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Appreciation of Imagery in Oil Painting through the Cultural Context of Henan Province

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Abstract

*This article is about the appreciation of contemporary Chinese imagery oil paintings in Henan Province, and the researcher has chosen the work *The Song of Saved Myself* by Wang Hongwei, a painter from Henan Province, China, as the object of discussion. This study is grounded in an analysis from a formalist perspective, combined with an exploration of cultural and imagery concepts. The purpose of the study is to identify the themes and analyze the imagery forms in the artwork *The Song of Saved Myself*, and to interpret the significance of formal elements in painting art within the socio-cultural systems. The written and visual data collection methodology in this study uses a descriptive qualitative approach based on empirical field work of the data obtained. Interview, documentation, visual records and observation methods were used to gather information relating to the painting under study. The research findings indicate that Wang Hongwei's work *The Song of Saved Myself* integrates Chinese cultural elements into contemporary landscape oil painting, demonstrating distinctive cultural and imagery characteristics. The concept used in the research is the basis for the formation of the imagery oil painting, which is analysed using a combination of formalism, concept of imagery and cultural significance. The implications of the research suggest that contemporary Chinese oil paintings from Henan Province cannot be viewed only from the formalist perspective of art, but also through the cultural contexts and the imagery features produced in the works. This study contributes to the understanding of the meaning, concept and aim of design utilized by contemporary Chinese artists in shaping the image of their paintings.*

Keywords: Art Appreciation, Socio-Cultural, Oil Painting, Formalism, Imagery.

Introduction

The analysis of artistic works necessitates a dual engagement with both formal aesthetics and cultural significations. As Peng Jixiang (2019) contends, art appreciation transcends mere visual consumption; it demands an interrogation of the artwork's compositional language alongside the sociocultural subtext embedded within its symbolic framework. This analytical paradigm proves particularly salient when examining contemporary Chinese art, a complex temporal category broadly defined as post-1980s artistic production that simultaneously negotiates China's sociopolitical realities and engages in cross-cultural dialogues with Western modernist traditions (Shi shengxun, 2018).

The evolution of this artistic movement remains inextricably linked to China's post-Reform cultural consciousness. Yang Zhonghua (2013) historiography reveals how 1980s Chinese artists, confronting Western cultural hegemony under globalization, strategically mobilized traditional cultural signifiers as acts of aesthetic resistance. This epistemological shift catalyzed

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a systematic reappropriation of indigenous cultural resources, transforming them into conceptual anchors for establishing cultural subjectivity within transnational art discourses.

Emerging as one of the most prominent manifestations in Chinese contemporary art, imagery oil painting has crystallized within this sociocultural crucible as a paradigmatic form that synthesizes Western technical vocabulary with Chinese aesthetic philosophy. Characterized by its non-mimetic representation and metaphoric visual syntax, this style—as documented by Lu Jiachuan(2014)—constitutes a deliberate formal strategy to materialize what theorists term "oriental aesthetic consciousness" . The genre's proliferation across regional artistic practices, exemplified by Henan-based artist Wang Hongwei's seminal work *The Song of Saved Myself*, demonstrates its efficacy in reconciling modernist abstraction with Chinese culture.

From the 1990s to the present, Wang Hongwei has created a large number of imagery oil paintings and has always impressed people. Critical to this artistic praxis is the reconceptualization of cultural memory through multimodal imagery. Contemporary imaginative oil painting goes beyond Warren and Wellek's (2017) psychoaesthetic framework of mental image re-creation and instead constructs an image that stimulates the viewer's sensory experience through the organisation and arrangement of painting forms.

These artistic innovations remain an expression of culture. Culture is a dynamic symbolic ecosystem, a complex of beliefs, values and environmental interactions that shape artistic creation (Ember and Ember, 2021). Through this theoretical lens, contemporary Chinese imagery oil painting emerges not merely as stylistic innovation, but as a discursive battleground where cultural identity is continually negotiated and re-inscribed.

The Purpose of the Study

1. Identify the subject of the work *The Song of Saved Myself*.
2. Analysis the imagery form of the artwork.
3. Analyse the significance of form in the artwork of *The Song of Saved Myself* through the socio-cultural context.

