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Philosophies in Figurative Painting:

A Study of the Language of Painting

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Abstract

This practice-led project will investigate particularities and philosophies held within the genre of figurative painting. That is, the fundamental issues of the language of painting. Why is painting so difficult to quantify as a language? This practice-led research seeks to address as its primary focus, a set of related arguments for quantifying painting as a language in and of itself.

The main investigative issues are as follows:

1. Analyzing the property of the language of painting from the perspective of linguistics and semiotics; 2. Discussing the linguistic factors such as material, representation, expression and meaning in figurative painting from the perspective of analytical aesthetics and phenomenological aesthetics; 3. Through form and style, and in combination with practice, formalism, aesthetics and traditional Chinese painting theory to explore the physical media factors that constitute the language of painting embodied in particular artworks.

The contribution to new knowledge involves: 1. establishing a field of practical, pure and non-referential language of painting that pertains to figurative painting and involves two levels—one is fundamental, relating to representation, realism and expression and providing a basis and scope for another level; the second one is physical, including material, form and other physical media. 2. based on questioning the existing defects in the analysis of the language of painting, putting forward how we can discuss painting itself effectively; and a feasible theoretical framework and discussion mode are given. In short, what is the language of painting and how it is formulated.

Declaration

This is to certify that

- (i) *the thesis comprises only my original work towards the Doctor of Philosophy except where indicated in the preface,*
- (ii) *due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,*
- (iii) *the thesis is 40,000 words in length, exclusive of abstract, footnotes, bibliography and image captions.*

Signature: MING CHENG

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Introduction

This thesis studies the fundamental issues of the language of painting. The discussion of the language of painting in this thesis is not in the sense of logical and notional ordinary language or other languages which are linear and possess narrative functions, but refers to the perceptible properties of painting. It is my contention that the only reliable way to discuss paintings is through enabling paintings to present themselves as an experiential episode. Therefore, the issues in this study do not intersect with a study of painting based in the Humanities and Social Sciences.

This study will contend that there is no reliable and effective method for studying the language of painting, especially at the physical level. It can be seen from the phenomenological texts analyzed in this thesis that this issue of the failure of methodology to understand the language of painting was also realized by phenomenological aestheticians. Mikel Dufrenne, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and other phenomenologists apply phenomenological methods and put forward their own concepts. However, this can only be said to be a partial step forward. The following will briefly explain the basic concepts and scope used in this thesis. I would like to note here for the reader that from here on in when I refer to “Painting Language” this should be understood as the language of painting.

Figurative Painting and Painting Language

A brief description will be given here to define “figurative painting” and “painting language” for the purposes of this study. From the perspective of art history, figurative painting has been a broad term used to describe many forms of painting that refer in some way to a concrete (as opposed to abstract) image. Here I define figurative painting, in terms of the most general concepts, as a painting bears a concrete image (Differentiation and analysis of this concept is not the focus of this thesis). Painting language refers to the perceptible properties of painting. In so far as this study is concerned, the two concepts—painting language and figurative painting—are indistinguishable, because in a general sense, figurative painting includes representation, subject, form, style, expression, meaning and so on; however, all these factors also fall into the category of painting language; in fact the theories of some researchers discussed in this study, such as, Nelson Goodman, Mikel Dufrenne and Ernst Gombrich, are based on the recognition of this category.

Actually, for representation, subject, form, style, expression and meaning, it is almost impossible to have a clear definition and division. They cover and overlap each other from different perspectives. For example, representation, form and style can be regarded as expression, as Dufrenne holds that representation is expression; and Goodman argues that there is no essential difference between representation and expression; or, according to Roman Ingarden, form can include representation, style, expression, material and so on.

In addition to the above factors, based on artworks, painting language, as focused on in this thesis, can be divided into two levels: level one concerns material, medium, technique and creative rules, or is collectively called “media”, and level two inclining to metaphysical aesthetic subject involves sensible form and psychic factors, or is collectively called “X”¹. The above factors (representation, subject, form, style, expression, meaning and so on) can also be grouped into these two levels—“media” and “X”. (For instance, meaning can be grouped into level two “X”, and the rest can be grouped into level one “media”, because representation, expression and style can be classified into technique, form can be classified into creative rules or material and medium.) This does not provide a framework or level based on a certain school of aesthetic theory or art theory, because establishing this layering is based on my own artistic practice—drawing, intuition, experience and sensibility. The relationship between two levels is that level one must be rooted in level two—the factors of media must be governed by the psychic factors—without level two “X”, level one “media” will be disordered and motley. Based on my experience from artistic practice, specifically, in addition to point, line, plane, color, composition and rhythm which belong to technique and creative rules commonly seen in formal analysis (mainly the objectives of Wassily Kandinsky, Roger Fry and Clement Greenberg), there are also elements that must be perceived through broader artistic practice. These elements mostly belong to technique and material—brush-wielding, brushstroke, half-dry stroke, glazing, flow and settlement of paints²—at level one. All of the above factors constitute painting language in figurative painting focused on in this thesis. It seems miscellaneous, but as has been noted, they cover and overlap each other in the experience of painting. Ironically, they are an idea which is cloudy and obscure—a scene which is clear when merged and confused when separated. However, in order

¹ It is supposed to be a noun, but I can neither find a suitable word nor create a new word, so it is named “X”, which has no other special meaning.

² My attention to and experience of these factors originates from my practice of calligraphy and traditional Chinese painting and ancient Chinese painting theories as well as later the practice in oil painting.

to illustrate this non-verbal experience of painting, this complex of elements needs to be disassembled and analyzed in order to address the question of this thesis: What is painting language.

The philosophers, art theorists and art historians above, whose work is central to this thesis, offer insightful opinions and sharp critical analysis from their academic background respectively. They provide important theories and viewpoints for this field, on the level of clarification and discussion, which are very theoretical, yet they were not artists in practice; therefore, the theories they advance are mainly based on linguistics, semiology, iconology and art philosophy. Correspondingly, discussing these theories from a viewpoint of art practice is meaningful in this project. The discussion of painting language in this thesis will benefit from those theorists by dialogue with these existing theories from a perspective of practice, thereby clarifying painting language and its properties closely integrated with broader practice.

Figurative Painting

As described earlier, the definition of figurative painting is relatively broad in this thesis, but in order to better discuss painting language, it is useful to narrow down further, namely, distinguishing pictures (image) from paintings (art)³. There is almost no distinction made between the two concepts of figurative painting in traditional art history and art theory—combining aesthetic appreciation and ideology (religious, culture and politics) for study has been the trend (such as Erwin Panofsky's three-level theory of iconology). Some scholars distinguish between pictures and paintings in different degrees or for different purposes. For instance, Hans Belting clearly advocated the distinction between the two concepts of image and art in his research, such as *Likeness and Presence* (1997)⁴. Images (pictures) are not created as art (paintings), that is, the image has its context and function when it is created and it is not created as an aesthetic object. Belting holds that compared with the image, art is obviously a younger concept, which appeared after art defeated religion in the field of the image. He argues that images are referential (not in the sense of semiotics), yet the purpose of art is not the actual function of images but for art

³ In this section, picture and image are used in the same sense, as are painting and art. They all refer to physical figurative works and do not involve C. S. Peirce's semiotic theory, W. J. T. Mitchell's picture theory and theories about text and image as well as L. Wittgenstein's picture theory of language mentioned in the following chapters.

⁴ Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

itself—art is created from the very beginning as an aesthetic object.

This view is similar to phenomenological aesthetics. Dufrenne did not put forward these two concepts of the image and the picture explicitly, but he made a distinction when discussing the aesthetic object. Namely, that the value of image work (picture) lies in its effectiveness, or in other words, the signifier object and aesthetic object have not yet been separated; however, artwork directs to itself, in which the meaning is immanent in the sensuous.

Formalists are less concerned with themes, objects of expression and reference. They only focus on form. That is, for formalists, such as Roger Fry and Clement Greenberg, there is no concept of image, only painting. Nevertheless, whether it is a picture or painting depends on many factors—the original intention of the creator, the relation between works and original context, viewers' cognition, research perspective and so on. For instance, in terms of context, religious “paintings” painted centuries ago are stripped of the original context and evacuated of their original cultural connotation become paintings not pictures in modern galleries. In Nelson Goodman’s opinion all the images are pictures not paintings, instead. In the sense of this thesis, whether a work is painting depends for the painter on the process and result of the painting when considered without external references. Whilst for the viewer, only the viewing method without external references becomes critical—a standpoint similar to formalism.

