

Art, Wandering Between Reality and Illusion

Ming Chen

Lecturer, School of Arts & Design, Guangdong Industry Polytechnic, Guangdong, China

Abstract

From the three latitudes of philosophical cognition, art development history, and contemporary art management, to find the challenges that art will face and the development trend that art will have in the future, we can find that the development of art is a process from real to virtual, the interaction between real and virtual and even the cycle of real and virtual.

Keywords

Art; Wandering between the real and the imaginary; History of art development; Art management; New trends.

1. Introduction

A few months ago, I published two groups of paintings I created in my WeChat Moment, entitled "Plum, Orchid, Bamboo and Chrysanthemum" and "Wandering between the Real and the Imaginary" respectively. One group of paintings is called "Four Gentlemen" in Chinese culture, which means the ancient literati character of steadfastness, tranquility, indifference, and ease, while the title of the other group is similar to the title of this thesis. It was very exciting that my spiritual master, Master Yuankong Fanjun of the Chinese Buddhist Association of Guangji Temple in Beijing, expressed his appreciation of the work "Wandering between reality and emptiness" [Figure 1]. Master asked me, "What is this picture?" I bowed to Master and replied, "It is an oil on canvas work that is using the visual language of unique colors, forms, and techniques to convey the universal spiritual realm." The universal spiritual realm is actually the top-level spiritual realm of human beings.

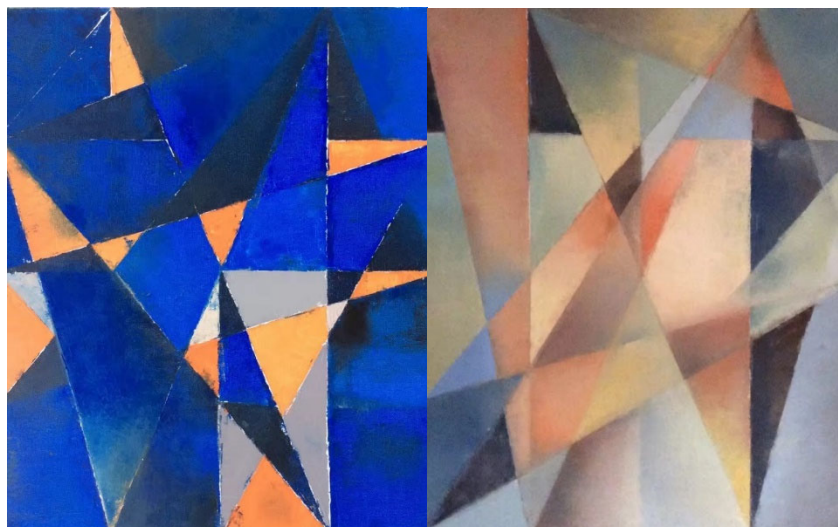


Figure 1. "Wandering between reality and emptiness" 50x60cm oil on canvas 2016

As a Buddhist convert, the philosophical outlook comes from profound Buddhism, and art itself is a philosophical category of aesthetics; thus, I tend to interpret the universe and art from a Buddhist philosophical point of view, and thus inspire my personal artistic creative activities.

So what challenges will art face in the social conditions of globalization and technological progress? What are the changes? In turn, what will be the development trend of art?

The research in this paper looks at these three latitudes: first, philosophical perception. The second is the history of art development. Economic and technological development has determined the development of art to the greatest extent. The third is the new challenges facing the management of contemporary art. By exploring these three aspects, it can be summarized that the tendency of art development is a process from the real to the virtual, the interaction between the real and the virtual and even the cycle of the virtual and the real.

