

See Bell-Picasso's *Avignon Girl*

Xin Wu^{1*}, Ying Wang²

¹ Shanghai Science and Technology Museum, Shanghai, China

² Huangpu District Financial Development Service Center, Shanghai, China

Email Address

2194962621@qq.com (Xin Wu), 806764376@qq.com (Ying Wang)

*Correspondence: 2194962621@qq.com

Received: 23 October 2021; **Accepted:** 15 November 2021; **Published:** 25 November 2021

Abstract:

This paper analyzes Picasso's famous painting *Avignon Girl*, the leader of cubism in modern painting school, and tries to explore the practical significance of artistic theory. Through the viewpoint in *Art* written by Clive Bell, this paper concretely explains the original artistic meaning and geometric form in the artwork of *Avignon Girl*, affirming Picasso's exploration and attempt for modern art and his outstanding contribution to finding new vitality and development direction of contemporary art.

Keywords:

Picasso, Bel, Avignon Girl

1. Introduction

Avignon Girl is the masterpiece of Picasso, a master of cubism in modern painting school, which marks the beginning of Picasso's analytical cubism. Some of his first "deviant" attempts in this painting seem to coincide with Clive Bell's views in *Art*. In Clive Bell's book *Art*, this paper puts forward a relatively straightforward point of view on the concept of art, and the actual art can arouse the aesthetic emotion of human beings. Among these different aesthetic emotions, it can find the commonness that touches people's hearts—meaningful forms. In the picture of *Avignon Girl*, these "meaningful forms" seem to be everywhere. Picasso took five prostitutes in Avignon Street as painting objects, which is the origin of the name of this painting. The five naked models pose with different enchanting postures in what seems to be blue, white, and tan scenery without perspective and depth of field. Except that the two characters' faces are relatively neat, the faces of the remaining three characters are seemingly deliberately destroyed by asymmetrical modeling lines or dark brown color blocks, creating a mysterious and strange feeling that no one can say. Also, regardless of the models from each angle, their noses are painted as sides, and the parts of their limbs are painted as different geometric shapes. In a word, *Avignon Girl* seems to have been "disintegrated" by lines and colors, but from a distance, "meaning" and "form" are full of pictures.

2. Primitive Art

Bell believes that primitive art is the art that touches people's hearts. It is not difficult to see that Picasso even used deliberate techniques in the right half of the

picture to paint the faces of two female characters into masks with religious ceremonies of African tribes. The original African characters in his works are depicted with highly generalized shapes and abstract and straightforward lines. The black and tan color lines make their forms rough and wild, hard and full of tension. In *the introduction of Picasso Cubism-African Wood Carving*, Faye Wong mentioned that the mask works of African primitive people are related to tribal beliefs. It contains their ancestor worship and maternal worship thoughts [1]. Picasso's mask lines are simple, with few tedious details, emphasizing rhythm and extraordinary formal temperament. Most of them are abstract geometric shapes in shape, and the essential characteristics of African blacks are composed of simple black and white and brown, with broad cheeks. The quiet facial expression, exaggerated eyes, and slightly plump lips make it full of the mysterious ritual feeling of primitive tribal religion. Picasso grasped these elements and used the proportion of the human body that did not conform to the conventional structure in the picture, which reflected the sense of abstraction and decoration, and emphasized that he did not pursue the shape of modeling but paid more attention to the resemblance of meaning. In *Research on Picasso Painting Art*, Su Hongxing also mentioned that "Primitive art occupies an important and valuable position in Picasso's creative career", and "Picasso's interest in Primitive Art is so strong, which may be attributed to his profound African ancestry" [2]. Since Picasso's *Avignon Girl*, his love and application of primitive art have been out of control. He constantly explored and tried, from analytical cubism to comprehensive cubism, and found a creative method like ancient primitive people using the most superficial formal art to approach the gods in their hearts. Picasso accurately extracted primitive people's art and advocated simplicity. It is the purest ideological art to use symmetrical and repetitive creative methods, show the mysterious and unpredictable meaning under the mask of ancient Africa with seemingly clumsy and straightforward painting skills, and return to nature and the gods in the heart in this general way. Perhaps the innate "superstition" and "awe" in human nature make this kind of power in primitive art detached from nature. Have a magic power that can shake people's hearts.

