

The Emotion Analysis during Oil Painting Creation Process

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Abstract—In this paper, the author analyzes and organizes the psychological expression during the creation process based on the author's own experience. The style, the content, and the success and failure of art works are determined by the psychological state of the painters. Creation is neither the monotonous work nor the simple duplication and pure imitation of other painters. Creation is a kind of mental activity, which reveals the inner emotion and the subconscious impulse of the painters. The subconscious can help the painters find themselves. A good mood enables the painters be free from depression. Works of art are not only the reflection of social life, but also the fruit of the artist's individual thought. During the psychological art creation process, the psychological forms, such as the subconscious, mental state and inspiration of the painters, are of great importance.

Keywords—*emotion; subconscious; mental state; self*

I. INTRODUCTION

I feel grateful to have chosen painting as my profession; it offers me a space to express, analyze and feel myself. I can express my emotions, specifically depressive states, and desires through painting. During the creative process, I experience my psychological changes, which are complicated yet normal. I have researched the relative document about art psychology, which rarely recorded the psychological experiences during the creation process. Based on the analysis of my own creation process, I recorded the entire psychological process from the generation of creation motivation to the end of creation, and I proposed my own viewpoints towards how to explore the subconscious and enhance the moods. The psychological expression during creation includes my personal experiences and general existence, offering the theoretical references for the oil painting creations.

Subconscious is a kind of thought with power, strength and efficiency that hides under our general consciousness. Consciousness is the tip of the iceberg above the sea level, however, subconscious is the broader invisible iceberg hiding under the sea level. Freud thought the major features of subconscious were of original impulse, unconscious logic, nonverbal behavior, amorality, unknowability, and nonrepeatability, tending to find a way and search for pleasure according to "pleasure principle".

Subconscious has been generating before we were born, including positive emotional awareness and negative emotional awareness, school education, family environment, parents' education and expectation, life experience, the concept and emotion that generated by ourselves, and all the aspects that have influenced our external thoughts. All in all, subconscious is the ocean of our "heart".

Good art works can touch our souls. Everyone has some wishes and experiences hiding in their mind, which are depressed within their heart, such as childhood experiences and emotional experiences. In the theory of Freud, depression is the prototype of subconscious. Artists attempt to release their own pain and depressed impulse through the way of painting, and painting is the result of subconscious impulse. The painting process is the process to relieve their hiding depression, which enables the artists to calm their inner contradiction and conflict, sublimating their instinctive impulse. The following characteristics are required in order to take full advantage of the powerful subconscious.

A. Listen to the Heart

Contemporary paintings put more emphasis on psychological and emotional communication between us. The lives of modern people gradually makes our psychological distance wider, which tends to give us a sense of indifference and loneliness. Yet painting is an effective method to bridge our inner hearts. Each artist has a strong and integrated inner world. This is a world that totally belongs to themselves and is dominated by themselves, in which they can analyze and reflect themselves, experience their time and space. They can create the images they comprehend by heart, which will generate the empathy with their appreciator. Being honest is the only way to create touching art work.

Painting is the expression of self freedom, and is the discovery and liberation of vitality. Ben Shahn has ever said: "In the art ... self is the content. When it combines with an image, self is both the subject and the object. This is art. It can discover all the sources of truth..." [1] It tells us that art needs to reflect our true emotion, find ourselves, and self is the key to the puzzle. Picasso has also explained it to us: "When we found cubism, we did not mean to invent it. We just wanted to express our inner stuff." [2]

When our depressed inner emotion is stimulated by the external environment, this unknown impulse will be expressed by the form of painting. The depressive state could possibly be expressed by some image or symbol, which holds the painters' expectation. It is only the true heart of the painters that understand the painters themselves. However, this kind of release is real; it makes their body and soul relaxed. Their emotions are released, and their mind is freed. The way the brushwork and the color to express the art are the following questions. It takes a long time to research the way and the content until they find the appropriate expressing method, but the premise is that this method is supposed to move and please the painters themselves. Being relaxed, natural and free is the best state to create. It is a way to integrate with the inner heart. At this moment, the artists could find themselves during the creative process and truly integrate themselves with paintings. The artists should be the creators driven by their inner heart, who closely watch their inner life with eyes and listen to their inner desire with ears.

