

# Analysis of the Artistic Characteristics of Contemporary New Meticulous Flower and Bird Paintings

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## ABSTRACT

The development of Chinese meticulous flower and bird painting has a long history of 2,000 years, including the emergence of flower and bird images with a history of nearly 4,000 years. In the first half of the 20th century, new trends of thought crashed traditional Chinese painting, marking the beginning of the modern process of meticulous flower and bird painting. In the 1950s and 1960s, meticulous flower and bird painting began to undergo innovations in content, form, and techniques. Since the 1980s, with the reform and opening up, social development, and the impact of various artistic trends such as the 85 New Wave, painters' horizons and mentality have begun to change. Entering the 21st century, meticulous flower and bird painting has gradually transitioned from revival to prosperity, with a large number of works with distinct personality characteristics emerging. These works have broken through the previous characteristics of single and similar artistic styles, as well as the limitations of painting tools and materials, breaking free of various existing aesthetic stereotypes in Chinese painting.

**Keywords:** Contemporary new meticulous flower and bird painting, Tradition, Characteristic.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Meticulous flower and bird painting is a branch of the traditional Chinese painting system. Traditional Chinese painting has its own system in the field of world art. Chinese flower and bird painting reflects the aesthetic relationship between humans and natural organisms, with strong lyricism. It often reflects the spirit of the times and indirectly reflects social life through the author's thoughts and emotions. The vitality of Chinese flower and bird painting is unparalleled by other paintings in the world.

## 2. OVERVIEW

Meticulous sketched flower and bird painting originated from ancient lacquer and silk paintings and flourished between the Tang and Song dynasties. The painting era of academy style in the Northern Song Dynasty was the mature period of meticulous sketched flower and bird painting, with the emergence of immortal flower and bird painting

masterpieces such as "Painting of Mountain Partridge, Thorn and Sparrow", "Sketch of Grasshoppers and Butterflies", and "Painting of Sparrows in a Cold Day", as well as a large number of outstanding painters with a lasting reputation. In modern times, meticulous flower and bird painting has absorbed Western modern art and developed in a diversified form through inheritance and innovation, resulting in a large number of excellent works. Some works focus on inheriting traditions, while others are characterized by integrating modern thinking, emphasizing technical expression, and having decorative features, making them unique in the art world.

Contemporary new meticulous flower and bird painting incorporates traditional meticulous language expression into the concept of Western painting's shape and color, making natural or fantasy objects more subtle. Overall, it doesn't replace traditional meticulous language, but after introducing new materials and combining new shapes and color concepts, the language expression "way" becomes novel.

### 3. "NEW" WAY OF LANGUAGE EXPRESSION

Contemporary meticulous flower and bird painters are brave enough to constantly try and explore in painting materials, color expression, composition, and expression techniques, in order to better express the emotional demands of contemporary painters.

#### 3.1 *Abundance of Tools and Materials*

In terms of material application, contemporary meticulous flower and bird painters dare to try various materials, including Japanese paper, cotton cloth, and Dacron. They transform the brush's weasel's hair of delineating into a sheep's hair with a long pen point, and transform the delicate coloring into a coarse crystal flash. In addition to maintaining the use of traditional plant and mineral pigments, the comprehensive use of acrylic, imported watercolor, and gouache has increased the expressive power of colors in contemporary meticulous flower and bird painting.

The materials for traditional meticulous flower and bird paintings mainly use treated silk or treated rice paper processed with alum. One of the advantages of silk and paper is the delicate surface texture and good material, while the disadvantage is poor color adhesion, which can't withstand repeated rendering and production processing. In order to enrich their expressive power in painting, painters have adopted some new tools in response to the limited and singular nature of traditional tools and materials, such as the use of linen, Dacron, resin cloth, etc. on the basis of the traditional meticulous painting materials of treated rice paper and treated silk. These fabrics naturally exhibit different special effect when painting due to their different thickness of textures and degree of water penetration. Various types of non-rice paper with different textures and thicknesses, such as leather paper, white tissue paper, etc., have now become painting materials in the hands of painters, as one of the exploratory elements of meticulous painting.