2. Philosophical Perception

The Chinese painter Shi Tao of the late Ming and early Qing dynasties was a very important figure in the history of Chinese painting, who had converted to Buddhism and was both an explorer and innovator of painting practice and an art theorist. His representative works include "Searching all the strange peaks and playing draft picture" (in the collection of the Chinese Imperial Palace Museum), "Qing Xiang Shu painting manuscript volume", "Shi Tao landscape book" [Figure 2,3,4] and so on. In his book "Shi Tao painting discourse" mentions "a painting", "the law", "change", "respected by", "brush and ink", "brush and ink", "brush and ink". "brush and ink", "wrist", "dense", "mountains and rivers", "wrinkles", "realm", "path", "woods", "sea waves", "four seasons", "distant dust", "off-beat", "both words", and "Ziren" a total of eighteen chapters of painting theory [Note 1]. Most importantly, the aesthetic thought of "Shi Tao Painting Discourses" explores the most essential factors and laws of painting image structure that lead to all things from the occurrence of the universe, throughout the ancient Chinese philosophical propositions about emptiness and reality, movement and stillness, etc. It discusses the unity of law and freedom, inheritance and innovation, wholeness and diversity in painting creation, and leads to the universal spiritual realm of human beings.

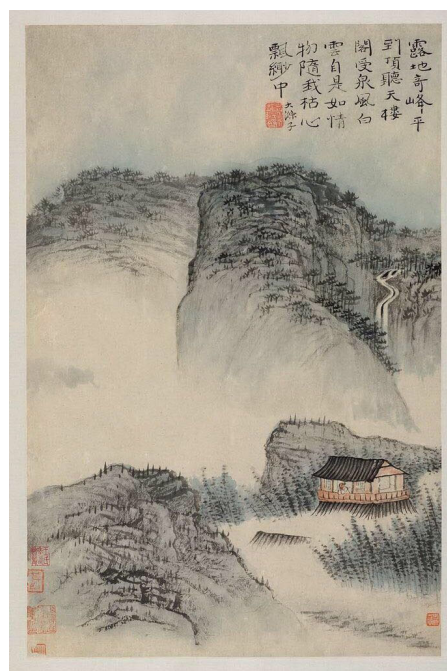


Figure 2. "Shi Tao Landscape Album", one of the twelfth, (Ming Dynasty) Shi Tao



Figure 3. "Shi Tao Landscape Album", No. 2 of Twelve, (Ming Dynasty) Shi Tao



Figure 4. "Shi Tao Landscape Album", No. 3 of Twelve, (Ming Dynasty) Shi Tao

From a philosophical perspective, art and society develop in the same direction. The development of art is deeply marked by the cognition of society, the world and the universe, a process from shallow to deep, from surface to inside, from simple to complex, and then from complex to simple again. As the Chinese Taoists say, the development of the human world is a process from simplicity to complexity, and then from complexity to simplicity, as the saying goes: "One life gives birth to two, two gives birth to three, and three gives birth to everything", and the ninety-nine return to one [Note 2]. The cognition of the nature of art from real to imaginary has not yet reached the ultimate mastery, but can only be completed in stages, and this transformation process is very long, which is determined by the objective regularity of cognition. The strange thing is that in contemporary art, the more tangible the carrier, the easier

it is to express the intangible content, while the more intangible the carrier, the easier it is to reflect the tangible content, and it has become the new consensus and new characteristic of contemporary civilization.

Everyone has his or her own philosophical outlook. Previously, I have been a believer in Buddhism for more than ten years, including three years of holding the Earth Store Sutra and five years of holding the Buddha's Sutra of Immeasurable Life and Pure and Equal Enlightenment, worshipping Buddha's meditation and reciting classics such as the Vajra Sutra and the Sixth Patriarch's Tantras. The emptiness and reality of art, I believe, are the expansiveness and subtlety, contrast and unity, and at the same time, impermanence and sexual emptiness. The connotation of my art leads more and more to the Buddhist spiritual world, and I go through artistic creative activities to confirm my personal artistic view, i.e., to concretely put it into practice. The year-long training in France was very rewarding, allowing me to clarify my own artistic direction and to make new breakthroughs in my personal artistic field. I believe that I will have better works to present as I move forward in this direction. In addition, the technique of virtual and real, the language of oil painting is reflected in the use of warm and cold colors, slow and fast brushwork, thick and thin texture, light and darkness, and other techniques. For example, the special exhibition of Johannes Vermeer and the paintings of classical masters such as Sandro Botticelli, Merisi da Caravaggio and Rembrandt that we saw in the Louvre not long ago. Among them, Rembrandt's oil paintings use a wide span of reality and fiction, and the technique is exciting and shocking, and we can feel the great charisma of the master's personality full of human compassion, as manifested in his masterpiece— A Woman Bathing in a Stream [Figure 5].



