

# The Calligraphy Interpretation of the Art Pen of Impressionist Painting

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## Abstract

Examining Impressionist painting with Chinese traditional painting theory and aesthetic standards, what is presented to modern people is this kind of "writing" style of writing which thrives in the face of natural feeling. It comes from the brushwork tradition of western oil painting for hundreds of years, and gradually develops to Impressionism and has distinct aesthetic characteristics, and directly refers to today's freehand oil painting. At the same time, the "writing" style of impressionist painting has a profound influence on Chinese and western oil painting art.

## Keywords

Impressionist painting, Writing style, Write, Calligraphy.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Huang Binhong said: "The European style is spreading to the east, and the psychology is compatible. In less than 20 years, painting should not be divided into Chinese and Western. Its spirit is the same. The brushwork of Westerners is a line, that is, the leak mark of the secret passage in the ancient law. " [1] It can be inferred from this passage: First of all, there are "brushwork" and "pen and ink" in oil painting, especially after Impressionist painting, which is a comprehensive embodiment of the subject's spirit, emotion, character and cultivation through comprehensive means or language such as composition, color, lines and brushstrokes. Secondly, Chinese and Western paintings are very similar in terms of the pen used to write "Italy". In the west, the development of freehand brushwork in oil painting is the way to further improve western oil painting. From the Renaissance Venetian School, which started with "seeing the pen", to the modernist school, from Titian and Rembrandt, to Turner and Monet, and then to Van Gogh and Mo Landi, the use of "writing" is becoming more and more frequent and skilled, and its artistic expression is becoming stronger and stronger, and the handwriting on the screen is obvious. Moreover, for a painter, brushwork is the embodiment of the mark of life, an indispensable part of his life, and has extremely important value. As the product of human spirit, the highest realm of painting is not to imitate objects realistically, but to express its own spirit and emotion fully and freely. From ancient times to the present, the reason why art is touching is that we can find the brilliance of human nature in it, and its main carrier is one of the elements of "pen and ink" with personal life imprint. While "writing" is the product of the creative subject's life passion combined with his own artistic accomplishment of natural generate, the artist's profound understanding of objects, the faithful listening to the call of spirit, and the record of the release of artistic nature.

For a long time, most of the researches on Impressionist painting have interpreted the revolution of light and color according to western theories and angles. Moreover, Chinese art researchers also lack the concept of national self-reliance in the style of "Six Classics Note Me" and use Chinese traditional aesthetics and painting theory to study, but they just copy books with westerners. However, after more than one hundred years of the Impressionist Revolution,

and when the color of Impressionist paintings has faded to "optical gray". That is to say, today, when the glory of Impressionist color revolution has faded, looking at Impressionist painting according to the standard of Chinese traditional painting, what is presented to modern people is this kind of "writing" style of writing which is flourishing in the face of natural feeling.

## 2. TRACING BACK TO THE ARTISTIC BRUSHWORK OF IMPRESSIONIST PAINTING

In the history of western oil painting, the so-called "pen and ink" is only a tool material under the shape. For example, Da Vinci's and Raphael's works are generally sketched first, and then covered with transparency, but they still fail to pursue the expressive force and vitality of composition, color, lines and strokes. Until the appearance of Impressionism, the aesthetic value of brushwork was gradually recognized by people, and began to be favored by painters. The expressive force of brushwork was explored from the strength, speed and direction of brushwork, and then it was possible for western oil painting to talk about the problem of "pen and ink". Of course, pen and ink is not only a matter of brush strokes and pens, but also a comprehensive embodiment of colors, lines and so on. However, as far as the early stage of western oil painting development is concerned, the premise of "writing" in oil painting begins with the emphasis on brushwork and the exploration of brushwork.

To a certain extent, the formation of Impressionist writing style of "Italy" is inevitable for the development of western oil painting. Rubens initiated the use of turpentine to color and developed the technique of semi-thick painting, as well as the direct painting method of oil painting. He emphasized the brushwork and thought: "Whether the brushwork is affirmative or not and whether the brushwork is expressive is a sign to measure whether an author is a great painter." [2] He raised the emphasis on pen and brushwork from Titian era to the height of judging whether a painter is a great painter, that is, he really established the brushwork.

