

IMAGE REPRESENTATION AND FORMULATION OF ARTISTIC CONCEPT IN OIL LANDSCAPE PAINTING

REPREZENTAREA IMAGINII ȘI FORMULAREA CONCEPȚIEI ARTISTICE ÎN PICTURA DE PEISAJ ÎN ULEI

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This article explores the core roles and philosophical connotations of artistic conception and imagery in artistic expression. By analyzing representative works of masters such as Zao Wou-Ki, Chu Teh-Chun, and J.M.W. Turner; it reveals the integration of emotion and scenery, the symbolic representation of imagery, and the interplay between abstraction and figuration in artistic creation. Drawing on personal creative practice, it examines the continuation and innovation of traditional imagery in contemporary art, presenting the aesthetic pursuit of “imagery beyond the image” and “conception beyond the scene.” The study aims to deepen the dialogue between Eastern and Western art and explore the creative and cultural significance of artistic conception and imagery.

Keywords: *landscape oil painting; creation of artistic conception; imagery expression; artistic creation*

Acest articol explorează rolurile centrale și conotațiile filozofice ale concepției artistice și imaginarului în expresia artistică plastică. Prin analiza operelor reprezentative ale măestrilor precum Zao Wou-Ki, Chu Teh-Chun și J.M.W. Turner, este dezvăluită integrarea dintre emoție și peisaj, reprezentarea simbolică a imaginarului și interacțiunea dintre abstract și figurativ în creația artistică. Bazându-ne pe practica creativă personală, este examinată continuitatea și inovația

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imaginarului tradițional în arta contemporană, evidențiindu-se căutarea estetică a „imaginarului dincolo de imagine” și a „concepției dincolo de scenă”. Studiul urmărește să aprofundeze dialogul dintre arta estică și cea vestică și să exploreze semnificațiile creative și culturale ale concepției artistice și imaginarii.

Cuvinte-cheie: *pictură de peisaj în ulei, concepția artistică; expresia imaginii; creație artistică*

Introduction

The concept of artistic conception is one of the core concepts in traditional Chinese aesthetics. It is not merely an artistic technique but also a philosophical thought and aesthetic idea embedded throughout Chinese culture. In *The Birth Of Chinese Artistic Conception*, Zong Baihua cites the words of Shitao to explain the essence of artistic conception: "Mountains and rivers speak through me, as I speak for the mountains and rivers... The encounter between mountains and rivers and the spirit within transforms into an image", The artist uses the mind to reflect all phenomena, speaking on behalf of nature. What he portrays is the fusion and interpenetration of subjective life feelings with objective natural scenery, creating a vibrant and intricate spiritual realm, profound and deep. This spiritual realm is the "artistic conception", which constitutes what makes art truly artistic [1 p.77].

"To speak on behalf of mountains and rivers" refers to the artist's responsibility to "voice" the natural world, meaning that the artist does not merely depict landscapes but interprets nature through subjective emotions and spiritual experiences. Through their works, the artist transforms the images and meanings of nature into an artistic expression. The phrase "the encounter between mountains and rivers and the spirit within transforms into an image" hints at a spiritual alignment between the artist and nature. When the artist "communicates" with nature through the heart, his creation not only replicates the outward forms of nature but also elevates it into a deeper artistic conception. This artistic conception represents a renewed perception and sublimation of nature and life.

Liu Xie was the first to introduce the term "imagery (Yi Xiang)". Since *Wenxin Diaolong* was written in parallel prose, the term "imagery" introduced by Liu Xie is merely a casual term, emphasizing "Yi" (meaning "meaning" or "intention") and highlighting the role of artistic imagination. However, Liu Xie did not provide a comprehensive explanation of the concept of "imagery" as a whole [2 p.92]. Zong Baihua believed that artistic conception is the crystallization of "qing" (emotion) and "jing" (scenery or imagery). The Northern Song Dynasty painter Zhang Zao (11th century) proposed the idea of "external teacher in nature, internal mastery of the heart's source", which reflects his understanding of the relationship between nature and the soul. In "external teacher in nature," the term "nature" refers to the natural world, which can also be understood as the universe and all

living things. Here, "external teacher" means learning from nature, suggesting that artistic creation should take nature as its teacher, drawing inspiration and materials from it. The artist must observe and experience the forms and principles of nature, presenting its beauty in a truthful and vivid manner. "Internal mastery of the heart's source" refers to the artist's inner world, including emotions, thoughts, and aesthetic concepts. "Internal mastery" means drawing creative inspiration from the depths of one's heart. Art is not merely a simple imitation of nature but requires the artist's internal realization and creativity, incorporating personal life experiences into the work.

