistic expression in students, which is evident in the artistic process of their artworks.

The contemporary society is rapidly changing and has access to vast amounts of information. The younger generation of art students can distinctly perceive various popular topics and issues in society. However, problems arise when they must use traditional painting methods to express their own views and thought.

The new social environment has promoted changes in creative ideas, which have also brought about technical innovations to watercolour painting. Traditional watercolour techniques can no longer support current creative ideas. Since the art exam is basically based on gouache, students have a short exposure to watercolour painting. This corresponds to unsophisticated painting techniques that result in their creation of superficial works in which the content is too formal to accurately express their intended ideas. The students learn about various new materials and techniques from the Internet, which negatively impacts their learning of traditional watercolour techniques. This creates an unusual situation whereby neither the new techniques are fully understood nor the traditional techniques are mastered. Therefore, the involvement of comprehensive materials in the teaching of watercolour painting in Chinese universities is an issue that must be considered.

2 Changes in contemporary Chinese watercolour painting

With the frequent exchanges of artists in China and abroad, local watercolour artists have been influenced by Western contemporary art concepts; in fact, their works exhibit this spirit of diversity and contemporariness. Contemporary watercolour artists are no longer limited by traditional watercolour painting materials as the choice of materials has become more open. This means that all materials that can be combined with water (water-based materials) are now their preferred choice of materials. The artist is far removed from the monotonous style of the traditional watercolour painting that is taught and, instead, puts forward higher requirements for the artistic expression of watercolour painting. The change in the artist's vision from using basic materials in watercolour painting to using watercolour materials in artistic expression has an impact on the teaching method of traditional watercolour painting in universities. Many new textures and forms that cannot be explained using the traditional watercolour teaching method have appeared in the works of contemporary watercolour artists.

Contemporary watercolour painting does not stop at

the innovation of materials, but also in changes to its techniques of expression. Even when using traditional watercolour paints, you must use the latest artistic expressions as much as possible. The language and content of contemporary watercolour painting has more flexibility and openness than traditional watercolour painting.

Contemporary watercolour painting has great flexibility, which is manifested by breaking the process of traditional watercolour painting. The steps of traditional watercolour painting usually begin with light colours followed by dark colours, large colour blocks followed by small details, wet painting followed by dry painting and distant view followed by close up view. However, contemporary watercolour paintings are different. Drawing upon Chinese painting and oil painting techniques, watercolour artists will arrange painting techniques and sequences according to their own creative content. Instead of rejecting traditional watercolour painting, they will allow the natural changes of the paint and water. Thus, the flow of water creates accidental texture and picture effects.

The changes in contemporary watercolour painting are also reflected in the subject matter of creation. Watercolour paintings are no longer considered as "small paintings" or mere sketches. The paintings now comprise abstract, decorative, imagery and other artistic elements. The artistic expression is no longer confined to specific matters and, instead, is conveyed by the visual impact or the contradiction between the abstract and the concrete in the painting.

Artworks basically reflect the connotation of their respective time period and contemporary watercolour painting is no exception. Contemporary art's constant reflection of "what is art" involves various fields such as religion, culture, economy and gender, among others. In its continuous reflection and negation, watercolour painting started changing into contemporary art. Contemporary watercolour artists are constantly seeking truth, virtue and beauty in society. By using watercolours as a medium to express the positive energy of society, they assume the burden of constructing the social, cultural and spiritual outlook of contemporary China.

The development of contemporary Chinese watercolour painting has an impact on the teaching method of watercolour painting in colleges and universities. The changes in the concept and development of contemporary watercolour painting - from painting in a narrow sense to a broad sense and

the extensive use of comprehensive materials - have made an increasing number of university teachers pay attention to these trends and think of new methods to teach watercolour painting.

3 New achievements and explorations in watercolour painting by Chinese university teachers

The watercolour techniques and artistic knowledge of teachers underpin the development of teaching methods of watercolour painting in colleges and universities. In the contemporary art environment, the contradiction between the development of traditional watercolours and comprehensive materials is an issue that must be confronted. The problem of inheriting traditional art and expressing contemporary art has become a major challenge in watercolour painting. However, watercolour painting university teachers can still break the tradition and find their unique artistic insights. Among them, Liu Shouxiang, Huang Zengyan and Zhao Yunlong are such outstanding representatives.

