

Collision and Sublimation - A Feasibility Study on Folk Art in Contemporary Art Creation

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Keywords: folk art; contemporary art; weave; garland; embroidery; Appropriation.

Abstract. As a non-material heritage, folk art has improved obviously than before in the status quo of the ecological environment. The combination of folk art and contemporary art not only brings massive national culture to the contemporary art creation, but also provides a broader platform for the development of folk art. The encounter of them is both sublimation and collision. By way of example analysis, the writer in real cases demonstrates the relationship between contemporary art and folk art, and explores it further regarding the folk art technology as a key breakthrough, which provides a reference for the future research on folk art.

Introduction

Heated discussion caused by the Twelfth National Art Exhibition gradually subsided. The splendid parts of the works amazed people. And the details were even more surprising. Young artist WANG Lei's work, "Cultural China--the Ming Dynasty", (Figure 1) got high praise in the critics, and eventually the work won the bronze medal of comprehensive materials group. The successful artist made a clever use of weaving technique in folk art combining with the idea of postmodern installation art and wove the deconstructed "Word Ocean Dictionary" into a archaistic work of contemporary art. After the integration of Chinese and Western culture the power of art conquered the eyes of the viewers. They read on the scene in the intuitive visual experience the "conversion" charm between folk art and contemporary art. The idea of "integration" prompted the author to reflect on the techniques used in the contemporary art in nearly a decade. Regarding folk art as accumulation yet walking in the forefront of art, works often can resonate with the different domestic groups. In addition to the energy of the art itself, the resonance comes more essentially from the brilliant rays sent forth by the foundation of folk art.



Figure 1

The folk art generated from the production and the social activities, is a simple, free, spiritual ideograph form widely spread and applied among the public. During the Elimination of the Four Stereotypes and the Cultural Revolution in the last century, people thought of folk art as trash and marginalized it. In the new century, the folk art of our country has made great progress both in protection consciousness and technology. But because the cultural soil of its survival is replaced by

the western consumer culture, even if there are good measures to protect cultural heritage, folk art still seems so far and strange in the public view.

Contemporary art is one of the most popular art forms in the world. The development of Chinese contemporary art has gradually entered into the public aesthetic appreciation in the thirty years since 1985. In the slogan that "the nation is the world", the works created by Chinese artists with a strong national brand issued their strong voice in the international art circle. Some well-known artists with ethnic style are: CAI Guoqiang and "powder" series of works, LV Shengzhong, and "paper-cut" series, XU Bing's "word and print" series and so on. Their art pattern discloses clear national language, and it also proves XU Bing's words, vice President of the China central academy, that "what can we rely on if not relying on tradition?" If probing into the word "tradition", folk art must be one of the most important parts.

Cases of Folk Art in the Contemporary Artistic Creation in Recent Years

LV Shengzhong's paper-cutting has become a classic combination of folk art and contemporary art. In the work "Spiritualism Hall", the "little red person" rich in original impulse with hands skywards, is calling the people to the place of the soul. LV Shengzhong combined people's restless soul and primitive witchcraft ceremony by the way of paper-cuts, which showed concerns about the social chaos. Paper-cut techniques and the symbolic language convey the artist's concepts by means of contemporary art metaphor on the basis of local consensus. Over the past twenty-six years, the audiences are still deeply impressed by the works, which is the first round of the collision between Chinese folk forces and contemporary art. Next the author will take the three "new" artists as an example to find again the shadow of the folk art in the contemporary art creation.

From folk paper garlands to "Plaster Model" of LI Hongbo^{[1][2]}. Paper garland is a traditional folk art that is now commonly used for festive decoration. Overlay the paper and stick them to a certain length of continuous paper, then stretch, pull, flip and transform a stack of paper "body" with continuous length and thickness into different forms of model like lantern, flower fan, hyacinth and so on. The change of LI Hongbo's paper garlands not just stay in the crafts products of folk art. After knowing about the techniques of making paper gourd, he made further research on the possibility of the various changes in its pulling-down. Then he applies garland grafting to his artistic creation, creating his first "garland" work "Scalability" (2009) (Figure 2). The creation can be divided into two processes. At first, stick million piece of paper by way of garland. After that, overlay the paper into a paper "body", which is borrowed from techniques of the paper gourd. Then cut, carve, grind and prune the "body" by using shaping skills, and form a relatively realistic body figure statue. Sculpture differs from the traditional clay sculpture and stone carving, because when creating the skills are also different from the skills of traditional clay sculpture such as throwing and pasting, which are one-off and irreversible. The biggest feature of "Scalability" is to bring the viewer the likelihood of visual change, which is from technical characteristics of paper garland. Before stretching the human being, it is stationary. From far away, it is a sculpture, but after stretching it, its visual effects shock the audience. The limbs of the portrait can be stretched to ten meters long, and can be twisted and stretched into serpentine scenery. The surreal effect is sublimated from the collision between traditional paper garlands technology and contemporary art. With the essence of folk unchanged, later LI Hongbo brought new works "Plaster Model" series (Figure 3). Series includes classic "paper sculptures" aids in the traditional sketch teaching of David, La Marseillaise, and Michelangelo and so on. People at the scene see a similar scale winding scenario again for the artist embezzling the garland technique again. There is an opposite contrast before stretching and after stretching the western sketch training aids. The former is classic familiar to all, while the latter hides behind the classics unpredictably and variably. It is this characteristic that has broken people's empirical cognition to classic matters, which is exactly what the artist wants to pursue and express. In Li's works, garland is a bond connecting the classics with the contemporary era. Yet whatever the sublimation of unknown form is, it takes root from the folk art.



