

Instant Darkness: A Study of Spatial Expression in Rembrandt's Oil Paintings

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Abstract:

Rembrandt is one of the most outstanding Dutch painters in the 17th century. The expression of light and dark space is the direction of his lifelong exploration. This paper takes Rembrandt's light and dark space representation as the research direction, combs the research results of Rembrandt's light and dark space representation, and emphasizes the exploration of spatial representation from the perspective of "dark". From his early life experience to explore the enlightenment of Rembrandt's painting style, with "instant darkness" as the main line, through its characteristics, structure and causes of space expression style of Rembrandt's oil painting.

Keywords:

Light and Shade, Instant Darkness, Space

1. Introduction

Rembrandt's painting language is another way to show his personal character combined with real life. The ups and downs of his life are like the treasure house of his artistic inspiration awakening. His tough will makes him look for the limits of art in the cracks of life, let it suffer and stick to himself. As he maintained throughout his life, "My soul seeks not glory, but freedom." [1] Rembrandt never stopped trying and exploring new painting techniques in his artistic career. "Contrast" is his best expression technique, "extreme" is the most simple expression method, and the unique expression method of "instant darkness" endows painting with soul.

2. A Moment of Dark Enlightenment

Rembrandt found in his early years in the windmill mill that the rotation of the windmill formed a natural phenomenon of alternating cycles of light and darkness. "The windmill often produced ingenious phenomena inside the mill. The Windows of the mill were usually very small, but when the sun shone, especially on a bright spring day, the whole mill was filled with a wonderful light, which I had never seen before. There was a slight east wind blowing outside, and the windmill's wings turned slowly, 'cock-a-hoop, cock-a-hoop', and when it turned the window, the light would suddenly change, though for a hundredth of a second, and the whole interior of the mill would go dark. So light and dark, light and dark, it's a very sharp contrast." [2] When light

shines on the mill, objects existing in the space can be clearly observed when it is bright. When light and dark alternate, the structure of objects in the space gradually becomes fuzzy, the air is full of transparent fine particles, the space appears unusually deep and mysterious. "On account of the instantaneous darkness caused by the turning of the windmill, the landscape of the mill can hardly be described" [3] He recalled the sight of the mill that day, and later depicted the feeling in the picture, the effect of which led him to think about the changes in light and the expression of air states in space. "It occurred to me then," Rembrandt said, "that all this space -- this air -- does it really have what we call color, does it have what we call color to represent that color?" [4] From that moment on, the seeds of enlightenment, which had been planted by accident in the darkness of the moment, began to sprout in his heart.

3. Features and Structures of Instantaneous Darkness

Instant darkness is the key to open the door of art space on the road of Rembrandt's painting, which contains Rembrandt's concentration and enthusiasm for painting. It has its own characteristics of accident and polarity, which is an important direction to study the artistic language of Rembrandt's painting. From the perspective of discovery, Rembrandt found that instantaneous darkness in the mill was an accidental event. Contingency plays a very important role in artistic creation. Artistic creation is the process of discovering contingency. The occurrence of a thing must be the product of the joint action of "contingency" and "necessity". In artistic creation, both of them are prerequisites to each other. Rembrandt happened to find that under certain conditions in the mill, the light and dark changed in an instant, and the whole space was beautiful and deep, the light and air interwoven, the color was brilliant. According to Rembrandt's memory, he had seen this scene at least hundreds of times, but never had such a sudden feeling. He firmly followed the guidance of his subconscious mind, even though his family died one after another and his financial bankruptcy, nothing could stop him from exploring art. Late in his life, Rembrandt said, "For forty years now I have spent most of my time solving this problem, because I know as little today as I did then." [5] The instant darkness is the contingency factor in Rembrandt's painting creation, which is the opportunity for the awakening of the artistic style. Forty years of persistence is the inevitable condition for the formation of Rembrandt's artistic style. The contingency and necessity coordinate and change with each other, and finally form a unity.

The theory of instantaneous darkness includes two parts: "Instantaneous darkness" and "instantaneous brightness", which is the generalization of Rembrandt's painting space theory. Instant darkness refers to the infinite extension of the space in which light and darkness oppose each other. It is the ideal painting space in Rembrandt's spiritual world. The two directions of light and dark in the painting space represent the most extreme, the most extreme and the maximum expression or contrast. They are not an extreme single behavior, but a painting language formed by light and dark because the time condition is limited in an instant. Its space is like "all perceived space appears as an intermediate state between two extreme states" [6] The contrast of light and shade forms the expression characteristics of "instant darkness" painting space, so that "space is the unity of absolute and relative, limited and infinite" [7].

