

The research of straw painting's theme in Henan province of China

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Abstract

This article mainly researches folk arts and crafts straw paintings in Henan province of China and elaborates them from their historical origin, production process, and different themes. The straw painting's theme can be mainly divided into several kinds—theme on flowers and grasses, probably walking beasts, birds, characters and a variety of combinations, each of which is the longing of the local people for luck and happy life, or the appreciation to the beauty.

Key words : *Straw painting; Manufacturing process; Folk art; Theme matter*

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I . Introduction

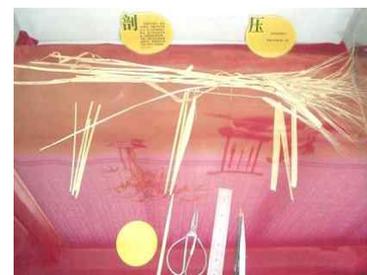
Straw painting, other names of wheat straw picture, wheat ironing painting and straw painting made by wheat straw is an important kind of handicraft of China's ancient central plain. According to research wheat, resourceful in central plains, was introduced into the west of our country by western Asia through central Asia. Based on the book of HouHanShu (written by Fanye, a famous writer of Southern Song Dynasty) , some minorities in southwest China only feed on wheat due to the salty land couldn't produce other grain.

In Shang and Zhou period, the wheat has already been introduced into the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River region as a kind of crop. According to the records in the book of TianGong KaiWu (written by Song Yingxing in Ming Dynasty), that the main food of people in ancient China including the areas of Yan, Qin, Jin, Yu, Qi, and Lu were wheat. From above it shows that today's provinces of Henan, Shandong, Shanxi, Hebei and other places are rich in wheat which provides a raw material source source for

straw painting and lay a good material base for the produce of this fine art. In this way Henan province, rich in wheat, has naturally become the hometown of straw painting.

II. The manufacturing process of straw painting

The working process of Straw painting is very complicated and must be all done by hand. It is very strict and exquisite from material choose to the accomplish. When selecting materials it is necessary to consider that the form and color of straw paintings are not easy to change and the style of finished product can be kept for long. So the thick, round pretty, shiny straws are first choice. (see in the picture 1).



Picture 1: material

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Picture 2 : trimming



Picture 3 : Pressing

As shown in picture 2, one should remove the top tips and root knots of chosen materials with scissors and stripped off the skin to make the only middle part left.

Just as in the picture 3, one should first split straws in the middle and scrape their thin film. Then suppress straw into plain films by hard and slippery object. Thirdly is dye straw flat pieces and carbonized them with ironing and pressing technology during which one can flexibly adjust the temperature to produce other color such as reddish brown, brown and yellow to meet needs of the straw painting's style. In order to rich straw painting's color, the straws can be colored into red, green, and blue. Finally work is cut and paste which based on the draft design and the ideal artistic image to create images such as lifelike birds or other objects in the natural world.

For straw painting from the material choose, design to its accomplish there are more than 20 procedures- smoking, steaming, bleaching, scraping, pressing, ironing, cutting and pasting and so on. Among of these procedures the ironing and pressing stage, the most flexible and the most in need of skills, is closely linked with the style of this product. In order not to break the overall image of the work the cutting should be neat, smooth and not with a burr or gouges.

III. The theme of straw painting

In China, auspicious patterns are important things favored by people to express people's mind. From ancient times to today every pattern has its meaning and every meaning represents auspicious.

Straw painting also has a wide range of themes. These patterns composed by straw is their reflection of the love for life and pursuit for beautiful things of people in Henan province, as well as, it is a profound reflection excellent folk moral tradition.

1. The category of flowers and grasses

Flowers and grasses pattern, a common and extensive theme in straw painting, is the artistic expression of people for beautiful nature scenery. According to the ecological habits of things, the symbolic rhetoric and other rhetorics are used to express a particular ideological content.

For example lotus, silt but not imbrued and a symbol of faithful and pure is like a person who not affected by bad environment around; plum flower, the hiding meaning of strong and brave, grows in winter and blossoms more exuberant when weather colder which like people facing hardship in all perseverance; bamboo who has sections in appearance used to describe the people who with perseverance characters; peony, gorgeous and beauty, is often regarded as a kind of flower represents rich and honor, and a passion for wealth and prosperity; calabash and pomegranate who have many seeds are often as a desire for children. Lotus and lotus leaf in picture 4 is simple and elegant which harmony with the pure quality of lotus pure quality.



Picture 4 : The lotus and water lily

2. The birds and the beasts

The style about animals and birds is another major theme and its applications in art form are the proof of the ancient ancestors' hardworking, intelligent, passion for life and good observations. As shown in picture 5 lifelike sparrows have played a very important role in controlling pest in central plains where agriculture occupies a predominant place. They were endowed as mascot by people due to its great contribution to agricultural production. So the straw paintings of this kind of theme are expressing the people's love for sparrows and desires for the harvest. As well as in picture 6

the soaring eagle with upright feather, sharp eyes and athletic body highlights people's praise for the arrogant and unyielding characters which also owned by eagle.



Picture 5 : straw painting sparrow



Picture 6 : The eagle

Animals in straw paintings are always fierce animals for example tiger and lion are most common. People who encourage himself as brave as tiger or lion express a kind of majestic demeanor by these fierce animals.

3. Characters

Straw paintings about this theme of characters mainly include historical figures who revered by people, fairy, fairy tales, or the common work scene of labors. As shown in picture7 a beautiful woman, carrying two altar of food, enjoys a good mood. This kind of description of labor scene fully expressed the labor's pure goodness deep in their spiritual world.



Picture7: The woman winemaking picture

4. A variety of combinations

Some individual image will produce a whole new meaning when they combine together with others. There is a wide range of theme matters in the content of straw paintings for instance some auspicious patterns in Chinese folk are combined with other signals to express certain meanings. Such kind of method is mainly use the implication and harmonics rhetorics to express meanings of things.

Put the fish and lotus together as shown in picture 8, using the method of harmonics performance, there is the meaning of "more than years", said the desire for the harvest. Again these things such as peach blossom, Chinese rose, Ganoderma lucidum and bamboo grouped together shows a meaning of Qunfang Zhushou. "Fang" means flowers and a metaphor of reputation or virtue. So the profound meaning of Qunfang Zhushou means many of those who have good moral character give wishes to the elder . And other combinations like turtle and crane refers to the longevity; dragon and phoenix means an extremely good fortune; pine and crane also refers to the longevity; magpie and plum blossom has a meaning of happiness.



Picture 8 : More than years

All these themes in straw painting express a kind of hope and desire of working class as well as a longing for better life.

It is necessary to apply for modern aesthetic concept, advance with times, to develop and innovate such traditional folk arts and crafts. If straw painting's theme matter can be expanded, -the manifestation of Chinese idiom story, traditional abstract symbols, social harmony and environmental protection advocated by new society, low carbon way of life, etc., not only the straw painting art can be inherited but also both the ancient Chinese traditional

culture and new social concept can be promoted.

IV. Conclusion

Due to the uniqueness of materials and method, straw painting's craft and artistic value are much more precious. Straw painting owns richful theme matters which probably can be classified into flowers and grasses, beasts and birds, humankind characters and a variety of combinations of several things, each of which is the thirsty for luck, happy life and beautiful scene in a good day of the local people. Straw paintings can enrich themselves by draing lessons from other Chinese traditional art forms and their themes can be resourceful in the course of future development and innovation.

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