

On the Art of Stick Pictures

SU Chun^{[a],*}; LUO Zilin^[b]; YU Meixue^[c]

^[a]Nanchang Normal University, associate professor, master, mainly engaged in preschool art education research, Nanchang, China.

^[b]Yuzhang Normal University, teaching assistant, master, mainly engaged in preschool art education research, China.

^[c]Shangrao Quality Education Center for primary and secondary students, associate professor in primary and secondary schools, bachelor, mainly engaged in art education research, China.

*Corresponding author.

Supported by 2020 Jiangxi Social Science "13th Five-year Plan" Fund Project "Adolescents Responsibility Anomie Risks in Network Moral Construction and Educational Prevention and Control Countermeasures" (20JY30); 2020 General Project of Humanities and Social Science .Research for Colleges and Universities of Jiangxi Province "A Cultural Heritage Study on the Application of Paper-cutting Art in the Five Fields of Kindergarten Activities " (JC20114);2020 Jiangxi Higher Education Reform Research Project"Construction and Applications of Ideological and Political Teaching Case Base for Art Courses of Preschool Education Specialties in Universities" (JXJG-20-23-12).

Received 6 June 2022; accepted 22 August 2022
Published online 26 September 2022

Abstract

Stick picture is a unique form of conveying ideas or feelings by using points, lines and planes. With a few strokes, objects depicted can be vividly displayed in front of us. On the basis of concise brushstrokes, it can convey the most incisive aesthetic taste and emotional experience, concise but not simple. It can not only present the expressive and impressionistic aesthetic characteristics but also express the intuitive and interesting aesthetic experience, which is the charm of concision.

Key words: Stick pictures; Unique; Express; Artistic language

Su, C., Luo, Z. L., & Yu, M. X. (2022). On the Art of Stick Pictures. *Higher Education of Social Science*, 23(1), 28-32. Available from: URL: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/hess/article/view/12761>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/12761>

In the beginning, everything was simple. Pursuing the ultimate concision as well as cleanliness and simplicity

in senses, stick pictures are more elegant in taste and thinking. If the highest realm of art is *true beauty without much embellishment like lotus in clear water*, then stick picture depicts exactly the noble soul with the simplest brushstrokes, and outlines the beautiful realm with the simplest lines, stopping at where it should and leaving you panting for more! In the stippling beauty of stick pictures, the viewer can taste the great beauty of the universe pursued by the masters, who are seeking the great beauty from the inner beauty. Every line tells their understanding of nature and conveys the belief in life. It is the essence of art and the core of the subjectivity theory of artistic creation.

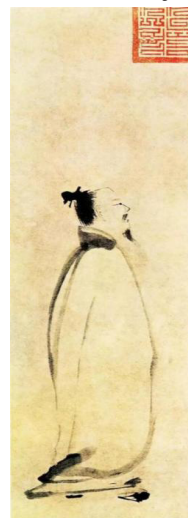


Figure 1
The Southern Song Dynasty, Liang Kai's *Poet Li Bai Walking and Chanting a Poem*

1. STICK PICTURE IS A UNIQUE ARTISTIC LANGUAGE

Art is a language, and the language of art is the material expression means of the art work and the external form of the work. Each art category has formed its own unique artistic language in the long-term art development. For example, painting uses artistic language such as line, color, and composition to form a painting image; music uses

artistic language such as organized melody, harmony, and rhythm to form a musical image; and film language includes pictures, sounds, montages, etc., so painters like to use lines and colors to express thoughts and feelings, musicians are good at using sound and melody to convey emotional experience, and photographers skillfully use light and shadow techniques to reveal the inner world. Without artistic language, there is no art work.

1.1 The Unique Personality of the Art Language of Stick Pictures

Stick picture is an important form of numerous human art languages, showing the characteristics of generalization, intuition, interest and vividness. People often use the expression form as well as tools and materials of stick pictures to abstract, generalize, and make bold trade-offs on objects, reducing the fineness of appearance and grasping the charm of essences, so that the works can achieve the unity of form and spirit.

Stick pictures are not only the basis of painting learning but also the embodiment of painting generalization ability. It uses simple points, lines, planes and other basic elements to abstract and generalize the complex shapes in real life, making them more concise and artistically appealing. It is a complete art form. Paring down is its modeling principle, but stick pictures are not simple paintings or reducing strokes. The creation of stick pictures should strive to be concise but not simple, simplifying images but not connotations and achieving the artistic realm of concise strokes and rich spirit in modeling.

