
Artistic Features of Kunming's Modern Folk Paintings

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Abstract

From the perspective of subject matter, modeling composition, shade of colors and painting style, this paper explores into the artistic features of Kunming's modern folk paintings in its full development, namely folk culture image in painting subjects, perfection-oriented concept of image modeling, liberal choice of colors, and innocent and unstrained painting styles for decoration.

Keywords : Kunming; modern folk paintings; artistic features

Since the 1980s, springing up from the Red Soil Plateau in central Yunnan Province, Kunming's modern folk paintings comprise an integral part of the garden of Chinese modern folk paintings, the creative body consists of farmers of the Han, Yi and other ethnic groups. These farmer painters with ethnic background have created a huge amount of Kunming's modern folk paintings with unique artistic features. It pays to achieve a deeper understanding of the cultural and artistic values of Kunming's modern folk paintings through a detailed analysis of their artistic features.

1. Folk Culture Image in Painting Subjects

As modern folk paintings are mainly composed by farmers, they are also referred to as farmer paintings, which contain rich folk cultural value. Folk-custom originates from social life, and can thus reflect the way most farmers understand the social life, which is embodied in all kinds of images in people's life and production activity, and which has heredity. Furthermore, folk-custom reflects a social-cultural phenomenon. Constrained by the folk cultural concept, modern folk paintings or farmer paintings display their folk culture images first in the choice of subject matters.

Yunnan's long and brilliant history of ethnic cultures and its rich connotation of folk culture can serve as the solid base of Kunming's modern folk paintings. With their unique praise

and worship of nature and visions of a better life, farmers of all ethnic groups living and reproducing in this the Red Soil Plateau naturally choose the local customs and related life and production activities as their painting subjects, so as to shed light on the artistic feature of folk culture image in painting subjects.

Let's take for example the painting Sani People by Bi Wenming, a farmer of the Yi Ethnic Group in Shilin County, Kunming. In terms of subject matter, this painting includes nearly all folk customs of Sani people (a branch of the Yi Ethnic Group). The picture includes dozens of color lumps, in each of which folk culture images such as Yi characters, clothing, daily life, farming, fishing, hunting and the like are fully displayed. By means of this picture, the painter not only describes cultural practices of the Yi Ethnic Group comprehensively but expresses his praise of the Yi life style as well. In addition, there are other paintings based on local customs and production activities, such as painting groups 1 and 2 Busy Seasons by Li Weihua, a farmer of Chenggong County, Kunming, Buckwheat Hammering and Spring Sowing by Bi Wengui and Jin Niu respectively, farmers of the Yi Ethnic Group in Shilin County, Kunming, Pepper Picking by Li Hongxian, a farmer in Guandu District, Kunming, Early Spring Fair Opening Lantern Show by Xiao Dexi, a farmer in Jinning County, Kunming, Dragon-boat Race by Li Furong, a farmer in Fuming County, Kunming, Teasing Son-in-law and The Torch Festival by Pu Guanghui and Ang Jizhong respectively, farmers of the Yi Ethnic Group in Shilin County, Spring Dance by Duan Yong, a farmer in Guandu District, Kunming. All these works, featuring diversification and multi-level, embody the characteristic of folk culture image in painting subjects, and the images that they eulogizes in the paintings also show the feature of regional hierarchy and diversity.

II. Perfection-oriented Concept of Image Modeling

Certain knowledge about the creative thinking of Kunming's modern folk artists is a precondition for us to deal with the composition concept of Kunming's modern folk paintings because it comes from accumulation of ethnic cultures. Most modern folk artists in Kunming are actually earthy farmers of all ethnic groups who have lived on this the Red Soil Plateau in Yunnan through generations. Nurtured in and inspired by diversified ethnic cultures, they have gained unique insight into and rich imagination about nature, society and life, which give their works of art full-bodied smell of the Red the Red Soil Plateau in terms of composition, subject and even color. The philosophic concept of "large and inclusive, live and beautiful" is highly valued in their paintings. While "large and inclusive" means that the artist strives for the artistic effect of integrity, symmetry, combination of motion and stillness, and perfect color tone by means of bigger size of picture and layout, "live and beautiful"

requires the paintings to be full of breath of life and reflect the beauty in farmers' eye. Under the guidance of this perfection-oriented concept, modeling and composition features of Kunming's modern folk paintings are embodied in the following 4 aspects.

2.1 Modeling and Composition Revolving Around the Main Image

Generally speaking, Kunming's modern folk artists are not satisfied with sheer mimicking objects and figures. Instead, when modeling and arranging for the layout of a painting, they want to express their praise of nature, society, nationality and life, and to reveal their free and unconstrained state of mind. Given an object to be depicted, they can form a clear picture in mind and manage to model and compose the painting according to the main image in their thinking.

2.2 Recapitulative Object-oriented Modelling Technique

In order to express their inner feelings, Kunming's modern folk artists usually infuse their works of art with true emotion, modify the objects, and construct the images recapitulatively instead of mimicking the natural objects mechanically. In doing so, shapes and styles of the objects are fully displayed, and perfection-oriented concept of image modelling held by Kunming's modern folk painters well demonstrated.