Painting Language

As described previously, the factors of painting language in this thesis are complex, as Curtis Carter notes in *Painting and Language* (1976); “either paintings lack syntactic elements and rules or that paintings are ordered differently from language units or that paintings and languages belong to different kinds of sign or symbol systems”⁵. That is, painting cannot correspond to morpheme, phoneme, grammar and other elements in linguistics. Thus, it is impossible to analyze this kind of painting language in terms of syntax and semantics (Dufrenne and Susanne Langer explain this in their respective studies). In contrast, in *Art and Illusion* (1960)⁶, Ernst Gombrich argues that painting, like language, is made up of limited elements by means of convention

⁵ Curtis Carter, “Painting and language: A pictorial syntax of shapes,” *Leonardo*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Spring, 1976): 111. DOI: 10.2307/1573117 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1573117/>.

⁶ Ernst Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

and provides an analysis of semantic or representational aspects of a language of painting, using “vocabulary” and “schemata” to illustrate language features of painting. After the linguistic turn in the 20th Century, some scholars assert that the field of art can be linked to linguistics or similar semiotic systems. Just as in the opinion of analytical aestheticians based on linguistic analysis, the painting language is not totally unanalyzable either. For example, Carter holds that there are some syntactic rules in painting that can be analyzed—*“shapes act as such elements in the languages of painting styles”*; and states a few assumptions, such as *“painting is language-like because it shares with written language the notion of syntax”* and so on.⁷ Goodman, based on linguistic analysis and semiotic methods, discusses some factors which have the property of logical structural syntax and semantic analysis, such as style, and dismisses some factors which lack positivity, act on perception and emotion, and cannot be expressed in logical language or propositions, such as media which only works on the experience and cannot be argued. In this thesis, I propose that the factors of painting language belongs to non-verbal symbols, which have fuzziness and illogicality, but have specific organizational modes and can form recognizable images. (The meaning referred and the objects aroused in reality by the image do not belong to the category of painting language in this thesis.) In addition to the factors based on the overall painting and can be discussed in terms of pure concepts, like representation, expression and style, the following three points which belong to physical media factor need to be briefly explained here (details in chapter 2 and 3). These three points, based on sensibility, are correlative and indistinguishable in practice.

First - the material in the painting:

The material of a painting has various names in the studies of different scholars, such as objectness (Belting), thingness (Heidegger), matter (Dufrenne). The material, in Erwin Panofsky’s stratification of iconology or Edmund Husserl’s phenomenological image study, belongs to the first layer—roughly and merely equivalent to the carrier. However, it is one of the elements of painting language from the perspective of this thesis. In *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* (1973)⁸, Dufrenne put forward two concepts—matter and material. The matter made up of the material is not a practical object, but an aesthetic object. It presents itself to the body, resorting to perception, having sensuous nature and acting as the prerequisite of artwork. Also,

⁷ Carter, “Painting and language: A pictorial syntax of shapes,” 111.

⁸ Mikel Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973).

in an essay *The Origin of the Work of Art* (1936)⁹, Martin Heidegger mentions that material shows itself in artwork rather than disappears. On this point, the material or thingyness is more like the poetic language or essential language launched by Heidegger—language exists for itself (details in Chapter 2). Making materials fully display their aesthetic sensuous through appropriate methods and techniques is the goal of making painting a painting, and the first step of obtaining independence and being itself. This independence is not just in painting, if making an extension to Heidegger's point of view about the temple and the axe. For example, at the time of history, ancient Greek sculpture and terra cotta warriors had the surface of sculpture painted with vivid colors. The viewers or users valued its superficial similarity and its referential function. The sculpture acted as, in Belting's terminology, as the "embodiment" of an absentee. However, after the paint peeled, due to different conservation contexts and times, the material of white marble and lime pottery and the sculpture, in the eyes of modern viewers, are interdependent and display each other, making the sculptures the artworks.

Second - form:

The factors, such as form, style or expression, are difficult to distinguish clearly and are vague concepts. If form is explained in theory, it has many meanings. Dufrenne, Ingarden, Clive Bell, Władysław Tatarkiewicz, Heinrich Wölfflin, Greenberg all have different arguments, which I will discuss later. And it's more complicated to discuss form hierarchically. For instance, at media level, it includes rules, media and other artistic elements, like line, color, perspective and so on. At aesthetic level, it involves harmonious combination, perceptual image, style pattern and perceptual processing. And other levels which are more comprehensive and abstract, like the definitions of form made by Ernst Cassirer, Ludwig Wittgenstein and some schools. Besides, there are different divisions and definitions in terms of aesthetic subject and object. The form based on art practice in this thesis needs to be restricted further in terms of figurative painting. This thesis contends that form—as one of the elements of painting language—plays a decisive role in painting. The most direct manifestation of a work is its form, and form is the arrangement and composition of the whole; form means that different factors (relationships between spaces, volumes, shapes and color) seek the result of coordination in painting, not for the object being painted. Form mainly refers to the following aspects. First, the creation of space. Second, the

⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1-52.

control of plasticity. Third, the relation of colors. (Contour, plane and depth discussed by Hildebrand Gurlitt and Wolfflin can be grouped into these three aspects.)

Third - the pure physical elements of painting:

The physical elementary form of painting. The physical interaction between artist and paint or the process of painting is relatively independent and free, such as brush-stroke, texture, the thickness and transparency of paint layer. These physical and active elements of a painting gradually acquired independent aesthetic value after Impressionism. These elements also existed before Impressionism, like the strong brush-stroke and granular pigment in Rembrandt's later works, but they were not commonly accepted or given aesthetic value in the way they did after Impressionism. Discussion of these elements are common in Chinese traditional painting theories of different periods, which showed their value and independence in aesthetics and painting process; even part of the viewer's attention is focused on the strength of lines and the effect of blending of ink, water and paper. From the perspective of content, these elements are attached to the surface of the volume or shape—the objects depicted in the painting. From the perspective of painting itself, the object is the material of the painting language, which is similar to the relationship between material and the matter launched by Dufrenne (details in Chapter 2).

“Content and Form” in the Perspective of Painting Language

As mentioned in the previous section, since the image in figurative painting does not refer to external things, then how can we define it. It is true that painting can be referential. However, because of this study's object and scope, I pay more attention to the perception, experience and analysis of painting itself.

Painting as an end in and of itself, can become the goal of painting, leading painting forth into its interior life. This view is similar to formalism or the modernist concept of art—viewing artworks as creations of pure visual form without paying attention to any theme, plot and content, which emerged and developed in European art history and aesthetic theory in the late 19th century. Here the seemingly clichéd topic of form and content must be mentioned. When it comes to the content, the painting language itself is the content of painting, and this is the standpoint of this thesis.

This thesis does not deny that painting can bear content, thought and doctrine, can be referential, can be given meaning, and can be studied from different angles or regarded as a direct response of a certain phenomenon and ethos, such as the second and third levels in Panofsky's iconology method, the picture subject in picture consciousness launched by Husserl for consciousness study, and the theories of literature and art, such as realism and socialist realism which emphasizes realistic meaning and have the tendency of instrumentalizing artworks. Even in Dufrenne's discussion against the external reference of painting, he also holds that it is difficult to imagine a novel with no content but form. From the symbolic perspective, the form is non-verbal symbol, while the content of painting which can resort to texts and logic languages belongs to the discursive symbol system. Therefore, it potentially contains factors of writing and discourse. Just when Greenberg and other formalists' views became the creed of modernist painting, William J. T. Mitchell wrote in an essay *There Are No Visual Media* (2005), that painting, even abstract painting, could not get rid of text, interpretation and criticism. As he said painters themselves and theorists will interpret it. So, according to Mitchell, "*the notion of a purely visual work of art was a temporary anomaly, a deviation from the much more durable tradition of mixed and hybrid media*"; and if the form of image or painting is regarded as a medium, then there is no "*'pure painting' characterized by 'pure opticality'. This argument, most famously circulated by Clement Greenberg (1940) and sometimes echoed by Michael Fried (1967), insists on the purity and specificity of media*"¹⁰, because visual media contain other sensory factors, such as sense of touch and text. In brief, on this point, Mitchell and Goodman agree that there is no clear line between picture and text.