Conceptual Frameworks

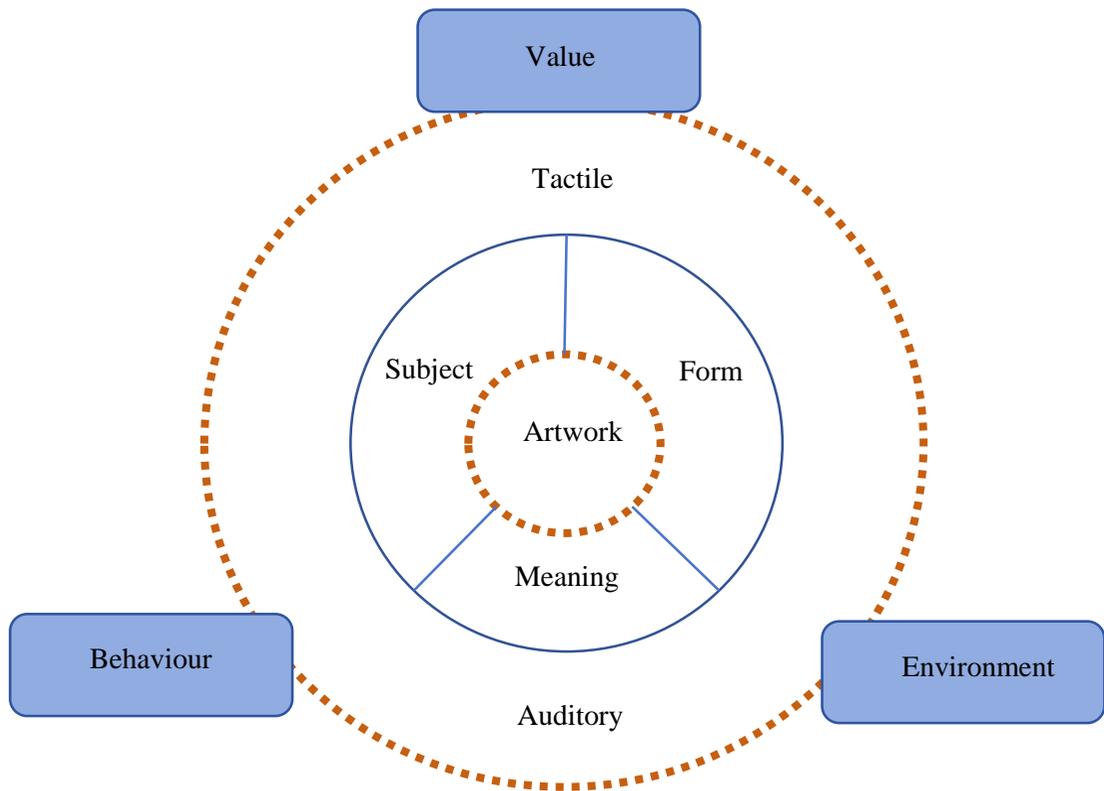


Figure 1. The conceptual framework is adapted from the concept of formalistic, imagery, cultural systems

Research Methods

The study approach is qualitatively descriptive with inter-disciplinary implementation using case study design of work analysis on subject, imagery form and culture meaning in Chinese contemporary imagery oil painting. Research in these dimensions is employed to analyze the compositional elements of the painting. There are four data collection methods used which are interview, observation, visual recording and documentation.

Data Analysis

Analysis the artwork *The Song of Saved Myself*



Figure 2. *The Song of Saved Myself*

Wang Hongwei

Oil painting

This painting measures 180cm x 180cm

Year 2015

Artwork Description

The name of this work of art is *The Song of Saving Myself*. The author of this work is a painter named Wang Hongwei. The medium used for the work is an oil painting. The dimensions of the work are 180 cm x 180 cm. The work was released in 2015. The artist presents this work as a genre of contemporary Chinese imagery oil painting style. This work shows the environment around the railway line of a railway station. There is a flat area below the rail and a platform above the rail in front of and behind the rail respectively. In each of these areas, there are two signs indicating the station's location. The word "Kaifeng" and "Bianliang" are written on the

station signs. Then, at the back there is a wall behind the station sign, which is clearly in the traditional Chinese style. In addition, objects that look like mountains appear behind the station sign in the front of the picture and behind the wall on the right, but the exterior of this mountain is incomplete. Pine trees, rocks, a tower, a flagpole and a large cloud forming in the sky appear in order next to the mountain on the right side of the picture. This work is a combination of many different objects, presenting a richness of form and content.

Subject

Ocvirk et al. (2009) state that the subject of an artwork is something visually tangible that can be reproduced by the artist. It can also be understood as the "what" that is depicted in the creation of the artwork. In depictive art, the subject involves the reproduction of things and the experience of the artist, which is the source of inspiration for the creation of the artwork.