4. The Expression of "Instant Darkness" Space in Rembrandt's Oil Painting

The contrast between the two poles of instantaneous darkness is not only the basis of the expression of spatial form, but also the expression of the ideal space in the spiritual world beyond the formal space. On the one hand, the painting space is to depict the natural space, on the other hand, it is the ideal space of the painter's heart beyond the natural space. "Momentary" in the instant darkness refers to the limitation of light and shade on the moment and moment, in which light and shade are not natural and objective light and shadow, but Rembrandt's strong and active thinking consciousness at the moment, the artistic inspiration inspired by chance, and the ideal painting space created. Spatial awareness and visual feeling are the endless exploration direction of painting space. Rembrandt advocated the use of extreme changes in light and shade to express the artistic realm of human nature painting. Whether it is the vivid reproduction of light and shade, or the "frozen" nature of the moment, the pursuit of spiritual world expression beyond the material, are the way of space expression of Rembrandt's oil painting.

Inspired by Caravaggio's contrast of light and shade, Rembrandt created the spatial expression of "instant darkness" on the basis of "strong light and dark shadow". There is an essential difference in the cognition of light and shade between them, and there is a huge difference in the understanding of darkness. "Light" and "dark" belong to the two ends of the limit contrast, and the contrast of light and shade is the exploration of the infinite possibilities of the two phenomena. Rembrandt's pursuit of "dark", it is not clear but has a rich sense of layers and suggestive, appears profound and mysterious. Caravaggio is more extreme, his dark side is represented as "black", engulf all the darkness outside the subject. The darkness depicted by Caravaggio is unified and concise. "When the shadow part in the painting is thick and dark, the shadow will create an atmosphere of nothingness" [8] The object in the dark part is swallowed up, and the picture space is just the reproduction of the natural world. In contrast, Rembrandt's expression of "darkness" is the innovation of painting language. On the basis of the overall unity of the dark part, he emphasized the depiction of the intermediate tone, stretched the depth of the dark color, eased the excess, enriched the content, and increased the levels to expand the dark space.

Rembrandt's "dark" is empty but not empty, and the diffusion is permeated with a quiet massiness. His precious light is like gold, so that the picture is almost occupied by dark colors, creating a visual feeling of deep space, and expanding the plastic space scope of the dark part. Inspired by Da Vinci's "atmospheric color method", Rembrandt used faint hazy light in the dark part, innovative techniques, layered and stained many times to form layer upon layer of space, and fluffy brush traces to form a sense of air floating like smoke. "It makes the dark part appear rich under the control of a kind of quietness and quietness, and always makes people feel a mysterious trembling of light" [12].

Rembrandt is a veritable master of light. Light is the tool of his painting. He arbitrarily uses light and shadow to create space and gives light a symbolic life. Rembrandt once said, "When I say 'light,' I mean air, and when I say 'air,' I mean light." [9] The light he describes is an imitation of nature, not sunlight, not candlelight, but the ideal artistic light that Rembrandt brings to life. He goes beyond the constraints of natural laws, and the light is not as rigorous as in science. The light in his works does not have a clear and unified direction, showing a certain symbolic meaning. According to the needs of the composition of the picture, Rembrandt expressed the light into a condensed or diffuse state. He endowed the top light, side light, backlight and shaped radioactive light with symbolism. For example, the top

light is suitable for presenting the stage effect can better highlight the subject; There are two light sources in the dark space of "The Shepherd Comes to Worship". The light on Christ is the brightest, and the kerosene lamp in the rear is so dim. The former does not clearly explain the source of the light source, the bright and mysterious light is a symbol of the coming light. "Rembrandt light is good at reflecting the lives of ordinary people and soothing the hearts of viewers" [13] He broke the traditional cognition of light expression. He did not emphasize the function of light in shaping the subject like Da Vinci, Raphael and Titian, but pursued a new direction of light stylized expression of space.

Western traditional painting is the description of the static space of "instant" time "frozen frame". "The painter's task is to fully, comprehensively, vividly and lifelike interpretation and display of the frozen" instant "and the spatial situation of this instant" [10] Rembrandt added the warmth of humanity to the "instant" limitation, and ordinary people walked into sacred religious paintings. The Carpenter's Family is a simple and warm ordinary family. The baby Jesus is Suckling in the arms of the Virgin Mary, Anne is teasing the baby Jesus, and St. Joseph is busy at the distant window. A beam of holy light blends into this warm space. The tools and debris blurred in the shadows become symbols of everyday life, all of which indicate that this is the reality of our lives. In the Holy Family and Angels, there is almost the same way of spatial expression. It is "because of the light and darkness, the painter can detect the intimate poetry under the appearance of things, and realize the greatness and spiritual state in a daily scene" [11].

5. Conclusions

Light and shade is the core of Rembrandt's painting expression. "Instant darkness" is the enlightenment of Rembrandt's painting space expression style, which is a state of natural space presentation. "Momentary darkness" and "momentary brightness" cycle alternately, thus forming a deep space with visual gradient and emotional implication. "Momentary brightness" is used to observe the composition and existence of objective space, and "momentary darkness" is used to create the emotional atmosphere of deep space. He used the silence and concentration of life to depict the inner ideal world, inherit the spirit of Renaissance humanism, pursue the soul of human art, create excellent painting language, and form a "momently dark" picture space of light and shadow, so that Dutch oil painting art reaches a new peak.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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