

“Love” in Han Meilin’s Animal Paintings

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Abstract:

Love is one of the emotional expressions of life, which represents the sincere feelings towards things or people. As an expression of emotion, love represents a positive emotional and psychological state. Moreover, “love” has many meanings, such as caring, compassion, and self-love. The emergence of love must come from our close connection with things or people, so the “love” in animal paintings is an expression and release of Han Meilin’s emotional state through his close contact with animals in daily life. Based on Han Meilin’s experience, his understanding of “love” is based on his understanding of life. The recognition, value affirmation, and ultimate goal of love in the animal painting series are slowly enriched on this basis. Han Meilin’s initial interpretation of love was through animal paintings, and he continues to create in this style, greatly enriching, interpreting, and expanding his definition of love.

Keywords:

Han Meilin, Animal Paintings, Love, Art, Beauty, Aesthetic, Social Harmony

1. Han Meilin’s Explanation of Love

1.1. Emotional Attitude - Survival Tool

Erich Fromm once said in “The Art of Loving” [1]: “Love is the only satisfactory answer to the problem of human existence.” This implies that love is the result of the full development of human potential, the manifestation of vibrant life, and the supreme art. Philosophy defines emotions as a subjective reflection of the value relationship of objective things by human subjects. Liang Qichao said: “Emotions are the driving force behind all human actions.” [2] As an emotional attitude, love contains the subject’s desires and motivations, which can fully stimulate human potential. This is also Han Meilin’s initial attitude towards “love” - as a positive energy, it can bring the desire for survival to people in life and death situations and bring hope to life when one is trapped in loneliness and distress.

At that time, Han Meilin was facing baseless charges and his only friend was a small lion dog, the only one who wagged its tail at him. Han Meilin felt both lucky and sad. Fortunately, there was a dog who treated him as a friend even in such a situation. Sadly, only the little lion dog wouldn’t expose him in this world. Days went by in repeated interrogations and labor, and the hellish torture made him carry dozens of sleeping pills on him, ready to end his life. But when they crippled Han Meilin’s

hands that could have realized his painting ideals and aspirations, he felt that life and death were no longer important. At this moment, the little lion dog appeared, wagging its tail, and just jumping around Han Meilin. When the guards saw the dog, they raised their clubs to beat it, and the little lion dog was then killed on the ground. From being stretched by hand, foot and bone, to being starved, beaten, and humiliated, all of this has led him to the brink of death. "The more they ask me to die, the less I will die. People only live once, why should their life or death be decided by others? Even if you give me all the sleeping pills now, I won't take them! I not only want to live, but also want to live with dignity!" [3] At this point, he once again had the idea of surviving, and this idea was generated not only from his compassion and sympathy for the little lion dog and its companionship in his moment of danger, but also from his love for art. It was only when his hands were destroyed that he made a move to rise up in resistance and fight to the death. Therefore, love is a positive force, a warm and helpful force when together with other life emotions, a force that can pull Han Meilin onto the path of art in his heart, and give him the power to survive with the power of love.

1.2. Love is emotional identification

When loving someone, a feeling of identification with their identity arises, and they are seen as one whole with oneself. Emotional identification refers to a person resonating with their own emotions and the emotions of others, and being willing to respect and understand the emotions of others. However, animals and humans are different. Although animals can feel everything around them, they do not have the ability of emotional identification. Generally speaking, each individual life form will build emotional relationships with each other in the same circumstances, because people trigger many emotional forces in their experience of the real world, conveying their own emotions in language, sound, environment and other experiences, and feeling the existence of other emotions, thus forming a silent language. In the experience, one can feel deeper emotions, more vivid life and understand their own existence. If no one could identify and accept Han Meilin at that time, he could only identify with himself, and express his emotional identification with himself through the experience of the real world and the way of empathy with the experiences of other lives. Love is his emotional identification with himself, he will cherish his own life through his love and affection for the lost lion dog, and also awaken his love for life through his love for art.

People can experience love through experience, and can also transmit love through experience. The subject grasps the external world by grasping their own experience and encounters on their own thoughts and emotions. The highly self-aware inner experience brought about by the subject's experience, emotions and cultural values, constitute a holistic aesthetic value and are placed in artistic creation to express the inner emotions. As the subject of artistic creation, Han Meilin will also incorporate his own experience of the outside world into artistic expression. Although he did not have a completely good experience of reality, he could constantly improve himself and cultivate his mind through the field of art, in order to purify his emotions and ease all suffering. The Analects of Confucius states, "The man of virtue makes the difficulty to be overcome his first business, and success only a subsequent consideration." [4] If Han Meilin wants the viewer to feel the pure love and benevolence in his work, he must first be a benevolent person and possess the ability to use the power of art to influence others. As a viewer, to be able to appreciate the thoughts and emotions

expressed in the work, to be able to immerse oneself in the beauty and deep aesthetic moments brought by art, is to recognize Han Meilin's work and his expression of love. Therefore, using love as emotional identification not only strengthens the resilience of life and increases the intimacy between lives, but also helps people to improve their self-awareness and cultivate their character.