Expression of Imagery and Artistic Conception

Zao Wou-Ki was an indispensable master in the 20th-century art history, whose artistic style embodies a profound fusion of traditional Eastern aesthetics and Western modern art forms. Drawing inspiration from the spirit of Chinese landscape painting, he adopted the format and compositional features of traditional landscapes, transforming their imagery into abstract symbols. Zao extended the essence of traditional Chinese landscape painting through the language of Western modern oil painting, achieving an abstract reinterpretation.

In Zao's works from the 1960s and 1970s, viewers can perceive his abstract and symbolic organization of natural elements such as mountains, water, sky, and earth. His paintings reveal "the structural momentum of mountains in their solid form" and "the implied movement of air in the void." From a distance, his works convey grandeur; up close, they exhibit texture and detail. Through the dynamic interplay of cohesion and dispersion, as well as the seamless connection of empty and filled spaces, Zao constructs a philosophical and abstract spatial realm [3 p.16].

Zao Wou-Ki's *18.11.66. S* is a quintessential work of Abstract Expressionism, showcasing the aesthetic pursuit of a profound fusion between Eastern and Western art. The painting intertwines blurred figurative elements with abstract imagery, evoking vague impressions of mountains, waves, or mist-like natural sceneries. These scenes do not directly replicate reality but serve as symbolic expressions transformed through the artist's inner perception.

By incorporating the Eastern landscape painting techniques of "liubai" (strategic blank spaces) and "imagery-oriented abstraction", Zao creates a space filled with tension within the vast expanses of blankness, allowing viewers to sense the profound meaning of the artwork amid its ambiguity. His artistic expression not only perpetuates the traditional Chinese aesthetic ideal of *qiyun shengdong* (lifelike vitality) but also employs contrasts of color, dynamic brushstrokes, and interplay of light and shadow to present a harmonious

coexistence of motion and stillness, transcending the figurative. This unique artistic atmosphere conveys Zao's deep philosophical reflections on nature, life, and the cosmos [4 p. 4].

Chu Teh-Chun's *Winter Memories A* (*Figura 1*) is one of his representative works exploring the relationship between color and space. From the perspective of imagery, Chu employs abstract geometric forms and color blocks in this piece, using striking color contrasts to evoke the imagery of "winter". The collision between the dark background and bright color blocks seems to reflect the interplay of harsh coldness and comforting warmth in winter, capturing a duality of opposition and harmony. While the painting does not depict winter scenes figuratively, the contrast between cool and warm tones, along with the arrangement of color blocks, conveys an abstract imagery of seasonal transition and

Figura 1. Chu Teh-Chun, *Winter Memories A*, 1988, oil on canvas, 100 x 73 cm



Source: <https://www.christies.com/zh/lot/lot-5751401>

Figura 2. Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Snow Storm – Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth*, 1842, oil on canvas, 91.4 × 121.9 cm



Source: Tate Gallery, London.

emotional fluctuation. From the perspective of artistic conception, Chu creates a serene yet tension-filled atmosphere through the interplay of color layers and formal contrasts. The geometric shapes and color planes in the work are not chaotic but are meticulously arranged to present a symbolic "winter's conception." This artistic conception not only portrays the unique stillness of winter but also subtly alludes to memories of the past and reflections on the passage of time.

