

Aesthetic Potential and Boundary Expansion of Water-Based Media in Watercolor Painting Creation

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Abstract: Water-based media is the material foundation of the watercolor language system. The fluidity of water, the transparency of pigment, and the texture of support interact to build the unique visual characteristics of watercolor. Contemporary watercolor creation continues to break through the inherent framework of traditional realistic narration and explore the beauty of texture, contingency, and artistic conception of water-based media. At the same time, in the process of material mixing, support innovation, and idea expression expansion, there are also some practical problems, such as vague ontology language, superficial media experiments, and unbalanced creation evaluation standards. Based on the ontology of water-based media, this paper clarifies the internal logic of aesthetic potential, rationally looks at the boundary changes brought by the expansion of media, and puts forward optimization paths from the aspects of deepening media cognition, rationally controlling the innovation scale, consolidating material knowledge, and connecting the spiritual connotation of media language, in order to realize the release of aesthetic potential and orderly expansion of the boundary of water-based media, and provide practical reference for the innovation of contemporary watercolor.

Keywords: Watercolor painting; Water-based media; Aesthetic potential; Boundary medium expansion

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1. Introduction

The artistic expression of watercolor painting is based on the material characteristics of water-based media. Water, as a harmonic carrier, determines the process of pigment penetration, halo, precipitation, and drying, and also shapes the unique appearance of watercolor, different from oil paintings, prints, and other paintings. For a long time, the public's understanding of watercolor has mostly remained in the creation mode of landscape painting and still life sketches, taking water-based media only as a tool to dilute paint, ignoring its own aesthetic value. Traditional watercolor creation pays more attention to the reappearance of the image and

uses the watercolor effect to serve shape-shaping. The material expression of the medium itself is often in a subordinate position. For a long time, watercolor has been regarded as an auxiliary tool for color practice and sketch recording. The artistic status has been limited to a certain extent, and the artistic potential of water-based media has not been fully released.

With the iteration of contemporary art concepts, painting creation has shifted from the original reproduction of objective objects to an emphasis on the self-expression of material language. Water media is no longer just an auxiliary means of coloring, but has become an important carrier to convey emotions and express ideas. In various domestic watercolor exhibitions, large-scale works and conceptual works account for an increasing proportion, and the creators are no longer limited to the traditional sketch aesthetic paradigm^[1]. More and more creators began to break through the shackles of traditional watercolor paper and traditional watercolor pigments, and introduced multiple water-based materials and non-traditional support carriers to carry out creative practice. However, in the process of media expansion, some works pay too much attention to the novelty of materials, confuse the boundary between watercolor and comprehensive material painting, and eliminate the aesthetic characteristics of water-based media itself. How to give full play to the inherent aesthetic potential of water-based media, rationally grasp the boundary of media innovation, and coordinate the relationship between material experiment and watercolor ontology language has become a realistic proposition that contemporary watercolor creation must face.

2. The inherent aesthetic potential of watercolor media

The aesthetic potential of water-based media is rooted in the dynamic material interaction between water, pigment, and support. The transparent and translucent color layer, the irreducible occasional texture, and the artistic expression of the combination of virtual and real form the unique aesthetic value of water-based media.

The first is the beauty of layering brought by transparent color overlay. The water-based pigment uses water as the solvent, and the pigment is in a translucent state. The coverage of the pigment is weak, and the bottom color of the lower layer can be exposed through the upper layer. After multi-layer overlay dyeing, the color is not simple pigment mixing, but optical color mixing after light passes through the layers of color. The color tone is mild and subtle, and the layers are rich and delicate. This transparent property makes watercolor different from thick-coating painting, and the picture has a transparent and ethereal visual temperament. The creator can adjust the thickness of the color layer depending on the amount of water. The thin dye is clear and elegant, and the thick product is deep and thick, forming a rich tonal range between transparency and translucency.

The second is the beauty of occasional texture generated by watercolor flow. The fluidity of water endows water-based media with creative characteristics that cannot be completely preset. In the wet painting state, the pigment diffuses, infiltrates, and precipitates on the surface of the carrier with water, resulting in natural texture such as water marks, color spots, and particle precipitation. The traces caused by water evaporation and pigment particle sedimentation cannot be completely copied by human strokes, and have a naturally generated smart temperament. The creator can control the flow direction of water color by sprinkling, washing, and dripping, and take contingency as an organic part of the picture^[2]. This contingency is not a mistake in creation, but the unique artistic language of water-based media, which transforms natural material changes into aesthetic elements of the picture. Of course, contingency is not entirely resigned to

fate. The creator relies on the control of moisture, time, and paper performance to guide the accidental effect to serve the overall picture and realize the balance between controllability and randomness.

