

An Analysis of Beauty and Criticism in Art from an Angellian Perspective

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Received: 24 May 2025; Accepted: 17 June 2025; Published: 7 July 2025

Abstract:

Engel's paintings are exquisite and elegant, honoring the neoclassical period's "great silence, sublime simplicity" aesthetic interest. He defined his unique view of art by his reverence for natural beauty, ideal beauty and classical beauty. He was convinced that art originated from a deep understanding of nature, and that real beauty was revealed through careful observation of life's little moments. Ideal beauty is reflected in his works as the pursuit of a higher realm beyond reality. Inspired by classical art, he emphasizes symmetry and harmony, giving his works eternal beauty. Engel also has unique insights into art criticism, he opposes the salon form which is expelled by interests, and honors the truth of art. This paper is based on Engel's self-description, analyzing his artistic view and Engel's art criticism and interest, and correctly affirming Engel's artistic value.

Keywords:

Angell, Artistic Beauty, Criticism

1. Introduction

As an outstanding representative of French neoclassical painting in the 19th century, Engel was influenced by ancient Greco-Roman art, the Florentine school of painting, humanism, and the era in which he lived in the process of forming his personal artistic concepts. Among the core concepts of his artistic pursuits, he insisted on the pursuit of authenticity in paintings and advocated that artistic creation should be faithful to nature. In addition, for Engel, "beauty" is a crucial theme, which can be said to constitute almost the entirety of his artistic style. He devoted himself to exploring the ideal and perfect form of classical art, and incorporated this pursuit into his works. In his artistic career, Engel had a unique and profound insight into criticism and fun. His attitude towards criticism was characterized by a firm confidence and adherence to his own artistic beliefs. Although his works were criticized in some periods, especially during the rise of Romanticism, and some people questioned his classical style, Engel never wavered in his faith in his artistic principles. His firm belief that art should strive for authenticity and a faithful depiction of nature made him resilient in the face of criticism.

1.1. Background of the study

Angell was an outstanding representative of the French neoclassical school of painting in the 19th century, and his artistic concepts were deeply influenced by the social and artistic trends of the time. Born in 1780, he grew up during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic eras, a period that had a profound impact on his thought and art.

In his early years, Engel was inspired by neoclassical painters such as David. David emphasized the restoration of classical art and the pursuit of ideal beauty, which continued in Engel's artistic outlook. However, unlike David's seriousness and coldness, Engel paid more attention to the profound observation of natural beauty and tried to present realistic and interesting artistic images through his attention to details. While being influenced by David, Engel also lived in the era of the rise of the Romantic movement. This period emphasized individuality, emotion and love of nature, and these elements also influenced Engel's artistic concepts to a certain extent. His reverence for ideal beauty was somehow balanced with the Romantic reverence for individual emotion.

Engel's view of art was in part a response to the changing times. His criticism of the salon system reflected a revulsion against the commercialization and low taste of the time, while his studies of drawing and color provided useful insights into later artistic developments. In the midst of the radical changes in nineteenth-century art, Engel's views were both an inheritance of tradition and a revelation of the future, and became an important force in the subsequent development of art.

1.2. Status of research

The artistic achievements of French neoclassical painting master Engel have attracted much attention and have been widely evaluated and deeply analyzed. Domestic research on Engel mainly focuses on Engel's aesthetic thought and the artistic characteristics of his paintings as well as comparisons with other schools of painting.

Wu Changyi in "The Rational Beauty of Engel's Painting" [1] talks about the image in Engel's painting is full of rational beauty, the painter uses lines, colors, and physique from a unique perspective, abstractly depicting a kind of rational beauty of the figure. Zhao Na in "The Display of Beauty--Interpretation of Engel's Painting Ideology" [2] focuses on in-depth analysis of Engel's aesthetic ideology. Engel's skillful use of formal elements, adherence to the ideal aesthetics, and innovative integration of the beauty of lines, highlights his unique approach to artistic expression. This ingenious way of presenting art has had a profound and great influence on later generations. Jiao Weina's "An Introduction to Neoclassical Shared Beauty - Taking Engel's Art as an Example" [3] Through an in-depth analysis of the neoclassical characteristics of Engel's art and an introduction to the shared beauty in the language, forms and concepts of his paintings, it explores the role of artistic beauty in painting as well as the modern painting's In this way, he explores the role of artistic beauty in painting and its potential influence on modern painting. Yang Zhao in his article "The Beauty of Engel's Art" [4] reorganizes the aesthetic connotation of neoclassicism, summarizes Engel's theoretical exploration of beauty, and analyzes in depth the artistic thought and painting style of neoclassicism represented by Engel.