The Tao Teh Ching says: In the beginning, everything was simple. The minimalist beliefs of the Chinese people are concise but not simple! When it comes to minimalism, the same language can definitely be found in Chinese paintings. In the minimalist paintings of the masters of the past dynasties, viewers can fully appreciate the profound attainments of no more and no less. Just like when we view the paintings of Liang Kai in the Song Dynasty, it is not only an experience of brush and ink, but also an experience of a state of mind, and even more of a Zen experience (Figure 1).

1.2 The Unique Form of the Artistic Language of Stick Pictures

As a unique artistic language, stick picture is different from other arts in the form of expression and presentation. Stick picture is not just a type of painting. Although it is simple in form, it contains rich connotations. This is a unique form of expressing a message through simple modelling.

We can feel and explore the unique formal features of the art language of stick pictures from several aspects: First, the use of stick pictures tools and materials is flexible and diverse. When creating stick pictures, we can choose single-color pens, pencils, ballpoint pens, or colored watercolors, crayons, oil pastels, etc. This strong

inclusiveness and adaptability make stick pictures occupy a place in numerous art forms. Picasso's *Woman and Dove* is a typical example of a pastel painting (Figure 2). Second, although the art form of stick pictures is unique in its art type, it can be seen everywhere in life, such as in advertising posters, publication illustrations, and logo design. It can be considered that stick picture is a grounded art form, and it is also a supranational worldwide artistic language.



Figure 2
Spain Picasso's *Woman and Dove*

More importantly, the basis for the full expression of stick picture connotations is its line language, which emphasizes the concise, smooth and vivid use of strokes, and the line is the mark symbol of stick pictures. This stroke of concise and succinct use of lines makes many stick pictures show vivid, concise and humorous emotional cores.

1.3 The Unique Charm of Concise and Comprehensive of Stick Pictures

Stick pictures are plain. They don't have any gorgeous coats, but they can still be vivid in a number of works of art. They have a plain sense of true beauty without much embellishment like lotus in clear water. The reason lies in its unique charm of being concise and comprehensive. The unique charm is manifested in all kinds of unspeakable frankness, nature and childlike interest. Picasso, the artist of nature, gladly drew a flying dove with an olive branch to commemorate the World Peace Conference held in Warsaw. The famous Chilean poet Neruda called it *Dove of Peace*, expressing his peaceful political beliefs and demands, and thus conveying the voices of the people of the world. The painting is plain and pure, fresh and simple, and has a poetic spirit, which makes people have an artistic feeling of returning to nature and returning to simplicity (Figure 3).

In the creation of stick pictures, if creators want to use the stick picture language of points, lines and planes to express personal words freely, they need to bring natural eyes and sincere hearts to project the insights drawn from nature and life as well as personal opinions of the true, the good and the beautiful into their works, transforming them into every stroke of stick pictures. Just because of this, we can find the truth from the pictures and recognize the goodness and beauty from the truth. The distance

between stick pictures and viewers is very close, and stick pictures also make people look unremarkable at first but never get tired of viewing them. The feeling can stand up to digging, thinking and scrutiny from everyone's eyes, and is memorable. Creators and viewers share the feeling and enjoyment of this concise and comprehensive way of expression.



Figure 3
Spain Picasso's *Dove of Peace*

Stick pictures are just right and to the point, concise but not simple, which is the charm of concision. Stick figures are the core pursuit of stick pictures. Among the trade-offs, stick pictures have found a balance point and achieved the ultimate concision. The ultimate concision can express the ultimate complexity, so as to realize the dialectical unity of ultimate concision creating complexity and beauty.

Stick pictures can be expressed in English as stickfigure or matchpicture, which is to use lines and geometric modelling like matchsticks in modelling, generalizing objects and communicating views. Most of them are two-dimensional planar plans of line modelling, with less pursuit of three-dimensional performance.

2. STICK PICTURES SHOW THE AESTHETIC CHARACTERISTICS OF VIVID AND IMPRESSIONISTIC

Art and nature have a very close relationship. Art is the reproduction of nature, and nature is an inexhaustible source of artistic creations. Humans are closely related to nature. Humans originate from nature and eventually return to it.

Humans have an innate sense of closeness to nature. Everything in nature contains infinite mysteries and historical accumulations. In the process of creating stick pictures, creators need to look at nature with a pure heart without any worldly vision and use their own eyes to discover and perceive the beauty of nature. Only in this way can we achieve spiritual communication with nature and integrate with it.

