

Narrative Expression of Light in Contemporary Oil Paintings

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Abstract: In modern and contemporary times, under the background that artists enjoy full freedom of choice, the use of light gets rid of the traditional role, takes light as the main form of expression to express the painter's personal subjective emotion, and makes attempts in various painting styles, which makes the appearance of today's paintings diverse. This paper studies the contemporary oil paintings of the development and innovation of light and the content expression of new forms, analyzes and summarizes the characteristics of the narrative expression of light with the word "narrative of light" combined with the works of contemporary art master Heimer Xiuyi, and discusses the significance of the narrative expression of light in Contemporary oil paintings.

Keywords: Contemporary oil painting; Narrative of light; Visual guidance; Subjectivity; Emotional expression

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1. Introduction

With different historical times as the background, the viewing and expression of light are also different. Since the Renaissance, light has basically been used to shape the sense of volume and express the sense of space. Renaissance and medieval art masters introduced light into the picture as an active force and mostly used it to express the symbolic role of religious themes. At this time, the main characteristics of light are soft and flat, and the light shines evenly on every corner of the picture. In the 17th and 18th centuries, the characteristics of light became the main modeling means in the picture. Light was used to create an atmosphere, and the light presented a spotlight like dramatic effect. In the 19th century, Impressionist "watching" moved from indoors to outdoors, making the eyes "watch" to richer colors. Neither Rembrandt, who expresses divine light, nor Impressionists depict richer colors with outdoor light, which does not infiltrate the use of light into more subjective and strong personal emotions. They just use light as an indispensable painting means to depict invariable religious themes and secular portrait landscapes through the needs of the art market.

Modern and contemporary times are the era of rapid development of technology and the era of information and knowledge explosion. Our life has undergone great changes. At the same time, it is also the era when artists extremely want to express their own personality and thoughts. The use of light gets rid of the role in the traditional sense and is used as the main painting means to show the painter's personal subjective emotion, making the painting styles diverse. Artists completely convert subjective light into an important factor to express subjective emotion in the picture, making the characteristics of light more "narrative" expression and characteristics.

2. Narrative expression of light

When it comes to narrative, people often associate it with linear narrative novels and nonlinear narrative paintings. And “light” together, and give them a new meaning, it seems a little confusing. With the development of time, in oil painting creation, this paper gives the word “narrative” a new connotation - “narrative expression of light,” that is, painters who are good at lighting use the gradient changes brought by the light in the picture to control the black-and-white gray relationship and composition in the picture, so as to emphasize the main part of the picture and weaken the secondary part, In order to attract and guide the viewer’s eyes, follow the painter’s intention, enter the situation in the picture, and have empathy and resonance with the painter. This separates the word “narrative” from the inherent context of the original “nonlinear narrative painting” and “linear narrative novel,” attaches the “narrative of light” to the painter’s strong subjective sexuality, and becomes the main painting language and painting content in creation. It is mainly reflected in four aspects: light and theme expression, atmosphere construction, visual guidance and picture interpretation. Subjective personal emotion can be fully expressed only when it is perfectly matched with various painting languages and the relationship between black, white and gray. The painter depicts the picture through his own unique painting means, and visually guides the viewer through light distribution. Light is like the clues of the story. First attract your eyes, and then lead you into the situation of the story. Finally, the author will tell you the stories the painter wants to tell you one by one ^[1].

The expression characteristics of “light narrative” are similar to the narrative characteristics of traditional thematic painting to some extent. This paper summarizes the characteristics of narrative painting - creating the solidification of space through character modeling, time sequence, spatial scene and character relationship in events, and creating an unrealistic moment in a limited plane space to extend time. For example, the 15th century Swiss painter Conrad Weitz’s wood painting the miracle of fishing (**Figure 1**) is the content of Chapter 21 described in the gospel of John - St. Peter met Christ after the resurrection, “some apostles and companions went to the sea to fish, but they got nothing. After dawn, Jesus stood on the shore, but they did not recognize him. Jesus told them to cast the net on the boat.