Figure 2



Figure 3

From the folk weaving to WANG Lei's "Hexagram" . The artist WANG Lei's research direction is also the language of paper materials. His works are also based on folk power. But different from Li's stretching techniques, he finds another way of "folk weaving" in the folk art. He diverted the paper into a piece of art paper by method of weaving techniques. There are many kinds of weaving, such as weaving of straw, wicker, bamboo, thread, cord, linen,, beads and ribbon in terms of material, and plain weaving, decorative weaving, pattern weaving, twisted weaving in terms of technique.^[3] It appears that paper materials and weaving technology does not have any relationship, yet this is precisely another possibility of the paper language. To cut the paper into strips and rub it into a string, artists can try to weave with rope instead of thread into clothes, hats, scarves and so on. The accidental attempts via folk art of weaving contribute to WANG Lei's first device work "The Handmade Toilet Paper "(2009) (Figure 4). After that, he always emphasizes the "appropriation" experience, and walk out his own art way with folk weaving.



Figure 4



Figure 5

In recent years, WANG Lei held a personal exhibition "Hexagram" in the National Art Museum of China, the highest level of domestic art museum, which represents fully affirmation of artists. Six of the works in the exhibition let the public feel the folk force in contemporary art. One of the works "Out of Thin Air" (Figure 5) undergoes the process of deconstructing, reconstructing and weaving with a whole year "River Newspaper", and eventually creates twelve sacks. On the one hand, the artist thinks that the newspaper itself conveys multiple meanings. From people to objects, all are paid great attention to by newspapers. At the same time it has the dual identity of both commodity and consumer goods. He expresses his personal feeling to this kind of media by "The Large Pocket". On the other hand, the twelve sacks of artists are neither the food containers in the view of peasants, nor the purses filled with tricks and tips in the soldiers' opinion. What does the number twelve mean? Does it mean the time, event, comment or anything else? That is exactly what WANG Lei's works leave the viewers to interpret. Figure twelve also appears in another piece of work, "Blossom Every Month". The artist weaves "Luoyang Evening News" in an amount of one whole year into twelve sheets in memory of

growth, and employs twelve kinds of patterns to explain his feelings to the homeland Luoyang, "the flower city". In his work "People's Daily", he once again weaves a full year of "People's Daily" into a volume of books of a half meter wide and four meters long. No matter this kind of reconstruction in the works is the artist's guess about the future from the current reality, or it is the feeling for the time in combination with his own growth experience, or even both of them, the luxuriant works can not neglect the root given by folk art.

From folk embroidery to GAO Rong's "Borrowing Line". Embroidery is called "needlework" in the ancient books, also known as the sowing, domestic arts or embroiders. It uses color silk, wool or cotton to puncture on silk, satin, linen and so on with the aid of needle and then embroider into patterns, images or characters.^[4] Female artist GAO Rong created her first needlework "Unit 8, Building 5 in Hua Jia Di Bei Li--layer 1/2" (2010) (Figure 6) by folk embroidery, in which she reproduced a lived doorway by cloth, cotton and sponge. In the scene, the old anti-theft doors and windows, broken meter box and rusty water pipes all seem a



Figure 6

corny, dull and simple mock-up, but when coming close, you will find secrets in the stains, rust and small leaflets that the surface of the dirty comes from a gorgeous filaments shuttle. It costs the artist half year to revive and sublimate the dull scene through needling with silk just like drawing pictures with pencil.

Later, GAO Rong in solo exhibition "Borrowing Line" again showed the female charm of needlework in works ranging from the "Standing" (2011) to the "Talk" (2012) and then to the "Guangzhou Station" (2012). The artist reproduced a familiar space from female perspectives, making these flat scenes seem less cold in her hand. These life details often neglected and even be studiously avoided are back. Viewers can feel in the works the modern woman's tenacity and soft brought about by the conflict between the tough appearance and soft materials, and it is the appropriation of the embroidery in the contemporary art that makes artists live up to the representative of contemporary needlework.

The combination of folk art technology and contemporary art

The combination of traditional and contemporary art has many forms, including an important creation direction, namely the appropriation of traditional modeling characteristics. For instance, Chinese artists Ah Xian combined the blue and white porcelain with body sculpture, and SHI Jinsong combined the classical garden with the present urban construction debris. It can be seen from the above cases that technique in the folk art is an important part of folk art. It was the technology that determined the final formation of folk art of the old period, and many other artists also used this way to create works, such as WU Jian'an, WU Wei and etc. Therefore, the technique in the folk art is a treasure already tested. Contemporary arts will all take root in it and bear rich fruit.

Conclusions

Mr. LV Zhongsheng once proposed that traditional elements are the basis of our creation. While the artists create art, traditional folk art has provided them great inspiration. Chinese contemporary art with the foundation of traditional folk art can better reflect our venerable history and abundant national culture. Inheriting and developing folk art can not only protect traditional heritage in museums. More importantly, folk art develops its new survival mode and much more multiple branches in contemporary culture. The combination of folk art and contemporary art is an improved way to promote folk art, as well as a new development of folk art. Therefore, when folk art encounters contemporary art, it shows the collision and sublimation of our ancestors' wisdom and our current creativity.

Acknowledgement

Project: The present paper is one of the achievements of the project named Teaching Reform of Contemporary Art Course and Training Mode of Collaborative Innovation Talents under the Background of General Education, which is supported by Teaching Development Foundation for Teachers in University of Shanghai for Science and Technology.

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