It is worth noting that the reflection and expression of beauty in nature do not mean a simple engraving or copying of nature. This is not the original intention and pursuit of stick pictures. The purpose of stick pictures is to abstract and sublimate the cores on the basis of retaining

the characteristics of the object itself. It is a high degree of unity between subject and object, representation and expression. As Zhang Zao, a painter in the Tang Dynasty, said, the external teacher is nature and the inner one is your heart. The external teacher is nature, and the inner one is the inner perception of the creator. The expression is that although artistic creation comes from the learning of nature. The beauty of nature is not equal to or cannot automatically become the beauty of art. In the process of transforming from natural beauty to artistic beauty, the creator's own thoughts are crucial.

For example, in Mr. Feng Zikai's *Seeking Fragrance*, the original poem said: Walking all over the Jiangcun, I didn't see any plum blossoms. When I came here, I suddenly saw a plum blossom blooming enchantingly. How did the wasp know there were plum blossoms here? Across the house, they all fly here seeking fragrance. This painting praises the plum blossoms blooming against the cold, and also praised the wasp's bravery and diligence, representing people's yearning for the prospect of life. It not only brings us a fresh and refined artistic infection, but also leads our minds into a state of tranquility, harmony, and Nature Unity.

Therefore, artistic creation is not essentially reproduction and imitation but pays more attention to the emotional expression and presentation of creators. Artistic creation requires the Tao realized from nature and supported by the creator's own opinions and perceptions, then transforms it into each stroke in the painting, finally realizes the integration of objective nature and subjective inner heart, and achieves stick pictures of vivid and impressionistic (Figure 4).



Figure 4
Modern, Feng Zikai's *Seeking Fragrance*

Artistic creation is a reflection of objective reality. Even if a certain amount of artistic processing is required, stick pictures still tend to retain their core quality of concision rather than pursuing too much carving. Transforming from simplicity to complexity is easy while transforming from complexity to simplicity is difficult, simplicity is the most valuable. This kind of simplicity does not only reflect the exterior of the depicted object,

but grasps its core spirit, understands and describes the true nature of the depicted object, and analyzes the interior of things through the exterior. Therefore, stick pictures not only get the form of the object but also integrate the spirit of the object, so as to achieve the unity of form and spirit. This concept of stick pictures may be most in line with Laozi and Zhuangzi School of the Taoist. Lao Zi said in the Tao Teh Ching that the Tao is the underlying principle behind the creation of the myriad things. Tao is the origin of the creation of all things, from least to most, from simple to complex, all things originate from simplicity; at the same time, stick pictures accurately grasp the essential characteristics of the depicted objects with concise and free brushstrokes, pursuing the harmony between man and nature, which is very consistent with Zhuangzi's life attitude of going with the flow and being free and easy.

Seeing the truth from the details, although creators have a deep understanding of life and nature, they are not entangled in the size, angle and other external details of objects when creating, and choose things that can reflect and highlight the essence of objects among a large number of external features. Only in this way can stick pictures be accurate, vivid and nuanced in conveying ideas or feelings, and are not limited by the external limitations of depicted objects. It is similar to the structure brushstroke proposed by Xie He in Guhuapinlu. He emphasized that lines can not only be used to present the external outline of things, but also the inner spiritual essence of things. Stick pictures are well-versed in that, and the techniques are simple and pure, without any flamboyant idea of showing skills, and are deeply affectionate. Although there are not many strokes, each stroke is worth ten, a few strokes can outline the rich images of the world, and accurately convey the charm of things. Therefore, when we view stick pictures, we can always feel touched that a random number of strokes can achieve the beauty of vivid and impressionistic. It is precisely because stick pictures take into account the most profound and deepest connotation and the most concise and comprehensive modelling. The so-called subtle strokes are all hasty, which are called reduced strokes, just like this.

Like we view *Little Fish Come* by the 91-year-old master Qi Baishi, the painting style is very concise. A fishing rod is hanging with a fishing line and the fishing line is hanging with the bait. Five fish are vying to swim to grab food. It is lively and full of the vitality of nature. The brushstrokes are vigorous and moist, the colors are strong and bright, the modelling is concise and vivid, and the artistic conception is honest and plain (Figure 5).

Picasso praised Qi Baishi's ink painting of fish without coloring making people see the long river and swimming fish, which shows his high recognition. In his later years, Qi Baishi's increasingly simplified style of painting has increasingly strengthened the modelling of similarity on non-similarity, reaching the realm of the simpler the brushstrokes, the more complete the spirit.

