

青年艺术文丛



线的延展

THE EXTENSION OF LINE

兰飞飞 著

WRITER LAN FEIFEI

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Abstract

Line picks one's thoughts out of the complicated details and may establish a purely aesthetic value on any subject (animated or not) in any expressive form.

The formal nuance of the line could create animated visual effects. With respect to the complication of the formal rules, any group of lines combines in accordance with its own rules. The combination, including the combination of similar or contrastive lines, is varied and flexible. Seen from the application of linear language in the drawings and entitative line in the installed works, we could find that as time goes by, the line, as an artistic language, show its own extraordinary charms in the broad application in varied field from outlining the natural objects to installing the artistic works.

Chapter One:

The Personality of Line

Smooth inertial movement is the essential quality of line, while to precisely simulate the construction is the basic function of line. Lines in movement can create imaginative or entitative spaces.

I. Forms of the traditional line

The individual examination and research on tradi-

tional line owe to effects on the following two aspects: infinite exploration of the imagery description of traditional Chinese lines; the painstaking research on the structural rules of the western lines. The traditional Chinese painting, as called "art of line", was growing mature with the development of both painting and calligraphy, which absorbed aspiration from each other. For instance, Zhang Xu created the Kuang Cao (wild cursive calligraphy style) after he watched the sword dance of Gongsun Daniang. At the same time, the creative cognition and deep research on the structure of line drew it back to its living origin: descriptive element. "Take the line for a walk" (Klee) suggests the free and easy way of a successful artist. Liberally arranging the lines and taking unconscious acts as part of the creation may bring the art a more broadened existence.

Linear art in traditional Chinese painting is based on the "use of brush pen", whose changes of strength, angle, and speed determine the abundant variation of lines, thus to create the visual, emotional and conceptive shocks. In traditional Chinese painting, lines, commonly single lines, are always used to draw the outline in a straightforward way. The changing of lines' length and density produces the rhythm of image. The natural and smooth drawing requires the consistent thickness of lines, the medium speed of pen using, and the equipoise of strength. To

represent an object, the lines should be precisely used to describe the exterior structure and image. The painters, who are rationally holding their feelings while drawing, tend to create the implicative images. In the works of Holbein and Ingres, the inner spiritual qualities of the characters are deeply revealed, while the former using concise and stable lines and the latter preferring more decorative lines to show the elegance of the character (picture 1-3). The ancient Chinese masters had amazing painting skills with respect to the application of such methods. They escaped from the restrictions of the natural objects, tending to change and summarize the natural situation of the targets according to their own understandings, thus their works being endowed with intense sense of form. For them, lines are not only used as the medium to represent the targets, but are also endowed with individual aesthetic values to strengthen their expressive force and connotative meanings.

Orderly arrangement of lines, without evident rise and fall, should be intentionally adjusted on the density, including denseness-foiled sparseness and sparseness-foiled denseness. In picture 2, Dürer takes the way of denseness-foiled sparseness. He patiently draws the hat, hair, collar and the patterns on the clothes in order to emerge a dense cluster of lines, which serves as a foil to the general and concentrated lines of the face. Picture 4,

the half-length portrait of a man who is holding a sapling, is the work of modern American painter, Sharn. The painter takes the way of sparseness-foiled denseness. The man behind the tree is outlined with only several curves, while the sapling in the hand is elaborately described with its dense branches and leaves veiling the man's head and hands, therefore a intense contrast of sparseness and denseness emerges, creating a sense of mystery. Such structural form requires the distance between sparseness and denseness, so some subjective elements may cause the increase or decrease of lines in certain parts. Dealing with such pictures, one should be rational to create the decorative effect. But some painters, who pursue nature and simplicity, may seek a casual orderliness with distinctive flavor through the liberal arrangement of lines.

The other way of linear form is mainly based on emotions. With the intense feelings towards the target objects, the painters call out their own artistic inspiration and release their emotions, combining the objects and themselves through the impressionistic lines. Such form has following features: The liberal drawing of free lines, thick or thin, dense or light, grasps the general feeling and vigor. The lines have fluctuant rhythms, which create the strong jumpy sense through sharp rise and fall. Getting the work done without any letup but only slight rendering will produce a lingering charm. One should

give prominence to the major structure but not to the details in certain parts, while the core piece and the relation between different parts should be paid careful attentions. The expressive force of the lines in such form is just like the Chinese calligraphy, suggesting a way of "writing". Release of emotion and enthusiasm makes the picture more charming. The lines seem to be doodled without specific intention, animated and natural. Grasping the expressive elements hidden in the target objects, the painters create a whole visual form, which conveys a general atmosphere and verve. In such way, the viewers can realize the representation of the objects and find out the inner emotion of the painters.

