

Artist's Self-Cultivation: From the Perspective of Artistic Creation

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Abstract: According to the article, artistic creation is the conscious labor of the creator, and its significance lies in its ability to realize self-expression and evoke resonance. Artistic creation can be divided into three stages: accumulation, conceptualization and expression. In the accumulation stage, the artist needs to observe life extensively and accumulate creative materials; in the conception stage, the artist should give full play to his or her imagination and recreate the materials; and in the expression stage, the artist should transform the conception into a work of art. From the process of art creation, we can see the relevant qualities that artists need to have. Finally, the article suggests that the base color of an artist is character and learning, as well as professional skills.

1. Introduction

When we watch a lively and delightful dance, read a magnificent poem, listen to a gentle and slow melody, or gaze at a heavily coloured painting, we may be shocked by its overall momentum or infected by its detailed touches. Artworks can always bring spiritual enlightenment to the audience, allow them to have a certain stir and yearning for the present and the future, or enable communication between viewers and authors at a spiritual level. Why do artworks possess such charm? What stages must artistic creation go through? What is the relationship between the merit of a work of art and the self-cultivation of the artist? As people who work in arts related fields, they should all think about it.

2. Meaning of Creation

2.1. Definition: Conscious Labor

The artistic creation in the author's view is the creator's labor of observing the world, imagining and reprocessing it mentally, employing certain artistic mediums to achieve specific purposes and effects. It is a process of attaching time value and presenting artistic works in a hand-brain combined approach, based on the theoretical knowledge and practical skills acquired previously. In short, it is a conscious and Creative labor process of the creator.

2.2. Significance: Self and Resonance

The significance of artistic creation can be roughly divided into two aspects. First, from a subjective perspective, artists can express their emotions. Second, from an objective perspective, art works can inspire people's thinking and evoke resonance. Chinese painter Wu Guanzhong once said, "Artists are a group of people with the deepest understanding of beauty. Their job is to express the faint sadness they carry in their blood about the fate and future of mankind, to infect others and provoke thinking."

In the work *L'Ang  us* by Jean-Francois Millet, a French realist painter, he depicted such a scene: at dusk when night is about to fall, a farming couple stands quietly in the fields, bathed in the last glow of the setting sun. At this moment, the distant church bells ring, and the couple put down their tools, put their hands to their chests, and pray silently. The bells seem to ring louder and louder, yet farther and farther away. When people look at this painting, it is as if they can also hear the lingering bells, transported right into the scene. If we analyze the creative significance of *L'Ang  us*, we can also conduct the analysis from the two aspects mentioned above. First, this painting fully reflects the author's strong democratic awareness and deep feelings for farmers, as well as his compassion for the kind and honest laboring people. In the process of artistic creation, Millet gave vent to his own emotions. Secondly, the artist also conveyed his self-awareness through this work, presenting the realistic image of the laboring masses to the audience, so that more people would pay attention to the difficult life of the lower class. At the same time, it criticized the unrealistic attitudes of Romanticism and Classicism in art, and objectively promoted the development of Realism. In addition, *Barge Haulers on the Volga* by Илья Ефимович Репин (Илья Ефимович Репин), a representative of Society for Travelling Art Exhibitions, also showed the author's sympathy for the hard life of the lower class. Their artistic creations all originated from life, expressing the creative emotions of artists, while reflecting social reality as well.

3. Three Stages of Creation

Artistic creation can be divided into three stages: creative accumulation, creative conception, and creative expression.

3.1. Accumulation: Searching for the Peaks¹

Art originates from life yet transcends life. This means that life is the source and root of art. Before artistic creation, materials need to be accumulated from life. Different artists have different ways of accumulation, such as appreciating nature by climbing mountains and crossing waters, or understanding public sentiment by delving deep into society. Take painters for example. They should always pay attention to details in life and be ready to take out pen and paper to record interesting materials they come across at any time. Qing dynasty painter Shi Tao, known as the "Bitter Gourd Monk", once inscribed on his work, "Searching for the Peaks to make drafts." [1] (Chen, D.2019) This conveys an attitude and method of creative accumulation in artistic creation. It was precisely because Shi Tao climbed Yellow Mountain and Mount Lu repeatedly, seriously collecting materials and constantly accumulating works, that he was able to create masterpieces like *Landscape Clearing After Rain* that made him famous in the history of Chinese painting. In the Northern Song dynasty, landscape painter Fan Kuan initially learned from Li Cheng, but later

¹ The translation of "Searching for the peak" is quoted from: Chen, D. Searching for the Peaks and Drafting Drafts—A Study of Zhang Daqian's Landscape Painting [J]. *Idea & Design*.2019(5).P47-53. "Searching for the Peaks to make drafts" is the viewpoint of Chinese Qing Dynasty painter Shi Tao on painting creation. It is advocated that painters should collect more materials from natural landscapes and observe more natural things. At the same time, it is important to pay attention to diligent learning and practice, improve skills, and constantly explore through repeated refinement, in order to transform the collected materials into personal artistic language.

gradually realized that “the methods of former masters were all derived from objects, so I should learn from objects rather than people”. Since then, he often stayed in ZhongNan Mountain and Hua Mountain, observing “the desolate scenes of misty clouds, overcast skies and storms” [2] (Yu, T.R.2022), and eventually depicted *Snowy Scenery and Cold Forest*². Therefore, artists should make meticulous observations, be sensitive, gain rich experiences, think constantly, and accumulate small bits into something great. Inspiration will then pour forth like a torrential river during the conception stage.

