



REVIEW

The Contemporary Transformation of Art—Talking about the Imagery Sculpture

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ABSTRACT

As the core feature of Chinese art, imagery runs through the whole process of art development. This paper discusses the inheritance and innovation of traditional imagery style, the content of sculpture art in the process of modernization, and puts forward personal understanding of the development, innovation and transformation of contemporary sculpture. The contemporary sculpture art is transforming from traditional mysterious imagery to clear and orderly style, this process is an innovation and transformation based on inheriting traditional art style.

1. Introduction

For the most part of the 20th century, Chinese sculpture art seemed to show a state of confusion about the future direction of its development. With the westerly wind spreading eastward, Chinese sculptors continue to learn from western art, but neglect to pay attention to the traditional culture and art of their own nation. It is undeniable that the culture and art of Western nations have played a positive role in promoting the development of modern and contemporary sculpture art in China. The Chinese sculpture art has changed from classical imagery art to modern realistic art form. After the collision and integration with western culture and art, Chinese sculpture art shows its own artistic wisdom again, and artists have

gradually defined their own direction of artistic creation. In the early 1990s, the artists reorganized the development context of Chinese sculpture art, and put forward the concept of “imagery” again, trying to make art creation return to the path of the development of national art, showing the unique national appearance and spiritual temperament.

Confidence in own profound culture, in line with various creative trends, is revitalizing the great development of contemporary art. Around the 21st century, with the rapid development of Chinese society, the sculpture art has also been developed on a large scale both in quantity and quality. As an important expressive style of Chinese sculpture art, “freehand brushwork” can better reflect the traditional cultural connotation of the Chinese nation and the unique artistic style of contemporary sculpture.

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The author thinks that as the representative of Chinese excellent traditional culture and art, image sculpture can maintain its expressiveness and vitality and reflect its value only through constant innovation and transformation. The author tries to explore the law of development of contemporary sculpture art from a macro perspective, and put forward own understanding of the transformation of imagery sculpture creation at present.

2. Inheritance and Innovation of Traditional Imagery Style

From the pottery figurines and stone carvings in Qin and Han Dynasties to the ink and wash landscape in Ming and Qing Dynasties, from music and dance in Pre-Qin Dynasty to the virtual performance of modern opera stage, Chinese imagery art tradition has a long history. The image spirit also permeates Chinese calligraphy, painting, poetry, dance, drama and other art forms.^[1] As a unique artistic style, imagery sculpture runs through the whole process of artistic development. Professor Wu Weishan divides Chinese sculpture into eight types in style: simple image style, strange abstract style, decorative realistic style, magnificent freehand style, ideal modelling style, customs realistic style, Cheng's exaggerated style and simple expression style.^[2] In fact, this division is based on the comparison of works of different times, and its reference objects are essentially different from western realistic and abstract works. As a whole, Chinese sculpture art tends to be freehand. Even in Qin Dynasty and Song Dynasty, there is a realistic style, which is also relative to the original and Han Dynasty freehand style. As the mystery of eastern mysterious art culture, the characteristic of Chinese traditional cultural and the core of aesthetic concept, imagery has been continuously studied and inherited in the development of Chinese art for thousands of years, and its understanding has been reached a higher dimension.

Traditional imagery style is the cultural identity and national consensus with thousands years of accumulation in China. It is also the soul and supreme realm of Chinese culture and art. In Chuang Tzu *Qiushui*, it is written that "those can be talked about are the rough surface of things. The essence of things is what can be desired. What is said cannot be said, what is meant cannot be noticed, and what is meant cannot be refined or rough."^[3] Meaning refers to the subjective consciousness of human beings. Image refers to the objective image. The relationship between meaning and image is the unity of subject and object. With objective images as means and subjective consciousness as purposes, the subjective feelings of the subject

towards the object are emphasized, which respects the artist's subjective initiative and creative thinking to a certain extent. Mr. Sun Yisheng divided the plastic aesthetics into three main systems in terms of the transformation form of human beings and objects: "similar to the transformation of physical images, called the concrete modeling system; unlike the transformation of physical images, called the abstract modeling system; like and unlike the transformation of physical images, called the imagery modeling system."^[4] The national form of Chinese freehand sculpture is a distinct manifestation of Chinese cultural spirit, which is the concrete formalization of the spirit of harmony.^[5] The Chinese sculpture art develops continuously along the imagery vein, and will follow this direction.