However, emphasis on content tends to make painting a companion of text, which is replaced by logical words. (To some extent, not being replaced by logical words is also the reason that Heidegger put forward his view of language based on anti-modernity or anti-anthropocentrism and Maurice Merleau-Ponty put forward the concept of body.) Therefore, there are some scholars who oppose the idea of focusing on content overly. Susan Sontag holds that content and form should be reconsidered. In *Against Interpretation* (1966), she points out that the interpretation undermines the art, guiding the art concentrating on content, instead of form or self-expression of art, makes the art barren and drab. By reducing the artwork into

¹⁰ William J. T. Mitchell, "There Are No Visual Media," SAGE Journals, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1470412905054673/>.

content and explaining it, the artwork becomes controllable and tame. Yet, she argues that real art has the capacity to make viewers nervous which is the power of the work-itself to the viewer, not the content or narrative. She says: "*Transparence means experiencing the luminousness of the thing in itself, of things being what they are*"¹¹—to weaken the content so that the viewer can see the work itself. Her essay is more a viewpoint or assertion than a systematic collation of research evidence. In comparison, Marshall McLuhan's study is more argumentative. Although what he did was a theoretical study of the media, his discussion provided an interesting perspective on the relationship between content and form. McLuhan asserts that the medium is the message. According to his argument, "medium and message" can be equated with "form and content", namely, the form is not the carrier of the content, the form is the content. In *Understanding Media* (1964)¹², McLuhan argues the content of any medium is another medium, such as the process of thinking is the content of speech, speech is the content of writing, writing is the content of printing, printing is the content of telegrams; or printing is the content of fiction and play book, fiction and play book are the content of movies. And he holds that viewers tend to pay more attention to the content of the media, which makes viewers ignore the nature of the media, then ignoring its role and its own message. Accordingly, what matters is the message of the media itself, not any separated "content". Or, as Vernon Minor opposes in *Art History's History* (1994), "*there is a tendency or trend, commonly known as a natural sign in artistic and art historical criticism that considers the relation between picture and the object represented. This means that a painting of a tree can be nearly as natural as the tree itself, so that we judge a painting of a tree on how close it comes to the real tree*"¹³, which is equivalent to the referential theory in linguistics, that is, tree in painting is semantic. Similarly, unlike traditional aesthetics focusing on content, phenomenological aesthetics understands that the real content of a work of art is its form, while the content usually understood is only the material of the artwork. Form uses content as one of its materials to convey a certain experience. In other words, form or, in general, painting language containing form and other elements itself forms an experiential world, in which there is no definite and concrete image. To paraphrase Fry's remarks on the essence of poetry: painting language is the essential effect of painting, and the image in painting only forms—as it may be said—a channel for the flow of vague emotions

¹¹ Susan Sontag, *Against interpretation: And other essays* (London: Picador, 2001), 9.

¹² Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1994).

¹³ Vernon Hyde Minor, *Art History's History* (Bergen: Prentice Hall, 1994), 73.

caused by painting language.

Certainly, while discussing painting language, this thesis does not mean that the content is totally negated. Like Sontag states in *On Style* (1966)¹⁴, having a purely aesthetic response to an artwork is very difficult, usually in art, where the content is the pretext or the bait which draws the consciousness, and come to play a purely formal rule. This view is similar to Dufrenne's position in *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* (1973), that is, the subject of painting is a pretext or reason for the artist's creation. In McLuhan's opinion, the content of the media can be counted as a tasty piece of meat. Even the firm formalist Roger Fry considers in his later stage that abstract paintings are less impressive than figurative paintings. For example, in the essay *The Double Nature of Painting* (1933), he states that "*the appeal made by these visual constructions much less moving than those of similar constructions in sound forms that we find in music ... Herein I think lies the real cause of the lack of emotional appeal of abstract painting, since it is evident that any suggestion of depth of space given by a flat canvas is due to an effect of perspective, that is to say to the representation of something outside the work of art ... so I revert to my idea that, in spite of these attempts at abstraction, painting has always been, and probably will remain, for the greater part a representational art*"¹⁵. He also tries to define the significance and purpose of representation in concrete arts in *Transformations* (1926)¹⁶. At least he reevaluated the narrative in visual art—combining representation with a formalism paradigm without giving up the pure aesthetic experience (pure aesthetic experience means dismissing the content or ignoring the signified). In addition, Meyer Schapiro, in his later stage, also changed from an advocate of formalism to a breaker of dogmatism and parochialism, no longer only focusing on the pure formal features of artwork and on longer regarding the aspects of artwork that beyond the formalism as illustration, entertainment and vulgarity.

In addition to the above viewpoints providing emphasis on form or content, a neutral and convincing viewpoint also comes from *Ways of Worldmaking* (1978)¹⁷ by Goodman based on analytical philosophy (briefly discussed in the last part of chapter 1). Also, Dufrenne does not make form and content opposite mutually but regarded

¹⁴ Susan Sontag, *Against interpretation: And other essays* (London: Picador, 2001).

¹⁵ Roger Fry, *A Roger Fry Reader*, ed. Christopher Reed (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 380. 381.

¹⁶ Roger Fry, *Transformations: Critical And Speculative Essays On Art* (Whitefish: Literary Licensing LLC, 2013).

¹⁷ Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1988).

it as a unity in the discussion of form in *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* (see chapter 2 and 3).

Study Background and Thesis Structure

Background

This thesis consists of three chapters which discuss the factors of painting language from the perspective of analytical aesthetics and phenomenological aesthetics, and the physical media factors in particular artworks though form and style. It is necessary here to briefly describe the current research status of these factors in painting language and the necessity and uniqueness of the texts referenced in this thesis.

After the 1950s, the study of painting language has been scattered in many schools of Western art theory. Although they hardly put forward the word "painting language" explicitly and do not study it for its sake, they all involved some factors of painting language. For instance, some philosophers of art and art theorists start with painting, such as Modernist and High-Modernist theorists, including Roger Fry, Clement Greenberg, Leo Steinberg. Others base their analysis on the external factors of painting and use other socio-cultural disciplines as a means, such as Feminism, Marxist-Criticism, Post-Structuralism, Semiotic history of art, Anti-Modernism and Psychoanalytic-Criticism, including Meyer Schapiro, Timothy J. Clark, Norman Bryson and Mieke Bal. While many have discussed the external reference of painting as a signifying symbol, fewer have studied painting language—which as I have already noted is specifically defined in this research as the perceptible properties of painting—except for the thread of theorists of formal analysis—Konrad Fiedler, Alois Riegl, Heinrich Wölfflin, Wilhelm Worringer, Fry and Greenberg.

In addition to the above studies of form or physical media, there are few persuasive analyses and discussions on the factors of representation, expression and meaning in the above theoretical trends. Ernst H. Gombrich in *Art and Illusion* (1960) explores the representation and expression psychologically and analyzes the conventionality of representation in painting with linguistic means as well as the discussion of style. Susan Langer in *Feeling and Form* (1953) analyzes the representation, expression and form by means of art semiotics and comes to the conclusion that art symbols are not referential. Similarly, in ancient Chinese painting theory, there are various texts on resemblance and vividness, such as the discussions of Gu Kaizhi (348-409), Xie He

(479-502), Chao Buzhi (1053-1110), Li Rihua (1565-1635). However, their writing provides outline assertions by means of concrete analogy based on personal experience rather than analysis and discussion. In other words, they offer the viewpoints instead of the rigorous conclusions.

The in-depth analysis and careful inference of the factors of painting language, such as representation and expression, can be seen only in part of the studies of several aesthetic schools. These studies are usually concerned with Semiotics and Linguistics in order to illustrate these concepts and the characteristics of painting language, such as analytical aesthetics (Goodman 1906-1998, Richard Wollheim 1923-2003), phenomenological aesthetics (Dufrenne 1910-1995, Merleau-Ponty 1908-1961), existential aesthetics (Martin Heidegger 1889-1976). There seems to be an unavoidable trend to combine Semiotics and Linguistics to study the factors of painting language, such as representation, expression and style. Therefore, in chapter one and chapter two, some issues of painting language that are fundamental in figurative painting are discussed, according to texts of analytical aesthetics and phenomenological aesthetics.

Structure

Chapter one mainly discusses some issues of painting language based on the works of analytical aesthetics, such as *The Language of Art* (1968)¹⁸, *Ways of Worldmaking* (1978) and *Art and Its Objects* (1968). Analytical aestheticians interpret art issues generally from the perspective of logical analysis. For example, on the basis of analytical aesthetics, Goodman quotes semiotic methods and fully combines them to explicate an art semiotic theory. His discussion is a completely inferential analysis, in other words, the discussion does not involve emotional factors and whether the artwork has its own innate excellence. On the methods of semiotics, Goodman generally belongs to Charles Sanders Peirce school, on account of which, his book *Languages of Art* can be called a system of art symbols. Goodman does not distinguish between pictures and paintings, because for semiotics, all images (pictures and paintings) are objects of knowledge or cognition—carrying out the concept, instead of the objects of the perceptual. Bracketing out objects of the perceptual coupled with his position of analytical aesthetics, Goodman excludes factors of perception. That is, all the paintings in Goodman's theory are pictures and

¹⁸ Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to A Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1968).

all of them are referential, namely, all the images are denoting symbols. This is contrary to the limitation of painting language in this thesis—rejecting external reference. However, casting aside the referential factors, analytical aestheticians offer a language analysis method that in many ways is quite formulaic to strictly discuss representation, expression, realism and other concepts that other scholars do not cover.

