

On the Creation of Dramatic Scenes in Painting

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ABSTRACT

The drama in painting works, through expressive languages such as composition layout, body language, lighting rendering, and technique application, significantly enhances the expressive tension and spiritual connotation of the works. It highly conforms to the contemporary aesthetic pursuit of novelty and depth, effectively promotes artistic innovation, and at the social education level, stimulates the public's thinking about art and culture. Taking the theme of "Pursuing Dreams in China" as its core, this paper delves into the dramatic expressive languages used in the process of painting creation. It meticulously combs through the concept of drama in painting, its internal relationship with painting creation, and specific forms of expression. Meanwhile, it applies the relevant theories to creative practice, integrates Chinese visual symbols, and showcases the cultural confidence of the Chinese nation.

Keywords: *Painting creation, Dramatic effect, Chinese culture.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Painting, as an important carrier of emotions and thoughts in the art field, possesses unique charm. Currently, dramatic expression is emerging as a new trend in painting creation, with many artists using it to break through traditional means of expression. Incorporating drama into painting creation meets the contemporary aesthetic demand for visual impact and emotional resonance, greatly enhancing the appeal of the paintings. Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, cultural confidence has received extensive attention. Integrating Chinese cultural elements into painting creation is not only a way to inherit national culture but also an important means to showcase the charm of Chinese art to the world, carrying great significance. In 2000, Liu Ye's work *Smoke*, with its unique dramatic expression, drew the author's attention to the dramatic elements in painting, thus initiating the creative exploration of integrating drama with Chinese culture. The Chinese Red Children Reviewing History is one of the achievements of this exploration.

2. OVERVIEW OF DRAMA IN PAINTING

2.1 Concept of Drama in Painting

Throughout the long history of painting, drama is like an invisible thread running through the history of fine arts.¹ It reveals the conflicts of social life through formal languages. Painting encompasses various types such as oil painting, ink wash painting, and watercolor painting. Although different types of paintings use diverse media, they can all serve as carriers for expressing drama. From creating a tense atmosphere in the hunting scenes of ancient cave murals to using abstract forms in modern artworks to represent inner conflicts, dramatic elements are presented in various ways. For instance, in the oil painting *The Approaching Storm*, the painter uses color blending. By depicting the approaching dark clouds with thick and somber tones, which contrast with the bright yet turbulent sea below, a dramatic atmosphere of an impending storm is created. In the ink wash painting *Fishing Alone on a Cold River*, through the variation in the density of brushstrokes and a large area of blank space, the vastness of the cold river is shown. Only

1. Li Ying. On the Drama in Painting [D]. Hebei Normal University, September 2013.

simple lines are used to outline the solitary boat and the fisherman, highlighting a sense of loneliness and independence, which is full of dramatic feeling. Dramatic elements play a unique role in paintings of different periods and styles, having a profound impact on artistic innovation and social education.

2.2 Painting Creation and Dramatic Expression

Drama relies on conflicts and exciting moments to enhance its appeal and evoke resonance. Painting creation borrows this characteristic and combines it with its own media to create a visual effect similar to the "pause" in drama. Western realist and expressionist dramatic techniques, as well as the freehand style of Chinese drama, have all provided rich inspiration for painting creation, enriching the forms and connotations of painting. Whether it is a realistic painting style that shows drama through the precise depiction of the expressions and action conflicts of characters, or a painting style that focuses on the expression of artistic conception, creating a dramatic situation through the combination of the virtual and the real, and the integration of movement and stillness, by incorporating dramatic elements, the works can be made more dynamic and profound.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGES OF DRAMA IN PAINTING CREATION

3.1 Composition Layout of the Painting

The composition layout of a painting is the foundation for creating a dramatic effect. The author carefully arranges scenes and props to construct a unique narrative space and atmosphere. Take Liu Ye's *The Silent Sea* ("Figure 1") as an example. The scene is divided into two distinct spatial layers: the foreground and the background. The foreground presents an indoor space with a Mondrian-style geometric order, featuring simple lines and calm colors. The daily activities of the little sailors are peaceful and stable, setting a tranquil tone. In contrast, in the background, a huge ship breaks through the waves and intrudes into the indoor space. Flames are burning around the ship, and the little sailors are in a panic while giving commands. The tranquility of the foreground and the turbulence of the background form a strong binary opposition, generating a powerful visual conflict and tension, making the viewers feel as if

they are in a tense situation and eager to explore the story behind the painting.



Figure 1 Liu Ye, *The Silent Sea*, 90×100 cm, oil painting, 1995.

Props in a painting not only serve a decorative function but are also crucial for conveying emotions and themes. In Eugène Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* ("Figure 2"), the props beside the heroine Clara Lesing carry profound symbolic meanings. She wears a Phrygian cap, which is a symbol of freedom. She holds a tricolor flag of red, white, and blue, symbolizing the ideals of freedom, equality, and fraternity of the French Revolution. The bayonet rifle implies the determination to fight. The classical dress showcases the power of women in the revolution and their classical beauty. These props echo each other, creating an image of the Statue of Liberty full of strength and a sense of mission, elevating the dramatic effect of the painting and enabling the viewers to deeply feel the strong desire for freedom of the people during the revolution.