From the Venetian painting school to the 19th century romantic works of Delacroix and Barbizon school. The expressive brushwork condensed by the former masters in the long experience accumulation has become an indispensable learning example for impressionist painters, and it is on this basis that a breakthrough in brushwork is possible. Especially in the close contact and study of French romanticists and realists, who are closely connected with Impressionists, this kind of "writing" style has gradually formed.



**Figure 1.** Turner, 1844 rain, steam and speed - the Great Western Railway, 91 × 122cm, painted cloth, National Gallery, London



**Figure 2.** Comsteiber's storm on the Birmingham coast in 1828, 14.5 × 15.5cm, cloth oil color, New Haven, Yale Center of British Art

First of all, Turner in England freely combines the "writing" style of painting with the "painting" style of painting, expressing his "writing" spirit with his strong feelings and impressions of nature, and making emotion the soul of his artistic creation. In his later works *Rain, Steam and Speed-Great Western Railway* (Figure 1) and *Snowstorm*, he used the "soap bubbles and lime slurry" ridiculed by critics at that time to "write" his impression with great passion. Turner initiated the "modernization" of western oil painting to express the subjective spirit. But Constable, who is equal to Turner, is not so wild. However, he developed a palette knife technique called "Snow White of Constable", which influenced barbizon school and Impressionism afterwards. This technique is well reflected in his work *Storm on Birmingham Coast* (Figure 2). The large color blocks paved by the color matching knife show a kind of meaning of "pen and ink" by splashing "writing" in transparent painting. Monet and others benefited a lot from Turner's large color block, thickness and flexible use of cursive writing style.

Secondly, Delacroix painting has developed a painting element that uses the principle of complementary colors, adopts the technique of color line separation, and expresses passionately with color lines. Each line has independent vitality, thus finding the painting element that expresses the emotion and spirit of the subject. In his works, the basic attribute of "form" began to disappear, and only a few vivid and passionate color lines had a great influence on Impressionism, Post-Impressionism and Fauvism. The power of art touches people spiritually, and Delacroix has made indelible contributions to both emotional expression and spiritual expression. On the brushwork, he emphasized that the broad-brush lines jump like notes, which is the essential beauty of painting that strikes the artist's soul, which is also regarded as the prelude of Impressionism.

Third, the relationship between Courbet, a realist painter, and impressionist painters is more direct. Courbet's rough "broad principle" of brushwork and knife technique makes the form of oil painting gradually show aesthetic value, that is, the charm of the form and connotation of "pen and ink" which is synthesized by brushwork, color and structure.

The naturalistic barbizon school is also very important to impressionism, and they have a closer relationship between teachers and friends. Barbizon school painters advocate nature and emphasize sketching and creating from the scenery. Impressionism directly inherits this tradition, and after returning to the studio more thoroughly, it will not be modified, so as to keep the fresh and natural "vivid" "pen and ink" naturally flowing on the canvas. Among them, Koro's scenery has the artistic conception beauty of Chinese landscape painting, and its style is particularly fresh and poetic, which is close to the traditional aesthetic ideal of China.

Fourth, Budan and qiongkang have made special contributions to Impressionist freehand writing. Budan is Monet's direct teacher. He led Monet and others to nature. Monet once said that "with indefatigable kindness, Budan shouldered my education. My eyes finally opened and I really knew nature. At the same time, I learned to love nature." [3] And Joan Kang also "became

my real teacher, and he finished the education of observing things with my own eyes" [4]. Bhutan and Qiongang often create outdoor sketches together with Monet and others. They emphasize complete outdoor creation, but when they go back to the studio, they will never modify it again like Barbizon painters. They think that the creation outside the studio is excited by nature, so the strokes of the paintings have the vividness that the studio modification does not have, and they carry out color research creation at different times and seasons in the same place. Impressionist painters inherited these traditions, and Monet also went to the extreme along the road of completely outdoor sketch creation and research.

