

COMMENT ON "THE PHILOSOPHICAL BASIS AND ARTISTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF CONTEMPORARY WESTERN PAINTING"

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In the middle of the 20th century, modernist art dominated by Europe and America entered a relatively calm period of reflection after more than half a century of prosperity and splendors. All kinds of new artistic languages and concepts have emerged continuously in about 50 years after modern art. All these phenomena constitute the artistic landscape after modernism in Europe and the United States, which is also called postmodern art in the history of art, remember Wang (2024).

Jean Francots Lyotard first put forward the term “postmodern condition” in her book *La condition postmoderne*, which specifically refers to the unique social and cultural conditions that gave birth to “postmodernism” in the later period of modern society. When Lyotard put forward “post-modern condition”, he mainly considered the post-modern knowledge condition. This social situation is summarized into three aspects: First, the discovery of discontinuity in the field of quantum mechanics and the change of scientific understanding brought about by the phenomenon of non-local connection prove that it is impossible to form a unified or regular understanding of some fields; Second, the change of post-modern social life brought about by consumerism, industrialization and commercialization; Third, the advent of post-industrial society in which theoretical knowledge occupies the central position of social development and change. This leads directly to postmodernism in the field of ideology.

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From the point of view of philosophy, the main forms of postmodern philosophy are: new hermeneutics represented by Gadamer, post-structuralism represented by Foucault and Derrida, and new pragmatism represented by Rorty and so on. The basic characteristic of postmodern philosophy is to oppose and transcend the dualism of mind and matter, monism and determinism; oppose foundationalism, essentialism, rationalism and moral idealism; and oppose subjectivism and anthropocentrism.

After the middle of the 20th century, European and American art, nourished by the concept of postmodernism, appeared to be extremely rich, diverse and vigorous. The development of art in this period was compatible with the dual dimensions of deconstruction and construction. Postmodernist art deepened it while questioning and reflecting on modern art, and continued to generate a contemporary art ecology with new aesthetic characteristics. Although the European and American Art of the period generally had a “post-modernity” temperament, the explicit concept of “Post-Modernist art” first appeared in the field of architecture. In 1966, Robert Venturi first criticized the aesthetic style of modernist architecture in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*. He believed that modernist architecture refused to make reference to history and culture, and over-emphasized functionality, namely the instrumental nature of architecture. Venturi further believes that the aesthetic purity pursued by modernism is an escape from and neglect of the complexity and contradictions of the real world. He believes that when modernist designers face design problems, they subjectively choose to ignore the real problems, and finally use “less is more” as a word. This excessive subjectivity of the modern way of thinking is obviously not advocated by Venturi. Venturi emphasized the richness of the real world, culture, and history, and he believed that the architecture of the postmodernist concept would include deconstructed classical and modernist styles. Therefore, in his architectural design, he always selectively retains the visual elements and symbols of classical architecture, while taking into account the practicality and functionality of modern architecture. When these factors are reconstructed and spliced together, a new architectural form is formed, and postmodernism architecture comes into being.

When the modernists declared the death of painting, the original linear development of painting stalled, artists gave up painting, and people even mistakenly thought that this is postmodern art. At that time, the authoritative American philosopher of art Arthur Danto said, “One of the characteristics of recent artistic productions is that the theory of the work of art is close to infinity, the object of the work is close to zero, and the result is a theory of pure form at the end. Then we can say that art is coming to an end.” Art has become a pure theory. As an art form, is painting still necessary?

The development of art in human society must have its own objective laws of existence and evolution. From the perspective of the history of art development, whenever

an art form goes to the extreme, it is inevitably followed by a return, and this return is not a simple repetition of the previous art. When the exploration of modernist art came to an end, painting was once again declared dead, and then the new painting with the characteristics of postmodernism appeared in the face of rebellion, return and tolerance. The English art theorist Tony Godfrey used the broader term “new painting” in his book *The New Image*. He felt that in the absence of a more suitable term, the peaceful term ‘new painting’ should still be retained and used.

The new painting art began in Germany in the late 1970s, and after entering the 1980s, its different styles became more and more mature. Art critics began to pay extensive attention to these new painting artists, and there were constantly comments, interpretations, and articles and monographs on new paintings. New terms such as German neo-expressionism art, Italian ultra-avant-garde art, French neo-liberal image, British New spirit, and American New image art have emerged in painting art. The artistic practices of these art movements and schools have explored the ontology of art from different concerns, abandoned the traditional painting mode, abandoned the content and theme, and broke through the material boundaries of art carriers. They incorporate the act of creation and the process of creation into the composition of artistic works, and the value of their works depends more on the implied thoughts and concepts, which is the essence of conceptual art. They reshaped the way of existence of visual art works, reflected and questioned the theoretical thrust of modern art in the process, and set off the anti-rational trend of thought with post-modernity in the field of art.

As Joseph Kosuth famously said, “Art after Marcel Duchamp is conceptual art” (Li, 2008, p. 112). These schools of conceptual art continue to deepen the concept of modernity in modern art and further construct the spirit of postmodernism from the standpoint of reflecting on modern art. According to Norman N. Holland’s analysis of the spirit of postmodernism, “Postmodernism is used to describe the various aesthetic forms and practices that emerged after modernism and broke away from it (Fan and Zhang, 2018, p.55).” Conceptual art can be regarded as early postmodernist art because it has the definite characteristic of deconstructing modern art. As the generalization and derivative of postmodernist visual art, conceptual art blurs the boundary between art and life, dispels the distinction between various art categories, breaks through the gap between elite culture and mass culture, elegant art and popular art, and releases “art” into the wider real world. All these have cleared the way for the prosperity and development of the artistic ecology of postmodernism.

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