1.3. Love is caring for happiness

Since ancient times, happiness has been the spiritual pursuit of the Chinese nation. The “Book of Rites” states, “When the great way prevails, the world is shared by all.” [5] The worthy and able are chosen to hold office, and people abide by their promises and cultivate friendships. This explains the basic characteristics and beautiful prospects of the “Datong (Greater Harmony)” society, that is, everyone can receive social care and live in peace and happiness.

The essence of love is caring for the happiness of the other person, and it is practiced by starting from love and achieving specific goals. Happiness comes from abundant material conditions and rich spiritual thoughts, and under the dual reinforcement of personal abilities and moral qualities, it can cultivate a person's ability to create material conditions and spiritual nutrition, and make people live a happy life. Love, as a kind of emotional identification and care, can make people feel more valued and happy, and create a harmonious atmosphere of mutual support and mutual assistance in society. Therefore, caring for happiness is the fundamental task.

2. Han Meilin's Interpretation of “Love” in His Works

In classical Chinese aesthetics, the aesthetic world of emotions in literature and art began with the Poetry in the Wei and Jin dynasties, as proposed by Lu Ji in his “Wen Fu,” which emphasizes that “artistic creation originates from inner emotions” [6], highlighting the importance of emotions in artistic creation. In Liang Qichao's aesthetics, his proposition that “art is the expression of emotions” also underscores the aesthetic essence of artistic expression of human emotions. It can be said that whenever a person starts to engage in painting, they will express their own emotions. Based on the influence of Chinese cultural heritage and philosophical thinking, we always resonate emotionally in the artistic expression of love. Among ancient and modern masterpieces of art both domestic and foreign, those that depict maternal love, romantic love, and care are especially abundant and the word “love” is the most common denominator. With profound and subtle emotions, artists often create moving works of art. They may experience the ups and downs of life, hardships, setbacks, and depression, and love becomes the spiritual support and anchor of their hearts. Therefore, no matter how they choose to express themselves, they always express sincere love. Han Meilin's animal paintings are also like this, and his expression of love is equally embedded in the depiction of each little animal. Upon seeing animals, one will instinctively perceive the unique connotation conveyed by the animal.

In his animal paintings, animals often appear as individual beings, but there are also a few instances where group animals are present. However, the works that most directly express “love” are those with pairs of animals, and the depiction often includes playful scenes such as wrestling or frolicking. For example, in his painting “Pigs”, the black pig and the pink pig, standing and lying respectively, the combination of their movements, facial expressions, and the atmosphere of the painting make the image lively and fun, providing the viewer with a relaxing and

pleasant experience. Of course, there are also scenes of mutual companionship, such as his rabbit painting, where two rabbits, one large and one small, show their dependent relationship with their bodies and heads closely together, demonstrating their deep feelings for each other, full of kindness and love. The image fully embodies an understanding of love and affirms the value of love. At the same time, through his works, he conveys to the viewers experiences of happiness and joy, and also imparts a positive humanistic value system. The creation of animal paintings by Han Meilin is a reflection of his expression in a particular era, and behind his individuality lies the overall atmosphere of the times. For him, the motherland, nation, and home not only nourish his life but also nurture and cultivate his soul. Therefore, on the one hand, “love” naturally becomes his eternal theme in artistic creation, and on the other hand, through his unique artistic realm and works, he opens up a spiritual channel for personal and public love. It is precisely because of this that his works can resonate with people and remain fresh for a long time.

3. Conclusions

The primary feature of art is beauty, but it cannot be without love. Love is not only an essential spiritual support for humans but also a source of belonging and hope for people. When we judge and evaluate artistic creations, we not only consider their aesthetic beauty but also whether they can guide people to do good and inspire them to love. This is also the artistic goal and aesthetic pursuit of many artists throughout history, who have a clear direction towards love. They advocate for justice, love for others, and good deeds. As long as it conforms to the laws of art, the aesthetic direction of art must manifest the power and belief in love. In real life, people are busy with their careers and survival, and they cannot avoid fatigue and exhaustion. Therefore, they use suitable forms of art to adjust their daily life and express their inner world. Thus, this principle is not only derived from the laws of aesthetic beauty but also from the needs of human history and progress. It is in line with the aesthetic aspirations of the vast majority of kind-hearted people and also promotes the harmonious development of society.

Conflicts of Interest

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