Huang Pengxia's "The Artistic Characteristics of Engel's Paintings" [5] mainly uses the research method combining theoretical exposition and example analysis to discuss Engel's biography and artistic thoughts, especially focusing on analyzing the

artistic characteristics of Engel's paintings and their far-reaching influence on later generations. Wang Boxin, in his article "Research on the Characteristics of Angell's Character Modeling in Oil Painting" [6], takes Angell's oil paintings as the research object, discusses the artistic characteristics of Angell's character modeling in oil paintings, and analyzes in depth the rationality, sophistication, elegance, solemnity, and innovative style of Angell's character modeling through the analysis of the five aspects of aesthetics, technique, temperament, composition, and deformation. At the same time, it explores his inheritance and development of classical aesthetics, as well as his opposition to and criticism of romantic aesthetics, which have influenced and inspired later generations of painting art. Wang Like's "Exploring the Characteristics of Engel's Portrait Painting" [7] elaborates on Engel's handling of figure modeling by means of exaggeration and distortion, and showing his characteristics of new exploration in painting through skillfully designing the composition of the picture. He fused the classical tradition with his personal artistic philosophy, pursued the eternal ideal beauty of art, and made new achievements in the field of portrait painting. Huang Shengwei in "The Study of Angell's figurative deformation of modeling language" [8] mainly elaborates on the formation of Angell's artistic view, analyzes the modeling language characteristics of Angell's painting language, and reflects and draws analogies to the figurative deformation of Angell's modeling characteristics.

In her article "On the Painting Controversy between Engel and Delacroix" [9], Wang Sujie presents a detailed debate around drawing and color in 19th-century French art, with a special focus on the painting controversy between Engel, who represented neoclassicism, and Delacroix, who symbolized romanticism. The aim of the article is to analyze this debate and briefly summarize the aesthetic ideas represented behind it, as well as to explore the revelations arising from it. Yu Fan's "Re-reading the Paintings of Angell and Delacroix: On the Unity of Drawing and Color in the Creation of Realistic Oil Paintings" [10]. This article systematically researches the artistic creations of Angell and Delacroix by tracing back the three debates in the history of art, and reveals the key role and importance of the unity of drawing and color in the creation practice of realistic oil paintings. The unity of drawing and color in the practice of realistic oil painting is revealed as a key role and important position. Xu Lifeng's "Revelations of Delacroix and Angell's Painting Controversy" [11] mainly introduces the revelations of Neoclassicism and Romanticism, and of Angell's and Delacroix's painting controversy on the development of modern art, and at the same time, examines the development of former Chinese art under the influence of the two currents of thought.

In summary, through the systematic combing of Angell's research mainly focuses on artistic characteristics, style and appreciation of some works, but also includes some of Angell's aesthetic ideas, but fewer papers are involved in Angell's art criticism, this paper focuses on extracting two chapters from Angell's Complete Works of Art, based on Angell's self-description, and analyzing the background of the era at that time, to enrich the value of the theory of art by Angell's perspective to organize the beauty and criticism of art, and combined with the appreciation of paintings to enrich the theoretical value of Engel's art.