In the development of pigments, in addition to maintaining the use of traditional plant and mineral pigments, the comprehensive use of acrylic, imported watercolor, gouache and high-temperature crystalline pigments (also known as rock colors) has increased the expressive power of colors in modern meticulous flower and bird paintings. Airbrush is also commonly used as tools for creating meticulous paintings. The probationary use

of various new tools and materials has brought exciting new scenes and promoted the development of meticulous flower and bird painting.

#### 3.2 *Richness of Color Expression*

Color is the most emotional factor in visual art, with the effect of instantly arousing attention and emotional resonance. At the same time, color is a visual factor rich in cultural metaphors, and the cultural traditions, customs, and emotional communication methods of different regions and ethnic groups are closely related to colors.

Contemporary meticulous flower and bird painting has gradually shed traditional color concepts, namely fixed colors and "emotional" colors. It elevates the aesthetic value of color itself to the scope of picture research, pays attention to the formal characteristics of color language, advocates the creation of light and color as subjective shaping elements in works, and clarifies that the expression of color is the result of thought rather than simply observing nature, and that the expression of color in the picture depends on the needs of the scene structure. Color is a medium for conveying emotions and shaping artistic conception. Traditional meticulous flower and bird painting basically follows the method of "coloring according to the category" in color application, whether it is a bright heavy color application or a simple light color dyeing. However, due to the limitations of traditional pigments in terms of color variety and hue range, this "reproduction" often tends to be "stylized". Contemporary meticulous flower and bird painting painters have begun to strive to avoid the oneness and patternization of color, updated the concept of "coloring according to category", changed the process of "three-alum and nine-dye" with "separate dye" and "cover dye" as the basic means, and began to absorb the color methods in Western painting, traditional murals, Japanese paintings and other art forms, to deal with the picture in a unified hue, and pay attention to the relationship between black and white, color contrast, cold and warm contrast and other relationships, making the picture both rich and unified.

The emergence of such new meticulous flower and bird paintings began with Jiang Hongwei's exploration of meticulous flower and bird paintings in the late 1980s. Jiang Hongwei didn't follow the trend of the 85 New Wave, but relied on his sensitivity to color to change the traditional way of flat painting in meticulous painting and explore the color effect of Western painting in washing and

dyeing. The color application of traditional meticulous painting doesn't advocate colour modulation, emphasizing the original saturation of colors. Therefore, the color experience of traditional meticulous painting is relatively simple, lacking transitions between colors. Colors display a sense of richness through combination and overlap. However, with the introduction of Western painting in the 20th century, this visual habit gradually changed. The colors of Western paintings are brought out in the color palette. The picture shows relatively rich intermediate colors depending on the combination of gray tone relations between colors. The sense of light and shadow flows in such intermediate colors. Jiang Hongwei cleverly captured this difference, fully blending color with ink, color with color, and forming his unique and experienced color world in the grasp of gray tone. It should be said that such exploration has unique value in the history of the conflict and integration of Chinese and Western painting styles in the 20th century. The fate of 20th century Chinese painting couldn't escape the reality of a large number of Western painting visual experiences being passed down. From a certain perspective, the integration of China and the West is one of the most important ways for Chinese painting to gain a sense of modernity. However, on this path, Xu Beihong and others were trying to incorporate the scientific form of Western painting into the relatively lyrical formal language of Chinese painting, but few effectively incorporated the color sense of Western painting into the traditional context of Chinese painting. This is precisely the reason why Jiang Hongwei's works can bring unique aesthetic taste. In his heterogeneous color world, what flows is the clean and rigorous style of Song painting, which has had a significant impact on contemporary painters. The appearance of Jiang Hongwei's color treatment during his exploration period may have been accidental, but his influence on other painters after his appearance made this visual experience a creative trend and formed one of the most dynamic and spatial directions in the current development of Chinese painting.