Fifthly, Goya's painting methods in Spain are diverse, and there are several changes in the writing style of direct painting. First, it has developed the half-thick "one stroke in place" writing style. For example, although Velazquez's writing style is mainly absorbed in "Umbrella", "Naked Maha" and other works, Goya's writing style is more free and more painting. Secondly, he created a kind of freehand brushwork technique of "splashing color and splashing color". In "Shooting on May 3, 1808" (Figure 3), Goya used transparent and semitransparent thin colors blended by thinner, and used the center and side front to throw a lot of strokes. "The pen is fine and colorful" and "wins more with less". Because of the aggression of the country, it is full of spirit. Thirdly, it forms a rough brushwork freehand brushwork method with scattered front, broken pen and separated brush strokes, for example, "Bordeaux Milk Maid" in his later years. Moreover, Goya gradually formed a technique of drawing black lines with thick pens, which is similar to freehand brushwork in Chinese painting and shows the transformation of western oil painting from realism to freehand brushwork. He directly influenced the formation of Manet's freehand brushwork, and Degas' black line came from Goya.



**Figure 3.** Goya's 1814 Shooting on May 3, 1808, 266×345cm, oil on cloth, Madrid, Prado Museum

Finally, the unique decorativeness, planeness, perspective and tick-off techniques of oriental art, especially Japanese Ukiyo-e paintings, are also an enlightenment for Impressionist to start a new pursuit. In addition, the invention of photography in the 19th century made artists have to think about a new way out of painting art, and the appearance of tube-mounted pigments provided the material basis and conditions for impressionist painters, and the impressionist "writing" was formed under such historical conditions.

### 3. CALLIGRAPHY CHARACTERISTICS OF IMPRESSIONIST PAINTING

With the development of western painting to Impressionism, the subjective consciousness of painting has been gradually liberated. Artists began to express their own spirit with brushes, and express their subjective impression of nature and their unique feelings with personalized "brushwork", so as to make their spirit free. The basic language form, which is composed of lines, strokes, colors, textures, etc., is the "pen and ink" for artists to express their emotions and

interests in their creation. It can rely on shapes and colors as the media of painting creation, and can also break away from the shackles of real objects and meet the subjective consciousness and spiritual needs of artists in its own independent form, thus forming rich meaning and showing different individual spirits. The only function and ultimate goal of painting language is to express the artist's thought, spirit, emotion, interest and knowledge of character through a special language form, and make the recipient resonate, understand the deep meaning and comprehend the spirit. Painting art must follow its own laws and characteristics of painting ontology language. Therefore, the appearance of oil painting "pen and ink" through "writing" has become an important condition for the construction of oil painting itself. If we compare Impressionism with various western oil painting schools before and at the same time, we can show the inheritance and summary characteristics of impressionist painting's "writing" and its new development to a certain extent.

### 3.1. Dry Writing, Dispersing the Front and Rubbing the Meaning of "Writing"

Impressionist painters developed a kind of "writing" style of writing with dry brush and brush. This is because Impressionism used volatile turpentine as a blending agent for direct painting, and the drying speed of color was relatively fast, showing a kind of "brush and ink" effect of "writing". In Monet's "Wheat Straw Pile (Late Summer)", this kind of writing style of "meaning" with scattered front and brush forms a kind of sunny visual gray air feeling, which shows the artist's "impression" well. This style of writing is also used in the works of Pissarro and Sisley. Pissarro's "writing" is rather clumsy and has a special position in Impressionism. This is because he always insisted on justice and the simplicity of character, and he directly guided the development of Post-Impressionism, and he expressed his ideal and spirit with personalized scenery. As far as this is concerned, his position is unshakable.

### 3.2. Thick (Wide) Brushwork of "Wet and Dry"

Impressionist "writing" presents a freehand brushwork effect of "wet and dry". Impressionists mostly advocate direct creation of outdoor sketching, and they try their best to capture the overall charm of the scenery. Therefore, the principle of "big and broad" in writing is fully reflected, especially in Manet's later outdoor sketch, the big "writing" in thick pen appears to be cadence, bold and powerful, showing a kind of self-interest, "artistic conception" and "I am everywhere". In the work *Monet Family in the Courtyard* (Figure 4), the flat light and shade modeling is adopted, which has the unfinished feeling of "writing", the style of painting is beautiful and moist, and it is easy and natural to improvise, and "one stroke in place" means nothing. If Impressionism is a revolution, then Manet is the forerunner of the revolution.