2. The Beauty of Art

2.1. Natural beauty

As a representative of the French neoclassical painting style in the nineteenth century, Engel's artistic style is unique, focusing on creating a sense of flow through the lines of the picture, composition and modeling is more rigorous, and at the same time, good at according to the principles of aesthetics of the image of the picture to carry out a creative and moderate deformation. This unique style of painting had an important influence on later painters to create different styles of paintings. Although Engel himself did not leave any specialized writings for study, we can get a glimpse of his artistic concepts through his words recorded in the form of diaries. Engel once said, "There is only one kind of art in the world, namely, eternal beauty and nature." He believed that there is no second art in the world, but only one kind of art, which is based on: eternal beauty and nature. Whoever denies this view and undertakes a quest is doomed to prove his error by the image of failure. What are the hypocritical fine artists who threaten that they have discovered something new trying to say? Our aim is not to invent, but, as many of us must do, to follow the example of the masters of art, to continue to use the countless images that objective nature offers us, to reproduce them in good faith, to give them a pure and appropriate style, and to bring the image to perfection. [12] He asserts that objective nature is the foundation of beauty, arguing that in the absence of natural beauty, discussion of beauty would be unfounded. As Giotto points out, "Nature is the mother of all things." In this view, Engel sees nature as the essence, reality, and nature of beauty. He saw the beauty of nature as originating from nature itself and reflecting its true beauty. During the Renaissance, the works of the masters showed true art by drawing on nature. He emphasized that artistic treasures could not replace the creation of nature, and that shoddy works of art would only stifle everything, because objective nature does not.

There is no painting by Engel that best exemplifies his pursuit of natural beauty than the Portrait of Belden. Created in 1832, before embarking on the painting, Engel made sketches of Mr. Belden in various poses. In his artistic portrayal of this energetic careerist, the artist fully demonstrated his ability to observe and capture nature. Through meticulous observation, the artist captured the typical character traits of this figure. Belden's character is deep and imposing, especially his sharp eyes and the smiling expression at the corner of his mouth. The figure is seated on a chair, his body slightly tilted, with a slightly higher three-quarter height as the point of view, forming a triangular composition consisting of the head and torso. In this composition, the artist places the figure's hands on his knees and naturally extends his arms outward, forming a clear, full arc of shoulders, hands, and knees. Despite the relatively subtle movement of the figure's limbs, this triangular composition injects vitality into the picture, maintaining stability while avoiding the sharpness of the square, creating a soft roundness. This reveals a quality of innovative expression in classical painting that incorporates natural science as well as natural beauty.

2.2. Ideal Beauty

The so-called beauty in Engel's conception is the ideal beauty, the beauty that integrates the beauty of natural individuals into one, and he himself believes that in order to shape the real and sublime image, he has to fall down in front of the beauty to study the beauty, and to produce the standard beauty in the uninterrupted observation. [13] In his paintings, Engel also tries to make the works have a beautiful sense of reality in order to make the viewers like them, and in Engel's paintings, the figures are overflowing with the atmosphere of rational beauty. He is committed to pursuing a rational and aesthetic style, showing a classical nature similar to Raphael's in his

images. By using lines, colors and physical beauty through a unique perspective, Engel depicts a rational and aesthetic figure in an abstract way.

In terms of composition Angell is a devoted defender of classical rationality, following a rigorous and harmonious presentation of the picture. Angell's paintings tend to be introverted and calm in their momentum, presenting a kind of feminine beauty, depicting on the canvas the delicate, lyrical beauty of a boudoir serenade. [14] The triangular composition is the most typical compositional form of classicism, which embodies the stability, permanence and solemnity that characterized classicism. Emerging in the field of Classical art, Angell's artistic views obviously had a special preference for triangular composition. Angell's portraits mostly take the triangle composition. There are also group portraits with triangular composition, such as "Homer's Salute", which shows the painter's praise for ancient Greek culture, and is an exemplary work of Angell's defense of the ideals of classicism.

The ideal beauty of art in Engel's eyes is a form of beauty that meets people's subjective wishes after refining and sublimating the natural beauty, and it is the idealized reflection of human's aesthetic sentiment. Engel's pursuit of ideal beauty is fully embodied in his expression of the God of beauty, and he has devoted his life to presenting the God of beauty in the picture, while consistently advocating "to fall down before the beauty to study the beauty". The Spring is a model work of his ideal beauty. The image of the maiden in The Fountain generally follows the laws of reason in ancient Greek sculpture. The picture shows rich line variations, richness in simplicity, and overall versatility. On the left side, with the turn of the raised arm as the apex, the outline of the girl's body forms a varied arc, like a gently falling veil; while on the right side, the pitcher and raised arm form a geometric structure of circles and triangles, which gives the picture dynamic lines, contrasting with the simplicity and serenity of the left side, and she concentrates their respective beauties into one, and the image is enlivened and more idealized. The artist has strictly adhered to the principles of rhythm, rhyme and other formal beauty in his creation, and the girl's body shape and posture reveals the beauty of the S-shaped curves created by the ancient Greek Plastiklis. Angell here created a new paradigm of perfect human aesthetics, presenting an endless rational charm for future generations. [15]

