

Landscape of Mind —Valencia's Painting

The work of Manuel Valencia shows such comprehensiveness that it is hard to define it as a particular kind of painting. This is the result of the openness of expression in his art pieces, which leads to a broad interpretation that transcends the limitations of tradition vs. modernity and East vs. West. His paintings leave a deep impression upon the viewer due to the infiltration and mixture of different mediums that cannot be isolated or enclosed, creating a clearly unique style in the combination of paper, pencil, color and form. Of course, uniqueness and expression are interrelated. Expression is connected with concept, and concept is expressed by form. In other words, if a painter is not able to get an insight of those relations, his or her uniqueness comes to zero. For an artist, a strong personality means bringing out new ideas from the inside in terms of language, concept and form. Valencia has fully believed in his own instinct and judgment. He flexibly deals with the visual relationship between color and pencil, material and form, whether that means keeping a balance between different colors or breaking that balance to create a feeling of flaw; showing relief in the combination of graphics and materiality, or confrontation between mediums. He has studied and experimented all those relationships with delicacy and from his conceptual perspective, building a perfect infrastructure and open language, and resulting in multiple meanings and paths for interpretation.

Valencia has depicted landscape as his subject matter. However, his landscapes are out of ordinary people's imagination. He has interpreted landscape into the following three levels of meaning: Landscape as a signifier of still time and space; landscape as a poetic metaphor; and landscape as a mixture of narratives. In Valencia's painting, a landscape describes the extended process of change in a unit of time or space when mixing individual expression and culture. It is the outcome of his choice, a filtration and editing of images, materials and forms. Therefore, his landscapes give way to a myriad of layers of perspectives. Generally, a landscape is a motif of narrative depicting the relations with natural and social environments. The painter's subjectivity plays a driving role in the use of a piece of landscape as a narrative unit. Thus, what is being chosen and what is being removed become the elements which create a metaphysical visual expression. In his regard, landscape is not an objective record, but a subjective expression. Valencia shows enough artistic sensitivity to turn an objective landscape into the contemplation and metaphor of a subjective landscape. These two levels are completely deprived from the temptation of objective narrative, leading to the viewer's psyche. This is a form of contraction and expansion of the time and space hidden in the images, in which the changes in landscape illustrate the scenery of the human heart in a gradual process that goes from contemplation to experiencing and ends in meditation. As a result, his works bring the viewer into a space of new imagination. Some of the images may be thought of as heavy rainfalls, vast darkness, calm sea, poetic landscape, infinite

universe, broken walls, abstract representations... This kind of open language has undoubtedly been reflected upon the core concept of his paintings.

For Valencia, it doesn't matter whether he is describing a figurative landscape or an abstract image, his expression's motive and process implies a binary relationship between memory and imagination, experience and sentiment, contemplation and meditation. He focuses on exploring and showcasing aspects hidden in the landscape. In other words, this is not a just relationship between form and content, materials and concept, but rather a new and contemporary expression of landscape linked to nature, society, tradition, language and experience. All of this can only be attained through the artist's unique methodology and the right use of paper, rope, plasters, cardboard, pencil, acrylic, ink and wash in form, as well as through a smooth handling of proportion in composition, delicacy and heaviness in color, lightness and darkness in the use of ink, and freedom and rigidness in completeness. As we can see, his paintings reflect his aesthetic taste and pursuit of simplicity in texture, wrinkles, grains, abstraction and reality, movement and stillness. Sometimes he even attaches images, adds drawings or handwrites random characters on the already finished piece of work, revealing the beauty of hand-made painting, creating a sense of ebb and flow on the peaceful texture of the rice paper, and adding movement to the picture with a perfect sense of verse and rhythm. This landscape construction method make the viewer feel as if intoxicated in the realm of poetry.

We could say that Valencia's work fully presents the characteristics of a "physical painting". He masters the use of traditional Chinese *Xuan* rice paper as his media of expression, adding on top daily life objects in order to enhance its vivid and expressive language. Of course we cannot deny the "physical" aspects of his paintings, but the full extent of use of that "physicality" further indicates that the material media itself is both an entity of objectivity and subjectivity. In other words, it has the function of words, and the implication of the multi-layered referential meaning. From such a perspective, Valencia spreads live materials on rice paper, thus changing the expression of unity in paper and brush, and dipping into a form of painting that uses those materials as if they were words, instantly activating the meaning of the painting and the connotations of the objects, and assuring the inseparable relationship between form and material. Thus, in order to understand the visual implications of his work, one must comprehend materials and implied meanings in the physical properties of painting. It is obvious that the artist has given spiritual connotations to the materials in his series of works, and presented a wide variety of shape and texture in a way similar to sculpture or collage. This confirms that material is no longer reduced to lines and color, but also a way to highlight the performance of independent media. It also means an interactive relationship between the material itself and the formal infrastructure of meanings within the painting (i. e., imagery, semantics and metaphor).

In addition to materials and subject matter, one of the most impressive aspects of Valencia's work is that his small-scale paintings on rice paper (CARTAS) can be installed into a larger piece of work, linking originally separate drawings in a much bigger whole. Each piece composes its visual expression by space, material and color, highlighting a closed and self-insurmountable world, despite the intuition to comprehend the inner realm of silence, quiet, Zen and meditation.

It is clear that Valencia has very well interpreted the dimension of contemporary art expression. His creativity started from simple aesthetics, adopting open methodologies and image narrative, highlighting materials to express the purity of spiritual nature and the subjective wishes of an artist, and offering infinite imagination to its viewer.

Curated by Huang Du

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