

Resistance or Compromise: A Comparison of Western Mainstream Painting Language Before and after the Invention of Photographic Technology

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the developmental changes in the language of drawing brought about by the invention of the camera. Therefore, this paper takes the time of camera invention as the node. First, we will analyze the common features of the painting language of the famous painting schools before this point in time and the common features of the painting language of the famous painting schools after this point in time. Then we will compare and analyze them to explore the development and evolution of the painting language. Current research on painting before and after the invention of the camera is mostly focused on aesthetic approaches, art criticism, and its influence on popular culture. It adds to the gap in research on the language of painting and provides some insights into the creation and development of today's photography and painting.

Keywords: early photography, painting language, influence, Western painting, element

1. Introduction

When we create or appreciate paintings, our judgment standards always seem intentionally or unintentionally close to the standard of "like or not like." This pursuit of realism, whether in the East or the West, has existed for quite a long time as a criterion for judging the quality of a work. However, with the development of technology, especially in the era of photography, artists had contradictory ideas when faced with absolutely realistic lenses. On the one hand, they showed concern about traditional painting. On the other hand, a whole new painting language began to develop. It is obvious that photography has enormous influence, but is photography the direct course of the change in painting language during this period? whether traditional painting models and languages be completely abandoned in the face of new technology? To gain a comprehensive understanding of the correlation between early photography and painting, it is imperative to analyze the progression of painting language throughout history thoroughly. Only by doing so can one gain profound insight into these complex matters. Since the research purpose is to compare the painting languages before and after the birth of the camera, the author will set the time when the Daguerreotype was published as the central point, that is, 1839, and focus on comparing the painting language of the mainstream Western painting school before and after this time.

1.1. Definition of Main Concepts

This paper selects the main schools of Western painting from the Renaissance to 1914 as the research scope and takes 1839 as the middle node to analyze and compare the painting language of the main schools before and after it. The reason for choosing 1914 as the end of the research scope is that 1914 was the year of the beginning of the First World War, and it was necessary to exclude the influence of war on painting. Meanwhile, for the selection of painting school, for the period before the advent of photography, this paper chooses Neo-classicism, Romanticism, and early Realism as the main research objects; for the period after the advent of photography, this paper chooses Impressionism, post-Impressionism, and Fauvism as the main research objects. The reason for the choice is that the former is one of the most mainstream painting schools, while the latter is the mainstream painting school, which is also deeply influenced by photography.

For the definition of the painting language in this paper, this paper will follow Yue Jiang's description of painting language and the sense of form in the picture in his book *Study of Painting Language*. As the main element of the sense form of painting, painting language includes "constituent elements of the expression, compositional techniques for artwork, material textures used, visual psychological perception, the laws of aesthetics, sketch relationships and color relationships, etc.". Therefore, the paper will compare the painting language from the aspects of lines, colors, composition, texture, and other elements in the painting as well as the materials and techniques used by the artist in creation.

2. Literature Review

The relationship between painting and photography has attracted much attention since photography was invented in the 19th century, and many scholars have discussed it from different perspectives. For the research on this topic, the writer will analyze the existing relevant literature from the following perspectives.

In the field of the history of painting, *The Story of Art*, which was first published by Ernst Hans Josef Gombrich in 1950 while gives a comprehensive elaborate on the history of art development, it also explains the puzzle of "the generation and change of style"[1]. As the representative individual of Warburg School, in his book, he indicated, "The history of art is not, as is sometimes supposed, the history of an ever-increasing mastery of technical problems, but rather a history of changing ideas and requirements." [1]. In other words, the development of art is formed by artists in the process of constantly solving the problems generated by the collision between society and the art tradition, and it establishes the importance of studying the details and historical context of images in the process of art historical research. The book *Art History - An Introduction*, published in 2003 by Hans Belting, Hans Belting, Wolfgang Kemp [2], Willibald Sauerländer, and Martin Warnke, also emphasizes the importance of the research methodology from Warburg School for the study of art history. Such as using the details in an image to explain the connotation of the picture and the changing history behind the content. and this research methodology is also known as the iconographical research method. Meanwhile, the author also agrees with the status of Wolflin's stylistic analysis in the book. Thus, the stylistic analyses of the Viennese school, which emphasize the form, coupled with the iconographic analyses of the Warburg school, which emphasize the detail, constitute the basic line of thought in art historical research.