Joseph Mallord William Turner's *Snow Storm – Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth* (*Figura 2*) is one of the finest interpretations of the sublime in nature within Romantic

painting, characterized by its intense dynamic expression and philosophical undertones. The steamship in the center of the composition, as the core imagery, symbolizes humanity's vulnerability and struggle against the forces of nature during the Industrial Revolution. The intertwining of waves, storms, and snowstorms evokes the primal power of nature, making the steamship appear both insignificant and resilient. This symbolic imagery is further elevated through swirling brushstrokes and blurred boundaries, transcending the literal depiction of a scene and transforming it into an abstract reflection on the meaning of human existence. Turner constructs a dynamic visual tension through the interplay of light and color, immersing the viewer into the heart of the storm, where they are confronted with the grandeur and chaos of nature, thus experiencing a sublime sense of awe and reverence. This approach to painting resonates with the Chinese artistic spirit of "*external teacher in nature, internal mastery of the heart's source*". Through his observation of the natural storm and the refinement of his inner emotions, Turner imbues the work with profound spiritual depth.

The Expression of Artistic Conception and Imagery in Personal Creation

18.11.66 (Figura 3) is an attempt to explore artistic expression through the dual dimensions of "imagery and artistic conception". The circular light source and mountains form the central imagery of the composition. As Zong Baihua said, "Imagery is the symbol of emotion and the projection of the soul." The light source symbolizes the "eternal cycle of nature" and the "rhythm of life", while the mountains represent the "bones of heaven and earth" and "the unchanging order".

In **29.11.24 (Figura 4)**, the creation of artistic conception is based on the contrast between "movement" and "stillness". Through the interplay of "the steadfastness of the mountains" and "the flow of light", the work weaves a poetic space. The piece attempts to present an "infinite meaning" through subtle changes in color, the abstract extension of texture, and the interaction between light and shadow, evoking the aesthetic pursuit of "imagery beyond imagery" and "conception beyond conception".

The artwork **21.11.24 (Figura 5)** intertwines abstraction and figuration, aiming to showcase a complex and multi-layered visual structure. The soft imagery of moonlight and the silhouettes of trees complement each other, serving both as an abstract representation of a natural landscape and as a projection of emotion and philosophical reflection beyond the imagery.

The moonlight symbolizes tranquility and eternity, while the vague outlines of the trees and distant mountains suggest the complexity and transformation of life. These images merge within the layers of color and texture, creating a subtle yet profound artistic conception.

In terms of artistic conception, the piece uses contrasts between warm and cool colors, dynamic changes in light and shadow, and the layered textures to create a visual experience

Figura 4.Chen Yuhang,
29.11.24, 2024, oil on canvas.



Source:Personal work

Figura 5.Chen Yuhang, 21.11.24, 2024, oil on canvas.



Source:Personal work

that is both dynamic and serene. The tension between the blurred background and the solid trees aims to evoke a sense of "conception beyond conception" on both visual and psychological levels. The work seeks to combine the spiritual essence of traditional landscape imagery with contemporary artistic techniques, striving to present an open and experimental visual effect.

Conclusion

In artistic creation, the artistic conception and imagery intertwine to form a deep emotional expression and philosophical reflection within a work. Artistic conception, as the spiritual core of art, emphasizes the fusion of emotion and natural imagery, while imagery serves as the concrete expression of this emotion and projection of the soul. Drawing from the Chinese traditional aesthetic theory of "External teacher, nature; internal teacher, heart", artistic creation should not only learn from nature but also draw inspiration from within the artist's inner world, merging personal emotions with natural scenes to construct a philosophically rich artistic space. Modern artists such as Zao Wou-Ki and Chu Teh-Chun have drawn on the spirit of Eastern landscape painting and Western modern art forms in their works, exploring the modern transformation of artistic conception and imagery. Through

abstract means, they present the deep connection between nature and emotion. Through these artists' practices, artistic conception and imagery are no longer merely traditional symbols; through the artist's internalization and innovation, they become important tools for reflecting the inner world, the spirit of the times, and philosophical reflection. Thus, in artistic creation, artistic conception and imagery are not just representations of nature and life but profound explorations of the essence of life and spiritual meaning, showcasing the deep integration of artistic form and philosophical thought. This inheritance and innovation of tradition allow artistic conception and imagery to maintain a powerful expressiveness and emotional impact in contemporary art.

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