Among modern folk paintings in Kunming, recapitulative object-oriented modelling technique is best demonstrated where painting objects are wisely chosen or abandoned. By "chosen" we mean the painter refine and exaggerate the image to be depicted while by "abandoned" we mean omission and simplification. Features of such kind are not rarely seen in Kunming's modern folk paintings: disproportion caused by magnifying the character's head in the picture; stocky and robust body of characters at work to show their diligence and earthiness; omission of the five sense organs in order to display the character's attentiveness; and bold omission of unrelated images to highlight the live scene of a certain folk custom.

2.3 Liberal and Abstract Image Modelling

Kunming's modern folk paintings also present themselves with liberty and abstract in image modeling. Farmer painters with different ethnic backgrounds in Kunming have their unique ways of thinking. When depicting the object, they do not base their paintings on the object itself but on their own assumptions. This phenomenon is the result of the historical accumulation of the folk culture, which fosters and influences the composer's consciousness in painting. So we can see the liberal and abstract elements in their paintings. For instance, multicolored flowers, birds, worms and grass are liberally added to their paintings of livestock (cattle, sheep, swine, etc.), houses, haystacks etc. To emphasize the theme and

play up the atmosphere, the figures in the paintings can be perverse, with feet upward while the head downward, or with many hands. Such is the liberal and abstract feature in the painting modeling governed by the perfection-oriented concept of image modeling in Kunming's modern folk paintings.

2.4 Two-dimensional Composition of the Painting

Kunming's Modern folk paintings have such structural features as scattered perspectives and two-dimensional composition of images, both of which are governed by the perfection-oriented concept of image modeling. Our first sight of these paintings is the well-rounded scene with perfectly arranged images and no blanks. Many of these folk paintings give us scattered perspectives. Some of the images in the paintings are to be seen horizontally, circularly, or upward and some to be overlooked. All of them fit perfectly into the painting, full and substantial in content. This painting modeling governed by the perfection-oriented concept of image modeling is another feature of modern folk paintings in Kunming.

III. Liberal Choice of Colors

One's first impression of Kunming's modern folk paintings is their bright tones, which produces warm, enthusiastic and infectious effects. In the choice of colors, the painter just follows his inclination instead of the color of the object itself, thus defying the principle that colors of different things interact with and penetrate into each other. When choosing the color, Kunming folk painters attach great importance to the sharp contrast among color lumps of different images, from which the painters seek harmonious beauty in their eyes. Therefore, unlike the realistic way of painting, there is no constraint on the choice of colors in Kunming modern folk paintings. The colors of the depicted objects are the results of their inspirations, so does the tone of whole painting. That is what we call "Liberal Choice of Colors". In an exhibition of Kunming's modern folk paintings, you can see the earth is painted in bright red, black, blue, or orange, and water in black, blue, green, or grass green etc. More astonishing are the varied color choices in the paintings of figures, birds, flowers, fishes, and worms, the sight of which convinces people that they are surely the folk paintings in Kunming. Such is the unique and ingenuous beauty in these folk paintings.

It should be stressed that this liberal choice of colors is neither the painter's ignorance of the colors in painting, nor the impetuosity in the use of colors. It finds its source in the local folk culture, in which farmers from different ethnic groups have developed their own inclinations in color. The sharp contrast between warm and cool colors and diversely matched colors are the manifestation of the ethnic clothes people wear every day. The folk

cultural ideas accumulated in the long history give the farmer painters unique inspirations and insights into colors.

IV. Innocent and Unstrained Painting Styles for Decoration

Influenced by the local culture, Chinese modern folk paintings, or farmer's paintings, have different styles. As with Kunming's modern folk paintings, they reflect the multiethnic and multicultural features of Yunnan Province.

The "innocence" in Kunming's modern folk paintings can be seen in two aspects: Firstly, modern folk paintings in Kunming start relatively late, compared with that of the other regions in China. They are immature in employing many painting elements. They are inexperienced and still in the early stage. Secondly, composers of those folk paintings have a subjective desire for this innocent style in their paintings. Considering this, we should analyze this innocent style from a philosophical perspective. Innocence itself has the elements of maturation, which is the pre-life of maturity. The unstrained style of modern folk paintings in Kunming is virtually the natural revelation of their innocence in painting with no affectation. This unstrained style shows the unity, of their paintings, the roughness and delicateness, the exaggeration and realism, the concision and luxuriance, the humor and graveness. Some of the paintings are only sketched out with chunks of hues according to the painters' intentions, rough and exaggerated; while some of them are vividly produced without passing a single detail. To take a tree for example, this painting shows luxuriant leaves as well as the wing-like venation on each leaf, and even the thorns on the chestnut and some cracked nuts are vividly depicted, delicate and refined in hue. Some of the images are depicted as being quiet and simple through roughness and exaggerating, while some of them are depicted as being luxuriant and impressing through delicate painting. By drawing a sharp contrast in the picture and seeking harmony in the contract, they depicted the images as being both humorous and grave, thus making it more suitable for decoration. We have good reasons to regard many of the modern folk paintings in Kunming as complete decorative pictures. Such are the innocent and unstrained painting styles for decoration in Kunming's modern folk paintings.

References :

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