Liu Shouxiang, currently a professor at the Hubei Institute of Fine Arts, is the first to explore new materials using traditional and expression techniques. In the painting process of “Black Pots and Fresh Fruits”, he chose Chinese painting pigments and adopted the “buried colour” technique, which is similar to that of Western classical oil painting. Using Chinese pigments as a base, he painted upon them dark black linings, black pots and other dark colours, such as the red apples that are painted in green with a purple-grey base. The floating colours of the Chinese painting pigments are then removed by rinsing with water to reveal the paper texture, which will shape the lining. After the floating colours are washed, watercolours are used to paint the apples red, shape the black jar and complete other details. This method of involving Chinese pigments in watercolour painting expands the artistic expression of watercolour painting. In recent years, Liu Shouxiang’s watercolour painting materials have become increasingly abundant. For example, the 2018 landscape painting titled “Matera under the Setting Sun” differs greatly from the traditional watercolour landscape painting method for three reasons: 1) the materials used in the painting are acrylic markers and watercolour paints, which produce an effect that is different from of a watercolour landscape painting that uses purely watercolour paints; 2) the painting process is different from that of traditional watercolour painting.

This painting was drawn using a fine pencil with light grey markers, after which the background was painted with acrylic paints and finally completed with watercolour paints; and 3) this painting is lighter and more transparent than traditional watercolour landscape painting. The difference is that with the use of new materials and new techniques, the overall painting has a strong effect.

Huang Zengyan, who is currently a professor at the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, has significantly contributed to the production of watercolour texture. The texture of traditional watercolour painting is the effect of water marks, water stains and smudges caused by wet-on-wet and wet-on-dry techniques. However, Huang Zengyan uses glue and paint as a medium in his process of painting. He uses a brush made of bristles to shape the picture on the drawing paper. Further, in order to change the dilution of watercolour paints the addition of water, he also adds materials such as egg yolk medium, opaque water-based paints or other rubber agents that are easy to set in order to make the brush strokes heavier and the colours richer. The intervention of glue and paint makes Huang Zengyan’s screen texture appear fuller. Looking at his collection, each work tells of his desire and attitude concerning art through texture.

Zhao Yunlong is a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts of Harbin Normal University. His watercolour artworks embody the artistic concept of the school. He was able to make the most of the water and watercolour paints in a solid and rigorous painting process. Zhao Yunlong is not immersed in the traditional watercolour painting taught in academic institutions. In recent years, he has begun to experiment with mixed media materials, learning the traditional Chinese pen painting method and focusing more on the writing and less on the screen. This new form of pen painting makes the overall painting have a lively and casual visual experience.

The development of watercolour painting teaching in Chinese universities cannot be separated from the efforts and innovation of university teachers. Liu Shouxiang’s innovative use of materials in the process of watercolour painting, Huang Zengyan’s innovation in the mixed media methods of watercolour painting and brushes’ bristles and Zhao Yunlong’s integration of traditional Chinese writing brushstrokes in watercolour painting exhibit new methods of watercolour painting in the academic institutions. On the premise of their

rich teaching and painting experiences, they continue to broaden the use of comprehensive materials in painting, making it possible for comprehensive materials to be incorporated in the teaching of watercolour painting in universities.

4 The impact of comprehensive materials in the teaching of watercolour painting

In the materialistic culture of today's society, people's needs and aesthetics have changed. Similarly, the teaching methods of art in colleges and universities need to adapt to the changes in the ideology of society today. Therefore, the involvement of comprehensive materials in the teaching of watercolour painting will have a positive effect on the future artistic creations of students who choose watercolour art. Although the characteristics of watercolour painting also determine the difficulty of innovation and expansion, the incorporation of comprehensive materials makes its expansion and innovation possible. The inclusion of comprehensive materials in the teaching of watercolour painting will enrich the teaching content of watercolour painting and make its diversification possible.

Comprehensive materials should be included in the teaching of watercolour painting so that students can better express their personal emotions and views

in their artworks. This will make their artworks be more appealing and persuasive, enable them to shift their creative and thinking medium from traditional watercolour painting to a more contemporary art form and also help them find their own personality. Contemporary art must keep up with the current trends. While continuously expanding comprehensive materials, teachers need to provide proper guidance and explain the concepts of contemporary art so as to prevent students from becoming too materialistic and neglecting their own artistic expression and, instead, cultivate them in line with contemporary times and unique creativity.

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