Figure 5. "Bathing" Rembrandt, mid-17th century, original exhibition site, 2017 (hidden in the Louvre, Paris, France)

3. History of Art Development

In the lineage of art history, the earliest art emerged from the activity of exploring the relationship between man and nature, in the process of exploring the world, and was oriented to address basic human needs. In Europe, for example, art originated in Ancient Egypt, Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome. Some of the earliest wall art in ancient Egypt bears the mark of the productivity of the time, such as agricultural labor and hunting. In Hippolyte Adolphe Taine's book "Philosophy of Art", he describes ancient Greece as follows: "A people always retains

traces of its native land, and the more ignorant and naive it is when it settles, the more profound the traces of it. [Note 3]" In this early stage, since writing had not yet appeared, the real art forms served the imaginary social content, i.e. imagination, thinking, ideas and other imaginary content were carried by the real forms, so for a long period of human development, art was firmly under the yoke of the real forms. Medieval art was mostly drawn from religious and mythological themes. Indirectly or directly, it took realistic depiction of reality as its point of departure and reliance, fitting the connotations of religious themes and myths into the forms of real life, thus confirming the credibility and authority of religion and myth through perfect art. This extreme realism gave rise to Byzantine, Romanesque and Gothic art. With the great progress of civilization and humanistic thought, capital society, technology and economy, European art gradually broke free from the shackles of solid forms and spread its wings, thus giving rise to Renaissance, Baroque Rococo, Neoclassicism, Romanticism and other arts. For example, during the Renaissance period, the liberation of literary and artistic thought, art gradually freed itself from the bondage of religion, entered the people and their lives, and cast itself into the spiritual world of personal heart and humanistic concern. For example, Leonardo di ser Piero da Vinci's world-famous "Mona Lisa" [Figure 6] and so on. Impressionism and Western modern art, such as the successive emergence of Fauvism, Cubism, Abstract Expressionism and other great art schools more gradually pushed the content of the imaginary and the form of the imaginary to the main role of art.

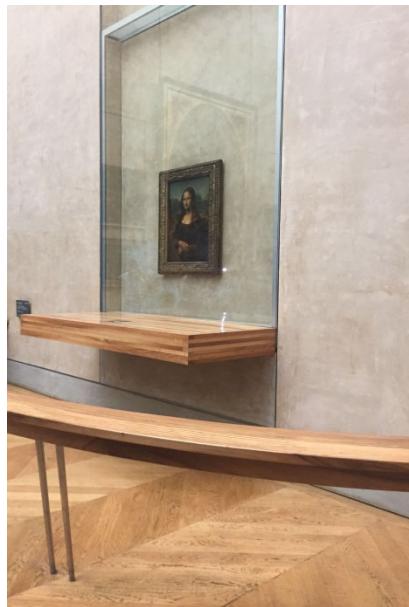


Figure 6. "Mona Lisa" Leonardo da Vinci Renaissance original exhibition site 2017 (hidden in the Louvre, Paris, France)

At this time, with the deepening of industrialization and the popularization of photographic technology, art was no longer satisfied with the exploration of the visible material world, and more great artists turned their horizons to the universe, constantly breaking free from the shackles of physical form, and sharply promoting the creation of various new artistic trends, resulting in a greater variety of artistic styles and the emergence of a number of great artists. Thus, one can clearly see such a process in art: from the virtual to the real, and then from the real to the virtual, the interaction between the virtual and the real, the process of the cycle of the virtual and the real. However, the development of art is a continuous process toward brilliance, far from reaching the end, or even just standing on the dividing line from real to imaginary.