Chapter two sets out and compares the properties of painting language from perception, based on phenomenological aesthetics, such as *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* and *Aesthetics and Philosophy* (Vol. 1, 1976)¹⁹. Different from analytical aesthetics and symbol theory—regarding paintings as symbols of reference—phenomenological aesthetics regards painting as the object of perception and aesthetics. For example, Dufrenne refers to semiotics and linguistics in his analysis of painting language, but more as a contrast, in order to illustrate that painting language and the study object of semiotics and linguistics are different. In his discussion, the semiotic school Dufrenne refers to is the structuralist semiotics of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes. Dufrenne's phenomenological method is very different from Goodman's method in grasping images. Namely, Goodman's theory does not involve the perception of property of material, in other words, the physical media of pictures—the material—has nothing to do with the reference of pictures; yet for phenomenological aestheticians, especially Dufrenne, media or materials (matter) have linguistic meaning and are objects of perception. Further, Dufrenne's study on the factors of painting language—matter, representation, subject and expression—is carried out in the mutual relationship between aesthetic objects (paintings) and aesthetic perception, which makes the level of painting language richer in the perspective of phenomenological aesthetics when compared with analytical aesthetics.

In chapter three, based on the fundamental issues discussed in the first two chapters, the physical media factors that constitute painting language in particular works are discussed through form, style, formalism and traditional Chinese painting theory. Taking an exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) of the work of the contemporary Chinese artist Cai Guo-Qiang and Arthur C. Danto's viewpoint, as well as the formalists Fry and Leo Steinberg's analysis of media factors in specific works as

¹⁹ Mikel Dufrenne, *Aesthetics and Philosophy* (Beijing: China Social Science Press, 1985).

examples, this chapter questions the uncertainty of work analysis and the deficiencies in language and methods. This chapter also indicates some dilemmas in the analysis of an artwork, especially when one thinks of its innate material qualities. In short, what is the reliable starting point for painting analysis? And how to discuss painting effectively is fundamentally a matter of language and philosophy. In addition, through the case study of eight studio-based works and the layout of the exhibition, this chapter explores the media factors and conducts some dialogues with the basic issues discussed in the first and second chapters; and based on Dufrenne and Goodman's theory, the issues of form and style in these eight works are defined and discussed after the related concepts have been clarified and an artwork discussion paradigm on media is provided.

CHAPTER 1

Painting Language through the Perspective of Analytical Aesthetics

This chapter outlines the fundamental issues of painting language such as representation, realism, including aesthetic symptoms, offering a view of analytical aesthetics. Some terms which are often mentioned when discussing artworks and their meaning (often ambiguously) are examined, which benefits from the discussions about the essential qualities of art and the special property of art symbols in specific writings.

I will clarify some concepts and properties of painting language based on various viewpoints of analytical aesthetics and studio works. The context of the linguistic turn—from epistemology to reflection on language—that is to say the view of language can be roughly divided into two. Firstly, the world is constructed in language; language is not neutral and transparent; all concepts are contained in language and this accommodates logical interpretation; language shaping dictates cognition. Secondly, the response to language ambiguity—the efforts of Daily Linguistics and Logical positivism that constructs artificial language are used to eliminate the ambiguity of natural language to avoid meaningless arguments.

This thesis extends the above two points to painting. Although different from language in the general sense—composed of concepts, propositions and logic, painting may be regarded as the construction of a language. Beyond the Linguistic turn, language is not a tool for communication and thinking, but a field for living and experiencing, a life world²⁰. Goodman argues in *Ways of Worldmaking* (1978)²¹ that the composition of the world is diverse, not limited to natural language, but includes mathematics, science, art, etc. The world is structured in these disciplines which are languages. If Painting operates within a field of experience and life, then by expressing it, presenting it, or constituting it, painting becomes a language. Secondly, Wittgenstein's early ideas, such as *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921)²², based on logical atomism, tried to divide the boundary between the sayable world and the mystical which is unsayable—a theory about what a proposition can say and what a

²⁰ Heidegger and others have similar expressions, see Chapter 2.

²¹ Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1988).

²² Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007).

proposition cannot say but only show. The mystical is unsayable because we do not have a language tool to describe it effectively, which does not mean it can be ignored. Just like a train, what a proposition can express runs on a track, while what is unsayable is on both sides of the track, which can be seen but cannot be touched. Logically, the unsayable should be infinitely classified. Painting can construct an experience that is unsayable. At this point, presentation (showing) and language (saying) are essentially equivalent and both construct the world.

There are some ways of making that constitute painting that can be expressed and corresponded by language (natural or artificial), such as representation, form, style and so on. However, their ambiguity in language needs to be eliminated. Only by clarifying these factors can painting language be established. The traditional empirical analysis method—the method before the Linguistic turn, by comparison, due to the lack of the assistance of modern logic and the lack of cognition of the language itself, is short of rigor and argumentation and is unable to effectively analyze the terms (concepts) and propositions. A confusion caused by natural language is inevitable. It is therefore necessary to make clear the basic elements of painting language with the help of some theories from analytical aesthetics. Based on the analysis of symbolic and logical artificial language (formal language) and ordinary language, these theories have their own advantages, such as the discussions of Goodman and Richard Wollheim. On the basis of analytical aesthetics, Goodman discusses some fundamental issues of painting language from the perspective of semiotics, such as *Languages of Art* (1968)²³ and *Ways of Worldmaking* (1978). Wollheim combines analytical aesthetics with psychology to propose some arguments, such as *Art and Its Objects* (1968)²⁴. Generally, they do not start from the analysis and questioning of metaphysical abstract issues, but focus instead on the analysis of basic concepts and categories.

Fundamental Issues

If the external engagement of figurative painting is excluded, namely, the narration with image as the tool and medium, such as the so-called expression in the general sense, the presentation of painting is unsayable. According to Wittgenstein's Picture Theory of Language, showing (presentation) is not included in the world that is

²³ Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to A Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1968).

²⁴ Richard Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects: An Introduction to Aesthetics* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

sayable and is not necessarily connected with logic (language analysis), or the language corresponding to the saying world repels the expression to it. But this does not mean that all the factors that make up the painting is unsayable, just as the form, rhyme and words of poetry are sayable, yet the imagery of poetry is not.

From the perspective of analytical aesthetics, the basic factors of figurative painting, such as representation, realism, expression and even marks, are worth discussing. From the perspective of painting practice, these issues are also worth pondering. For artists, clarifying these basic issues can allow a deep insight into many properties of figurative painting. On the one hand, these issues can be separated from specific works—having certain generalities, and they can be explained under known rules, such as semiotics or linguistics; on the other hand, as aesthetic or artistic issues, they have certain particularities and can only be understood, when specifically attached to the artwork, and may require the participation of empathy and projection. Exploring these issues in a practice-led project will have a different focus than pure theoretical research. These basic issues will be discussed below one by one.

Realism

Realism is the most intuitive and obvious factor in figurative painting. Compared with representation, which is almost synonymous with realism in use, realism emphasizes the properties of a painting rather than the relationship between those properties. Realism refers more directly to the presentation—a property of painting. But from the perspective of analytical aesthetics or semiotics, realism is still a means of language and symbol. In *Languages of Art and Ways of Worldmaking* by Goodman, we see an application of the method of analytical philosophy to the field of art and the creation of a semiotics based on art.

In *Languages of Art*, Goodman holds that “real” realism is impossible. However, he still gives a description for realism which is easier to be accepted—through suitable distance, lights and angle; seeing the object through normal vision unaided by observation instruments. The object must be recorded and copied by the observer with free and innocent eyes, avoiding taste, thought and interpretation. As long as the painter has appropriate technical training, this is indeed the best explanation for realism. The eight studio works of this project (see figures in Appendix 1; details in Chapter 3 and appendix 1 and 2) are basically in line with this description from the viewer's perspective, although I have not completely abandoned the observation

instrument, nor avoided the taste of technology and the choice of so-called "suitable" distance, light and angle. However, looking back at the history of art, "recording and copying" of objects is an extensive, vague and broad concept. We see this both on the portraits before the Middle Ages and the Hyperrealism or Photographic Realism in the second half of the 20th century.

The ways for an object to exist are various. Similarly, the ways and means of recording and copying are various too. Goodman gives an example that an object could be *"a man, a swarm of atoms, a complex of cells, a fiddler, a friend, a fool, and much more ... If all are ways the object is, then none is the way the object is"*.²⁵ That is, there is no so-called realism in terms of the rules of semiotics. From the viewpoint of art practice, a painter cannot or should not pay attention to all sides of the object in painting, a realist painting with well-rounded parts as well as less figured parts usually is considered a more dramatic representation and closer to the image observed by eyes in certain cultural traditions or conventions. It might be said that to some extent, it is the painter or painting that teaches the viewer the way to see, or shapes the viewer's eyes.

Goodman agrees with Ernst Gombrich that "free and innocent eyes" do not exist. Vision is affected by other organs and the brain as well as need and bias, it is also influenced by the object which is being observed and the environment around it. No person's viewing can avoid choices, exclusion, analysis, organization, reconstruction and so on, let alone cultural difference, plus the regulation of the eye itself, so the true vision cannot be obtained. More importantly, people in different historical and cultural background have respective representation system.