Different lines describe different objects. Even the same lines may present themselves in different styles because of the different moods held by the painters. Rembrandt's *Sleeping Lady* and Shi Ke's *Er Zu Tiao Xin Tu* (Two-Faced Buddha) are both portraits of figures at rest. The former describes a naive and innocent lady, who is sleeping with clothes on. The painter pays more attention to draw the head and outline the body with several lines, thus conveying an indifferent atmosphere. For the latter piece, Shi Ke outlines, with several concise lines, the image of a dozing ascetic monk with light heart. The thick lines of his clothes contrast sharply against the lines used for his body and skin. Degas shows his special

sensitivity through liberally describing the women's skin with thick or thin lines. Rouault tends to use thick and powerful lines to divide up the different parts of the human body, featuring the intense religious sense of tragedy. The ladies in Kollwitz's works, like withered saplings, are struggling with life. The painter tends to use the dry and pained tone of drawing. Grigorescu uses the tone of satiation and verve to create the images of lovely farmer girls, who are healthy and unpretending. Through such examples, we can easily find out that the form and structure of lines play an important role in the expression the emotions.

II. Liberation of line

Kandinsky's monographs on aesthetic and psychological structure of lines provide theoretic foundations for the abstract drawing and decorative fine arts, pioneering a wide foreground. Abstract painting, also called "gesticulated painting", combines the construction of spaces and the expression of emotions, enriching the tradition of lines' forms through practices. Many artists now have escaped from the traditional understanding of plane of lines, getting rid of the stale and bring for the fresh ideas. They have made many amazing works through the bold attempts, thus forcing us to pay attention to them.

In another word, it is their works that lead our vision, feeling and thought into the three-dimensional imagination of entities.

Considering the number of projects that Patrick Dougherty has installed around the world since 1985(now nearing 175), as well as their memorable shapes,size,and backyard-familiar material-tree saplings-There can be little uncertainty in the art world about his work.

His waving, willowy,whimsical.wind-blown-looking, woven-wood structures typically tower over or hold into buildings, trees, and other elements of the landscape. Dougherty's three basic approaches to "stickworks" - in conjunction with architecture, with trees, or free-standing. His site-specific installations can last a couple years or more, but his focus is on the process, not the product; he says"Having the products at the end is,not my goal. My goal is building it. It's someone else's job to contain it, have it, maintain it." "Everything's a vehicle for making a good piece that captures the imagination of the people who pass by or use the space." he says.

The production steps each time are essentially the same, with unique end product. It begins with a site visit, when ideas start to percolate in the actual venue. He believes that "the success of a piece lies in capturing the essence of a place and then playing with what you make of that essence."

When tree material has been located and brought to the site, Dougherty can begin to "sketch" the structure he envisions with branches. Using scaffolding and occasionally aided by volunteers, he constructs an armature of saplings. Gradually, his woven-wood sculptures came to life. The first layer, fleshing out the eventual shape, is structure. The second layer is all about aesthetics: Adding sticks where they look and feel good, "erasing" earlier lines, and making the surface safe. Last comes the cosmetic layer. "I use all the drawing conventions to make an interesting surfaces. I use emphasis lines (heavier branches) and shading (adding white branches to swirls of red maple)."

Although the basic process stays pretty much the same each time around, Dougherty works with a wide variety of wood types, of necessity. In knowing what each can or can't do, he avoids reaching for something done before that current material may not sustain. Willow and maple saplings, he says, can have lacy-looking limbs, allowing a kind of grandeur: "Your eyes slip along their lines. Their slick, shiny bark lets you imply more motion."

Bark has shades and luster, some is mottled and some smooth: All of these surfaces have value to Dougherty. Ash has bigger, stiffer-looking limbs, they can be used to point and suggest direction. "A lot what I am doing is

pointing one limb to another . It's kind of like building electricity between them.”

For nine weeks during the fall of 2004, Dougherty was artist in residence at Grounds For Sculpture in Hamilton, New Jersey, where he filled the 10,000-square-foot museum building with his work. Dougherty himself has begun to build longer spans into his project schedule. His extended stay in New Jersey allowed him to create a much larger than usual body of work.—the five different pieces in effect formed a retrospective exhibition. A spacious, light-filled place, the museum building gradually filled with woven wood in fantastical shapes, some brushing the arched, raised-rib ceiling.

Made from countless truckloads of saplings, a two-story fairy-tale tower grew up and through a corner of the cantilevered mezzanine where a nest-like cocoon sprawled over edge. Five loosely connected structures resembling whirling dervishes activated the largest expanse, and free-wheeling wall works visually connected that area with a huge sphere. This colossal cue ball, as it was informally named, “grew” from a base of heavy stones weighing down a platform that, in turn, anchored the curving branches of the rounded armature.