Edward Munch was an expressionism painter. His mother died when he was 5 years old, and his sister, Sophie, died from tuberculosis when he was 15. Early in his adulthood, he lived through the deaths of his father and younger brother, and his only younger sister suffering from mental illness. It seems Munch's childhood had been involved with illnesses or deaths. Such memories of childhood and youth became the major content in Munch's paintings. Munch almost integrated his personal experiences with his painting expressions. For example, *The Sick Child*, one of his early works, was created by taking his seriously ill sister, Sophie, as the prototype. The colors and images in Munch's works give us a sense of depression and anxiety. Some psychoanalytic characteristics it expressed was compatible with Munch's obscure inner world, originating from his childhood experience. The rich emotion expressed in the painting was the release of the painter's subconscious. Munch had explained his purpose about *The Sick Child*: "What I want to paint is not what I see now but what I saw in the past." [3] This clearly illustrates that his works cast a gloomy emotion from his childhood, rather than directly depended on his childhood life. It is the compensation towards what he had lost in his memory. Taking full advantage of his personal experience, Munch released the emotions hiding in his mind.

During the painting creation, we seem to have a long way to go, but also seem just to return. Dai Shihe has ever said that: "In fact, everyone is painting the circle. Only someone gets back to the start, yet someone gets lost." [4] What we need to do at last is to look for ourselves gropingly on the canvas.

B. *Crazy Passion*

Passion is the impulse of emotion, is an extremely active mental state. When heard the call of inner heart, passion will be unable to stop like the flood current. The depressed expression desire will be activated thoroughly. At this

moment, the mind and intelligence of the painters are in the high-speed state. A variety of emotions and ideas are full of their mind. The painting is the material expression of their mind and thought, and passion is the support to accomplish the expression. The work without passion is featureless, but the work expressed under the crazy state tends to be breathtaking. This is a process that could surpass the rational state of common people, and a thought and aesthetics sublimation. Freud considered that: "An artist tends to be introverted, making him look like the person with mental illness. He is a person driven by his over-arrogant instinct." [5] Artists such as Van Gogh and De Kooning all have the similar state. During the creation process of his late works, Van Gogh had almost been crazy. The high purity of color and the sharp contrast of his paintings offer us a great visual impact because of his mental illness. All the twisty brushworks and the rough lines reflect the painter's complicated emotions and strong desire of expression. De Kooning's works enable us to feel his passion during the painting process. The bold brushworks and the color uses totally make us experience his free mental state during the creation process. We can also see similar ideas shown in the traditional Chinese painting and literature. A famous ancient Chinese literary critic Liuxie raised the ideas of "shen" and "wuyou" in his masterpiece *Wenxin Diaolong* or *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* [6], which means that we should adjust our mental state and integrate it with the object in the outside world. Such ideas are pursued by the free-minded and romantic Chinese painters during their painting process.

Passion makes the creation full of pleasure and the temptation of discovery. This is the moment of being most active and confident, and the sharpest moment to feel beauty. It is the moment of the coming of inspiration.

II. THE DEPRESSION GENERATED DURING THE CREATION PROCESS

A. *The Generation of Depression*

First, the creative process is usually full of passion, and this often gives us a feeling of excitement and joy which is caused by our unconscious impulses. At the same time we also inevitably encounter the unpredictable anguish. During the painting process, our mood is changeable and complicated rather than being oriented and controllable. Our changeable moods during the creation process are the reflection of the changes of our thoughts and consciousness. There are various causes of our depression and anguish: sometimes the loss of source of creation will cause us pain; sometimes the discrepancy between the actual painting and the painting we imagined will make us feel restless; sometimes a lack of suitable approaches will bring us into a bad mood. Under such circumstances, we would rack our brain to solve these problems while our horizons shrinking from the overall situation into one specific point. As a result, we become more and more nervous.

B. *The Self-regulation of Our Mental State*

The mental state is a kind of emotional state and it plays an extremely important part in the artistic creative process. Positive mood will be of great use to artistic creation. When we encounter bottleneck during the painting process, we should relax and adjust our mood to the best condition. Hypertensions aggravate the mental burden and thus restrain our psychological functions. Take bicycling for example, if we always stare at the wheels nervously and grip the handles tightly, there is no way that we can drive it successfully. On the contrary, if we calm down and relax, things will become much easier. So when we encounter difficulties during the painting process, we should learn to relax ourselves by chatting with our friends or taking a walk outside. I should emphasize that relaxation here does not equal to slackness, it means temporary relaxation instead. On the one hand, temporary relaxation can relax our mind and recharge the batteries; on the other hand, it also can adjust our way of thinking and may help us solve the problem from a different angle. A good mood lies in the dynamic balance of the state of mind. Our mind should be both dynamic and static. Only when our mindset is dynamic and active, can we become very creative. Only when our mindset is static and placid, can our thought become clear and deep, and thus can we maintain the right direction in the painting process. Therefore, the dynamic balance of this kind of psychology should be the mutual adjustment of passion and calmness and of the impulse and the control. All emotions should be kept in balance. It is precisely at this moment that whether a painter has a strong inner-self and a strong willing is being tested. The painting process is the struggling process of fighting with ourselves. Of course, it is better that we accomplish the painting at one stretch. However, if some problems get in the way, we should not give up. "Destruction" sometimes can produce unexpectedly great works. "There's no making without breaking." Art is often very weird, the more you try to do something, the less likely you will make it. And the part inadvertently painted out is often the most attractive part. [4]