### ***3.3 Innovation in Composition***

The composition of traditional meticulous flower and bird painting is cut and managed based on the "pruning" method, emphasizing the "starting, reinforcement, transition and conclusion" of the primary and secondary, front and back combinations between images, emphasizing the "natural" composition layout and not revealing

traces of human processing. There are two styles of traditional flower and bird painting — panoramic flower and bird and broken branch flower and bird. In terms of techniques, panoramic flower and bird painting can be regarded as a treasury vault of "all element" expression techniques, not only with the techniques of delineating and filling colors, but also being the birthplace of ink freehand brushwork. The language skills that Chinese painting can have at are almost fully demonstrated by it. Broken branch flower and bird painting is to create a vast space that is constantly supplemented and deepened through association by capturing a certain part of the scenery and utilizing the characteristics of spatial extension. It is based on seeing the small from the big, displaying infinity through limited space, creating many assumptions in appreciation to supplement and create different artistic conceptions. Its composition is to highlight the theme of flower and bird itself, often abandoning many auxiliary scenery. Therefore, the painter must repeatedly analyze and study the insertion, direction, thickness, curvature, and relationship with other branches. Therefore, the formal beauty of the schema is a manifestation of the painter's highly difficult language accuracy.

The traditional composition of flower and bird paintings is based on principles with profound cultural heritage, such as using one as ten, reckoning blank as inked, seeking echo, focusing on reuniting and dispersing, and being good at hiding and revealing, just like Chinese opera art, which believes that the stage performance art of "seven or eight people expressing a powerful army of millions of people, five or six steps travelling all over the world" is the characteristic of Chinese culture. However, modern meticulous flower and bird painting mainly focuses on full composition. In current national art exhibitions and various types of flower and bird painting exhibitions, over half of the meticulous flower and bird painting works are fully composed. In modern meticulous flower and bird painting composition, more emphasis is placed on the concept of composition in design. For example, decomposition composition refers to dividing a painting into several pieces, redistributing its position, or changing its composition from color to achieve decorative beauty. There are also some compositions that aim to seek changes in traditional compositions and create works that seek novelty and diversity through symmetrical compositions. Contemporary meticulous flower and bird painting often has rich content, grand scenes, and full composition, giving

people a strong visual impact, emphasizing the "subjective" factors of composition, drawing on and absorb the principles of modern plane composition, and paying attention to the clever comparison of key elements, lines, and surfaces on the screen, forming a combination of new order. When necessary, such works will weaken the spatial sense of the picture, strengthen the trend of composition and the handling of tone, be adept at cleverly arranging the virtual and real, and express the ethereal artistic conception, using thick and hazy large color blocks as the space and background of the main object, making the picture both tight and loose, light and thick, and combining the virtual and real, achieving moderate relaxation and rhythm in close and meticulous painting. At the same time, such works blur the prominent images, or cover dye them on specific images to weaken their contrast, or break through the constraints of meticulous painting lines, giving the appearance of objects a sense of fuzziness with emptiness and softness.

### **3.4 New Technique Expression**

Traditional meticulous flower and bird painting is basically created through sketching, coloring, and dyeing. The later developed "boneless" painting method is to "collide with water and color" on non-permeating treated silk or rice paper, weakening the role of line drawing. Modern new meticulous flower and bird painting has explored various methods of image processing and expression based on traditional techniques, such as rubbing, wadding, staining, washing and wiping, local alum dyeing, and the ultimate use of "collision with water and color", enriching the color expression and better expressing the painter's aesthetic ideas. The comprehensive application of various techniques and treatment maintains a technical level of "high difficulty" and "complexity" in the painting, distancing modern meticulous flower and bird painting from traditional meticulous flower and bird painting on a "technical level".

## **4. "NEW" CONSTRUCTION OF STYLING ELEMENTS**

The selected styling elements of the new meticulous flower and bird painting serve the painter's preset content needs. The image elements they adopt come from the vast world and are not constrained by traditional rules. They may reorganize various elements to make the construction novel or even bizarre.

### **4.1 Wide and Rich Theme Content**

The theme of flower and bird painting is the natural flowers, birds, fish, and insects. In the eyes of ancient Chinese people, these small creatures in nature had emotions and were able to communicate with people. The ancient Chinese observed them with friendly eyes, expressed them, and endowed them with eternal vitality. And such eternal vitality is the product of painters' understanding and recognition of the changing laws of the universe, nature, and social movements they experience in real life, as well as their own insights into life, once again using the flowers, birds, fish, and insects of nature as carriers and media in their spiritual space to express themselves.