Dougherty's sculptures are, as one viewer said, mammoth “drawings in spaces.” As three-dimensional drawings, they invite walkthroughs and look-outs.

Anyone at the park could watch and talk with Dougherty as his sculptural visions moved toward material life. As volunteers gained familiarity with the task involved towards the material life. They devised a job list: stripper(of leaves); weaver(of stick); detailer(for surface beauty and safety); scaffolder; and bender. Magdalena Nijander, Dougherty's project assistant at Grounds For Sculpture, specified some of his winning ways with volunteers. He used the word 'we,' Nijander says approvingly, "and he often asked 'What do you think?'".

Dougherty chatted about how his art-making philosophy, and a style of life to accommodate it, has involved over these years. His move to art in general and to sculpture specially was motivated partly by the experience of building his own home in North Carolina. There's a certain amount of reminiscing about 'the sylyan life,' about 'diving into the bucolic'.

He began his art study with clay. Even though he liked its mark-making potential, this medium thwarted his desire to work big. So he eventually moved to "another kind of greenware": sapling. Tree seemed like "a giant warehouse at his fingertips." Ever since, he "never lacks for ideas with a branch in his hand." During his art school days in the early 1980s, he says, painting was seen as "More real than the real thing." The artist puts down a base and reacts to it, and so on and on, in interplays that

can't be planned. His response to that was a determination to build sculpture with the same vitality that painting was thought to have. "You'd put down a base or make mark or state your idea," He explains, "Then an organization would come back. Then you'd add the public. Rather than excluding people, there would be a constant interplay. You'd have a reactive situation, a hub for lots of different things to happen."

Since he believes sculpture is about conversations, about openness between the artist and the viewer, Dougherty's observation that "Sculpture is a kind of ministerial occupation" doesn't surprise. He routinely stopped working to talk with visitors and touring school kids. "You've got to be empathetic with the viewer: Remember the questions you asked when you weren't a sculpture resonates with people's need to know, to make, to experience innovative thinking."

In contrast to artists who choose to "Burrow down, seeking a unique manifestation of their own personality," He says, "I'm just not that interested in working ideas in the back and leaving them on the table. I really like the bigger conversation that takes places, with the sponsor, helpers, the public." Such talks, possibly brief, but potentially electric, coupled with the excitement of new work—that's what it's all about for him: "if people connect with what I'm doing, then I

feel there's a worthiness to the effort."

Nick Cave's "Soundsuits" embody sculpture in motion. For the past decade, the Chicago-based artist, who has art degrees from the Kansas City Art Institute and Cranbrook Academy of Art, has operated on the boundaries of visual and performance art, but his work transcends artistic categories. Looking at Cave's work is like experiencing a visual explosion of sound and movement—Cave himself says that he aims at communicating a sense of "massive intensity" in his art.

"I'm interested in exploring the moment, the pure second of encounter with an artwork", Cave said recently in his studio. He was preparing for a comprehensive exhibition, "Nick Cave: Soundsuits", that includes close to 40 Soundsuits and wall sculptures, with video and live performances using the Soundsuits. The show, awarded a \$50,000 grant from the Joyce Foundation, opened this spring at the Chicago Cultural Center. It will close on July 9. Cave's pursuit of the "unexpected, to make people shift gears, to shift the meaning of the day, the way an accident changes your life or the way you see the quick reflection of someone in a street window", underlies his broader project—to explore the social consequences of human perception.

The percussive aspects of the Soundsuits—their ex-

traordinary visual punch and the sense of confrontation and improvisation conveyed when they are used in performance with music—relate perhaps to Cave’s background with the Alvin Ailey Dance Company. But Cave’s work also taps into a thread in contemporary visual art that emphasizes the kinesthetic and the experiential even as it exploits the tangible qualities of objects. It is art rooted in the scientific and cultural shifts of the last century, changes that have profoundly redefined what we think of as “real”: in contemporary physics, particles are no longer defined as material stuff, but as dynamic processes, and reality is as much about flow and change as about static matter. An artwork—blending physical, conceptual, and even kinesthetic experience—could be defined as a receptive event as much as an object. And Cave, straddling performance and sculpture, provides a quintessential example.

Cave’s emphasis on illuminating and projecting an immediate, cathartic moment throws visual art back to its originary, Dionysian place within ritual—that is, beyond the linguistic, beyond words, even beyond a reliance on meaning. To explain, Cave uses a performer’s terminology of rhythm and pace: “I’m not trying to put theory around my art. I’m more interested in hitting hard with the work, then responding, then hitting hard, then responding—then looking back, trying to scoop it up and give it back to the world.”