Chinese contemporary sculpture absorbs the essence after comparing the eastern and Western art, manifests the culture's inclusiveness and richness in the multi vocabulary co-existence. Western art pays attention to individual and emphasizes individual creation. Impressionism is the dividing point of Western plastic arts. Before impressionism, figurative modeling was the mainstream western plastic arts. After impressionism, abstract modeling, figurative and abstract modeling coexisted and developed toward two poles. Chinese sculpture not only emphasizes individual creation and personality characteristics, but also emphasizes the unity of the whole and the generality of the times, calling for the fashion of the times, showing the overall cultural state, and forming the spirit of "unity" in Chinese art. Imagery style has a wide range of internationality, it also exists in Africa and Europe. Although it is not a patent of China, the spirit of Eastern perceptual freehand brushwork is different from that of Western rational realism. Therefore, the author thinks that the sculpture culture of the East and the West has their own merits. The western sculpture values a rule, an order and a narration. The eastern sculpture seems to value a feeling, an idea and a rhythm, which pays more attention to the expression of emotion and the expression of soul. Chinese contemporary sculpture consciously or unconsciously inherits the traditional national freehand brushwork in the blending of the East and the West. While highlighting the style of the times, Chinese contemporary sculpture also pays tribute to tradition and returns to tradition.

The contemporary transformation of imagery sculpture makes the forms of sculpture more diverse. From the modelling form of image sculpture, it has the characteristics of concise generalization, exaggeration and distortion, and expression of form and spirit. Sculpture attaches great importance to the generalization and choices in shape. Simple generalization is that artists analyze concrete objects in reality with an whole perspective, using induc-

tion and omission of expression techniques, focusing on the overall portrayal without paying attention to details. Simplicity is not the simplification and homogenization of objects, but the refinement and sublimation of objects based on the understanding of their essential laws. If simple generalization is the basic feature of the contemporary development of imagery sculpture, then exaggeration and distortion are the remarkable features of the contemporary development of image sculpture. The exaggerated deformation of sculpture is not aimless and scale-free, but a subjective adjustment made by the artist to the concrete objects in reality. It is not divorced from the characteristics of the objects themselves, but makes the spatial shape of the body expand and change, that is, it is deformation without losing normal state. Expressing the spirit by form and modeling the form with spirit, the image sculpture is characterized by both the form and the spirit, which is an important feature of the contemporary development of imagery sculpture. The relationship between form and spirit has been discussed by artists since ancient times. Compared with form, the depiction of spirit is more important. "Huaianzi Annotation" says: "spirit is more precious than form. Once the spirit is confined the form can be well followed, while the victory of the form leads to the impoverishment of the spirit."^[6] Contemporary sculpture emphasizes the depiction of image on the basis of form, which inherits the ancient artistic tradition. On the whole, contemporary sculpture shows the charm of the times, which is simple and concise, grand in scope and endless in tension.

3. Discussion on the Content of the Contemporary Process of Sculpture Art

Chinese imagery sculpture should focus on grasping the regional spirit of the times and cultural accumulation in the contemporary multi-cultural development. In contemporary sculpture art creation, artists should consider four aspects: affection for people's lives, rooting in national culture, carrying forward the spirit of innovation, and unique personality language.

People's livelihood is the direction of artists' creation in the new era. Like other literary and artistic creations, the creation of Chinese sculpture art should always be closely related to people's life, social reality and historical changes. This is not only the starting point but also the end point of artistic creation. "The most fundamental, crucial and reliable way of artistic creation is to take root in the people and people's life. Artists should step into the depths of life, understand the essence of life and get a thorough understanding of life, draw nourishment from

the great practice of the people and colorful life."^[7] Art creation originates from life. Being divorced from reality is tantamount to trapping oneself in the bottom of a well, what can be seen from the outside world will be limited. Only by tapping the source of life, generalizing the essence of life, praising the quality of the people, shaping typical images and creating spiritual beauty as the general direction of contemporary sculpture creation, keeping in mind of the people and paying attention to the feelings of the people, artists can create works that meet people's emotional needs and aesthetic habits. In the meantime, artists should approach life and have careful observation, intimate feelings and profound thinking of real life. Only in this way can artists create excellent works belonging to this era. This is also why contemporary art should enter the public, stepping into the life, let the public participate in the evaluation, and actively listen to the public opinions.