For example, Gombrich points out that Egyptians in ancient Egypt, the English in the seventeenth century and the Japanese in the eighteenth century, all needed to study how to read the other two cultures' realist paintings. Whether a painting is 'realistic' or not, it does not depend on the relationship between painting and its object but a relationship between the representation system and a given "standard system". In fact, the "standard system" is the convention in linguistics and semiotics. In other words, realism is the issue of convention and education, instead of resemblance and illusion. Here Goodman echoes Peirce's concept of icon, index and symbol. Namely,

²⁵ Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 6.

those three cultural groups respectively observe the conventions in their own culture and accept painting according to the norms of semiotics in the subconscious, then regard it as realistic, when they read their own paintings. From a semiotic perspective, in all cultures, any images (including paintings) act as signs, and the drawing and reading methods of the painting need convention.

From the perspective of semiotics, especially the C. S. Peirce school that Goodman belongs to, realism is more like a way of providing, interpreting and obtaining information. That is, Peirce considers that the structure of sign consists of three parts—representation, object and interpretation, and the process of sign activity is a process of infinite interpretation. Realism is equivalent to the icon in the way of sign activity—the relationship between representation and object—proposed by Peirce. Correspondingly, Goodman denies the idea that realism is a kind of painting which could make the viewer generate an illusion that the painting is what it represents by imitating. Moreover, he also opposes the idea that realism is to provide information by copying as much as possible. Because applying reversed perspective or complementary color in a painting also can provide same information after proper interpretation just as the so-called “normal painting” (traditional perspective picture) does. He calls it contexts and systems of interpretation of symbol, noting that *“any number of other drastic but information-preserving transformations are possible. Obviously, realistic and unrealistic pictures may be equally informative; informational yield is no test of realism”*²⁶. Goodman quotes from Descartes and Berkeley to argue that we did not apply any interpretation rules when seeing a “normal painting” because we used the rules automatically and were not aware of making conscious interpretation. Consequently, he holds that realistic representation does not have much to do with imitation, illusion or information but rules accepted through common practice; that is, the preciseness and realism of painting depends on the standard of system, or say, conventional agreement. Mieke Bal also holds a similar view. For example, she considers perspective as a code established by convention. Although it is long regarded as an excellent device of realism, it is more symbolic (in the sense of Peirce), *“we accept perspective as ‘natural’, as realistic, because we are accustomed to it, even though we know that there are many art forms, within and outside our own culture, that are not perspectival”*.²⁷

²⁶ Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 35-36.

²⁷ Bal, *Reading "Rembrandt"*, 32.

In short, from the perspective of analytical aesthetics, realism is not an effective concept. In terms of semiotics, there is no clear boundary between realism and non-realism, at most, realism can be equivalent to the icon, if it is not regarded as the nature of painting but related to an object.

Representation

Realism or similarity is not a precise concept from the above analysis. To a certain extent, they belong to the category of representation. Whether for traditional aesthetics or figurative painting, representation is a key word. But after the Linguistic turn, when linguistics and semiotics are widely used in various fields, the connotation of 'representation' is also important. Influenced by logical positivism, these terms exclude metaphysical elements in logical language analysis; in analytical aesthetics and art-related semiotics, concepts like representation hardly involve the external subtlety and exquisiteness of artworks. For example, the model that Goodman constructed in semiotics is in line with Rudolf Carnap's formal language theory. Goodman's *Languages of Art* is actually a study of the art symbol system—"needs to be supplemented by and integrated with intensive examination of nonverbal symbol system, from pictorial representation on the one hand to musical notation on the other".²⁸ In his text, "'Symbol' is used here as a very general and colorless term ... the most literal portrait and the most prosaic passage are as much symbols, and as highly symbolic, as the most fanciful and figurative".²⁹

In terms of symbols, representation is not a crucial issue for painting, and it can even be eliminated in the field of symbols. For example, in the analysis of representation, Goodman leads to denotation which is an important concept in his theory as well as in linguistics and semiotics. From the perspective of language analysis, Goodman considers that it was naïve that the traditional definition of representation; say if A represents B, namely, A resembles B, or to what extent that A represents B relies on the extent that A resembles B. The reason, he argued, is that similarity and representation are not necessarily correlative, because "*resemblance in any degree is no sufficient condition for representation*"³⁰. Here, Goodman further restricts the scope of pictorial representation observing that representation is a type of expression, on the other hand, it has a close relationship with verbal description, but

²⁸ Goodman, *Languages of Art*, xi.

²⁹ Goodman, *Languages of Art*, xi.

³⁰ Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 4.

not the same, the two cannot be confused, if in the research of symbols.³¹ He gives an instance using John Constable's painting of a castle and other paintings to illustrate the representation through the perspective of semiotics and language analysis. Suppose a Constable painting is A, an object to be represented is B. Although Constable's painting is more resemblant than other paintings, it represented the castle, not other paintings.³² So Goodman claims that *"denotation is the core of representation and is independent of resemblance"*³³.

The reason why similarity and representation are not closely related is that the similarity is high-capacity argued by Mitchell in *Iconology*. Similarity (iconicity) contains too many things on the one hand; on the other hand, similarity cannot be illustrated appropriately by the concept of sign derived from linguistics. Although Peirce defines the icon—one of the relationships between representation and object—is any sign that *"represent its object mainly by its similarity"*—a definition that includes diagrams, maps, equations and metaphors³⁴, the icon is still denotation.

It does not make sense that art represents objects, if "represent" refers to painting. Goodman emphasizes that the core of representation is more denotation than resemblance. In order for a picture to represent an object, it *"must be a symbol for it, stand for it, refer to it; and that no degree of resemblance is sufficient to establish the requisite relationship of reference. Nor is resemblance necessary for reference; almost anything may stand for almost anything else. A picture that represents—like a passage that describes—an object refers to and, more particularly, denotes it"*³⁵. From semiotics, painting is a kind of symbol that is not special. However, if the relationship between a painting and the object it represents is a denotation, what is the difference between the denotation of a painting and the denotation of other things, such as verbal or graphical denotation? Goodman's research is based on art after all, so he cannot completely deny the characteristics of representation, so he has to return to the similarity and concede that similarity is the characteristic that distinguishes the graphic (painting) denotation from other denotations.

In fact, if the core of representation in a semiotic sense is the denotation, then for

³¹ Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 3.

³² Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 5.

³³ Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 5.

³⁴ Mitchell, *Iconology*, 56-58. 64-66.

³⁵ Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 5.

the denotation of artworks, similarity is necessary but not necessarily similar to the object. This involves a concept—'representation-as', which is often confused with representation. If it is not in the fields of analytical aesthetics and semiotics, these two words cannot be distinguished due to the lack of analytical tools in traditional aesthetics and art theory. In *Languages of Art*, through logic analysis, Goodman sorts out and clarifies representation and representation-as in the field of semiotics to illustrate the characteristics of symbols in reference through artwork. For example, with regard to representation-as, he argues that *"a picture that represents a man denotes him; a picture that represents a fictional man is a man-picture; and a picture that represents a man as a man is a man-picture denoting him"*³⁶. In the above three cases, he explains that the first case referred to the denotation of the picture, the second concerned what kind of picture it was and the third was about denotation as well as classification. In short, with the example he uses, that is, if a picture represents Churchill, it denotes and represents Churchill; if a picture represents Churchill as an adult, then it is an adult-picture denoting Churchill.³⁷ Therefore, in his opinion, at least, there are two cases of what is being represented, and what kind of representation it is. His discussion about Rembrandt's painting—*Landscape with a Huntsman*—could be a suitable footnote. The man in this Rembrandt painting might not an actual person, so the painting does not represent anyone but a man-picture. In this sense, although denotation is a necessary condition for representation, it is not a necessary condition for representation-as. In this case, the man in Rembrandt's painting represents or denotes nothing. It is only representation-as. Namely, as Goodman observes if *"we cannot determine whether a picture denotes anything or not, we can only proceed as if it did not—that is, confine ourselves to considering what kind of picture it is"*³⁸. In general, Goodman regards the system of depiction about representation as a kind of language, and stresses that the pictorial representation and verbal description are analogous when they are in the control of denotation. That is, the pictorial representation and verbal description all have entity objects. Yet representation-as is equivalent to the empty term in logic and there is no object corresponding to it in reality. Goodman's recognition of this point made his discussion a little beyond the analysis of language and symbols.

This kind of linguistics-based view of semiotic art language similar to Goodman's has

³⁶ Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 27.

³⁷ Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 27.