Pine Tree

Pine trees are a recurring subject in traditional Chinese paintings, and in Chinese culture, pine trees are rich in symbolism. From ancient times to modern times, Chinese literati and painters have created art based on the different feelings that the characteristics, colors, and gestures of pine trees give (Wei Wen, 2019).

The pine tree in this piece is located in the upper right of the image. It displays a curved form and is identified as an old pine tree by the rough bark on its trunk. Above the pine tree there are many curved pine branches, which are covered with pine leaves. The foliage is dense in the centre and sparse on the left and right sides, and the foliage on the left side shows a fuzzy shape, while the rest of the shape is clear.

Mountain

The mountain is one of the subjects in the work of *The Song of Saved Myself*, and it appears in two places in the picture. Firstly, one of the mountains is located on the far left of the middle area of the screen, and it shows the shape of a mountain tip. The surface of this mountain is smooth and close to the appearance of a realistic snow-covered mountain. The left side of the mountain appears visually blurred and dim, while the right side of the mountain is clear and bright. It appears in a place that does not correspond to the visual logic of reality, which was deliberately designed by the artist with the aim of creating an illusion in the work.

Secondly, another mountain appears in the upper right of the picture, which also shows the shape of the tips of the two, the smaller one on the left and the larger one on the right. This mountain is found by observation to be composed of rock and earth, and its surface is of coarse.

Water

The water in the work is presented with the appearance of a moat around a traditional Chinese city wall, which is located to the left of the middle area of the picture. Visually, it is a muddy river, not clear, with sunlight shining on it. The nearer water has a heavier color while the farther water has a lighter color and there is a reflection of the sun in the water.

Sky

The sky in the work is at the top of the picture, and it appears as a twilight sky. There is a small amount of texture on the left and right side of the sky. Besides that, it is almost a grey color that

is laid flat at the top of the picture, showing a very flat form. The purpose of this is to make the subject in front of it more prominent in the image.

Sun

The sun, which provides the Earth with inexhaustible energy and light, is the foundation of all life in the world and is very important to mankind. At the same time, the sun is an important cultural element, which often appears in Chinese folklore and mythology. The Sun has a special status and unique significance in Chinese culture that cannot be compared with other stars (Wang Yuding, 2000).

In *The Song of Saved Myself*, the sun is located in the middle of the picture, a little to the left. It shows the reflection of the sun in the water. Through observation, we can see that the brightness of the sun reflected in the water is diminished and not very bright and dazzling. There is a halo around the sun, which is a kind of solar halo phenomenon.

Stone

The stone in the artwork shows the image of Chinese Taihu Lake Stone. Taihu Lake Stone is a naturally occurring stone that abounds in the Taihu Lake region of China, which is famous for the lake and is also known as wigwam stone. Taihu Lake stone is a peculiarly shaped stone formed by the erosion of lake water and acidic soil over a long period of time, and its surface shows many rounded depressions and perforated places. As a special cultural carrier, it has a unique artistic charm and connotation, which is not only beautiful in form, but also permeates the ideals of the Chinese people (Shi Fan, 2021). Taihu Lake stone as a subject in the work is distributed in two places.

Firstly, a piece of Taihu Lake stone is located in the middle area of the picture, which is narrower at the top and bottom, while wider in the middle part. The surface of the stone has been eroded by the lake and has formed many folds, which are thick and thin and irregularly intertwined. And its surface is unevenly distributed with some nearly round holes, but these holes did not penetrate the stone.

Secondly, another Taihu Lake stone is located in the upper left area of the picture. This is a very famous Taihu Lake stone called “Auspicious loong stone”. It is one of the peculiarly shaped stones that were brought from the Taihu Lake area to Kaifeng, the capital city of Song Dynasty, by the Chinese emperors of the Song Dynasty for the purpose of constructing the royal gardens (Zhang Di & Zhu Yi, 2021). The Auspicious loong stone in this work is narrow at the top and wide at the bottom, and its surface is relatively smooth without rough texture. The surface is relatively smooth, with no rough texture, and there are a number of hollowed-out holes of different shapes and depressions caused by the erosion of the lake water over a long period of time.

Cloud

The cloud in the artwork is located at the top of the picture, and it is presented in the image of the Chinese “Auspicious clouds”. Auspicious clouds are not real depictions or descriptions of clouds in nature, but rather images that have been endowed with souls and carefully designed. It is an image symbol that symbolises Chinese culture, and its aesthetic features are always presented to give a lively and smooth beauty (Ren Xiaomei, 2015). The clouds in the work occupy half of the sky in the image, presenting a larger volume with darker colors above them

and brighter colors below them. These clouds are thick and have more layers, and their edges show a uniform and similar appearance, giving a soft feeling visually.