Figure 2 Eugène Delacroix, *Liberty Leading the People*, 260×325 cm, oil painting, 1830.

Body language can delicately reveal the inner world of characters and drive the narrative development of the painting. In Giotto's *The Kiss of Judas* ("Figure 3"), Judas appears to be devoutly leaning forward to kiss Jesus. His body is slightly inclined, and his hands seem to be about to embrace Jesus. However, his eyes are flustered and evasive, and he dare not look directly into Jesus' eyes. The contradiction between this subtle body movement and his eyes exposes his betraying heart. Jesus, on the other hand, has a firm and composed gaze, calmly accepting this kiss as if he has already seen through everything. On the right side of the painting, a man angrily points at Judas, seemingly accusing his act of betrayal. On the left side, a man in a red robe urgently grabs Jesus' wrist, as if trying to protect him. Behind them, a disciple holds a dagger, ready for action, and the soldiers witness all this with expressions of surprise on their faces. The entire painting centers around Judas' kiss to Jesus. The rich body language of the characters constructs a dramatic scene full of conflicts, vividly showing the intense collision between betrayal and justice, sin and holiness. In the modern painting work *Quarrel*, the author depicts two characters facing each other. One person leans forward with a finger forcefully pointing at the other, and his facial expression is angry. The other person leans backward with both hands waving, trying to defend himself. Through these body languages, a fierce quarrel scene is vividly presented.



Figure 3 Giotto, *The Kiss of Judas*, 200×185 cm, Fine Arts, 1305.

3.2 Lighting Rendering

Light and shadow are powerful means to create the atmosphere of a painting. In Caravaggio's *The*

Calling of St. Matthew ("Figure 4"), the painting depicts a dark room. Most of the area is dim, and a strong beam of light shines obliquely from the window on the right side, like a stage spotlight precisely illuminating the key characters. The light follows the direction pointed by Jesus' right hand and falls on the faces of St. Matthew and his fellow workers beside the dining table, clearly reflecting their expressions of surprise and joy. Under the strong light, St. Matthew becomes the focal point of the painting. His surprise and bewilderment are vividly portrayed, forming a sharp contrast with the characters in the darker areas around, which further emphasizes St. Matthew's reaction. Through the carefully designed layout of light and shadow, Caravaggio clearly defines the primary and secondary relationships among the characters, skillfully guides the viewers' gaze to the core of the painting, and propels the plot to a climax, creating a sacred and dramatic atmosphere.



Figure 4 Caravaggio, *The Calling of St. Matthew*, 322×340 cm, Fine Arts, 1599.

3.3 Technique Application

Painting techniques are the key for the author to express the inner spirit. Different painting genres have unique techniques. For example, the thick and thin painting techniques in oil painting, the wet and dry painting methods in watercolor painting, and the chapping, rubbing, dotting, and dyeing techniques in ink painting can all add unique charm to the dramatic expression. In Liu Ye's *The Sword* ("Figure 5"), he boldly uses color contrast. The blood-red color occupies four-fifths of the area of the painting, like a surging and dangerous wave. The remaining one-fifth of the cliff is covered with a gloomy dark blue color. The collision of these two strongly contrasting colors creates an

extremely tense and perilous sense of fear. The texture formed by the natural flow of the fluid medium in painting at the edge of the cliff makes people feel the surging of natural forces, enriching the texture of the painting and giving the viewers a different feeling both visually and tactilely, as if they are on the scene. Against this background, the confrontational scene of the two little girls on the cliff is even more dramatic, highlighting the important significance of painting techniques in creating a dramatic atmosphere. For example, in a watercolor painting, the author uses the wet painting method to let the colors naturally blend and flow on the wet paper surface, presenting the turbulent dynamics of the river. Then, combined with the dry painting method to outline the stationary rocks on the riverbank, the combination of movement and stillness enhances the drama of the painting.



Figure 5 Liu Ye, The Sword, 180×360 cm, Fine Arts, 2001.

4. PRACTICAL CREATION OF THE "SEEKING DREAMS IN CHINA" THEMATIC SERIES OF WORKS

4.1 Work Conception

Since ancient times, the Chinese nation has had magnificent dreams like "Chang'e Flying to the Moon" and "Jingwei Filling the Sea", which manifest the nation's unceasing spirit of pursuing dreams. Inspired by these tales, the author selected "Seeking Dreams in China" as the creative theme, aiming to comprehensively present the unique elegance of the Chinese nation through the works and convey national cultural confidence.

Under the concept of "Seeking Dreams in China and Drawing Lessons from History", while delving into A History of Chinese Art, the author was captivated by the distinctive charm of Chinese visual symbols. These symbols, whether in terms of color, pattern, or shape, bear rich cultural

connotations and tell age - old stories. The author yearned to use a unique artistic form to display the profundity and splendor of Chinese history, enabling more people to experience this cultural allure.