³⁸ Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 26.

a defect—rejection of perception, even though this can also be said to be the characteristics of logical positivism and language analysis. Goodman's concern in semiotics is *"to take some steps toward a systematic study of symbols and symbol systems and the ways they function in our perceptions and actions and arts and sciences, and thus in the creation and comprehension of our worlds"*³⁹. His symbols are neither complicated classification like Peirce nor like signs in Saussure's linguistic semiotics. In his symbol world, art symbol is involved in the worldmaking, it is all components of its own semantics and syntax. Goodman's view and methods of structuring this symbolic world originated from formal language, deeply influenced by Carnap, Lewis and Cassirer, making art a symbol system which possesses cognitive function and involves in worldmaking.

Goodman's conception of art is also influenced by Ernst Gombrich, particularly *Art and Illusion* (1960). In *Art and Illusion*, Gombrich claims that language composed by words is very similar to painting structured by visual expression; and painting is not natural and self-evident but the process and result of conversion. Instead of offering a direct copy of the world, artists need a vocabulary to code reality, very much like writers. Therefore, painting should be read and decoded. In other words, a painting is a text assembled by signs in semantic space. Accordingly, the core concept of Goodman's art semiotics is symbol, as a system element, takes part in the worldmaking and forms reference relations with other symbols in the system. Significance comes from reference relation.

Consequently, discourse on art language in Goodman's theory is partly different from the actual aesthetic experience. For instance, Goodman interprets the meaning of representation and expression with reference to analytical philosophy. What the art represents or expresses has little to do with the object that is represented or expressed; representation and expression depend on the various relations of symbols in different reference domains and direction. For art practice, that might turn the aesthetic experience into a process of identifying symbol systems and symbol references—a process of decoding symbols. Concerning this situation, some scholars, such as Mitchell, hold that such approaches partly could not foreground the characteristic of image research in visual field, and when using semiotics to study paintings scholars were inclined to give meaning to all the signs in painting or only

³⁹ Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 265.

highlight the signs considered to be meaningful. The image is placed below the language, without stressing the self-reference of image as signifier. Mitchell argues in *Iconology* (1986) that a picture should not be a word which was painted⁴⁰. That is, in order to achieve aesthetic experience, it is not enough to employ symbolic reading mode and not necessary to interpret its reference. So, apparently, there is a certain distance between the theories of Goodman and others base on aesthetics, linguistics and semiotics and the art practice based on another set of technical systems.

Wollheim, who also belongs to the school of analytical aesthetics, also opposes this semiotic painting theory based on linguistics—placing representation in a system of rules and conventions, or considering that the meaning of representation depends on pictorial structure. Indeed, not all scholars agree that painting has a linguistic structure (see Chapter 2). And as mentioned earlier, the theories based on semiotics require that it must have a cognitive meaning to the thing represented, otherwise the rules of representation cannot be applied by artists or viewers. Therefore, the result of rejecting perception is that the grasp of the meaning of representation is interpretive—decoding, instead of perceptual.

In *Art and Its Objects*, Wollheim argues that the media and representation of painting influence each other. Although the role of media here is different from the matter (or thingness) concerned by phenomenological aesthetics (see Chapter 2), when facing an artwork, the focus on media will provide a more appropriate experience than the explanation of pure semiotics. Different from the core of representation by Goodman—denotation, Wollheim holds that the core of representation is “seeing-in” which is a keyword of Wollheim’s theory. That is, representation and the media used for representation are simultaneously perceived. In other words, seeing-in is also called twofold-ness—when seeing a painting, something (image) can be discerned and, at the same time, something (media) behind it (image) exists. These two are two aspects of a unified experience—representational and configurational. For painters, when marks and strokes fall on the canvas, they will merge into one and guide the painter to complete the work, and something emerges from the marks in the eyes of the painter and the viewer.

“Seeing-in” is a special experience. In *Painting as an Art* (1987)⁴¹, Wollheim explains

⁴⁰ Mitchell, *Iconology*, 7-46. 95-115.

⁴¹ Richard Wollheim, *Painting as an Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

from psychology that seeing-in is prior to representation logically and historically. For example, our human ancestors saw the image of an animal in a cloud. In fact, it would be more accurate to explain this special experience from the perspective of human evolution and modern cognitive neuroscience, rather than psychology. That is to say, this is the intermodal perception—the result of fusiform gyrus and nervous system processing visual signal. Perception does not give the visual signal to consciousness intact, but first integrates the discrete materials to give a unified meaning. This will lead to pareidolia. Pareidolia are also shaped by the acquired. It can evoke more complex cognitive behaviors through conscious processing, and is connected with cultural background. For example, tea reading and lead divination, which were popular in Europe, as well as illusory paintings using optical illusions, all reflect such psychological experience. (Or it can be explained by multistable perception.)

Representation and media, due to seeing-in, are closely linked together on the one hand, and on the other hand, the position of representation is lowered, becoming a derivative of seeing-in on media. However, as Wollheim says, seeing-in tells us that great artworks guide viewers to appreciate the way artists handle their materials. The viewer will appreciate how objects are painted—the way of representation, not only what is represented. In all the viewing of painting, the viewer can only devote to twofold-ness—to be aware of the surface of the painting and the object painted at the same time, otherwise it will be impossible to understand the style of painting. Indeed, the visual basis of the processing method of painting is an indispensable factor for appreciating or understanding of the work.

For example, in my studio work *Untitled 1* (figure 1), the representation and the media dominated by seeing-in are clear. The painting technique of the marks in the clothing area of the character, including the subdivision of the hue, the deposition of the paint, the marks left by the palette knife and the thickener, are constantly evoking the viewer's twofold-ness, rather than denoting to the workers. In this painting, the visual technique, that is, the construction of space, the structure of color patches, the arrangement of viewpoint and the representation are two aspects of the unified experience. Although they surpass the representation to a certain extent, they are given to the viewer along with the representation of the painting. Conversely, a picture of a worker does not need to arouse the twofold-ness.

In general, the representation centered on 'seeing-in' highlights the role of perception, making the scope of it completely different from the scope of representation based on semiotics. That is, paintings that can call for special perception are of representation. However, this will expand the scope of representation and include abstract painting—due to seeing-in more focuses on psychological experience, in which abstract painting can also provide representation and media. Therefore, abstract painting is within the scope of representation. Compared with Goodman's neglect of the basic mechanism of perception in representation, Wollheim's concept of representation is more painterly and closer to works of art.

Expression

According to the criterion of analytical aesthetics, in addition to representation, the term expression is not clearly defined and has the same ambiguity as representation. For example, Goodman in *Languages of Art* uses an example to illustrate the ambiguity of expression in natural language: a person expressing sadness means that he expresses the feeling of sadness or his having of that feeling. In this example, expression has three possible meanings—referring to a sense, a property or an occurrence. In painting, expression usually contains two possibilities. First, the artwork is an intermediary, behind which the expression is released by the artist. Second, the work is expressive, and expression is the primary property of the work. In either case, the meaning of expression is ambiguous. In addition, from the perspective of art practice, representation and expression are hard to differentiate. Any form of representation can be regarded as expression. For example, the smooth brushstrokes of Hyperrealism are expression, and Lucian Freud's rough brushstrokes are also expression. Conversely, any form of expression can also be regarded as representation, especially according to Wollheim's seeing-in theory.

From the perspective of Semiotics, Goodman does not particularly stress the distinction between representation and expression in *Languages of Art*. Goodman holds that the only tentative distinction is in domain and direction. Representation belongs to objects or events, while expression belongs to feelings or other properties. Based on the precondition of denotation, this distinction could be divided into three points. First, the object which is denoted is a concrete subject or an abstract property.

Second, compared with representation, frequently the feeling or emotion or property expressed is detached from the medium, like a painting could express temperature, similarly, color and temperature could be expressed by a piece of music. Third, expression is more direct and immediate. Goodman holds that the expressed object is the feeling or emotion that acts on the viewer instead of being linked with expression causally. Certainly, he confesses that expression is not necessarily related to feeling or emotion. The reason why Goodman does not emphasize the difference between representation and expression is that he deduces that *“whether or not what is represented is concrete while what is expressed is abstract, what is expressed subsumes the picture as an instance much as the picture subsumes what it represents”*⁴². In the case of symbols, expression and representation are the same mode, a picture must refer to what it expresses. An object denoted by a painting is the exemplification to that painting, therefore, Goodman holds that *“all expression is exemplification”*⁴³. Regarding denotation, exemplification and expression, Goodman thought that they are stressed in the arts and vary with artists and works, and all three are symbolic artistic labels (signs). Goodman made technical analysis from the art symbol itself to explain the expression, without paying too much attention to the artist (sender) and viewer (receiver), or discussing the metaphysical aspects of expression.