Wall

The wall as a building is one of the subjects in the work of *The Song of Saved Myself*, and it appears in two places in the picture. One of the walls is on the far right in the centre of the picture. This wall shows the style of Chinese “Hui-style” architecture, which is a type of traditional architecture. Specifically, the top of the wall is covered with grey tiles arranged horizontally, with reflections of light visible on the surface and broken areas in the middle. Additionally, the wall is covered with thick and brightly colored paint, presenting a relatively flat appearance, but the paint is peeling off at its top left corner and at the very bottom of the middle area. Finally, the shadow of a sign appears on the left side of the wall, which adds to the sense of light on the wall.

The other wall is located to the left of the centre of the image and is shown visually as being far away. This wall is presented in a traditional Chinese wall appearance, showing the jagged top, which serves to prevent enemy incursions. Secondly, the far left side of the wall presents a rightward sloping edge, which means that the bottom is long and the top is short. In addition, the wall is built horizontally.

Tower

The shape of the pagoda in Chinese architecture originated from ancient India. This kind of architecture is a unique, religious architectural style with Chinese characteristics, which was created by the fusion of Buddhism and traditional Chinese architectural style after Buddhism was introduced to China. Therefore, the use of the image of the pagoda in oil painting gives the work a deeper Chinese localised meaning and metaphor (Liu Xi'ning, 2020).

The tower in this work is located in the centre of the picture, and it shows the appearance of the “Po pagoda” in Kaifeng City, Henan Province. Po pagoda is located in the southeast of downtown Kaifeng, it was built in China during the Song Dynasty, and it is the first Buddhist pagoda building built in Kaifeng area. It is an equilateral hexagonal tower in the form of a pavilion, constructed of bricks and wood, and decorated with a lotus pattern around it. Its shape is unique and beautifully decorated (Feng Shen et al., 2023). In the work, the tower stands on the water surface, and it is divided into three floors, each of which diminishes in size with its height. Its lowest level has two arched doors, while the second and third levels have two arched windows each. In addition, there is a spire above the third story of the tower, the lower half of which has the appearance of a small tower, while the upper half shows a cylindrical appearance that is wide in the centre and narrow at the top and bottom.

Railway

The railways are a public facility created by people and belong to the subject of architecture. The railway in this work are located at the bottom of the picture, and it shows two horizontal and side-by-side rails. The surface of both rails is rusted, and on the far left side of both rails the shape is blurred and not clearly visible. In addition, the visually more forward rail shows a strong lightness on its entire surface, with its middle section showing a broken area. The left side of the visually more distant rail shows a stronger sense of light, while the right side is not so obvious.

Station Sign

Station signs are public facilities in order to provide service information to passengers, it is composed of images, words and symbols and set up in various stations, belonging to a kind of modern urban architecture. Wu Hongmei et al. (2023) states that station boards as a window to culture reflect the change of history and cultural lineage of the area. The station signs in the work are one of the subjects of the picture, and they appear in two positions.

Firstly, one of the station signs is located at the bottom left of the screen. This station sign is shown as a station sign in shadow, with light found shining on it at its right edge. This is not a complete image of a station sign; it consists of a pentagonal sign and a foot that supports the sign. The word “Kaifeng” is written in Chinese characters on the sign, and some texture has formed in places due to weathering over time.

Secondly, the other stop sign is located in the middle area of the picture to the right. It shows the station sign in the sunlight with a bright color throughout its surface and a complete shadow behind it. In addition, this is an image of a complete train station sign, which consists of a pentagonal sign and two feet on the left and right that support the sign. In the middle of the sign, the word “Bianliang” is written in Chinese characters, which is the name of Kaifeng in ancient times, and the surface of the sign is relatively flat.

Flagpole

The flagpole in the work is located in the upper left, which is actually the image of a traditional Chinese commercial billboard. This traditional billboard consists of a signboard and a pole. The signboard is made of cloth and uses visual symbols such as colors, words, and graphics to convey information about goods and solicit customers, which is an important form of advertising in ancient China (Zhang Tingting, 2014). And the front pole is usually made of wood, and there will be decorations on top of it.

The flagpole in the work consists of a small flag and two wooden poles. One of these vertical poles is inserted into the water, and this wooden pole gets thinner and thinner from the bottom to the top, above which there is a rounded and inverted trapezoidal wooden block. The other wooden pole appears above and crosses this vertical one, and at its left end hangs a small flag made of cloth, which flutters in the wind in a curled state.