Thirdly, it is the artistic conception expression potential of the combination of virtual and real. The water-based media itself has the ability to transform virtual reality. Where there is sufficient water, the colors blend hazily, and the boundary of the object image disappears, presenting a virtual artistic conception; After the water dries up, the outline of strokes and shapes becomes clear, forming a real picture part. The visual effect of the combination of emptiness and reality coincides with the implicit and ethereal pursuit of Oriental traditional aesthetics. The water-based media is not just a description of objective images. The hazy feeling produced by the dense watercolor can be used to express the emotional atmosphere, turn subjective feelings into visual language, and make the picture separate from the reproduction of objects and images, with space for spiritual expression. Many local watercolor creators will use this feature to integrate the poetic flavor of mountains and rivers into the picture, and can create a distant atmosphere without too much depiction, so as to realize the integration and symbiosis of techniques and oriental aesthetics.

At the same time, water-based media also have simple and simple material aesthetics. Watercolor media do not need thick media paste, and rely on water to complete all the blending. The creative process is simple and direct. The water marks, paper lines, and pigment particles in the picture maintain the true appearance of the material without too much decoration, presenting a simple and natural material texture. This material aesthetics guides the creator to return to the material itself, get rid of excessive and complicated picture decoration, and realize the unity of material language and spiritual expression.

3. The practical direction of contemporary watercolor media boundary expansion

Contemporary creators' expansion of the boundaries of water-based media is mainly carried out from three dimensions: pigment material innovation, support carrier breakthrough, and technical concept expansion, constantly breaking through the existing paradigm of traditional watercolor.

At the level of pigment and blending media, the creation is no longer limited to traditional tubular watercolor pigments, and materials such as water-borne propylene, water-borne tempera, and plant water-borne dyes gradually enter the watercolor creation. The creators use different water-based materials to address the shortcomings of traditional watercolor, which is not resistant to repeated superimposition and is easy to redissolve in water. Some creators will mix different water-based pigments together and combine them with media additives to adjust the fluidity and precipitation characteristics of the pigments to enrich the texture of the picture. However, the premise of this kind of material experiment is still to take water as the basic harmonic medium and maintain the basic characteristics of the water-based medium.

In terms of support carrier, traditional watercolor highly relies on water-absorbing watercolor paper, and the capillary effect of paper fiber controls the diffusion of water. Contemporary creation carries out water-based painting on semi-absorbent and weakly absorbent carriers such as synthetic fiber paper and DuPont paper. As the water absorption of the carrier changes, water no longer rapidly infiltrates into the fiber; the pigment is suspended on the carrier, and the flow and aggregation patterns also change, producing a special picture effect that traditional paper cannot achieve. The expansion of the carrier broadens the performance possibilities of water-based media, and also frees watercolor from the single limitation of paper.

At the creative concept level, water-based media broke through the theme confinement of scenic still life and intervened in the expression of ideas and thematic creation. It is no longer just to use the watercolor

effect to serve the depiction of the body, but to take the watermark, penetration, and digestion as the theme of expression^[3]. The use of water-based media dissolves in water and is easy to disappear to express abstract propositions such as time, disappearance, and memory, so that water-based media can be upgraded from a technical tool to a carrier of conceptual expression. Many thematic watercolor creations are no longer limited to small sketches, but are developing towards a large scale, further testing the control of water-based media in a large space, and expanding the theme carrying capacity of watercolor.

4. The realistic dilemma in the process of expanding the boundaries of water-based media

While the boundaries of the media continue to widen, watercolor creation also exposes many practical contradictions, which restrict the play of the aesthetic value of water-based media.

4.1. The media experiment is superficial, and there is a problem of valuing the form and ignoring the core

Some creators unilaterally pursue novel effects of materials, are eager to follow the trend of various emerging materials, blindly superimpose various new materials, only pay attention to the strong visual texture impact, and do not really understand the internal characteristics and spiritual direction of water-based media. In the process of creation, only the effect of external texture is mechanically copied. The selection and use of materials are separated from the theme and emotional expression of the work. Instead, the stacking of materials obscures the spiritual connotation of the picture. Media innovation is separated from the noumenon of expression and can only become a superficial gimmick, making it difficult to form a deep artistic expression.

