

## PROCEEDINGS ARTICLE

# Exploring the Metaphorical Meaning of Group Portraits in Contemporary Lacquer Paintings

Mengting Zhang<sup>1,\*</sup><sup>1</sup> Xiamen Academy of Arts and Design, Fuzhou University, Xiamen, China

## ABSTRACT

Metaphors exist in all aspects of human life and play an important aesthetic role in artistic thinking. Taking metaphor as a clue, this study expounds the metaphorical meaning contained in the works by analyzing the characters, scene collocation and picture colors in contemporary lacquer paintings. At the same time, the metaphorical character characteristics of group portrait characteristics in the works, the metaphorical national characteristics of common emotion, the metaphorical characteristics of the times of group spiritual dilemma and the metaphorical artistic characteristics of "lacquer" and "human nature" are explored from shallow to deep. The unique artistic language of metaphors plays an important role in the creation of contemporary lacquer paintings of group portraits. How to give full play to the function of metaphors deserves deep consideration by creators.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The human mind is naturally metaphorical, and metaphors exist in all aspects of human life, including artistic ways of thinking, and play an important aesthetic value [1]. When confronted with a work of art, people unconsciously map their own perceptual understanding onto the people or things in the picture for interpretation and analysis, and paintings of group portraits are more likely to metaphorically represent the collective unconsciousness. In addition, the collective unconsciousness connects the viewer, the painting and the author in an artistic exchange of thoughts, and a common part of their respective cognitive edifices is built in the process.

Group portrait painting uses painting language to depict group portrait scenes, which shows the similar emotions of multiple characters in a specific scene. It is different from the expression of literary form and film and television performance with plot. It is silent but more powerful. On the basis of painting report and narrative, contemporary lacquer group portrait paintings aim to explore group representations and

inner emotions of characters with similarities in certain situations and to stimulate the imagination of audience through artistic images to achieve the function of metaphor and mapping [2].

## 2. GROUP PORTRAIT CHARACTERISTICS EXPRESSED IN LACQUER PAINTINGS OF GROUP PORTRAITS

While expressing a relative and temporary image, contemporary lacquer group portraits always maintain an eternal and unchanging concern for the social attributes of human beings, and this eternity is often conveyed to the viewers in a metaphorical way, which is one of the reasons for the power of lacquer group portraits.

The history of human development and the development of the individual life are linked to painting, and metaphor plays a great role. Metaphors are present in group portraits on ancient lacquerware and group portraits in contemporary lacquer paintings, but the connotations and aesthetic values

\*Corresponding author. Email: [201720003@fzu.edu.cn](mailto:201720003@fzu.edu.cn)

conveyed are very different. In the early stages of the development of contemporary lacquer painting, the subject matters are mainly ethnic minorities and vernacular customs, with a metaphor for national unity and the pursuit of simplicity. With socio-economic and political development, new artistic thinking goes into the creation of lacquer paintings, and more artists focus on the role of metaphor in the creation of lacquer group portraits, thus changing and subverting the visual characteristics of group portraits. For example, a large number of lacquer paintings on the theme of urban life have emerged. Lacquer artists observe and explore the commonalities of modern urban people, integrate, refine, classify and depict the living states of urban groups through artistic techniques, metaphorizing the psychological characteristics, consumption concept and aesthetic taste of modern urban people in China. Guowei's Su works on the image of urban women construct pictures from a personal perspective and subjective consciousness based on the diversified use of paint materials. For example, "bright winter" shows the diverse expressions of modern urban women when shopping with a cutting visual schema. The character images are matched with rich scenes, presenting the life scenes of modern urban women and metaphorizing the new consciousness of contemporary lacquer paintings. The beautiful and exquisite face and fashionable clothes with rich texture highlight the psychological characteristics of modern urban women's pursuit of individuality. The lively picture metaphorizes the unique freshness and vitality given to the young group by the changes of the times. This state is also the reflection of the vigorous development of young lacquer painting. At the same time, with the change of living environment, there are also some emerging groups. The creators of lacquer painting seize this change of the times and depict professional images such as takeout, courier and designated driver shuttling on roads. Unified clothing and transportation have become their identity symbols. Creators look for common spiritual outlook and use traditional paint to depict the daily life and work of groups in the new era. This integration of traditional materials and modern themes shows that contemporary lacquer painting actively explores and forges ahead with creative confidence.