4. Contemporary Art Management

It should be noted that with the acceleration of globalization, cultural exchanges, and the sudden advancement of technology, the development process of art from the real to the virtual has also accelerated. As a result, contemporary art and its management will face unprecedented new challenges. Especially in the Internet era, this includes new challenges to concepts, values, aesthetics, and circulation in all directions. The process of artwork completion will be different from that of the past, and the art aesthetic will also be unprecedented in the millennium. Some commentators have summarized this as the "softening" of art [Note 4], the characteristics of which precisely summarize the main trend of the change from real to imaginary contemporary art.

The new challenges facing contemporary arts management are three-fold. The old concepts and thinking system cannot adapt to the requirements, and art management calls for new thinking to promote the new inherent needs of art development and give birth to a new art management system.

First, with the general improvement of cultural and scientific knowledge and comprehensive universal education from early childhood to adulthood, art is no longer the monopoly of a few individuals, but can be enjoyed by all. Art has changed from a function that used to be mainly for the pleasure of the powerful public or for the realization of individual art market value or individual cultural value, to more often a form of mass self-entertainment. As Confucius said 3,000 years ago in China, "You are in the arts". Art is no longer just a profession or occupation, but will gradually be deconstructed into a way of life for self-entertainment or spiritual cultivation. Second, the process of art production and aesthetics will involve more people's subjective consciousness, which will profoundly change the aesthetic model and, to a certain extent, determine the value and social acceptance of artworks.

The creative activity of contemporary and future art is moving from the more closed individuality of the past to the openness of communication, and art is transforming from purely creative activity in the past to more extensive communication and more interaction with the audience [Note 5]. The relationship between the artist and the work will be more detached from the essence of art creation than ever before, and the audience will play an increasingly important role in the aesthetic process. As Eastern Buddhism has said since time immemorial, "To see a mountain is not a mountain, to see a mountain is like a mountain, to see a mountain is still a mountain". The existence or non-existence of external things is often determined by the "mind" of the audience. In the future, art will produce a thousand kinds of artistic effects when a thousand audiences face the same art work. In the extreme, without the aesthetic participation of the audience, the work of art will almost lose its objectivity of existence. This can be interpreted by the Buddhist saying "everything is created by the mind". The artwork is only a medium that provides a link, a path or a bridge to a certain awakening of the human spirit. Therefore, in the future, to a greater extent, the value of art will not be measured by the objective artwork itself, but by the changes in the subjective world of consciousness of the audience. As the objective value of the artwork declines and the role of the audience's subjective consciousness rises, art in the future must study more about the characteristics of the audience and the changes in the art vehicle.

And thirdly, art will be infused with more contemporary technological features, integration and co-location. The more influential works will be those that draw more on and import technology. In addition to its own scope of vision, art will be broader and more far-reaching than ever before, and various new materials will be more widely used than ever before, especially the functions and energy of technology will be used to enhance or spread them. Mere traditional materials such as ink, watercolor or oil can hardly meet the artistic mission and aesthetic pursuit proposed by the new cognitive era; instead, new elements such as images, sound and

light, computer intelligence, and virtual space are being applied to art as never before. For example, in a recent exhibition of contemporary artworks at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, various new means were widely applied [Figure 7, 8]. The spiritual world is being carried into a broader future by contemporary technological developments and new realms of cognition, and the development of networks and new materials offers more and greater possibilities for entirely new artistic pursuits.

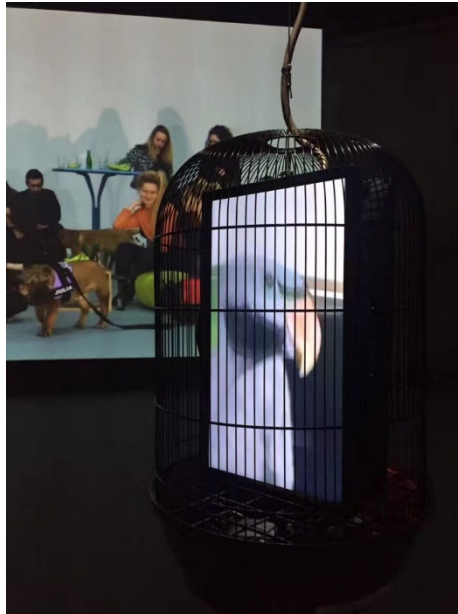


Figure 7. One of the video works of contemporary art, the contemporary art exhibition at Palais de Tokyo, Paris, March 2017