In painting techniques the writer found many books related to painting techniques. Cennino Cennini made collation and summarization of 14th-century Western art techniques in *The Craftsman's Handbook* in the early Renaissance [3], which is arguably the earliest book on the techniques of painting materials. The German scholar Max Doerner's book *The Materials of the Artist: Their Use in Painting with Notes on the Techniques of the old masters*, first published in 1921 (the English

version was first published in 1933), which is regarded as the "bible of technique"[4]. This book is a reliable source of information on traditional European painting materials and techniques and an essential tool in American and European art schools. The book contains a comprehensive list of traditional European painting materials, such as the methods of making and using water-based and oil-based materials and different kinds of painting techniques in oil, tempera, and watercolor in traditional European painting. In this book, the author provides a detailed description of the painting techniques of the dominant schools of painting in Europe in the 14th and 18th centuries, recording the development of painting techniques and the differences in the use of techniques between the different schools. David Hockney's book *Secret Knowledge: Rediscovering the Lost Techniques of the Old Masters* (first published in 2001) points out that "In the early 15th century, a number of artists in the West began to use optical devices to create projections that helped them paint." [5]. In addition to painting techniques, the book also has a very profound discussion on the issue of "painting and representation." The author believes that if the hypothesis is true, the creation of paintings since the Renaissance has been somewhat limited by the use of optical instruments, which encouraged a focus on realistic representation. However, after the advent of photography technology in the 19th century, the market no longer needed realistic paintings. Painters did not have to rely on instruments to paint, and the painting language was liberated to some extent.

In photographic history, many books systematically organize the history of photography. Gu Zhen published *World Photographic History* in 2006, which recorded the technology basis before the birth of the camera and the condition of early photography. Also, the origin and characteristics of various schools of photography. For the evolution of photographic art, *A World History of Photography* (first published in 1997) by Naomi Rosenblum made an authoritative and comprehensive collation of the development history of photography according to the timeline. In addition to the technical nature of photography, Naomi Rosenblum emphasized the wide range of applications, the aesthetic value, and the range of social phenomena [6].

In the field of mutual influence of photography and painting, early research has provided a wide range of theoretical information. In 1963, Walter Benjamin discussed the question of the tendency of artistic development under the existing conditions of production through the perspective of the birth of the art of photography and cinema in his book *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. In this book, the author introduces the concept of "Aura," which he explains as "a unique manifestation of a distance, however near it may be" [7]. However, the technological revolution of "mechanical reproduction" made it possible to make copies of artworks, for which Benjamin expressed his regret for the loss of the "Aura" of artworks in his book. But in general, the author takes an optimistic view of the future of artistic development and popular culture following the advent of photographic technology and mechanical reproduction. The author believes that technological development makes artworks reproducible, allowing the "exhibition value" of artworks to go beyond the "cult value," which will finally lead to the era of art belonging to the public with equality. John Berger published *Ways of Seeing* in 1990 based on Benjamin's theory. In the first chapter of this book [8], the author describes the impact of photography from the perspective of viewing styles. Traditional European painting was characterized by "perspective," meaning that things were observed with the naked eye of the viewer. However, the advent of photography changed the ways of seeing, destined to change the tradition of painting.