Imagery Form

Tactile Imagery

The sky above the artwork shows areas of overlapping paint, the left side of the artwork shows worn and weathered areas on the surface of the stop sign, the right side of the artwork shows uneven areas on the wall due to peeling paint, and the bottom of the artwork shows uneven areas on the ground. These textural effects on the work create a tactile imagery for the observer, allowing them to experience the unevenness of their skin as it comes into contact with it.

Many straight and hard lines appear in the work. They depict the edge lines of various objects in the picture, such as station signs, walls, flagpoles, and platforms. These hard, straight lines add to the solidity of the various architectural objects in the picture and create a unified effect in the picture. This uniformity of straight lines enhances the tactile feel of the picture, thus creating hard tactile imagery.

The cypress tree in the upper right corner of the work is depicted as having a number of repeating rounded leaves that display a blurred and soft outline. This reminds the viewer of the tactile sensation of plant leaves in nature, creating soft and fluffy tactile imagery. The cloud form shown at the top of the artwork is created by simplifying the shape and color of real clouds, which are depicted in a soft yellow-grey color with rounded semi-circular edges, evoking the softness of clouds. These similar shapes create a unifying effect in the picture, enhancing the feeling of softness in the artwork.

The bright colors on the right hand side of *The Song of Saved Myself's* stop sign and its shadows suggest a strong sense of light in the area, while the warm colors on the wall behind the stop sign are close to the reality of sunlight on a white wall. These forms create tactile imagery for the viewer, allowing them to experience the warmth of the sun and thus imagine the warmth of the sun on their skin.

A deep greyish-purple is used for the dark areas presented on the station sign on the left side of the work. This color gives the painting a cold atmosphere, reminiscent of the surface of a building without temperature. The cool color of the station sign is placed at the forefront of the painting through its composition, as well as enhancing the three-dimensionality through the contrast with the brighter colors shown around its edges, and using its surface texture to draw the viewer's attention. The use of these elements and principles enhances the cold feeling conveyed in the painting, bringing a clearer tactile imagery to the viewer.

The middle area of the work depicts a soft yellow-grey circle, the reflection of the sun in the water, which the viewer identifies as a warm tactile imagery. The clouds above the work show a warm color and are depicted in a uniform, soft semi-circular outline, which is then enhanced by the contrast of value elements that create a sense of light and warmth in the artwork.

The two clouds at the top of the work convey a sense of flow through their arrangement and the skilful depiction of their contours. Above is a large cloud that dominates, while below is a smaller but brighter cloud. Their edges are softly semi-circular and overlap, seemingly expanding, especially the brighter one below, creating a dynamic effect. This allows the viewer to feel the movement of the air, creating a tactile imagery of movement. The yellow flag on the flagpole in the artwork also evokes the same feeling with its fluttering shape in the wind. In addition, some curves in the picture, such as the edges of the cypress tree and the Taihu Lake stone, also enhance this tactile imagery.

Auditory Imagery

The use of a grey-tinged color over a large area of the work, both the warm grey at the top of the work and the cool grey at the bottom, is a soft and uniform color that reduces conflict and creates a sense of tranquillity and simplicity in the painting. In addition, many of the objects in the picture are close to geometric shapes, such as two mountains close to triangles, two walls close to rectangles, and two station signs close to rectangles. The simplicity and orderliness of these shapes also enhances the quiet atmosphere.

The painting creates a quiet atmosphere by utilising the artistic principles of harmony and balance. Specifically, the painting creates a sense of balance by arranging a large number of heavily colored cypress leaves on the right side of the artwork, and by making the colors of the wall and the station sign on the right side of the artwork brighter and more visually prominent to counterbalance the visual weight of the heavy colors of the station sign on the left side of the painting. In addition, similar straight lines and circles appear in the painting, which also creates

a sense of harmony. The use of these principles gives the painting a sense of stability and calmness, which helps to create an atmosphere of serenity.

The contrast between the warm grey sky and the cool grey ground creates a sense of distance in time and space, reminiscent of the interval between the past and the present. The shapes of various traditional elements displayed in the artwork evoke nostalgia and longing for tradition. In particular, the auspicious dragon stone and the traditional flagpole, whose proportions stand out due to a visual illusion, not only enhance the dreamy and illusory feel of the painting, but also seem to emphasise some kind of past glory or memory. The word “Bianliang” on the pure white signboard stands out under the sunlight, as if it is the author’s inner monologue, revealing the memories of the past and representing the purity and loneliness of the heart. The “Kaifeng” station sign in the shadows, with its cold texture, hints at the indifference of reality. The shape of the rusty railway track also reflects a sense of indifference and forgetfulness in the face of social change. Overall, the painting creates a strong nostalgic feeling and an emotional atmosphere of coldness, loneliness, purity and illusion through the clever use of artistic elements and principles, creating a feeling of silence in the viewer.