Unlike Goodman's expression (centered on exemplification), Wollheim's view of expression is that expression is empathy—the psychological state is projected into the object. Wollheim's view of expression not only emphasizes the expressiveness of the material object—the substrate for projection, but also emphasizes the intention of the artist and the expressive perception of the viewer. Paradoxically, he also holds that artists and viewers can be inconsistent with the expressiveness of the work. This is consistent with reality, because in most cases the artists, viewers and artworks themselves cannot reach consistency. Dufrenne in *Aesthetics and Philosophy* (1976) also mentioned that the painter's intentions and emotions can be very different from what is presented in the work when discussing the relationship between painting and language (see Chapter 2). Wollheim does not show the accuracy of analytical aesthetics in the issue of expression, but tends towards a kind of axiological aesthetics—judging the value of artwork through the consistency of the three and the projected psychological state. Wollheim's requirement for achieving expression is

⁴² Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 52.

⁴³ Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 52.

that the artists, viewers and the works are consistent firstly, yet whether the three are consistent or not is actually a cultural issue to a large extent. In other words, it is the issue of language rules and the commonality of meaning in culture. For example, my opinion (see Chapter 3) on the use of gunpowder in Cai Guo-Qiang's works seeks to illustrate this issue—whether in terms of rules or expression, gunpowder can hardly acquire linguistic meaning. The consistency of the three depends on the holding and recognition of commonality by members of a group, only in this situation can expression exist effectively.

In Wollheim's theory, representation and expression are actually the same thing at the root. Expression is empathy and projection under the condition that the group members are consistent and this involves a psychological aspect. Representation is the consistency achieved under the combined action of seeing-in and media, and seeing-in is still linked to the cultural background—a group—and also involves a psychological aspect. Thus, representation is expression, and conversely, expression is representation. The slight difference is that representation requires the viewer's previous visual experience, yet expression requires only previous emotional experience. This is consistent with Goodman's view that expression belongs to feelings or other properties. This is also the reason why Goodman does not analyze expression too much. Indeed, compared with realism and representation, expression, as one of the properties of painting, is obviously derived rather than inherent.

Marks

As with the layering of painting language in the introduction, the three issues discussed above belong to the "X", which focuses on concepts and inferences. The materials, media, techniques and creative rules included in the "media" are all physical media factors of painting, or the intuitive properties of painting, and consequently are innate to the language of painting. If we start with the method of analytical aesthetics or semiotics, most of these factors are beyond the method and cannot be analyzed and discussed, such as the perception of matter. Only a few factors can be placed within the framework of analytical aesthetics, such as lines and patches of color. Within the scope of cognition some technical analysis is possible however, with non-pictorial line and color patches—marks.

The analysis and discussion of these mark factors do not have to be carried out

within the framework of semiotics. For example, formalists, such as Kandinsky, Fry and Greenberg, discuss them in detail (see Chapter 3); and there are many evaluations and discussions of criteria on lines of painting and strokes of calligraphy in ancient Chinese painting theory. However, these discussions are analogous or emotional, resorting to experience, which is a way to face the artworks rather than the marks themselves. These discussions do not distinguish the relationship between the artwork and the mark. The method of discussing the artwork is not suitable for analyzing the characteristics or properties of the marks separating from the artwork.

Accordingly, effective analysis of the characteristics and properties of marks can be carried out in the field of semiotics. For instance, Mieke Bal provides a pattern within the range of semiotics—stressing the discussion of diachronic meaning stream of post-structuralism more than the discussion of synchronic syntax of structuralism semiotics by means of introducing the concept of pre-text which was embodied in *Reading "Rembrandt"* (1991) and *Quoting Caravaggio* (1999). Based on this pattern, she studies marks, or traces and stains in paintings from the angle of art practice. For instance, her discussion on the key hanging over Joseph's waistband (*Joseph Accused by Potiphar's wife* 1655 Rembrandt)⁴⁴ and the bold line or a blot of ink which she regarded as a narrative syntagm (*Magi Adoring the Infant Jesus* 1635 Rembrandt)⁴⁵ both demonstrates her semiotic methods of narrative. However, her method cannot avoid reference to the content of the artwork or art history, so it does not seem to be a pure discussion of marks. More precisely, to some extent, it is a semiotic version of iconology or art history—reorganizing iconology with the method of semiotics.

In comparison, Goodman's analysis of marks is pure and technical. Some discussions on "aesthetic symptoms" can be regarded as discussions on the properties of marks in artworks, although his purpose is to explain the particularity of the symbol system of art, rather than analyze these elements from the perspective of specific works. This is because Goodman was influenced by the art semiotics of Ernst Cassirer and Langer. He regards painting and music as a language which has the same order as natural language. He did this in order to define a nonverbal symbol from a verbal symbol. Through the perspective of local syntax, Goodman argues the above in detail within the concept of aesthetic symptoms.

⁴⁴ Mieke Bal, *Reading "Rembrandt": beyond the word-image opposition: the Northrop Frye lectures in literary theory*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 47.

⁴⁵ Bal, *Reading "Rembrandt"*, 210.

For Goodman every artwork is a kind of symbol or label. A Label in Goodman's context is very close to Saussure's understanding of a sign. Goodman describes that *"just as objects are classified by means of, or under, various verbal labels, so also are objects classified by or under various pictorial labels. And the labels themselves, verbal or pictorial, are in turn classified under labels, verbal or nonverbal"*⁴⁶. In this context, symbol and label basically have the same meaning for Goodman, the nuance is that symbol usually refers to the painting as a whole. But label sometimes refers to the component in a painting, or it can be regarded as mark. In Goodman's opinion, just as it would be in vain to research art without representation, expression or exemplification, it would also be futile to observe and study art if the label (mark) is ignored.

Goodman holds that art is a symbol system and that the difference between it and other symbol systems is the property of the aesthetic and non-aesthetic. Goodman presented a viewpoint about aesthetic symptoms, and specified it in the section "When is Art" both in *Languages of Art* and *Ways of Worldmaking*.⁴⁷ He argues that the art symbol system is aesthetic and has the following five symptoms in general (or, it is the symptoms that make it aesthetic). Conversely, other symbol systems are non-aesthetic and do not have these five symptoms. The aesthetic symptoms of art label (mark) are reflected in five aspects:

"(1) syntactic density, where the finest differences in certain respects constitute a difference between symbols—for example, an ungraduated mercury thermometer as contrasted with an electronic digital-read-out instrument; (2) semantic density, where symbols are provided for thing distinguished by the finest differences in certain respects—for example, not only the ungraduated thermometer again but also ordinary English, though it is not syntactically dense; (3) relative repleteness, where comparatively many aspects of a symbol are significant—for example, a single-line drawing of a mountain by Hokusai where every feature of shape, line, thickness, etc. counts, in contrast with perhaps the same line as a chart of daily stock-market averages, where all that counts is the height of the line above

⁴⁶ Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 30-31.

⁴⁷ Goodman presented four symptoms in *Languages of Art* at first and completed them in *Ways of Worldmaking* later.

the base; (4) exemplification, where a symbol, whether or not it denotes, symbolizes by serving as a sample of properties it literally or metaphorically possesses; and finally (5) multiple and complex reference, where a symbol performs several integrated and interacting referential functions, some direct and some mediated through other symbols.”⁴⁸

These five aspects clarify the properties of marks in a semiotic way. Syntax is the combination rule between sign and sign, which is reflected in all symbol systems. For example, the sign in Saussure’s structuralism linguistics is coded to form various levels of language structure by the syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations of signs. Here, syntactic density refers to the close connection between elements which depends on the number of symbols and the properties of arrangement instead of the inner structure of the symbol. Only nonverbal signs involve density. Goodman differentiates painting (a description system possessing density) from text writing and number writing (expression system without density) by proposing the notion of syntactic density. Also, he presents some instances to illustrate non-density, for example, it is impossible to recognize temperature differences between 90 and 90.1 degrees on a digital thermometer with readings in tenths of a degree; no musical pitch is written between c and c# on standard musical notation.⁴⁹ In short, the combination of elements (sign or label) such as line, color patches in painting is syntactic. But in terms of the horizontal syntagmatic relationship, the signs are closely combined, sticky, and difficult to disassemble, while in terms of the vertical paradigmatic relationship, the signs are irreplaceable. That is, there is no systematized difference of symbols in linguistics between nonverbal symbols.

Semantic density means the property of the arrangement of individual elements in a given system, every part of the painting is in a relationship of mutual reference. This concept is analogous to synchrony in structural linguistics. Features of semantic density are equal to features of representation and expression. Different from the semantics of lexical items in a proposition—clear and discrete, the semantics of the marks in an artwork are suggestive and continuous, forming a unified texture. Semantically, the marks are high-density. From the perspective of the relationship between syntax and semantics, a functional mathematical formula containing x and y can represent a straight line or curve line on coordinates, yet this functional formula

⁴⁸ Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, 67-68.

⁴⁹ Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, 15.

only describes a syntax without semantics. However, a curve or straight line in an artwork is mainly reflected in semantics and even pragmatics, and usually it cannot be described by syntax. On the other hand, if the plastic rules are regarded as syntax, then it can explain why Cezanne's still-life works are sturdy and present a stable structure—he seeks and highlights the syntax.