### **3. COMMON EMOTION OF GROUP REVEALED IN LACQUER PAINTING OF GROUP PORTRAITS**

Lacquer paintings of group portrait interpret national culture in the form of lacquer, arouse the common cultural psychology of national groups, stimulate the resonance of group emotion, and form the unique

memory of the group [3]. The image created by artists is the result of the unconscious transmission of cultural archetypes from generation to generation. The individual cultural characteristics embodied in unconsciousness are determined by the cultural environment in which the creators grow up. The life characteristics handed down from generation to generation maintain a certain cultural continuity. Contemporary lacquer paintings take the Chinese artistic spirit as the core, metaphorize and reflect the common feelings of the Chinese nation behind the picture, and maintain the unique cultural continuity of China's social structure [4].

For example, the color of red lacquer, which has experienced thousands of years, metaphorizes the special emotion of the Chinese nation. In lacquer painting, it represents the celebration, blood, heat and rebirth. Contemporary lacquer paintings of group portrait are well versed in the combination of color and form. The 13th art exhibition work "the war of Maguan" reveals the national pain, and the red of this work conveys a cold feeling. The large piece of red above the characters reflects the sense of sadness and describes the national war. A large area of solid color squeezes the characters in the lower half. Many characters wear specific clothes of the old era, with dark and heavy colors. The characters are depicted in sad and rigid images. The upper and lower parts together constitute a sense of visual depression. For in-depth depiction of the characters' facial expressions, some people close their eyes and sigh, some cry angrily, and some are indifferent and at a loss. It truly portrays the psychological state of many people in the special era, metaphorizes the historical pain of weak national strength and humiliation, and reminds modern people not to forget history. In another work "Why are flowers so red" in this art exhibition, multiple levels of red convey a kind of warmth during marriage. The red clothes of the characters are matched with the warm color system to create a whole scene of the marriage of ethnic minorities, full of Chinese red elements. The bride dressed in gorgeous wedding clothes is matched with exquisite makeup and accessories. The red color is in sharp contrast to the white color. Many characters set off the protagonist and show a strong aesthetic pattern of lacquer painting while clarifying the protagonist and theme of the picture. The expression depiction of the bride's eyes contact with the children adds a warm meaning to the picture. Although many characters in the picture are dressed in red, different characters have their own characteristics. The ingenious shielding and height difference between characters and horses make the picture show a sense of rhythm, plot and dynamic. In addition, these two group portraits have different metaphors for red paint and figure forms, but viewers have the same

perception of the picture with the same national emotions and cultural psychology.

#### **4. CONTEMPORARY SPIRITUAL DILEMMA OF GROUP CONNOTED IN LACQUER GROUP PORTRAITS**

Metaphors in contemporary art works construct the aesthetic characteristics of pluralism and individuality. Depicting the spiritual state of the times is an important task of visual art. Modern lacquer paintings of group portraits reveal the spiritual state of groups with different identities and levels in modern life through metaphor.

"In this way, people are thrown into a wandering state and lose all feelings about the historical continuity connecting the past and the future... The essential human nature is reduced to ordinary human nature, to the vitality of being as a functional body, and to the enjoyment of mediocrity and triviality" [5]. In figure painting, this mental state is mainly expressed through the facial expressions of the characters, and the painting of multiple characters shows a universality and modernity. The multiple faces in lacquer paintings of group portrait are the multiple or same externalization of human ideology, and the ways and means of various emotional expression. The expression function endows the features of the appearance and display of the face. People can also hide and cover their hearts through the facial expression. The expressionless face sometimes contains more emotional and psychological levels. For example, the work "the boundless sea of stars" in 13th National Art Exhibition depicts five anthropomorphic doll images with a sense of time and space, the unified skin color of the characters and exaggerated and similar facial features. While maintaining the overall picture, it adds the sense of mask of the characters, which means that they have the meaning of absurd pondering. There are some differences in facial expressions, but on the whole, it is a sense of emptiness, blankness, or indifference to the surroundings. The delicate and fashionable character image and the rigid feeling of the doll constitute the conflict of character form. The vertical depth and hierarchy of the background push the character image to the front of the picture, which is full of visual impact. The fullness of the whole picture and the emptiness conveyed by the facial expressions of the characters metaphorize the inner unknown and confusion under the pursuit of exquisite fashion; the fairy tale expression and thick color texture metaphorize the inner ideal but can't get rid of the