3.2. Conception: Imagination and Reprocessing

Creative conception takes place after a great amount of work has been done in the first stage. Creative conception refers to the integration, rearrangement and imagination of previous materials and experiences in the minds of artistic creators – a series of reprocessing. Imagination is an important part of creative conception. Without imagination, Li Bai would not have had the loneliness of “raising a cup to invite the bright moon, our shadows form a party of three” in *Drinking Alone by Moonlight*, nor would he have had the magnificent momentum of “Don’t you see, the Yellow River coming down from heaven, rushing into the ocean, never to turn back” in *Bring in the Wine*. Without imagination, Eugène Delacroix would not have created the grieving spirit of the allegorical figure of Liberty leading people forward with the flag held high in *Liberty Leading the People*. Imagination played a pivotal role in the conception process of these great poets and artists. “For me, nothing is more real than what I have created in my paintings through imagination. Apart from that, everything is fleeting clouds.” Said Delacroix.[3] (Zhang, X.2010) “In sickness and old age, it would be hard to travel all famous mountains, so I can only clear my mind to observe the Dao, and roam them in repose.” [4] (Yang,N.2020) Zong Bing’s “Travel through Paintings”³[5] (Gao,F.2021) in *Introduction to Landscape Painting* still reflects the importance of creative accumulation, while demonstrating the abundant imagination Zong Bing displayed during conception.

3.3. Expression: From Zero to One

Creative expression is the last stage of artistic creation, carried out after accumulation and conception, yet it often goes hand in hand with conception. Creative expression is purposeful, conscious and proactive. Conception guides expression, while expression in turn influences conception. During the artistic expression process, many artists constantly generate new ideas for conception, interacting back and forth until finally producing works that conform to the laws of beauty. This of course requires the inherent cultivation of the artists.

It is through the combined effects of these three stages—accumulation, conception and expression – that exquisite works of art can be produced.

4. Artist's Undertones: Cultivation

Tang dynasty painter Zhang Zao put forward, “Learn from nature externally, attain the mind’s source internally.”⁴ [6] (Chen, J.Q.2021) That is to say, Artistic Creation should not only emulate reality but also reflect the thoughts and emotions of creators. The method to reflect their thoughts

² The *Snowy Scenery and Cold Forest* is one of the representative works of Chinese Northern Song Dynasty painter Fan Kuan. It is currently collected in the Tianjin Museum.

³ The translation of “Travel through Paintings” is quoted from: Gao Fei. “Travel through Paintings” and “Meditation” (chenghuai) -- Spiritual residence in Huangshan Image by Mei Qing [J]. *Journal of Nanjing Academy of Arts (Fine Arts and Design)*. 2021 (06). P58-65.

⁴ The artistic creation theory proposed by Chinese Tang Dynasty painter Zhang Zao. He advocates that artistic creation should learn from nature, but the beauty of nature cannot be transformed into artistic beauty without artist's internalization. For this transformation process, the artist's inner emotions and constructions are indispensable.

and emotions lies in enhancing their own cultivation. The cultivation referred to here, in my opinion, includes at least two aspects – Inner and outer cultivation.

4.1. Outward: Hone skills

External cultivation mainly refers to technical proficiency, which occupies an extremely important position in artistic creation, and its level of excellence directly relates to the quality of works. Painting, sculpture, music and other different art forms have corresponding technical requirements that require a long period of diligent study and practice in order to achieve a high level of excellence in a particular field. Technical accomplishment consists of artistic techniques and expressive ability, meaning that it not only includes proficient manipulation of materials and tools, but also the understanding of elements like color, shape and melody, as well as comprehension of expressive forms such as harmony, unity, contrast and rhythm. At the same time, creators should also possess unique memory, especially pictographic memory and abundant emotional memory, vibrant thinking skills and keen observation. They need to have their own understanding and creative approach to works in order to develop a unique artistic style. The cultivation of external skills not only represents technical improvement, but more importantly a thorough understanding of the art forms themselves, providing solid foundations for creation.

However, just having outstanding skills alone cannot enable an artist stand out in the art world. The cultivation of internal skills is equally important.

4.2. Inward: To improve one's moral character and enrich one's intellectual breadth

The common ground between artists and artisans lies in that both should possess superb skills, while the difference manifests itself in whether they have profound internal cultivation. This is mainly embodied in moral character and knowledge.

The shaping of moral character is especially important for artists. Qualities such as honesty, patience and sense of responsibility can be reflected in the creative process, and can also earn the respect and recognition of the audience. These qualities construct a stable and trustworthy image of the creator, enabling them to remain calm under pressure and take both success and failure in a composed state of mind.

The cultivation of knowledge is also part of internal skills. Artists need to have extensive knowledge reserves, advanced aesthetic ideals and profound cultural heritage, including understanding of art history, culture, philosophy and other fields. Such diverse cultural background can not only enrich the connotations of artistic creation, but also allow creators to communicate better with viewers. Profound cultural implications enable works to have greater depth of thought, which can also guide the audience to gain deeper understanding and appreciation.

5. Conclusions

In summary, creators need to accumulate patiently and practice diligently in the process of art creation, and create excellent art works through rich imagination and flashing inspiration. At the same time, creators also need to improve their personal cultivation and level of learning, including social responsibility and humanistic concern. Only in this way can one become a qualified artist and create works of art that stand the test of time.

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