In addition to the books that have been published, there are also a considerable number of journal articles and dissertations discussing the interaction between photography and painting. Zhisheng Yan published a journal article, *Painting Strategies under Image Watching*, in 2019 [9]. The author discusses the influence of photography on painting, such as the record value of painting, which was very important previously, had receded into the background because of the emergence of photography from the perspective of viewing mode. As a result, painting was reformed under the pressure brought

by photography, and many artists were exploring new painting strategies, which also promoted the development of modern art. The journal article *The Idiom in Photography as the Truth in Painting*, which was published by Rosemary Hawke in 2002, uses the works from the German artist Gerhard Richter's "photo-painting" to reveal the increasingly blurred line between painting and photography [10]. By analyzing Richter's blurred and unfocused images, the author explores whether photography, a medium that has been regarded as more objectively realistic than painting, is necessarily more realistic than painting. This reflects that people have begun to doubt the original assumptions of the media. In 2010, Xiaohui Liu's master's thesis, *The Liberation of the Image -from Classicism to New Media Art* from China Central Academy of Fine Art, studied the transformation of artistic concepts at the birth of photography through time sequence and specific cases. To predict the impact that new technologies may have in the future. In 2016, Wei Lin's master's thesis, *The Different Ways but the Same Pursuit of Arts —Researched the Synchronization between the early photography Arts and the development of Western painting* from Qilu University of Technology also discussed the process of the fusion between two sides in the early photography era, when the painting was trying to explore its new value and photography was trying to prove that it was part of art.

Most of the published books and journals focus on the impact of the invention of photography on art criticism, aesthetic methods, artistic styles, and popular culture. However, the proportion of specific research on painting language is not very large for all published articles, and the literature on the evolution of painting language over the years is also less.

3. Methodology

In this article, we will investigate through the following methods:

(1) Documentary research method. By searching the published books and journals at the domestic and international level about the language of painting and the relationship between photography and painting, as well as organizing and analyzing the theories provided by the references. This will create a reliable theoretical basis for the research in this paper.

(2) Photographic analysis method. Find the artworks of painters of the relevant schools through the Internet and publications, and analyze them after summarizing and analyzing them, highlighting the information in the paintings that relates to the language of the painting. After the analysis, the collected characteristics will be summarized to provide information for the analysis in the second half of the article.

Overall, the article will be divided into four sections. The first section is an introduction to the background of the research, the research methodology, the literature review, and the significance of the research. The second section is a systematic analysis of the artworks of the most representative schools of painting before and after the invention of the camera to identify their respective painting languages and to summarize the characteristics of the painting languages. The third part is a comparative analysis of the painting language of the two sides, and this step is to search for the differences between these two groups. In the fourth part, while describing the differences in the language of painting, the influence of photography on the language of painting will also be analyzed by combining the existing relevant theories.

4. Conclusion

Although photography has only existed for two hundred years, its impact on painting has been unprecedented. Due to the pursuit of realism in painting at that time, the absolute realism of photographs was destined to impact the painting style. Similarly, because of the common characteristic that photography and painting are static visual carriers, photography's tendency to converge with painting in some aspects is inevitable. When combing through Western discussions of

painting and photography during the nineteenth-century period, it is not difficult to discover that people were not completely accepting or rejecting the new technology but rather displayed a complex range of sentiments. Perhaps it was the expectation of revolution, the fear and anxiety of new technologies, or the confusion about the future of traditional things, which all forced artists of the period to explore new paths in painting.

However, the shift in the language of painting did not happen suddenly after the birth of photography. When we carefully observe the paintings of the early photographic period, we will discover that although the language of painting has changed considerably, it still serves realism in essence. Impressionist paintings, for example, have more generalized brush strokes and brighter colors than their earlier counterparts. However, the logic behind them is still based on rigorous optical principles, and their painting languages are designed to reproduce the optical presence.

Through a comparative study of the painting language of the mainstream painting schools before and after the emergence of photography, we can comprehensively analyze the painting language of the mainstream painting schools in these most ups and downs, full of conflict and integration periods in the history of Western art. At the same time, we can get an in-depth understanding of the mutual influence of painting and photography in their development until they become symbiotic. Perhaps from this, we can also provide some inspiration for the present-day creation and development of photography and painting, as in the near future, we can have some new references when facing the challenges of new technologies.

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