In principle, most flower and bird paintings express the phenomenon of praising and loving life in a Bixing way. The content is mostly transformed and evolved from the themes of "golden birds exploring flowers", "bees and butterflies lingering on flowers", and "swimming fish playing with lotus" in folk art, to the flower and bird themes in "elegant culture", as well as popular folk themes with certain meanings such as "extending longevity and auspiciousness", "congratulating the New Year", and "wealth and fortune". The subject matter of Chinese flower and bird painting can be visual narrative poetry with "story plot", visual logic poetry without "story plot", or expressive visual recreation that integrates narrative and logic. The primitive form of pomegranates painted by Xu Wei is also closely related to the concept of using pomegranates as a metaphor for "many children and many blessings" in folk art. The ideas and theories of Chinese literati painting have had a profound impact on flower and bird painting. The expression forms of Chinese flower and bird painting, such as borrowing objects to express emotions and feeling the scenery and painting with sudden interest, are all based on this, and their anthropomorphic and even exaggerated deformation characteristics are also derived from it.

Today's meticulous flower and bird paintings continue the characteristics of the simple essence of the ancient people in terms of the expansion of the theme, and emphasize the close connection with their living space. They feel life with the eyes of modern people, and directly contact the nature to create a moving artistic composition full of colorful inner beauty. With the change of traditional aesthetic concepts, meticulous flower and bird painters have broadened their themes in order to better express the thoughts and emotions of modern

people and reflect the spirit of the times. Therefore, in addition to traditional themes such as plum blossoms, orchid, bamboo and chrysanthemum, peony, *Paeonia lactiflora*, and lotus that were often painted by predecessors, there are also themes that were not previously explored or considered "not suitable for painting" by predecessors, and even unknown to the public. Of course, common crops such as grains, vegetables, melons, and fruits, as well as grass and insects, are often depicted by modern painters. Modern meticulous flower and bird painters are more willing to express the flower and bird sentiments in four seasons, wind, dew, fog, moonlight, rain, snow, and other conditions, reflecting the theme content from the perspective of modern meticulous flower and bird painters.

#### **4.2 Styling Features**

Excellent meticulous flower and bird paintings often have a fusion of emotion and scenery, meaning and environment, as well as vivid features in image shaping, which have a strong appeal and make viewers associate themselves through the transfer and imagination, as if they were personally on the scene. Chinese ancient painters could paint without facing the real scene and wield their brushes to create natural charm, indicating that Chinese ancient painters created their paintings from the perspective of reflecting the essential characteristics of the object.

The expression of personality characteristics in the styling techniques of Chinese flower and bird paintings includes: First, under the guidance of the concept of "personification", the style of Chinese flower and bird painting is always depicted in a locally enlarged and microscopic manner, resulting in its proficiency in meticulous carving and delicate emotional expression. Second, in the process of expressing the emotions of the creative subject, flower and bird paintings also pay special attention to the expression of artistic conception. Artistic conception is an artistic effect formed by the fusion of the objective picture depicted in a painting and the expressed thoughts and emotions. Third, in the process of emphasizing the creation of the environment, there are special and wonderful aspects in the composition of the methodicalness and the blank composition of the picture. These wonderful aspects are reflected in two fields: One is the special understanding of "the great void virtual space" in the picture, which is the spatiotemporal relationship with subject attributes, and the other is

the extremely exquisite "painting montage" technique in its artistic composition.

The innovation and transformation of flower and bird painting in terms of styling principles and composition have significant limitations. To break through the old mode, it is obvious that acting blindly is not feasible. The only feasible way is to delve into real life and experience it, delve into the collision of contemporary art environment, search for new visual images, capture new flower and bird traces and shapes, and then create new visual language symbol forms.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

Based on tradition, drawing on the strengths of others, absorbing the essence of Western art, and characterized by inclusive development, the new meticulous flower and bird painting comes into being. Under the influence of other categories of paintings, painters begin to research and develop painting materials, update techniques, expand themes, and explore new forms of expression. They extensively use special techniques and create texture effect to highlight the picture, resulting in significant changes in the expression techniques and creative concepts of meticulous flower and bird painting. However, some drawbacks also emerge as a result. If painters completely rely on special effect and texture as the main means of creation during this process, and even abandon brushes and other essential tools and materials for traditional Chinese meticulous painting, and regard "the odd" as beauty, it will change the true nature of Chinese painting. Painters should not neglect the essence left by predecessors and the most fundamental aspects in Chinese painting while innovating and expressing individuality. This is worth pondering deeply.

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