**Figure 4.** Manet's *Monet Family in the Courtyard* in 1874, 61×99.7cm, oil on cloth, New York, Metropolitan Museum

### 3.3. The Meaning of "Writing" in "Painting with Cursive Script"

Impressionist's "writing" is a kind of "writing" meaning of "painting with cursive script". Impressionism developed gradually from objective reality to subjective expression of "writing", and they began to pursue subjective expression in the later period. Although Monet emphasizes that "light" is the main character of the picture in the weeping willow. However, in fact, the protagonist is his own subjective interest and emotion in the painting, and what he tries to grasp is a kind of charm and passion. Similarly, Sisley and Berthe Morisot, a female impressionist painter, formed a kind of pen and ink interest of "painting with cursive script" in the later period, and Sisley's "writing" presented a lyrical meaning. In his work "Snow Scenery in Louvain" (Figure 5), the long-line song like grass "writing" is poetic and presents a happy mood after snow, which is the embodiment of the painter's melancholy poet temperament. Bert Morisso, as a female painter, is more relaxed than other impressionist painters. In her masterpiece Young Maid (Figure 6), "writing" like a wild grass quickly is relaxed and comfortable, and she enjoys leisure. She was well-fed all her life, but she often helped other members of the team as much as she could, which promoted the victory of Impressionism.



**Figure 5.** Sisley's Snow Scene in Louvain in 1878, 61×50cm, oil on cloth, Paris, Orsay Museum



**Figure 6.** Berthe Morisot's Young Maid, 1885/6, 61.3×50cm, painted on cloth, National Art Museum of Washington

### 3.4. Complementary Color Broken Stroke Method for Color Juxtaposition and Separation

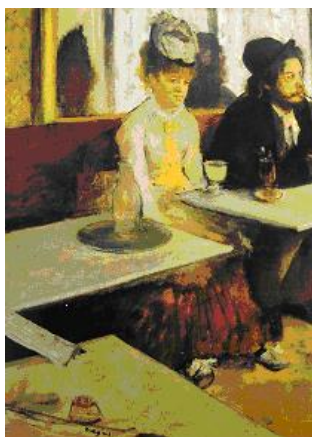
It presents the color juxtaposition and separation. This is the development of Delacroix's writing style in his later years, while Impressionism is dry and broken. In Renoir's work the swing (Figure 7), the separation and juxtaposition of color dots or lines caused by broken pen creates the charming interest of sunshine vibration after the addition and mixing in people's eyes. The "artistic conception" is fresh and pleasant, free and leisurely, seemingly aimless expression, but in fact, it is full of interest. His highly skilled writing technique is good at creating a kind of gorgeous, mellow and comfortable atmosphere. Although Renoir's family is poor, he is naturally lively and optimistic, as if detached from the world. Therefore, one's spiritual temperament can not be concealed in painting.



**Figure 7.** Renoir 1876 "Swing" 92×73cm, oil on canvas, Paris, Musée d'Orsay

### 3.5. Linear Brushwork of Ink Outline

Impressionist's "writing" is a linear brushwork sketched in ink, which first appeared in the works of Spanish master Goya. However, Degas and others inherited and developed it. In his works Absinthe (Figure 8) and Dancer on the Stage, he wrote with black lines very smartly, and the strength and push of the pen when it was delivered, the center and side front of the pen, the hidden front and the dew front were well controlled, and the later dry pen sketching was more skillful. His unsociable temperament makes him a person who explores alone, and the dancers he painted have some bitterness and desolation. Degas's "writing" is free from tradition and contains rich beauty of "pen and ink", which is similar to Chinese freehand brushwork. From the freehand brushwork principle, he is a true impressionist painter.



**Figure 8.** Absinthe by Degas, 1875 / 6, 92 × 68cm, oil on cloth, Musee d'Orsay, Paris

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

Impressionists highlight the subjective interest of "writing", and most of their paintings are "written" with different brushwork. They are either unrestrained and relaxed, fresh and comfortable, or they are written with books and poems, or they accumulate "lines" to form a plane and have bold bones, and so on. Moreover, as the most important representative of Impressionist style, Monet developed into freehand oil painting in his later years. After a long period of painting practice, he gradually got rid of the shackles of rich and colorful natural images, and explored the expression of subjective interest and the expression of subjective spirit with "meaning", and gradually entered a state of "unable to use the law". Those large water lilies vividly show the "aura" between the green leaves and the Red Lake in front of people with their vivid "writing". Their realm and artistic craftsmanship have echoed the freehand brushwork of China in a far-reaching way, achieving the same effect. Therefore, impressionism has a milestone position from realism to freehand brushwork in Western painting, which will have a profound impact on Chinese and Western oil painting art.

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