2.3. Classical beauty

Engel's artistic style is a kind of aesthetic classicism, and he takes "great stillness, sublime simplicity" as his artistic aesthetic interest. The transition from Davitt to Engel marked an important turn in neoclassicism. While Davitt represented a style that emphasized the spirit of revolutionary struggle and depicted events relevant to the times, Engel became a representative of the pursuit of perfect form and exemplary style, moving away from reality into the realm of myth and pure art. This shift was not only a formal shift from a strictly classical style to a flamboyant orientalism with formal aesthetics, but also a fundamental change in artistic philosophy.

A pupil of David's, Engel, despite his adherence to the classical tradition, dabbled in Romanticism in some of his works, making him one of the most controversial artists in the history of French art. At the age of seventeen, Engel had already set foot in David's studio, where extreme demands were made on the form, conforming to the concepts of neo-classical painting and perfecting his painting technique. Engel's picture composition and pursuit of ideal beauty differed from David's portrayal of sculpturally strict images. In depicting women, Engel used a slightly distorted

technique to produce his unique ideal beauty, i.e. the pursuit of absolute serenity of formality. This artistic pursuit is reflected in his paintings of various subjects.

In sculpting the figure, Engel employs the technique of perspective in order to present three-dimensional space in shallow relief rather than in the traditional rounded form. This requires a solid foundation in drawing, the use of clean and varied lines to sculpt the figure, and a moderate amount of “compression” of the form. Based on Jean Goujon’s bas-relief *The Goddess and the Spirits*, Engel created *The Great Courtesan*, a work of shallow sculpture, deep compression, and clear contour lines. By reducing the volume of the human body that should be presented, the painting makes the arms, hips and legs of the figure appear gentle in terms of thickness and changes in undulation, as if they were carved into the picture. The overall picture is natural and smooth, emphasizing the soft form of the oriental woman. Through direct and powerful contour lines, the painting highlights the softness and beauty of oriental women, giving a sense of harmony and balance, nobility and serenity, and endowing the picture with classical beauty.

3. Art Criticism and Interest

The *Complete Works of Engel’s Art* mentions the need for the artist to be convinced of his conviction and courage in pursuing the right path, unaffected by the accusations of unlearned men. Engel also mentions faith and kindness as great qualities of the gifted. The achievement of an artist’s work depends on the total artistic effect, while valuable details are often perceived only by a few connoisseurs. By quoting Voltaire, Engel emphasizes the greatness of boldness and strength in fighting against the prejudices of the masses, but also points out that if such boldness is in the hands of the wicked it may lead to absurd denial, depletion of the mind, and nothingness. Artistic interest is considered almost as rare as genius, and is the expression of an eye for good and bad and an insight into flaws. Good fun was closely related to goodness of character, an expression of good feelings, avoidance of the intention to pursue flukes, and development through extensive upbringing. A broad and deep sense of fun needs to be acquired through the crystallization of upbringing and practical experience, and is a natural quality adapted to the laws of society.

Comments about the unlearned often show unseemly interest, while a full love and appreciation of high levels of beauty requires an ever-increasing interest in the appreciation of artistic masterpieces. Finally, Engel also talks about the need to be open and honest with friends; true friendship and kindness help to increase the desire for truth, goodness, and beauty, whereas the bluster of the fop or the unlearned is not encouraged. To benefit from the criticism of friends, one needs to know their character, their interests, their way of thinking, and their analytical faculties in order to judge the correctness of their opinions. The perfection of art depends upon human observation, and the critic is to have the interest in great art and high style that he should have.