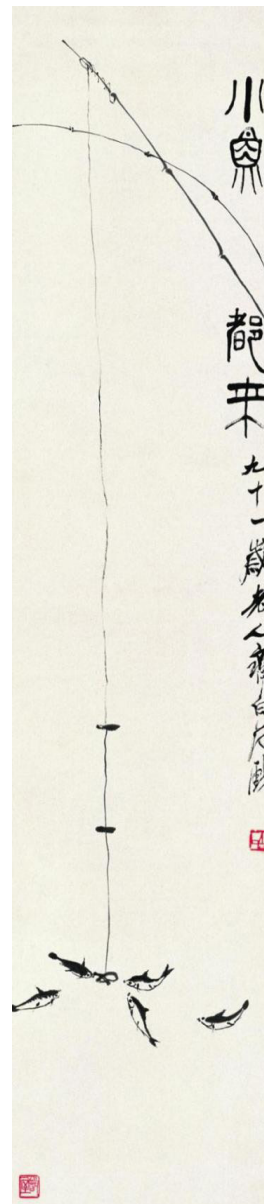


Figure 5
Modern, Qi Baishi's *Little Fish Come*

3. STICK PICTURES SHOW AN INTUITIVE AND INTERESTING AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

Art creation and appreciation are interdependent, each work has its own appreciators, and the appreciation of artworks is actually the pursuit of beauty and the soothing of the soul. Therefore, we say that artworks are inseparable from viewers while art and appreciation are dialectically unified. Stick pictures give people a sense of intuition in the form of expression and often make people enjoy endless fun in terms of content. This is the aesthetic experience brought by the art form of stick pictures. In addition, creators express sincere and natural feelings through their work, and viewers can arouse their own resonance when appreciating the work, reminding people of their own life experiences and achieving a spiritual

connection between creators and viewers. The resulting feelings can be comforting, interesting, or thought-provoking. Faced with the complexity of the external world, stick pictures also allow viewers to find a spiritual habitat.

In American cartoonist Mitra Farmand's work *Cat Chasing A Bird*, the bird caught was drawn in one stroke by Picasso, which is realistic, intuitive and interesting. (Figure 6).

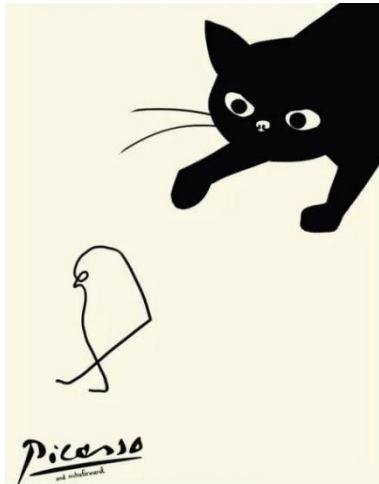


Figure 6
Cat Chasing A Bird
by Mitra Farmand,
USA

The basic modelling of stick pictures is composed of triangles, squares, circles and other figures, which are interesting and plastic themselves. Stick pictures depict everything by its basic modelling with exquisite changes. With simple modelling and smooth brushstrokes, often a few strokes can make the depicted objects come alive in front of us. The relationship between these basic modelling is very strong, and the whole can be affected by one stroke. Sometimes a slight change can lead to a great one on the whole. Creators are also keen to use the combination changes of these basic modelling to show the characteristics and substances of the depicted objects. Not only that, creators of stick pictures, appreciators, and the universality of content they draw also bring us a rich and interesting experience. There are many creators of stick pictures, and there is no limit. Anyone can be a recorder of nature and life, and different ages and identities of creators will give people different aesthetic experiences. If you let children create children stick pictures, it is the full expression of children's nature. Children injecting their own rich creativity into stick pictures will add a lot of childishness and interest to the work, which is the presentation of simple childlike innocence and child interest.

In the contents of stick pictures, the objects depicted can not only show all things in nature but also convey various expressions of life and project real life. Each stick picture contains the creator's own unique vision and perspective, conveying an attitude towards nature and life. Mr. Feng Zikai's original cartoon is actually a kind of ink stick pictures. Take Mr. Feng Zikai's *Zhan Zhan's Bike* as an example, the picture records the scene of a playing child who imagined the cattail leaf fans to be a bicycle wheel, where the child's imagination and creativity stand vividly revealed on the paper. We can feel the child's devotion, joy and innocence like we are there, and experience the honesty and tranquility brought by stick pictures as well as the compassion and fraternity in the author's heart. Stick pictures are conveying the most incisive interest in a few brushstrokes based on concise use of them. (Figure 7).

By combing the art of stick pictures, this unique artistic language will be re-examined and taken care of, which will help creators of stick pictures to learn and refer to the artistic expression techniques and aesthetic taste of stick pictures as well as apply the artistic symbols of stick pictures in creations of their own work, showing the unique artistic charm of stick pictures.



Figure 7
Modern Feng
Zikai Zhan
Zhan's Bike

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