4.1.1 Symbolic Character Modeling

By chance, the author came across Dong Xiwen's The Founding Ceremony. The bold application of red in the painting filled the scene with a warm and solemn ambiance, greatly inspiring the author. Red symbolizes auspiciousness, festivity, warmth, and vitality in Chinese culture and is a highly representative Chinese color. Referencing the works of painters such as Liu Ye and based on the author's own image, a unique "Red Baby" image was created to represent the author. During the clay - sculpture modeling process, initially, the posture of the Red Baby seemed stiff, and the proportion was unbalanced. Through repeated trials and adjustments of the bending angles and size ratios of various body parts, for example, changing the ratio of the head to the body from the original 1:5 to 1:4, which is more in line with the characteristics of children, the Red Baby image gradually became vivid.

4.1.2 The Landscape Scenes across Time and Space

Simultaneously, the author explored the scene expressions that carry Chinese history. After studying the works of painters such as Jin Shangyi, it was discovered that landscape paintings possess unique advantages in time - space expression. For instance, he integrated modern elements with the artistic conception of Fan Kuan's A Solitary Temple amid Clearing Peaks (Snowy Forest) from the Northern Song Dynasty to construct a unique time - space scene. Therefore, the author combined "golden - green landscape" with the "Red Baby", allowing the Red Baby to explore history in a dream - like ancient scene, creating a strong sense of drama and fantasy.

4.2 Creative Practice

In the initial stage of creation, the most significant challenge was to make the elements in the painting harmoniously unified, highlighting the theme while also featuring a sense of drama and Chinese characteristics. In character creation, the Red Baby image was indistinct, and it did not blend

naturally with the background, resulting in a lack of expressiveness in the painting. To address this issue, the author repeatedly deliberated on the posture and proportion of the Red Baby through clay - sculpture modeling, used a flashlight to simulate light from different angles, and observed the effect of the Red Baby under light and shadow. Eventually, the posture of the Red Baby sitting side - saddle on the Galloping Horse Treading on a Flying Swallow, holding binoculars with both hands to explore, was determined. This posture is highly dramatic. Sitting side - saddle on a horse is uncommon, and it is even more peculiar when it appears on the Red Baby. The action of holding binoculars with both hands seems to guide the viewers to explore the unknown together, greatly enhancing the narrative and attractiveness of the painting.

In terms of color application, it was necessary to showcase the richness of painting colors while also highlighting the characteristics of Chinese culture. The author took great care in handling the color of the Red Baby's clothing. Purple was added to the dark parts to enrich the color hierarchy. The contrast between the bright yellow and purple emulated the color-scheme of Chinese Tang-style tri-colored glazed pottery, adding a Chinese-style flavor to the painting. The color-scheme of Tang-style tri-colored glazed pottery originated from the colorful ceramic art of the Tang Dynasty. Its vivid and warm color combination reflects the open and prosperous cultural characteristics of the Tang Dynasty, echoing the positive and energetic national spirit represented by the Red Baby. The background "golden - green landscape" used pigments such as gold, lapis lazuli, and malachite to create a magnificent and ancient - charmed atmosphere. It forms a sharp contrast with the Red Baby image yet also complements each other, strengthening the dramatic effect.

In the final picture ("Figure 6"), the Red Baby curiously raises a toy binocular with both hands and gracefully sits side - saddle on the Galloping Horse Treading on a Flying Swallow from the Eastern Han Dynasty. The side - saddle riding posture is ingenious. Usually, for the sake of stability, most people ride astride. The Red Baby's side - saddle sitting indicates that she has certain balance skills to control the horse freely. And this mature body movement on the young - looking Red Baby raises doubts among the viewers. When the Red Baby is sitting side - saddle on the horse, she can still hold the binocular steadily with both hands and explore forward. A series of picture elements prompt the viewers to think: "What is she looking at with the

binoculars? What gives the Red Baby such superb horse - control skills? Why is the mount of the contemporary Red Baby the Galloping Horse Treading on a Flying Swallow from the Eastern Han Dynasty?" Thus, the viewers can dig rich "drama" from the picture.



Figure 6 The author, The Red Baby Reviews Chinese History, 100×100 cm, Fine Arts, Self - photographed, 2021.

5. CONCLUSION

Centered around the theme of "Seeking Dreams in China", this paper has successfully integrated dramatic expressive languages into painting creation. Through in-depth research and sorting, the author has mastered the laws of dramatic expression in painting and applied them to creative practice. During the creation process, the author deeply explored the connotations of Chinese visual symbols, organically combined dramatic expressive languages, skillfully integrated landscape elements, meaningful props, and carefully shaped the "Red Baby" image, striving to show the unique charm of China. Although there were problems such as hasty drafting, chaotic pictures, and unclear primary and secondary elements in the creation, for hasty drafting, a detailed drafting plan was made in subsequent creations, leaving sufficient time for sketching; for chaotic pictures, the main and secondary elements in the picture were clarified, and the composition was reasonably arranged to solve the problem; for unclear primary and secondary elements, the portrayal and highlighting of the main elements were strengthened. The author will continue to learn and practice, improve his own artistic aesthetics and creative ability, and actively

integrate the advantages of diverse arts to contribute to the development of painting creation.

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