3.1. Fun in the Salon

The salon interest of the first half of the 19th century seems to have been mainly embodied in Engel, the great painter of the academy at the time. In those days, a style like Engel’s antique, aesthetic, and sublime painting was usually recognized, while Delacroix’s modern, dramatic, and poetic style was often ridiculed and opposed. Because of this, Delacroix felt the need to put aside his brushes and turn to quills to

write about his artistic positions in newspapers and magazines, engaging in heated polemics with academy painters and critics. [16] Baudelaire's campaign against a painter named Boissard was prompted by the Salon committee's banishment of the painter because of his naive qualities, which most painters did not possess, and which were out of step with the typical, boilerplate culture of the art world at the time. The jury always voted for paintings with a stable composition, dignified figures, and classically elegant colors that reflected the official intentions. The avant-garde painters were rejected, which was detrimental to the continued development of art.

Angell's attitude towards the salon is opposed to it, by all accounts an unhelpful thing, a dangerous custom, a tool for scandalizing and destroying art, and this type of salon, formed for our customs, is killing art and is only finding a way for the artisan's product. The reason for this is simple: the salon committees are officially titled, and are therefore comparatively unfair to really good work, which is good or bad not in terms of its artistic value, but in terms of whether it is favorable to the official orientation of public opinion, and the government wishes to limit the types of paintings through the institution of the salon for the purpose of clamping down on the public's ideas, and the government does not consider that any work of an agitational, revolutionary, or dramatic character meets its ideal standards. In his response to the Salon exhibition, Engel discusses whether or not French citizens should not have the right to reject works, whether or not the jury should admit only selected works, and the problems that arose in terms of hanging positions and the distribution of prizes. Engel argued that the Salon impeded the feeling of grandeur and beauty and made artists chase for money and sale prices, likening the Salon to a marketplace for selling paintings. He emphasized that the abolition of the salon was to prevent the destruction and retrogression of art so that it could serve high ideals and not be swayed by commercial purposes. Criticizing the salons for misleading the arts, Engel called for their closure to revitalize and protect the arts.

3.2. *Drawing and Color*

Engel considered sketching to be a high degree of artistic honesty. Engel focused heavily on the importance of sketching as the foundation of artistic creation. He advocated improving sketching through in-depth study of human anatomy, structure and proportion. He emphasized the accurate representation of form and line as the key to establishing the structure and form of a work of art. Through meticulous sketching, the artist could express a deep understanding of the subject matter. Angell was relatively conservative in his views on color, which he believed should be subordinate to sketch and structure. He advocated that color should serve form and expression in a work of art, rather than exist solely for the pursuit of gaudy effects. In his conception, sketching was based on a deep technical foundation, and color was a supplement to that foundation. Therefore, he emphasized the importance of sketching and regarded color as an auxiliary means rather than an independent form of expression. Overall, Angell advocated the unity of drawing and color, emphasizing solid technique and depth of artistic expression. His views had a far-reaching impact on the art world in the 19th century, laying the foundation for the subsequent development of art.

4. Conclusion

In Engel's view of art, beauty is a comprehensive experience deeply rooted in nature, ideals and classical tradition. He revered natural beauty and pursued vivid and realistic expression through accurate observation of human structure. According to

Engel, nature is the greatest master of art, and artists should draw on the essence of nature and use it as an inspiration and guideline for creation. Ideal beauty occupies an important position in Engel's artistic philosophy. He pursued an idealized expression beyond reality, and through the idealized presentation of the human form, he highlighted man's pursuit of perfection in art. This idealism is not only reflected in the shaping of specific images, but also in the pursuit of artistic creation, which is a high degree of abstraction and sublimation of the inner beauty of human nature. Classical beauty also has far-reaching influence in Engel's art. His reverence for classical art is reflected in his pursuit of structure and order. According to Engel, the classical tradition is an eternal benchmark and a classical model for artistic creation. By drawing on and passing on classical beauty, artists are able to find fundamental guidance and inspiration in their creations.

However, criticism of art was equally important to Engel. His critique of the salon system reflects an aversion to artistic bureaucracy and to aesthetic innovation. Engel's emphasis on sketching is reflected in his precise pursuit of structure and proportion, which are considered essential basic skills for artists. His cautious attitude toward color, on the other hand, reflects his respect for classical tradition and his emphasis on order and harmony in art. Taken together, Engel's view of art is a comprehensive pursuit of natural, ideal, and classical beauty, accompanied by a rigorous critique of inadequacies in artistic creation. His view is both an admiration and pursuit of beauty and an incentive for his own continuous improvement, injecting an enduring and insightful vitality into the art world.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

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