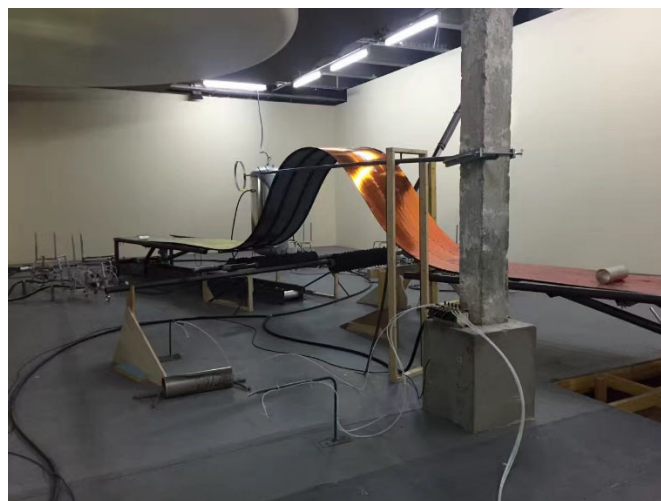


Figure 8. One of the contemporary art installation works, the contemporary art exhibition at Palais de Tokyo, Paris, March 2017

This human development from the real to the imaginary will pose a whole new challenge to art management already, requiring that the social and cultural ecology be reconstructed in such a way as to provide a better outlook and living environment.

For me personally, I am influenced by a philosophy rooted in Chinese aesthetics, while receiving a university education in Western art painting. In recent years, I like to travel between mountains and landscapes, and my works are more Chinese landscape paintings with lakes and mountains, expressing emotions and more figurative. For example, the oil paintings "May Lake Shore" [Figure 9], "Back Mountain of Temple" [Figure 10], "Peach Blossom Source" [Figure 11],

"Lake Boat Imminent" [Figure 12], "Smoke and Willow Flat Lake and Far Mountain" [Figure 13], "Afternoon" [Figure 14], etc. During my stay in France, my oil paintings of scenery series include "Impression of France II" [Figure 15], "Impression of France III" [Figure 16], "Impression of France V" [Figure 17] and so on. However, how will my art develop in the future? First, I deeply agree with the artistic viewpoint of "My Way is consistent" [Note6] of Shi Tao's painting monks, and deepen my artistic subjectivity. Secondly, the philosophical content of emptiness and reality and the artistic viewpoint of moving between emptiness and reality are both the themes that interest me in creating art and the navigation to deepen my artistic practice, guiding me to use my unique language and develop my individual style. Third, a wider range of materials and media will be applied. From a single oil painting on canvas to the use of rice paper, acrylic, cardboard, gold and silver foil, lacquer and other materials. Or not only the medium of painting, but also multimedia such as sound, light and electricity. Sometimes, materials are also symbols to convey culture. Recently, we have used traditional Chinese rice paper and western acrylic together to create paintings with great effect, such as the works "One of French Impressions" [Figure 18], and more profound cultural fusion, as demonstrated in "Vase Flower Series" [Figure 19] [Figure 20].



