Nation and Reality--Analysis on the Cultural Value of Russian Oil Paintings

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Abstract. The oil painting art of Russia has a long history that is incomparable by paintings of other nations. The historical culture and local customs and practices it describes are exactly the vivid portrayal of the Russian culture and character. Through the overview of the Russian oil painting art development, this paper attempts to make the cultural vein of Russian art clear, thus illustrating the cultural value of Russian oil paintings via specific works of painters. Based on the tracing and exploring, we can realize the national character of Russian painting art more precisely, and we can be enlightened to learn the serious attitude and persistent pursuit for cultural tradition from Russia. As a result, it is to facilitate the inheritance, innovation and development of China’s oil painting art.

Development Overview of Russian Oil Painting Art

The unique Russian oil painting art has always been favored by oil painting fans from all over the world. With elegant lines, massive brushwork, and profound literature connotation, it makes people highly praise the Russian art. As an important part of the world painting art, Russian oil painting art has a long history that cannot be compared by other nations. Early in the tenth century AD, Russian artist started to study Byzantium icon and put it into practice, which directly lays the foundation of Russian portrait painting development. With the continuous development of Russian painting art, the perspective and texture performance was attached with importance, and the paining skill became increasingly mature. Till the 18th century ruled by Peter the Great and Ekaterina, Russian painting art achieved unprecedented development. Due to the special preference to the painting art by rulers, many excellent artists were dispatched to Europe to learn painting specially. At the same time, painters in the cutting-edge art from France and Italy were invited to Russia to teach painting, which was an important period with the communication between Russian oil painting art and European paining art. Thanks to the profound foundation laid in the early time, the Russian oil painting art welcomes its golden age in the 19th century. From the critical realism to the generation of new genres containing the formalism and aestheticism, Russian oil painting art has shown it’s vigorous vitality. Outstanding oil painters in this period, including Repin, Serov, Surikov, Ivanov, Belov, Kramskoy, Vasnetsov, and Serov have created the glorious history of Russian oil painting art in the 19th century together. In contrast to the devotion to innovative weird art by the Western art in the 20th century, oil painters of Russia in the 20th century expressed their persistent care about beauty. There is not only careful observation of nature and life in their works, but also deep concern about the human nature and spiritual life. In the exquisite expression that seems to be “stubborn”, there is always unusual but wonderful thinking of art, infinite patience, and vivid and mature skills, which jointly constitutes the solid art style of contemporary Russian oil paintings. The high-quality works of painters not only have important status in the contemporary Russian art history but also share a place in the modern oil painting history of the world.

Cultural Character of the Russian Oil Painting Art

Given the profound connotation of Russian oil paintings, historical culture and local customs and practices described in Russian oil painting works are reviewed. The rich sense of history and lively
sense of life makes people impressed by the painting art of the nation. These great works showing painting skills and describing Russian history, nature and social life are exactly the vivid reflection of the Russian culture and character.

As a superpower with the largest national territorial area, Russia has its unique regional advantage; that is, spanning over Eurasia. It has the special character of tolerating Eastern and Western cultures. After going through twice cultural migration, it absorbs the Eastern and Western culture and artistic essence and finally forms the special national characters of being rough, brave, tough, patriotic and practical. Such national characters are rooted in the Russian oil paintings based on the traditional European painting art which gives out the dazzling light in the artistic history of Russia.

In the long process of Russian art development, Russian oil paintings have always been advancing towards the main line of realism. No matter the realistic and classical painting school focusing on portrait paintings in the early time, or the itinerants Russia that symbolizes the coming of a golden age for Russian oil paintings, “the profound humanitarianism mind, the true love for the land, the healthy and positive affection, and the spiritual force beauty and ugliness but advocating the true, good and beautiful artistic ideal may be hard to be refuted by any eloquent tongue” for the passion of nation about art just like Russia. Unlike the Western culture that pays attention to the physical world blindly, the Russian culture worships the morality and quality, pursues for any ideal and worldly beautiful things, criticizes any unfair things in the world, and reflects the national spirit fully by praising the patriotism. It is exactly these strong spiritual forces that are prompting the continuous development of Russian oil painting art.