Figure 1. The miracle of fishing 1444 oil painting on wood 132 × one hundred and fifty-one

On the right, there were so many fish that they couldn’t pull up the net. At that moment, one of them said, “it’s the Lord.” St. Peter heard this saying, “put on a coat (because he was naked) and jumped into the sea. The rest of the disciples were in the boat.” Then they had a meal with Jesus.” We should know that painting used to be purposeful and functional. The miracle of fishing is for illiterate farmers. It uses painting to illustrate biblical stories, convey the gospel, and persuade people to be good. Among them, the expression of time extension for the modeling of people or things by light, specific time, space and unrealistic moments

is the same as the expression characteristics of “light narrative,” but “narrative light” is more subjective and dynamic.

3. Narrative characteristics of light

This paper analyzes the narrative characteristics of light in oil paintings from four aspects: light and theme expression, light and atmosphere construction, light and visual guidance and light and picture interpretation: The narrative expression of light in oil paintings is closely related to the choice of painting theme. The theme expression is closely related to the painting theme. There are many kinds of painting themes of oil painting, such as historical painting (religious painting and allegorical painting), genre painting, figure painting, landscape painting, still life painting, etc. painters express their views and emotions by summarizing their life experience and describing the content related to the theme. With the choice of different themes, light plays an important role in the primary and secondary changes of the picture, the tone of color and the expression of emotion in the work. Supplemented by different viewing methods of the painter, the narrative light is taken as the protagonist, and the composition of black, white and gray is carefully arranged to comply with the overall structure of the picture. In order to guide the viewer into the picture situation depicted by the painter ^[2].

The narrative expression of light in oil paintings is directly related to the construction of picture atmosphere. The moving part of any excellent painting is inseparable from the artist’s rendering of the picture atmosphere by using light. The influence of light on the brightness and atmosphere of the picture is very important. “The shape of an object can only be presented by light and shadow. The most magical side of oil painting is to use light and shade to make the plane appear in relief.” All the paintings we can see today are inseparable from the important influence of light on various painting language elements in the picture, such as the strength of lines, the change of light and shade levels, the temperature of colors, the distance of space, the composition of black, white and gray, etc. the intensity, direction and nature of light play a vital role in creating the picture atmosphere, whether it is to depict outdoor direct sunlight, window light, cloudy light source, candle light, fire light, indoor cold light or warm light, night street light, hidden light source, or more subjectively processed light, the painter relies on skillfully using the transformation of light to achieve the ideal picture atmosphere and mood. For example, cloudy or indoor window light will create a quiet, warm and harmonious atmosphere and mood, The backlight or hidden light source will always create a heavy and mysterious picture atmosphere. When we marvel at the color of an oil painting in the art museum, it may not be the mature painting skills and gorgeous colors that attract your attention, but the unique picture atmosphere and mood constructed by these painting elements combined with the light, especially the cold and warm colors and light and dark level changes brought by the light, which will create different picture atmosphere and arouse the interest of the viewer, and make the viewer resonate with the painter.

The visual guidance of light is to use the composition of black-and-white gray in the picture to divide, arrange and combine the picture, and visually guide the viewer according to the virtual and real, primary and secondary formed by the change of the contrast between black-and-white and gray. The arrangement of dialogue in black-and-white and gray is to control the light. Using light - white in black, white and gray for visual guidance, the Greeks made great contributions to the future painters’ technology of expressing light. They continued to study the decoding of yin and Yang images, and created a secret code for the three-dimensional formation different from the flat silhouette contour image, that is, the three-tone code used in “light and dark modeling,” It has become the basis of all inventions of Western art in later generations. Among them, the three-tone code is often composed of black, white and gray. The brightness in the three-tone code and the white in Woodcut are the means to express light ^[3]. Through light distribution, the painter takes light as the main painting language and means, so as to express the subjective emotion that the painter

wants to express, create a picture effect with a specific situation, sublimate the work to a higher level, infect the viewer and bring the viewer into the specific situation in his picture.