National culture is the foundation of artists' creation in the new era. Five thousand years of cultural accumulation has provided abundant resources for our artistic creation. Artists should make full use of this precious resource, build up national self-confidence and carry forward national spirit. While fully absorbing the excellent cultures of all nations in the world and using advanced, scientific and beneficial elements for themselves, artists should not forget the civilization history of the Chinese nation itself. They should base themselves on the soil of national life and strive to create excellent works embodying Chinese style and spirit. Every nation has its own cultural characteristics, and culture is the spiritual pillar on which a nation depends for its survival and development. Today's globalization does not mean that the national character is disappearing day by day, nor is the national character a fixed entity. It also constantly brings forth new ideas along with the changes of national life and times. Globalization is a pluralistic concept, and the coexistence and complementarity of the unique values and styles of different nationalities is also the goal of globalization. "The native and national Chinese traditional culture is the essence of Chinese national culture. With the firm belief of self-respect and self-confidence, adhering to inheritance, reference and promotion, and facing today's "world culture" trend with broad mind, is the road of development of contemporary Chinese sculpture. Globalization and nationality are not contradictory relations. National traditional culture is the backbone of contemporary Chinese sculpture."^[8] Artists should be good at learning Chinese traditional culture, establish cultural consciousness and self-confidence, and create excellent works with rich content and profound thought with respect.

The spirit of innovation is the soul of artists creating in the new era. "There are talented people in every dynasty, each leading the way for hundreds of years". Some classical works will also change with the passage of time and the development of the times, because people's psychological and aesthetic needs are constantly improving, which requires artists to have innovative consciousness. Essentially, it is constantly "weeding through the old and bringing forth the new". Contemporary sculpture art can maintain its vitality only through new creation. How to innovate? The author thinks that we should pay attention to the following points: First, we should constantly develop and innovate on the basis of devoting to the achievements of the ancients. When many contemporary artists encounter bottlenecks in their creation, returning to traditional art often brings them more inspiration. Second, artists should be curious and enthusiastic about new things, which will enrich the forms of contemporary art and make breakthroughs in the aspects of expressive techniques, material media and formal language. Artistic creation is a kind of practical activity that we subjectively express the objective world. It is also a self-understanding and understanding of natural things. Therefore, the expression of personal feelings is also an important condition to maintain innovation. Thirdly, we should pay attention to the influence of scientific and technological revolution on art. The development of science and technology is the motive force of innovation and plays an important role in promoting the development of contemporary art. Contemporary artists' creation and technology are becoming more and more closely related, as can be seen from various installation works. Professor Wu Weishan also put forward his own view on the path of innovation: "the expansion in the vertical space" – to study from the profound tradition of the nation and the field; the expansion in the horizontal space – to study from the essence of other nations and fields; the development of crisscross space -- to stick to the East and draw lessons from west, stand at the height of human beings, and embrace a variety of beneficial cultures in a broad mind. "[9]"

Characteristic language is the motive force for artists to create in the new era. Artists should observe things from a unique perspective and pursue unique personality. Qi Baishi, a famous painter, once warned his disciples that "learning from me can improve but trying to be me will not make any influence". He thought that painters should "walk in their own way, create works with their own spirit". An artist should not be a machine of imitation and plagiarism. Every artist should have his own way of expression. Defining one's own language, fully understanding and grasping of oneself are not only the embod-

iment of one's unique personality, but also the indirect embodiment of the artist's values on life. Artists' multiple understanding of sculpture language also contributes to the diversified development of contemporary sculpture art. In the meantime, the expression of individuality is not absolute self-expression. Formalism will lead to the melting of individuality into the so-called principles, and the form without content will have no significance and value. The cultivation of artist's personality can start from three aspects: first, to have broad knowledge and profound understanding of the development and change of things; second, to have a higher aesthetic creativity and observation, feeling, imagination and expression; third, to have a unique perspective of observation, to find the artistic language and expression in line with their own personality, to create from their own feelings, and express their true feelings. The vitality of the works of art is also the real expression of the artists' inner world. Red flowers and green leaves have their own wonders. Individuality is the eternal value of the artist's own existence and an important condition for contemporary artistic creation.

4. Conclusion

Traditional imagery style is the cultural identity and national consensus accumulated over thousands of years in China. It is also the soul and supreme realm of Chinese culture and art. Imagery symbols are in line with the development of contemporary art, and they are important inheritance and development of national traditional culture. Contemporary sculpture art is changing from traditional mysterious image to clear and orderly state. This process is an innovation and transformation based on inheriting traditional art style. Artists should have active thinking on current creation, which can "go out" and "jump back". Contemporary art creation should keep up with the trend of the times and highlight the spirit of the times so as to create excellent works full of vitality. As the four main courses of artists' creation, concerned with people's livelihood, rooting in national culture, developing innovative spirit and forming unique language, should be well studied, understood and practiced. Only in this way can artists create excellent works with both national characteristics and distinct personality along the direction of traditional culture.

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