

# Wu Guanzhong's Formal Beauty and Practical Application

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**Abstract:** Wu Guanzhong has created new painting idea and paradigm with modern aesthetic value, exploring his artistic ideas and creative concepts has become a necessity, his historical background and cultural context need to be patiently sorted out, and the creative concepts such as "form is the fine art itself" are all embodied in his art works. This paper discusses the content of Mr. Wu Guanzhong's formal beauty and its specific use in his practice.

**Keywords:** Wu Guanzhong; Formal Beauty; Practice

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Wu Guanzhong, in his study of traditional aesthetic thought, has carried out in-depth understanding and practical work on traditional painting techniques. He utilizes traditional ink painting techniques and incorporates his understanding of modern art into them to create art works with a modern sense.

## 1. Wu Guanzhong's Interpretation of Formal Beauty

He combines the literati painting's pictorial style with the abstraction and other characteristics of western modern painting. What he means by abstract beauty is that "in the creation of paintings, starting from the most recent modeling elements—points, lines and surfaces, we study the modeling characteristics of the modeling elements at each level and their relationships with each other, as well as the aesthetic impacts formed, and thus form a set of formal beauty". aesthetic impact, thus forming a completely new set of modeling principles, which is abstraction. "The idea that Chinese painting and calligraphy have abstract beauty is clearly stated in the article "About Abstract Beauty".<sup>[1]</sup>

I was sketching in the field, the white paper fell on the grass, the sunlight cast the shadows of various shapes of weeds onto the white paper, often composing mesmerizing images, that is the ghost of grass, which is detached from the shell, a form of abstract beauty. The orchids and bamboos in Chinese ink painting, in fact, also belong to this semi-abstract formal beauty category similar to the projection. Calligraphy, relying on the structural beauty of the line organization, which often departs from the distant ancestor of hieroglyphics and becomes a means for the author to express his feelings, can be said to be the home of abstract beauty.<sup>[2]</sup>

In the formation of abstract beauty, Mondrian used Geometric abstraction and Kandinsky used Organic abstraction, which enriched and transcended the classical principles of formal beauty with different new concepts and methods. Wu Guanzhong believes that abstract beauty is not the monopoly of Western modern art, he said: "Is it the Western modern abstractionists who first inspired people to pay attention to the problem of abstract beauty? Definitely not." He also does not agree that abstract beauty is exclusive to the literati: "The relationship between likeness and unlikeness is actually the relationship between figuration and abstraction. What is the chiaroscuro in traditional Chinese painting? The same is the expression of landscape or birds and flowers, there is a difference between the vividness of chiaroscuro and the chiaroscuro is not vivid, because there is a figurative and abstract harmony or contradiction, the elements of beauty and ugliness in the haunt of the elements, these elements are possible to pull out of the study of the comparisons. Music is auditory, pleasing to the ear or vomit noisy twitter is the key, people do not know the content of the empty mountain bird language, but can analyze the rhythmic pattern of its so good to hear. Art is visual, pleasing to the eye and cannot be seen at a glance is the key, the analysis of its formal laws is the same as music. To extract the beauty attached to the object itself is to extract the factors and conditions that constitute its beauty, which are abstracted from the object, although they are from the object.....<sup>[3]</sup>

Despite the many factions of Western abstractionists, no matter whether they want to express the spatial composition or the speed of time, no matter whether they are semi-abstract, full abstract or claim to be purely theoretical and absolute abstraction..... they all still come from the objective object and the objective life, however, this objectivity has a hidden and a present, and there is a nearness and

a distance.

Suzhou lion forest has a stone,like a lion is not a lion,originally very interesting,can be associated with people to enjoy.Some people on the side of a tail,he thought the masses with him,do not know appreciate the abstract beauty.Abstract beauty in China's traditional art,in architecture,sculpture,painting and crafts and other modeling areas play a universal,huge and far-reaching role.We should inherit and carry forward the abstract beauty,which should be the object of scientific research in the plastic arts.A large number of natural or artistic beauties belonging to the category of abstraction are not only appreciated by intellectuals,but also loved by the working people.Moreover,most of them come from the folk,and many of them are discovered and processed by folk artists."In the mid-70s,when Wu Guanzhong and Zou Deyi went to the Forbidden City to look at the paintings,they also said,"Don't think that there is a problem of formal beauty only in modern times,but the old ancestors have long been studying formal beauty in their paintings,"which shows that he believed that abstract beauty has long existed in all fields of traditional Chinese art.<sup>[4-5]</sup>



Fig.1 Wu Guanzhong "Mistakenly Entering Laoshan" 1988 Chinese painting 96cmx180cm

## 2. Wu Guanzhong's practice of sketching for formal beauty

Wu Guanzhong said in the book "South of Heaven and North of Earth", "Essay to the road, art to metallurgy", my article does not carry the road, I'm afraid that it is not enough to metallurgy, but it is just an occasional comparison after painting, it is the painting of the rest of the matter. I wrote about all kinds of feelings involved in sketching: landscape scenery, local people, flowers and plants..... Being engaged in the painting profession, sometimes you have to paint hard. Hard painting is very bitter, because there is no source of life. For this reason, decades of years, year after year traveling, most of my life is consumed in the deep mountains, old forests, springs and rocks and villages. I don't like the term 'traveling and sketching', because I have never enjoyed the relaxation and pleasure of traveling and playing in the mountains in sketching, but on the contrary, I have suffered a lot.