When appreciating an oil painting, everyone has his own interpretation meaning. Before the beginning of the modern art movement, picture works appeared to make people understand. Even untrained people can see pictures and understand them somewhat. With the gradual improvement of the public's aesthetic ability, when the audience appreciates an excellent oil painting, because they have different personal experience, life experience, knowledge accumulation and the specific national culture of their own country, everyone has different viewing methods. After entering the picture situation, the audience creates the work again. So as to resonate with the painter's emotion. From the perspective of psychology, the audience's interpretation of painters' paintings are like mobilizing the audience's memory and experience of the visible world. Starting from the psychological direction of the audience's visual perception, the audience's aesthetics is closely related to various times and aesthetic tides from the traditional aesthetics to the contemporary public's aesthetic vision. Each country has its own specific national culture or a kind of psychological orientation and cultural accommodation of mass culture. For example, Giotto's works are more "real" than his previous works of Cimabue, because Giotto's works can deceive the audience's vision more with the progress of painting skills. This is more like the renewal of artistic style and artistic trend. The audience's ability to interpret artistic works will also be enhanced with the changes of the times [4].

4. The narrative expression of light by contemporary painter Heimer Xiuyi

Wilhelm heimxiuyi is one of the most important contemporary artists in Denmark. He has unique views on the narrative expression of light and unique choice of light, and has created his own artistic style and artistic aesthetics [5]. Haimer Xiuyi's unique choice of light is closely related to his unique life experience, his character and attitude towards life. Haimer Xiuyi's character is quiet and lonely. His personal habits and living environment have been proved to be as obscure as his paintings. He is not good at communicating with people and likes to stay away from people. His paintings are the same as his character. Full of silent silence and silence, each of his paintings seems to inject his love for the small world he lives in and his keen insight into all cautious people and things around him. The theme of his paintings seems simple and monotonous - he repeatedly paints an empty room and a young woman, but behind the simplicity, there are very delicate details and tones. In his works before his death, there were more than 60 paintings of his own indoor scenes, such as the painter's easel (**Figure 2**). In the quiet and plain room, a young woman was sometimes present and sometimes absent. This young woman was his wife IDA, the eternal model in his picture, and the woman who took care of him when he died of throat cancer in 1916.

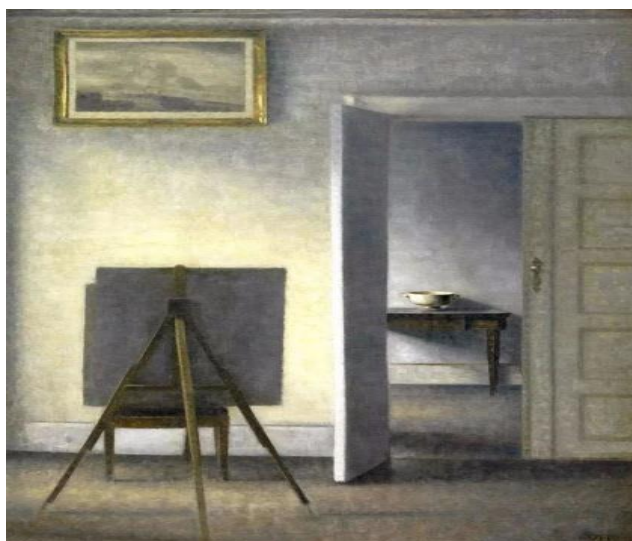


Figure 2. The painter's painter 1901 oil painting

Heimer Xiuyi's painting skills are more concrete. The painting theme is familiar scenes and characters related to light, but the people and objects in the picture are not faithful descriptions of reality, but have been highly refined and summarized by him, erasing all the cumbersome details that affect his pursuit of the picture, and the painting style is both traditional and modern. He repeatedly refined and simplified the natural window light and indoor warm and cold light, making the light in the picture more subjective, and the tone atmosphere is always neutral and cold. The narrative light in his works is sometimes shaped, sometimes shapeless, sometimes mottled. Heimer Xiuyi always takes the narrative light as black.