Throughout various works of Russian oil painting art, there are numerous works manifesting the spiritual connotation of Russia. No matter in portraits, genre paintings, landscape paintings, historic paintings or religious paintings, Brave, tough, persistent, and patriotic Russian nation has always shown exuberant desire of creation in the artistic world. The itinerants from Russia in the 19th century to the avant-garde art in the 1920s, to the realist oil paintings of socialism, and to the hard re-modeling period of the 20th century, Russian oil painting art has been trying to create another time model on the traditional basis. Such numerous artistic expression forms are all deep introspection about the previous artistic forms, and they are more about infinite expectation for the future oil painting art development. These, however, are all closely related to the spiritual connotation of Russian culture and character.

The Cultural Influence of the Russian oil Painting Art

The history of Russian oil paintings is very glorious; these works do not only have the European traditional paintings style of elegance, but also the Russian national culture deep cultural background. The fifties and sixties of the last century, many artists came to China to hold exhibitions and training of the former Soviet Union, China has sent a large number of artists to the Soviet union to study, through frequent art exchange, Russia's oil painting art to the Chinese oil paintings and painting teaching has important influence. Influenced by the Soviet Russia to form of Chinese oil painting teaching system, from the fifties and sixties of the last century to now has been in the art colleges, and to cultivate art talents in our country has made the significant contributions. Reviews the developing course of Chinese oil paintings since the 20th century, Russian painting's influence on Chinese oil paintings plays an irreplaceable role, make the Chinese oil painting art to mature gradually, and now all the countries concerned major historical themes of painting creation, is still used by Russia's painting mode.

Reviewing the development of Chinese oil paintings, we can see that Chinese artists in the process of learning painting made arduous efforts, especially oil paintings as a door to art, artists not only to master painting skills and principles of art, what is more important to the Chinese traditional artistic style and aesthetic ideas and special social life into the oil painting creation, so that Chinese oil paintings with dual artistic value on the form and content. Under the international background of economic globalization, the rapid development in today's world culture and arts, artists of the individual creativity, modernism and post-modernism ideological trend to make the world a lot of
fine arts colleges and universities gradually give up the realism painting education system, focus on
the cultivation of students' creativity and personalized, however, still retains the art colleges in
Russian realistic painting education system. In such a background, the further development of
Chinese oil painting still needs to learn from the fine tradition of Russian oil painting art, on the
basis of realism creation way, the integration and innovation, at the same time, the inheritance and
development constantly exploring the cultural value of Chinese oil painting.

Conclusions

The Russian culture and character has promoted the revival of Russian art nationalitization in less
than 200 years. In the recent centenary, Russian political and economical fields are experiencing a
series of major reform, but the culture and character of Russian nation has never changed
significantly. The oil painting art of Russia is proceeding in the new historic time and continues to
present the excellent artistic tradition of Russia. Contemporary oil painting art of Russia keeps
trying in the current context and attempts to move the world by the sincere artistic attitude. There’s
no doubt these oil painting works full of “Russian style” are the most direct reflection of the
Russian nation carrying forward its outstanding national characters.

Through the in-depth understanding about the oil painting development history of Russia and the
influence of Russian culture and character on its oil painting art, we can realize the national
character of Russian painting art more clearly. Moreover, the fundamental difference between
Russian oil painting art and Chinese oil painting art can be learnt by us, namely, the difference in
national culture and character. It plays a key role in enlightening the oil painting art development of
China. For excellent cultural art, we should always hold the humble attitude and absorb artistic
essence from Russian oil paintings. Their earnest attitude and persistent pursuit for national Culture
tradition should especially be studied by us, so as to promote the inheritance, innovation and
development of China’s oil painting art.

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