Figure 9. "May Lakeshore" 40x50cm oil on canvas 2016

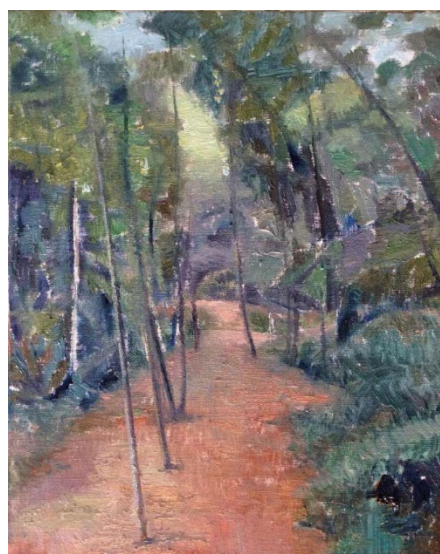


Figure 10. "The Mountain Behind the Temple" 40x50cm oil on canvas 2016



Figure 11. "Peach Blossom Land" 60x70cm oil on canvas 2016

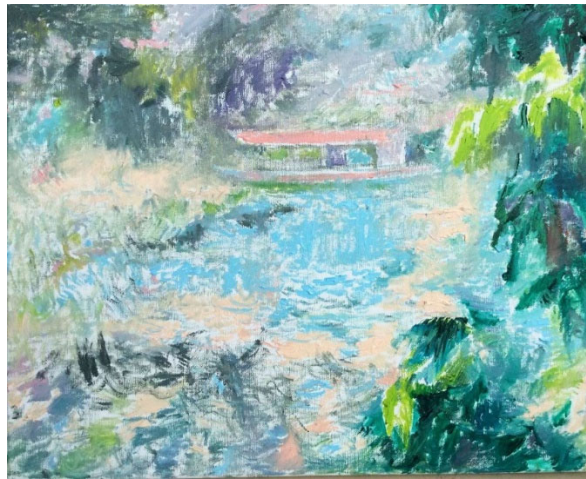


Figure 12. "The Lake and the Boat Are Things" 40x50cm oil on canvas 2016

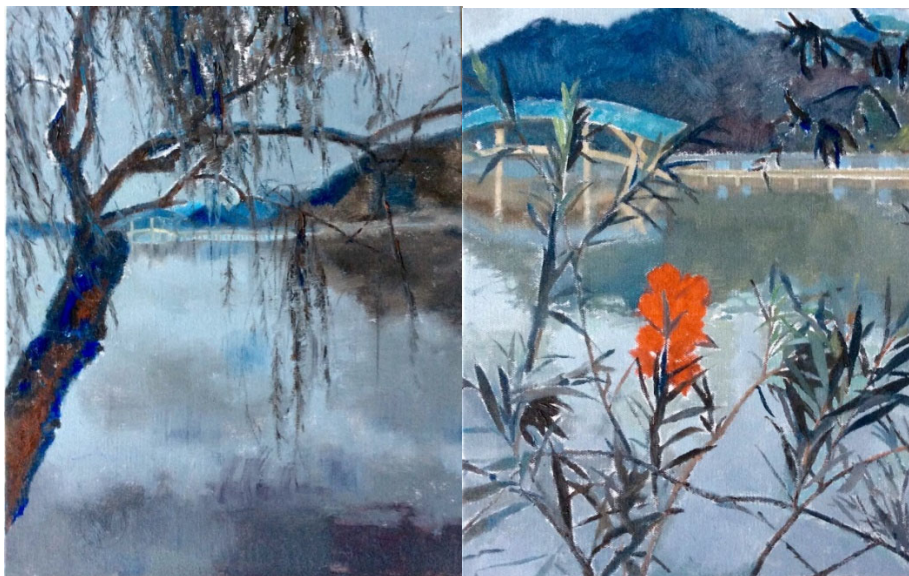


Figure 13. "Smoke Willows, Pinghu and Distant Mountains" 40x50cm oil on canvas 2016