heavy reality; leopard print with wild meaning is painted on white paper, which metaphorizes the psychology of longing for freedom and release. These elements produce internal conflict and confrontation in the picture, which is the metaphorical expression of many contradictions in the daily life of contemporary young people. Therefore, the metaphor in Chinese contemporary lacquer paintings of group portraits not only has the ordinary emotional transmission, but also has the meaning of criticism and irony. The exaggerated and realistic character images metaphorize the common spiritual dilemma of modern young people. The surface affluence coexists with the internal emptiness. At the same time, it implies the illusion of concealment and camouflage in modern life or contemporary art.

#### **5. "LACQUER NATURE" AND "HUMAN NATURE" OF LACQUER PAINTING OF GROUP PORTRAITS**

Contemporary paintings, sculptures and other visual art works have rich connotation. As the language in the artistic cognitive system, visual language shows the unique metaphorical function of art, and uses the concrete picture form to metaphorize the abstract concept. The creation of group portraits in contemporary lacquer painting is mainly on concrete portraits, and realistic depiction goes hand in hand with image creation. Through the description, exaggeration and dramatization of the realistic image, the concrete image shows a unique aesthetic effect, and gives full play to the metaphorical function to tell the "lacquer nature" and "human nature".

Chinese painting as a whole pays attention to lyricism, pursues cultural taste and ideological realm, "metaphorizes" temperament, sentiment, cultivation and strength of the Chinese national group, and contains rich philosophical thoughts. Contemporary lacquer paintings of group portraits are painted with traditional lacquer, and the aesthetic thought of "metaphor" naturally exists in the contemporary lacquer painting of group portraits, transmitting the aesthetic value. The lacquer painting consciously tells the Chinese art language and metaphorizes people's nature and spirit [4]. Taking the 13th National Art Exhibition as an example, more works use natural lacquer. Ancient materials and contemporary art blend with each other, realizing the in-depth dialogue between the spirit of Chinese classical art and contemporary art, the ingenious combination of exquisite technology and passionate creation, and the confluence of artistic sensibility and rationality.

Therefore, contemporary lacquer painting is not just a kind of painting, but a collection of profound "lacquer nature" and complex "human nature". Artists of lacquer painting travel in the real and ideal world, observe and explore human nature, analyze the group representation and psychological state with lacquer as materials, and refine their own values and aesthetic characteristics in their works. Various group images, group words and group emotions metaphorize deep artistic care for contemporary human nature. The large scale of contemporary lacquer painting of group images and the massiness of lacquer board first create a sense of reality. The depiction of character modeling combined with the use of comprehensive materials, or the luster after delicate grinding, or the concave-convex feeling as if it was clumsy, convey a strong spiritual attitude in the form of visual and tactile expression, link the viewer, works and creators and provide more metaphorical space for multi-dimensional thinking of human nature.

Of course, there are still deficiencies in contemporary lacquer painting of group portraits. The independent expression of lacquer language in group portrait creation is not complete, and the in-depth application and diversified exploration of metaphor function in lacquer painting of group portraits are not mature enough. Secondly, group portraits of contemporary lacquer paintings mainly appear in large-scale theme exhibitions. The metaphorical function of some works is insufficient, and the experiment and construction of the modernity of the pictures are also slightly weak. These problems still need to be further solved by the creators based on practice.

## 6. CONCLUSION

As a language in the art cognitive system, contemporary lacquer painting is gradually shaping itself and showing its unique metaphorical function facing the world and the future, with broad prospects for development. Group portrait painting belonging to

it also needs to continuously purify, precipitate and refine the lacquer art language. While highlighting the "technicality" of material aesthetics and diverse techniques, it pays more attention to improvement of "artistry" and adheres to people's attention in the expression content. Besides, it uses metaphor function to highly summarize the external characteristics and internal emotions of contemporary groups, expresses the development of society and the progress of human beings through the lacquer painting of group portrait with aesthetic characteristics of the times, and gives full play to the unique and important role of contemporary lacquer painting in the construction of contemporary national culture.

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