The work uses brushstrokes to form many parallel or perpendicular lines, which are distributed in different places. For example, warm colors are used to form the edges of the station sign on the left and the surface of the flagpole, bright colored edges above the wall on the right, and warm coloured surfaces on the railway tracks below. These uniform and softly colored straight lines create a sense of tranquillity in the work due to their own stabilising characteristics, giving the viewer an auditory imagery of quietness.

The grey-green leaves at the top right of the artwork are formed by some rounded brushstrokes, which display a soft edge that can create a relaxing and serene atmosphere. The clouds at the top of the artwork, they also show soft and light colored brushstrokes around their edges, which also enhances the quiet atmosphere.

Culture Meaning

Value

In terms of the use of colors, the work appears with a grey tendency, despite the use of a wide variety of colors. For example, the taupe in the sky, the cold grey on the left side of the station board and the warm grey on the right side of the wall. This also implies the Chinese Taoist philosophical concept of “Light Color View”, which believes that dazzling colors are uncomfortable for the eyes and stimulate human desires, and play a negative role in life. It advocates plain, natural colors and stresses the restoration of the beauty of simplicity. This is a reflection of Taoist thought, which emphasises the inner spirit and opposes the outer substance (Li Xingxing, 2020).

In the image of the railway line at the bottom, the foliage of the pine tree at the top right and the mountain at the left, the leftmost area of the shape of the subject uses an unspecific image while the right side shows a specific shape. In addition, dotted lines are used on the flagpole and city wall on the left side of the image, while solid lines are used on the two station signs. The combination of these forms implies the philosophical concept of “the Interrelations between Emptiness and Substantiality”. This concept in art requires the use of a combination of abstraction and figuration in order to represent the living world.

The artwork highlights the artistic principle of contrast, but the picture displays a visual effect of harmony, balance and unity. For example, the cool colors on the left side of the signboard and the warm colors on the right side of the wall form a clear contrast, but at the same time the similar shapes of the two signboards create a sense of harmony. All these expressions contain the philosophical concept of “Harmony and Integration” in the Book of Change. This idea is expressed in art by regulating the different nature of the artistic elements to achieve harmony, unity and balance of the sense of beauty.

In terms of the use of lines, there are numerous straight lines in the picture, for example on station signs, walls, flagpoles and railway tracks. These lines, whether thick, thin, dotted or solid, are all in a state of straightness. This also implies Chinese Confucianism. In Chinese Confucian philosophy, “straightness” stands for fairness and uprightness, as well as honesty and openness, which are the basic principles of human behaviour in life. The artist implies this idea in the form of the work.

Painter Wang Hongwei’s choice of the form of mountains and water as the subject of *The Song of Saved Myself* work implies a value. In the unique traditional Chinese culture, the spirit of landscape refers to the integration of oneself with nature, drawing sustenance from nature, desiring to break free from complex social relationships and to liberate both the body and the mind, and seeking only that serene relationship between man and nature (Yang Ganjie, 2023). This is also a presentation of the painter’s own thoughts.

The work is created by utilising the shape of the Auspicious loong stone and the Auspicious clouds, which also implies a value. The shape of the Auspicious loong stone is similar to that of the Chinese loong, a fusion of mythological and religious concepts, which inherently contains magical life force and symbolises auspiciousness (Huang Lingzi, 2022). While the cultural significance of Auspicious clouds originates from the worship of nature, it has the meanings of good fortune, beauty, peace as well as sacredness, which is the Chinese people’s cognitive and emotional attitude towards natural phenomena (Lu Lei, 2010). Through these images, the artist tries to convey the auspicious meaning they contain to the observer.

The image of a pine tree appears next to the mountain on the right side of the picture, which is a pine tree standing on the top of the mountain. Its branches and boot are presented in a curved and vivid shape and its leaves in a simple round shape, which implies a traditional Chinese cultural idea. Pine trees growing on top of mountains have a strong vitality and grow luxuriantly even in the cold winter. In Chinese culture, the pine tree represents an indomitable spirit, a symbol of the soul of the nation, which is a noble spirit and high moral character. At the same time the pine tree also symbolises vitality, eternal youth and longevity (Chen Chuanxin, 2017).