4.2. The boundary of ontology language is fuzzy, which confuses the boundary between watercolor and comprehensive material painting

When a large number of non-aqueous and strong coverage materials are intermingled into the picture without restraint, and the ontological characteristics of transparent and blending water and color are completely abandoned, the work will also lose the ontological attribute of watercolor painting. Some of the creations used excessive coverage and thick painting, and the water-based media was only used as an auxiliary ornament, which eliminated the unique aesthetic characteristics of watercolor, resulting in a decline in the recognition of painting language^[4]. In the long run, it is easy to cause the generalization of the concept of watercolor art noumenon, which is not conducive to the inheritance and development of watercolor painting.

4.3. Creators' insufficient cognition of media material performance

New materials emerge endlessly, but many creators lack a comprehensive understanding of the physical and chemical properties of materials, and mostly rely on scattered experience to create. Lack of understanding of the lightfastness, water absorption of carriers, and chemical reactions between additives of different water-based pigments, and blind mixing of materials are likely to cause hidden dangers such as picture discoloration, cracking, and falling off. At the same time, some creators are too afraid of the randomness brought by water and, in pursuit of accuracy, deliberately inhibit the accidental texture of water-based media, wasting the aesthetic potential of the media itself. Many art teaching still attaches importance to modeling

training, the proportion of media materials courses is small, and the material experiment class hours are few, resulting in the lack of systematic material practice accumulation of creators.

4.4. The evaluation system is relatively backward

In the face of a large number of media development experimental works, the traditional watercolor evaluation criteria are difficult to adapt. Many works only use the difficulty of techniques and the degree of realism to evaluate the works, while ignoring the expressive value of the material language itself. Some of the judges still stick to the traditional watercolor aesthetic inertia. They are not tolerant of experimental media works, and experimental works are not objectively recognized, which in turn limits the benign development of media innovation.

5. Optimization paths of aesthetic release and boundary expansion of water media

The innovation and expansion of water-based media should not be the accumulation of borderless materials, but should explore the potential of media on the basis of respecting ontological language, and realize the unity of materials, forms, and ideas.

5.1. Deeply cultivating the ontological cognition of water-based media and fully releasing the inherent aesthetic potential

The creator should return to the material relationship of water, color, and carrier, and take into account the internal laws of permeability control, color layer superposition, and texture generation. We should not unilaterally avoid the contingency brought by water; take the initiative to accept the traces naturally formed by water color, integrate the transparent color overlay and water trace texture into the creative idea, and turn the media characteristics into the advantages of expression. We should not blindly imitate the thick painting shaping logic of oil painting, and give up the unique language advantages of watercolor. During daily creation, you can increase the number of practice of material drafts, accumulate practical experience under different moisture and paper conditions, and improve the control ability of water-based media.

5.2. Rationally carrying out media experiments and holding the core boundary of watercolor

The expansion of media can introduce multiple water-based materials and new carriers, but we must adhere to water as the basic blending medium and maintain the basic characteristics of water-based media, such as transparency, flow, and infiltration. The choice of materials should serve the theme of creation and emotional expression, and materials should not be abused for the sake of novelty. The creator should clearly understand the difference between watercolor creation and comprehensive material creation, grasp the scale of innovation, and not cross the border indefinitely, so as to destroy the ontology language, and maintain the identity characteristics of watercolor painting while expanding the expression space.

5.3. Strengthening material knowledge reserve and enhancing the precision of creative practice

The creator should take the initiative to understand the physical and chemical properties of various water-based pigments, additives, and carriers, clarify the chemical reactions between various materials, and avoid

the storage risks caused by the mixing of materials. When using new materials for reference, we should first make a small draft experiment, fully understand the characteristics of the material, and then make a formal creation, so as to make the material experiment fall into the rational and controllable practical level.

5.4. Promoting the deep integration of media language and spiritual expression

Media is the means of expression, not the ultimate goal of creation. Whether it is to explore the aesthetics of traditional water-based media or to experiment with new materials, it should serve the ideological connotation of the work. Make the flow of watercolor and the texture of virtual and real match with the theme of the work, make the media language and emotional narrative echo each other, avoid the separation between the material effect and the intention of the work, and truly realize the unity of material beauty and spiritual meaning.

6. Conclusion

Water media is the noumenal foundation of watercolor painting. Its transparent color overlay, flowing texture, and virtual and real artistic conception contain rich aesthetic potential. The development of contemporary watercolor art cannot be separated from the expansion of the media boundary. Pigment innovation, carrier breakthroughs, and conceptual changes open a new expressive space for watercolor. However, media innovation is not equal to an unlimited material carnival. Blindly pursuing novelty in form will destroy the unique language characteristics of watercolor. Watercolor creation practice should fully explore the material beauty of water-based media, rationally grasp the boundary of media expansion, adhere to watercolor ontology language, pay equal attention to integrity and innovation, and promote watercolor art to continue to glow in the contemporary context.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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