Painting and writing, writing and painting, is there any connection between painting and writing? It can be said that there is no connection between painting and writing. Because the painting is not an illustration of the text, the text is not a footnote to the painting, they are independent of each other, do not rely on each other. I feel that painting and writing are pursuing and exploring different aesthetics and moods of life, and even if they are about the same subject matter, the focus will not be the same. Painting and writing may inspire each other, but they should not be subordinate to each other or replace each other. To be 'beautifully illustrated', the picture and the text must each have their own appearance, but unfortunately my own picture and text are not beautiful!"<sup>[6]</sup>

Wu Guanzhong's passage is a true portrayal of his sketching journey, in which he recorded different landscapes and perceptions, and he recorded the process and origins of the works he created about himself. It is helpful in analyzing Wu Guanzhong's formal language of painting. Several themes of ancient and old trees appear in his works. "As if most painters favor ancient trees, I also have a keen love for old trees, and whenever I go to a place, I always ask if there are any old and big trees nearby, and say that there are, and I am not willing not to see them. Once, in the Wuyi Mountain Forest heard twenty miles away there is a big tree, surprisingly large, indescribable, so I and a few fellow travelers will have to go to take a look. Drizzle drizzle, in the steep and slippery trail overgrown with trees climbed the so-called twenty miles, finally at the entrance of a valley to see the lesson is indeed a huge old tree. It was full of branches, each branch as thick as an ordinary pine tree, and we circled around it without seeing each other. It sits like a mountain in the jungle, the jungle are prostrate in its knees, with a realistic approach is difficult to show its reality, from any side can not show that it occupies the three-dimensional space.

I love the old tree, not to cherish its annual cycle, to put it bluntly is to love its image of the beauty of the pale. I ran to Hainan Island, Gulangyu Island, Xishuangbanna, Nanning..... to look for big banyan trees, the gnarled trunk, layers of hanging air roots, can let realistic painters endlessly explore, can give abstractionist painting to endless inspiration."

Wu Guanzhong in sketching not only marveled at the beauty of nature contained in the ancient trees, but also through the perspective of creation to observe the ancient trees, "These old trees seem to gesture each other somewhat similar, such as white

pine, white pine bright, dry branches on the color block mottled, light green and pink-green is the main key, occasionally red, and then suddenly there will be a flash of a few black ink brush strokes, that is the dead broken branches, lining the dry branches appear to be more transparent, the most is a good subject for oil painting. Its branching dash, zigzag, more rhythmic sense of rhythm, and pine needles are evenly distributed, sparse and leakage, sieve down the stars of the sun, full of hula. The Forbidden City, Jingshan, Tuan Cheng, Beihai, Summer Palace, Thirteen Tombs.....all have tall and sturdy white pines, a few of the most expensive have enjoyed the emperor's annual salary it!"<sup>[7]</sup>

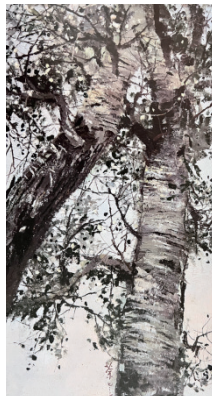


Fig.2 Wu Guanzhong, Double Poplar, 1975, 73cmx40.3cm, Collection of National Art Museum of Singapore

Wu Guanzhong has his own unique insights into the practice of formal beauty, he said: "I often like to paint densely packed city houses or densely packed mountain villages, the beauty of which lies in the densely packed and the unevenly packed. Sometimes, when I have enough time, I have to paint strictly and precisely, but the result is not as rich and varied as the effect expressed by feeling. Painters should have the ability to depict objects, but the key question is whether they can keenly capture the beauty of the object. Reason, which requires objectivity, is purely objective; emotion, which favors self-feeling, breeds illusion. Training that strictly demands objectivity in depiction is not the path to art; sometimes it is instead astray, lost, or even contrary to art."<sup>[8]</sup>

Mr. Wu Guanzhong's weighty exposition of formal beauty as well as the theories of Western modern art, his argumentation of the position of form in the art of fine art modeling, from the basic concepts to the specific methods, and a clear understanding and assimilation, fully demonstrates his deep knowledge of Chinese and Western art, and likewise shows his courage and methods of innovating for the modern art of China.

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