Figure 3. Sunshine on the floor oil on canvas in 1901

The white in the composition of white ash is the visual center of the picture. His feelings for these lights are so strong that they make the light the real protagonist of the picture. He tries his best to describe the sense of light passing. The narrative light in the picture seems to be a window to communicate with the audience. The light appears quiet and beautiful in his picture. The lines of the walls and windows in the picture are like a cage, separating indoor and outdoor. It seems that only his studio is his place of peace of mind. For example, in sunshine on the floor (**Figure 3**), the tone of the picture presents a faint purple gray full of melancholy color. The afternoon light forms a backlight effect through the white translucent curtains and falls on the wooden floor. The lattice shape of light and shadow echoes with the lattice shape of windows, doors, wallboards and photo frames, and the light attracts the eyes of the viewer. The viewer who enters the picture situation has a faint sense of loneliness, despair and bondage. IDA sits in front of the table in the lower left corner, leaving only the back of her long black dress. It seems that she is sitting on something, but it is so silent ^[6].

From the narrative light of Heimer Xiuyi, we can understand his way of dealing with the world and his sincere and simple feelings for his wife and room unintentionally revealed in the brush. It is through his depiction of the most familiar and ordinary people and things around him again and again that he makes his works noble and quiet. Heimer Xiuyi's painting language is the use of lines and capture narrative light, combined with other painting elements, such as the depth of space, neutral tone and thin strokes with air feeling, to convey his subjective emotion and inner emotion. In an interview, when asked about the obvious pattern structure in his works, he once replied: "The line is the decisive factor for me to choose the theme. I like the architectural content called image and, of course, light. But for me, lines are the most meaningful." For example, the work IDA playing the piano (**Figure 4**) is still neutral and cold, but the visual center of the picture is still filled with a beam of warmth.

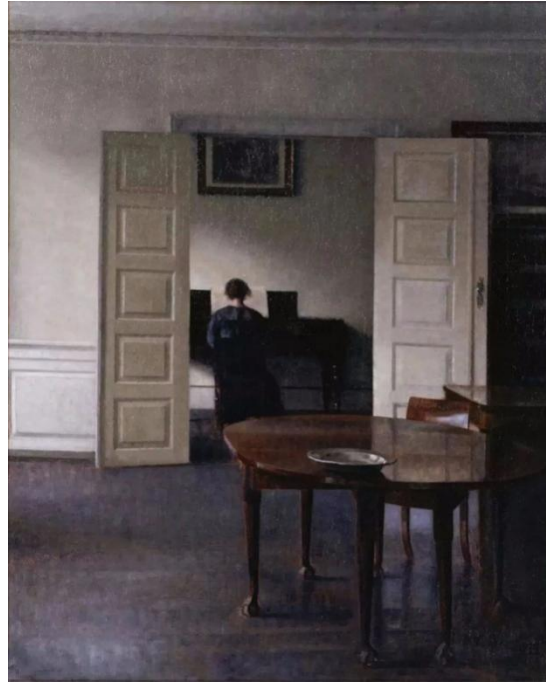


Figure 4. Ida playing the piano, 1893 oil on canvas

The warm sunshine gently falls on the wall, piano and his wife IDA. Although there is no very straightforward description of the relationship between the two and his wife, nor does it describe his wife perfectly, he can still realize his ordinary, simple and deep love for his wife through Heimer Xiuyi's lighting. This emotion becomes deep, great and quiet with the daily mutual company and silent payment. The narrative light as the protagonist of the picture allows the audience to imagine and sublimate what the painter thinks from the same perspective as the painter.

To sum up, as an important language means in oil painting art, with the continuous development, reform and innovation of the times, in the contemporary context, the function and function of light also have newer painting functions and forms of expression with the development of Western art history. The application of light gets rid of the traditional role and becomes the main content form to show the painter's personal subjective emotion. It makes contemporary oil paintings have very obvious narrative characteristics of light, which also inputs fresh blood and inject new vitality into the expression language of light. At the same time, it also has very important aesthetic significance. In the future, we should enrich and deepen the expression forms and artistic effects of light with renewed vision and ideas, and add new aesthetic significance and artistic value of light.

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