The mood in the creation process is very complex. The painting itself requires repeated scrutiny and repeated modification. For example, during his creation of "Last Supper", Leonardo da Vinci often had to modify the part painted the previous day first. Sometimes he would stand there for three or four days without touching the painting, just holding the arm and staring at the portraits in the painting as if he was criticizing them. This masterpiece was revised repeatedly before being finalized.

III. INCORPORATE ONESELF INTO THE PAINTING

Art creation is a kind of spiritual activity and painting is the artist's spiritual product. Self expression in art is the creation of art works. Unlike the camera which can present the exact picture to us, artists use media materials to express their true feelings of life in their paintings. The true feelings reflected in the painting are the self expression of the artists. The creation process is the self-expression process of the

painter's sensitive inner self about their own understandings of life. In turn, when the people are appreciating the works, they can understand the feelings of the painters through the works. Facing the same scene, different painters could produce different works. Just as the saying goes, "there are a thousand Hamlets in a thousand people's eyes." That is because different people have their own different life experiences and their own emotional excitements and different observation angles. So in the face of the same scene, painters would naturally add their own feelings and understandings into their works. That is to say the painters would incorporate themselves into the painting. The painters add their own personality into the paintings while the paintings present the personality of the painters. They are closely related to each other just like a pair of conjoined twins. In the ordinary people's mind, the normal farmers' life and work can be dull and laborious, but their life has been constantly praised in the French painting master Miller's works. Under his paintbrush, the farmers' life is warm and beautiful and is kind of holy in its own way.

We should try to understand the artists' mental activities when they experience and observe their life from a psychological point of view. Subjective participation is throughout the whole painting process. It is here the "subjective" means the presentation of self-consciousness. When a painter observes an object, the object is transmitted to the brain through the optic nerves and the subjective initiative of the brain casts a personal color to the object, and then the painter would produce this image of the object in the brain through the paintbrush. The painting will naturally reflect the painter's feelings and understandings of the object. Art is the transcendent self expression of the artists. The artists would hide their own feelings and understandings in their works to confirm and demonstrate their own existence. The uniqueness of artistic expression is that it is not only about expression, and the expression itself is the ultimate goal.

Post-Impressionist Van Gogh devoted all his passions into his works. His work "Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear" was painted after he cut his own left ear. The background of the painting is that Van Gogh invited Gauguin to live with him but they quarreled constantly because of personality conflicts. After one fierce argument, their relationship completely fell apart. Gauguin moved out in anger, and Van Gogh cut his own left ear out of pain. In the painting, Van Gogh, sallow and emaciated with deep-set eyes, who was wearing the bandage on his head, showed a feeling of grief and despair. Both the brushwork and the color of the painting gives people a fanatical uneasiness. And this exaggerated expression is undoubtedly the real expression of his inner world.

The arts must be rooted in life just as trees must be rooted in earth; they take roots in the everyday world and then bear fruits for themselves and the human beings. This is the fundamental basis for human existence. When we appreciate a piece of art, we should not only understand

some relevant background and the relevant information about the artist, we should also consider it as a pilgrimage of the human spirit. The work itself has shown certain rare humanity possibilities.

IV. CONCLUSION

During the painting process, the painter's mood could influence the work, and, in different moods, the painter could create different painting styles. This paper only summarizes several emotional states from my own point of view. There are various specific painting processes and each specific oil painter is unique. The painting process is very complicated: the subconscious impulses act on the consciousness and with the processing of the subjective consciousness an image is formed. The subconscious mind is very powerful and it is the source of the formation of creative impulses. As a result, exploring the subconscious mind correctly is very important. The painters should first listen to their inner voice, and feel free to express the feelings with passion. However, this is still not enough. Without deep understanding, the work will be superficial. They also need to continuously strengthen their cultural cultivation and accumulate their life experiences. Only by constant learning can they have inexhaustible subconscious thought. It is quite normal to encounter difficulties during the creation process. The key is to deal with the problems with the right attitude, and thus it is very important to develop a good mindset. Currently, there are such a great variety of oil painting styles that the painters can easily get confused and disoriented. The painters should paint the familiar things using their true feelings. Only in this way, can they produce successful works which can really impress others as well as themselves.

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