This also confirms Bell's statement that human perception of "meaningful forms" may come from the power of religious belief, echoing some natural "gods" hidden in human nature. It is precisely because of the limited intelligence and ability of primitive people that their "art-like" has put an end to camouflage, and they have no skills to reproduce and show off accurately. So they will try their best to create meaningful forms. And this kind of "form" is inspired by their purest and holy thoughts-offering sacrifices to nature and gods.

3. The Geometric Composition

Bell mentioned in *Art* that meaningful forms are composed of the combination and relationship of lines and colors and the aesthetic impression. It can be seen from *Avignon Girl* that Picasso gave up the description of the natural human body structure proportion. He firmly grasped the external performance characteristics of the model and re-dissected the human body structure modeling. Each limb part is regarded as a single geometric facepiece. Its deformation is exaggerated: the ugly and stiff faces of girls are composed of geometric color blocks pieced together, and straight lines on the outline replace curves, which deconstruct and separate the angular human body with black or white stripes, but they are not messy [3]; On this basis, Picasso also completely denied the traditional painting method since classicism with the primary

purpose of showing the depth of three-dimensional space on two-dimensional images, opened up new horizons, studied the contents of his works from multiple angles and dimensions, and then integrated and reshaped multi-point videos, resulting in three-dimensional sight and developing multi-dimensional perspectives. Hard to imagine, at the beginning of the 20th century, Picasso dared to create avant-garde works that were difficult for ordinary people to understand. Even today, it can make people feel strange. Even Matisse, a pioneer artist and representative of Fauvism at that time, said Picasso might be crazy. According to the present research situation of Picasso by domestic experts and scholars, Wang Jiachun's *Thoughts on Picasso's Painting and Speech* and Wang Juan's *On Picasso's Realization of Emotional Consciousness in Painting Creation* all agree that *Avignon Girl* is the beginning of Picasso's cubist art [4,5]. Thus we can guess how much sensation the first cubist work caused to public opinion in the art world at that time. However, compared with his later comprehensive cubist works *Dream*, *Girl in Front of the Mirror*, and *Guernica*, it can be seen that the former is more hesitant and careful in shape and color, and this painting shows his experimental attitude of longing for breakthroughs but trying carefully. Also, Cezanne's influence on Picasso must be mentioned. Su Hongxing mentioned in *Picasso Painting Art Research* that "Picasso once said: If I know Cezanne, he is my only teacher. I spent it ..." and "Whoever understands Cezanne will understand cubism" [2], which is in line with Bell's "I noticed that the most distinctive feature of Cezanne's works is to insist on pursuing the highest goal of 'meaningful form.' Excited ...", the admiration for Cezanne coincides with the affirmative view. As the leader of a post-impressionism, Cezanne emphasized the simplification of everything in nature into spheres, cylinders, cones, etc. He tried his best to eliminate the original figurativeness in objects to construct the geometric aesthetic feeling of pictures. And inherit the use of impressionist colors. The structural composition of the image is decided by color blocks with different shapes and sizes [6]. Picasso developed and improved on Cezanne's foundation. Although the geometry of *Avignon Girl* was still conservative, he abandoned the figurativeness of Cezanne's painting to the objective world. He added the enlightenment of the relativity theory of scientific development at the end of the 19th century. Breakthrough the concepts of multi-space and multi-angle video, Infect your thoughts and abstract forms in your works. Perhaps there is some coincidence between Picasso and Bell in their ordinary cognition of artistic practice and artistic theory. Still, this new artistic creation mode composed of geometry and artistic aesthetics emphasizing formal abstraction has injected the freshest blood into the development of modern art after the 20th century.

4. Artists

Bell said that comfort is the enemy of artists. Looking back at the number of Picasso's numerous works of art, the academic circles generally divide them into Blue Period (1900-1903), Rose Period (1904-1906), Cubism Period (1907-1916), Classical Period (1917-1924) and Surrealism Period (1925-1925) [7]. He didn't find the threshold of cubism, and before being appreciated, people were poor and helpless for a long time. To survive, He had to live frugally and work day and night to do farm work. Especially in the blue period, his family was even cut off from him. He lived alone in the street full of desperate and poor people. His best friend committed suicide and died because of brokenheartedness [8]. Therefore, people say that his works during this period reveal blue melancholy and sadness. Not only that, but Picasso was also a tremendous communist fighter. During the Nazi era in Germany, he refused the inducement of fascism and painted behind closed doors. He joined the French

Communist Party and actively advocated and maintained peace. He created a series of representative works, such as *Guernica*, *Bones Repository*, and *Peace Dove*. Throughout Picasso's life, no one will say that his life is unhappy.