In the middle area of the work there is the image of the Po pagoda, which is a Chinese style stupa that contains cultural values. Stupa architecture reflects Buddhist concepts and symbolises compassion and equality (Wu Guozheng, 2005). After the stupa was introduced to China, its culture gradually merged with the Chinese architectural culture, resulting in the Chinese stupa implying the Chinese national spirit, which refers to thinking about how people should live in a way that is the best and ideal, and that requires people to explore and create in real life. It can also be understood as a kind of glory of humanity (Dai Xiaojun, 2015).

The artwork utilises the form of the traditional Chinese flagpole in its artistic creation, which also implies a kind of thought of the painter. The flagpole in the artwork is a traditional building related to a shop signboard or billboard, which is a kind of signage with the function of publicity

and explanation. When it appears in a painting, it becomes a sign of national cultural identity, and it is also used by the painter to indicate his own cultural identity and propagate this message to the observer.

Environment

Clouds, sun, mountains, water, stones, sky and pine trees are not only important traditional Chinese cultural elements, but also exist in the natural environment. The forms they display in the real environment caught the painter's attention, and Wang Hongwei simplified and subjectively manipulated the appearance of these natural objects to form the elements in his works, such as the circle generalised from the shapes of the pine leaves, the sun and the edges of the clouds, and the triangle simplified from the shape of the mountain. Thus, these objects in the natural environment are the source of the form of the artist's works.

Based on the renewed esteem for traditional Chinese culture in contemporary society, contemporary Chinese painters are motivated to create. Wang Hongwei, as one of them, is influenced by this environment and his love for traditional culture. He continues to absorb traditional culture in his artistic creations. His works show the pursuit of the spirit of traditional Chinese culture and make use of various traditional cultural elements in his creations, such as emphasising the light tones that imply the value of Chinese aesthetics in the picture for artistic creation.

There is a strong traditional cultural atmosphere in Wang Hongwei's daily life environment, which demonstrates the traditional cultural ideas that have influenced the painter and become the basis for the expression of his works. For example, the artist uses the form of the pine tree, which represents the indomitable spirit, the form of the cloud, which represents beauty and peace, the form of the sun, which represents light and power, and the form of the Auspicious loong stone, which represents auspiciousness, to create his works. These forms are inextricably linked to the traditional ideas of the environment in which they live.

This work is called *The Song of Saved Myself*, which was created by the artist to express his inner world. Therefore, the artist chooses the objects or landscapes he likes in his life to create art, and traditional architecture and stones appear in the picture, such as the form of the city wall on the left side of the picture, the form of the wall on the right side of the Hui-style architecture, and the form of the Taihu Lake stones that often appear in Chinese gardens. These objects are all objects that Wang Hongwei likes and exists in the architectural environment, and they bring a lot of inspiration to the artist's creation, making his works highlight the traditional architectural forms and forming works with Chinese characteristics.

The forms of the station sign and the railway line are the symbols of architecture in modern society, and they also belong to the objects in the architectural environment. The modern architectural environment also influences Wang Hongwei's artistic creations, such as the station sign on the left side of the work whose surface shows a muscular effect, the station sign on the right side which shows solid colors under the sunlight, and the rusty railroad tracks. The form of the objects in the modern architectural environment aroused the artist's interest and was the basis for the formation of the work.

The Chinese stupa in this artwork is the extant Po pagoda in Kaifeng, Henan Province, which is located in the south-eastern part of the city centre of Kaifeng. This represents the introduction of Buddhist ideas into the region. Living in Kaifeng, the artist was naturally influenced by Buddhist thought and the architectural forms of stupas, which led him to incorporate Buddhist

culture into his work and utilise the architectural forms of stupas in the surrounding environment to create his artwork.

This artwork was created by the artist in 2015, after the implementation of China's "Reform and Opening-Up" policy in 1978. Following the implementation of this policy, Chinese contemporary art emerged as a cultural form in the primarily Western-dominated international cultural exchanges during the 1980s. This led Chinese contemporary artists to esteem Western cultural thoughts while neglecting traditional culture, resulting in a decline in traditional culture. This trend of declining traditional culture has persisted in Chinese contemporary art up until now. Based on this sociocultural context, Chinese painters and scholars began to return to Chinese classical philosophy in the 1990s, seeking their own cultural spirit and ethical paradigms. The extensive use of traditional cultural elements in Wang Hongwei's works, such as flagpoles, Auspicious loong stones, and Auspicious clouds, serves as a response to this historical phenomenon.