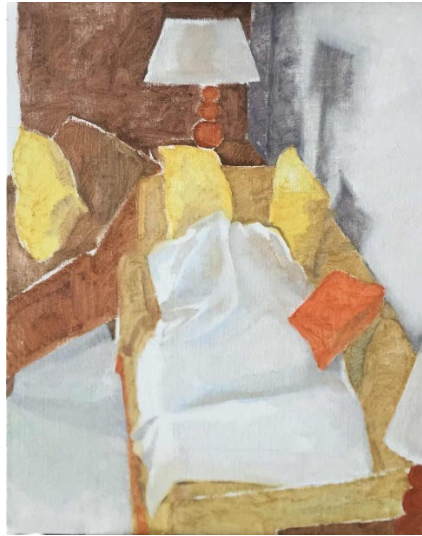


Figure 14. "Afternoon" 40x50cm oil on canvas 2016



Figure 15. "French Impression No. 2" 40x50cm oil on canvas 2016



Figure 16. "French Impression No. 3" 40x50cm oil on canvas 2016



Figure 17. "French Impression No. 5" 60x70cm oil on canvas 2017



Figure 18. "Impression of France" 50x50cm Chinese rice paper acrylic 2016

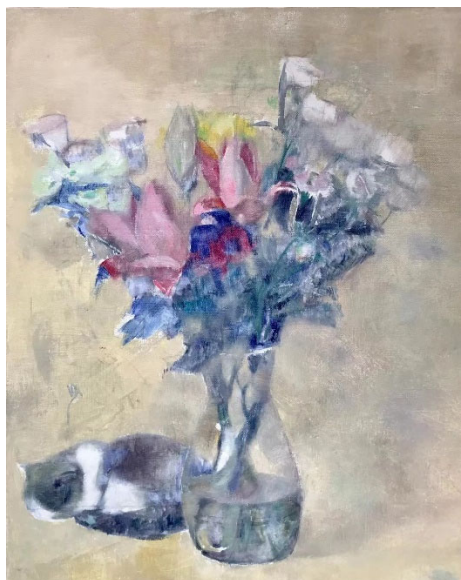


Figure 19. One of the "Vase Flower Series", size 60cmx50cm, oil on canvas 2021



Figure 20. "Vase Flower Series" No. 2, size 60cmx50cm, oil on canvas 2021

The art management market has a great role in influencing art, even producing great art and artists through the market. Every contemporary or cutting-edge artist quickly presents their great works of art that transcend their time through the market. There are many masters of contemporary art that I admire, such as Bernard Buffet (1928-1999), a French Expressionist painter who recently had a retrospective at the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris, such as the work Self-Portrait [Figure 21]; David Hockney (1937-), an important British Pop painter. (1937--) David Hockney, an important British Pop painter who had a solo exhibition in China last year; Anselm Kiefer (1923--) Anselm Kiefer, a German Neo-Expressionist painter; and Zhang Xiaogang (1958--) Zhang Xiaogang, a contemporary Chinese Symbolist painter; etc.

While presenting a more profound analysis of the laws of the market in terms of contemporary society or cutting-edge art, I honestly don't care much about the impact or outcome of the individual on the market. The market is the vane of art, representing the success or otherwise of the individual; on the other hand, existence is justified, as in the case of great artists such as Johannes Vermeer, Vincent Van Gogh, and Amedeo Modigliani, who produced great works of art without catering to the market. It is with great pleasure that I am able to find my personal artistic direction and dedicate myself to it, in this day and age of art. As an artist, I personally believe that it is more important to focus on my own internal demands and expressions, rather than just the laws of the social market or the many changes in the outside world.



Figure 21. "Self-Portrait" Bernard Buffet, 100x65cm, oil on canvas, 1949, retrospective solo exhibition at the Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris, January 2017

5. Concluding Remarks

Obviously, art itself has a philosophical or theoretical point of view on the relationship between the real and the imaginary and its wandering between the real and the imaginary. Looking at the three latitudes of philosophical perception, the history of art development, and contemporary art management, we can find that the development of art is a process of moving from the real to the imaginary, the interaction between the imaginary and the real, and even the cycle of the imaginary and the real. And undoubtedly, contemporary art management faces the new challenges of changing subjective consciousness and new technological development.

References

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- [6] From Analects of Confucius. Confucius said, "Zeng Shen, my doctrine is something through which a basic idea runs from beginning to end." Zeng Shen said, "Yes, I see." The master left and his followers asked: "What does it mean?" Zeng Shen said, "The key point of our master's doctrine is but forgivingness."
- [7] All the paintings, except for those with signed names, were solely drew by Chen Ming, lecturer at Guangdong Industry Polytechnic.