Indeed, compared with Van Gogh and others, he had the yearning that all artists should have. A steady stream of women around us, great wealth, and a high international reputation. However, as an artist, his thoughts are not indulged in real life of drunkenness. Still, he keeps moving forward with ongoing thinking and high fighting, constantly challenging himself in the past and trying different artistic styles, creating the purest works of art. Perhaps coincidentally, Bell's aversion to the "upbringing quality" among artists and the academic class is also reflected in Picasso. When Picasso was not famous in his early years, he lived with people in poor neighborhoods. He looked at them with his eyes and drew pictures of their sufferings. In addition, He never stopped paying attention to women's sex and love, whether in life or art; When he was a child, he was infected by his father and began to study traditional art. Later, he was admitted to the San Fernando Fine Arts School in Madrid to receive formal traditional art education. However, later, he did not hesitate to confront his relatives and took the road to leave the academic school. Or all of this, as Bell said, education has bound the creativity of human artistic thinking, and the Academy of Fine Arts has used painting skills to wipe out the instinct of human expression of emotion, while real artists are using thoughts and emotions to create real art. Perhaps it is precise because of this that Picasso can boldly create and constantly think.

5. Conclusions

Picasso (October 25, 1881-April 8, 1973) and Bell (1881 -1964); *Avignon Girl* (1907) and *Art* (1913-1949), an artist's shocking works of art and an art theorist's subversive artistic thoughts appeared at the same time in an era with rich tacit understanding. Perhaps it was a coincidence that they had agreed, but it is unknown that Picasso's artistic practice of cubism was closely linked with Bell's creative theory of "meaningful form", which triggered an academic discussion of "what is art?" which was inconclusive by later generations. Maybe there is another possibility that Picasso's *Avignon Girl* has no shadow of deliberate form at all. The so-called aesthetic feeling in shape is just a meaningless smear game made by him after a meal. All this is the novelty of art theorists in creating new art, their aversion to traditional art, and their wishful blind and profound speculation that they urgently launch a new art revolution in the quiet and stuffy art world.

They are looking back and looking forward to the future. The world affirmed Picasso, Bell, and the challenge of "meaningful form" to the traditional breakthrough and authority in the constant renewal and iteration of art, which revived the long-lost art with new vigor and vitality. The spirit of doubt and negation should not be discarded. The *Avignon Girl* is a work of art? Should artists take "meaningful form" as their true artistic standard? Is it because of the meaningful form that it has brought so many unbearable things to the present art world? Where is the future direction of art? What artists should learn now is that, like Picasso and Bell's artistic spirit, The art practice methods and ideological theories of predecessors are constantly summarized, constantly considered, constantly denied, and constantly developed in denial, so that the created art will be remembered by the times and will never fade in time.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

References

- [1] Faye, W. Introduction to Picasso's Cubism - African wood carving. *Grand View of Art*, 2013, 9, 57.
- [2] Su, HX. Picasso Painting Art Research. Hebei University, 2007.
- [3] Cui, H.X. Aesthetic charm of female images in Picasso's cubist paintings. *Art exploration*, 2007, 2, 53-54 + 141.
- [4] Wang, J.C. Thoughts on Picasso's paintings and speeches. Capital Normal University, 2003.
- [5] Wang, J. On Picasso's emotional consciousness in painting creation. Shandong Normal University, 2011.
- [6] Zhang, W.Y. Thoughts triggered by Picasso's "Crying Woman". *Art Jian*, 2021, 27, 20-21.
- [7] Jia, S.S. On the inspiration of Picasso's cubist painting art to fashion design. Hebei University of Science and Technology, 2018.
- [8] Yang, J.Y. Pictorial analysis of Picasso's works in the blue period. *Peony*, 2021, 14, 86-87.



© 2021 by the author(s); licensee International Technology and Science Publications (ITS), this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)