Behavior

The images of stones, pine trees, sky, and clouds depicted in the work all exhibit vivid yet simplified forms, such as the clouds' edges appearing semicircular, and the pine trees constructed from curves and circles. These forms are the result of the painter's careful observation of objects in nature. Meanwhile, images like walls, signposts, and mountains in the painting present a concise and stable geometric shape, which is also the painter's simplification of their shapes based on their visual appearance. These vivid forms on the canvas reflect the artist's outstanding creative abilities.

In Wang Hongwei's artworks, a large number of traditional architectural elements appear, such as city walls, walls in the Hui-style, flagpoles, and towers. Additionally, some modern architectural features are also present, including signposts, railroad tracks, and platforms. These forms are distributed throughout the composition, reflecting the painter's preference for architectural subjects as well as his personal aesthetic inclinations.

The water and the mountains on the left and right sides of the work cannot be real in reality, but are a visual illusion created by the artist. The artist makes the form of mountains and water appear in the work in a clever way, which expresses the desire to break free from complicated social relations and get peace in nature, which is also formed based on the artist's personal behaviour, reflecting the artist's wish to return to a peaceful and simple idyllic life. In addition, the idea of seeking the best life in reality, symbolised by the image of the stupa, also expresses Wang Hongwei's desire for an ideal life.

The form of Auspicious clouds and Auspicious loong stone symbolise auspiciousness in this work and it was created by the artist as an expression of himself. The combination of their characteristics reflects an act of blessing, that is, the artist expects his future work and life to be better and smoother. In addition, the choice of the Auspicious clouds form, which symbolises the sacred, and the sun form, which symbolises light and power, to form the picture is also determined by the artist's behaviour, which also reflects the artist's reverence and worship of nature.

Wang Hongwei's artwork highlights traditional Chinese cultural ideas and philosophical values through form, demonstrating unique cultural values. The artist uses clouds and stones, which are rich in cultural ideas, to create his works, and also uses design principles that imply philosophical concepts to organise his images, such as the use of unglamorous colors in his works, emphasising

the aesthetic principle of “Harmony and Integration”. This is also determined by the artist’s behaviour, which also proves his respect for and recognition of his own country’s culture.

Summary

The Song of Saving Myself establishes a dual narrative system through the juxtaposition of traditional natural imagery and modern industrial symbols. Traditional elements such as pine trees, mountains, and Auspicious clouds embody national spirit, while corroded railway tracks and modern station signs hint at industrialization’s erosion of nature and tradition. This thematic selection not only reflects the artist’s acute sensitivity to cultural symbols but also reveals the tension between tradition and modernity through symbolic interplay, creating a visual language that converges time and space.

The work transcends the visual monotony of traditional oil painting through multi-layered tactile and auditory imagery. Tactile elements such as textured Taihu Lake stones, soft pine-needle brushstrokes, and the physical contrast of warm and cool tones immerse viewers in an embodied sensory experience. Auditory dimensions emerge from the orderliness of geometric structures and the tranquility of gray-toned hues, evoking an aesthetic realm of stillness. Technically, the artist reinterprets the freehand expressiveness of traditional Chinese painting through simplified lines and gradient washes, achieving a contemporary transformation of Eastern aesthetics that balances form and spirit.

The cultural interpretation of the work is rooted in the multidimensional integration of Chinese philosophy. Daoist asceticism manifests through desaturated tones such as gray skies and balanced warm-cool palettes, metaphorizing simplicity and desirelessness. Confucian ethics of rectitude are symbolized by linear compositions, exemplified by the rigid lines of station signs and city walls. The Book of Changes principle of yin-yang harmony materializes in the interplay of voids and solids, as seen in the staggered mountain forms and the contrast between station signs’ light and shadow. Additionally, the blending of Buddhist elements and folk beliefs reveals the stratified nature of cultural meaning. This philosophical multiplicity not only pays homage to tradition but reconstructs the discourse of local culture through artistic form.

Wang Hongwei’s creations can be seen as a microcosm of China’s cultural self-awareness in the post-reform era. Confronting globalization’s impact, the artist employs bilingual station signs as metaphors for historical ruptures, engaging in dialectical reflections on cultural identity. The illogical landscapes and illusory lightscares in the work project both personal ideals of liberated living and the collective psychological ambiguity amid societal transformation. Such creative practice transcends mere aesthetic experimentation, becoming a case study for reconstructing cultural subjectivity within globalized discourse.

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