In relation to the concept of density, Mitchell considers that the example of the ungraduated mercury thermometer example given by Goodman properly illustrates the difference between image and text. Every change in the mercury gives is an indication of temperature, but it cannot give a uniquely definite reading. Reading a painting is like reading an ungraduated thermometer. Every change, like line, texture and color, in a painting are semantic; compare with a thermometer or chart, painting is replete. Every mark in painting has density and cannot be isolated and distinguished from this dense field, because its meaning depends on its relationship with other marks, like a patch of color on the nose of the *Mona Lisa* could be read as highlights, but it can obtain such significance only in this given image relationship and cannot be transferred to other paintings.⁵⁰ Langer in *Philosophy in a New Key* (1942)⁵¹ presents a similar concept: compared with verbal symbols (as presentational symbols), each basic element of art symbols will lose their independent and stable significance if they depart from their integral configuration. Their (nonverbal symbol) functions as symbols, are contained in a synchronically integral structure of appearance. That is, their semantic features are special. And this is their most essential difference from discursive (verbal) symbols.

Relative repleteness encapsulates the notion that the more meaning a symbol bears, the more replete it is. Goodman explains through example the nature of curves. So there are two curves: compared with the drawing of a mountain by Hokusai, the line of a stock-market chart is thin and dispersive syntactically, yet the line of contour in the drawing of mountain is subtle and ample. Every change of color, texture and line in painting will bring a different reading. In contrast, the line on the chart yields to many restraints, the color and thickness of the line, the texture and brightness of the paper will not bring any difference of significance, except for the coordinates⁵².

⁵⁰ Mitchell, *Iconology*, 67-68.

⁵¹ Susanne Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

⁵² Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 229.

Danto however, does not think that distinguishing the two lines is an issue of repleteness and attenuation completely, instead he believes it is more about style. Yet he observes that Goodman sketches at least the difference between diagram and drawing.⁵³ In practical terms, the more replete the symbol (mark) is, the closer it is to the work of art. For example, let's take a painting *View of Madrid from Torres Blancas* 1982 by Antonio Lopez Garcia, a guide map of Madrid with picturesque landmarks and a true and accurate map of Madrid. Comparing the three, each mark in the painting is replete, yet the lines and patches of color in the map only serve as the indicators and are not replete; the repleteness of the guide map is between the two. More importantly, because of the density and repleteness of the marks, the significance of the artwork is not in its relationship with Madrid. However, without Madrid itself, the map and every point and line on it are meaningless.

Exemplification is inclined to a feature, namely, symbol has a metaphorical relationship with the referent, like the color of the word "red" is red, or what the symbol stands for is not completely out of the symbol, like "'having seven syllables', which has seven syllables"⁵⁴. Or, as a relationship, exemplification is similar to the index presented by Peirce. Multiple and complex reference refers to a referential function of symbol—suggestive rather than clear. Goodman gives some instructions about this concept in *Problems and Projects* (1972). In general, when a symbol can refer to many different objects at the same time, this symbol possesses a multiple meaning system, like "a" refers to "x", "a" also refers to "y", and "a" refers to "z" as well, then "a" has a multiple meaning system consists of "x, y, z".⁵⁵ A symbol in a painting will refer to one or more new objects according to other symbols. "Exemplification" and "multiple and complex reference" are more focused on the nature of the overall work, rather than the specific visible marks in the work.

These symptoms can be regarded as the semiotic interpretation of the properties of marks. Symptoms only can provide some clues macroscopically and cannot encapsulate the immersion and liveness offered by real work. Moreover, the determination of whether the mark has these symptoms is the result of cognition and inference. For a symbol system, even having these symptoms is not necessarily aesthetic, let alone deciding these symptoms is not easy. However, compared to the

⁵³ Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, 160.

⁵⁴ Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, 60.

⁵⁵ Nelson Goodman, *Problems and Projects* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972), 66.

metaphysical discussion of painting elements, it is ingenious and technical to use them as a basis for the theoretical interpretation of the marks of the work.

The Signifier and the Signified of Painting

These two terms signifier and signified from Saussure's linguistics are used here to illustrate the symbolic characteristics of painting language. The two terms can also be said to be close to "content and form", but the latter are not accurate and applicable to this thesis, due to the content is often regarded as discourse and narrative, and resorts to the language; and the form in general sense is often used inaccurately (see Chapter 3), which refers to the marks mentioned above to a large extent. The signifier here can refer to the whole work as a signifier, or the individual marks constituting the painting as signifiers respectively.

The doctrine of the traditional formalist or purist attaches importance to marks. Their theories cast aside all the external issues of context and signification and reach or grasp the artwork purely and directly by characters of form, such as composition, color, texture and line, instead of its content, like scene, plot, figure and idea directed by the work. Formalists attempt to untie the connection between the internal elements of the painting and the external world. For example, in *The Life of Forms in Art* (1934), Henri Focillon proposes a concept of autonomous and organic artistic creation which is associated with the shifting domain of materials and techniques and, like Fry, he emphasizes the autonomy and independence of art. Heinrich Wölfflin develops the early formal analysis in art history by proposing five pairs of concepts⁵⁶ in *Principles of Art History* (1929). Fry considers that it is hard to understand art by discussing the life of the artist and analyzing the meaning of the picture; it should be appropriate to highlight the abstract elements of art determined by the interior of art instead of exterior.⁵⁷ Clement Greenberg is influenced by Fry's *Vision and Design* (1920)⁵⁸ and Kant's views on aesthetic experience. He argues that the nature of modernism or formalism lay in criticizing itself in a way specific to the discipline itself. He objects to factors that are not fundamental to painting, which should be eliminated from painting to purify its form. For Greenberg, abstract painting with characteristics of modernity is the ideal painting, casting aside the unnecessary traditional factors—theme and content. In his opinion, the developing

⁵⁶ 1. Linear—painterly. 2. Plane—recession. 3. closed—open. 4. Multiplicity—unity. 5. absolute clarity—relative clarity.

⁵⁷ Minor, *Art History's History*, 165-167.

⁵⁸ Roger Fry, *Vision and Design* (Chelmsford: Courier Corporation, 2012).

process of painting is to reach abstraction and independence by means of self-restrict and self-purification.⁵⁹ (details in Chapter 3)

Formalists canceled the discursive part of the signified—the content, because content often falls into the category of art history and analysis of iconology, and has more relationship with an intellectual history, less with the artistry. For instance, iconology is concerned with the study of content and the extension of its meaning. In *Studies in Iconology* (1939) Erwin Panofsky presents an example—*Last Supper* by Leonardo da Vinci to illustrate the three levels of method of iconology, that is, pre-iconography, iconography and iconology; the process of this kind of methods is to lead to significance from the surface to the deep by three steps of nature, convention and internal meaning.⁶⁰ Namely, this kind of method mainly focuses on image and how the image stands for or interprets such and such. In phenomenology, the image consciousness launched by Edmund Husserl is more concise. It is divided into image carrier, image object and image theme, the structure of which is that, for example, this framed painting (image carrier) is an image (image object) referring to that such and such (image theme).⁶¹

In practical terms, the reason for the formalists to dismiss content is not sufficient. "Contents" are not related to painting but are inferred and endowed by viewers and researchers. (Here, I only refer to paintings in the ideal sense). For example, Gombrich advocates revising the concept of iconology, compressing the ambition of iconology, and using the author's intention as the object of interpretation of iconology, so as to determine the only provable meaning of the artwork. However, the compression Gombrich speaks of is still not fully determined—the author's intention is not always the provable meaning of the artwork (see Chapter 3). In short, all the discursive should be eliminated. (Studying painting from the perspective of art history is not included.) As mentioned earlier, although Wollheim also emphasizes the artist's intentions, but unlike art historians, his argument is aimed at the artwork, instead of the words that lead the work out of the work.

The signified or "content" is generally considered to contain the meaning of the work, because the pure signifier does not involve the meaning or not. In the field of

⁵⁹ Minor, *Art History's History*, 168-172.

⁶⁰ Minor, *Art History's History*, 212.

⁶¹ Liangkang Ni, "Phenomenology of Image Consciousness," *Journal of Nanjing University*, 1 (2001), 3.

analytical aesthetics, the study of content or significance is also an aspect. The art criticism of analytical aesthetics basically contains three aspects, that is, description of art, interpretation of art and evaluation of art, mainly focusing on content and significance as well from another meta-criticism angle. For instance, Monroe Beardsley further puts forward the concept of critical interpretation and critical description in *The Aesthetic Point of View* (1970). The critical interpretation refers to the meaning of artwork, namely, the semantic association between the work itself and so-and-so outside of the work; the critical description as a fresh element tends to formalism, facing features of artwork, like color and shape, rhythm and tempo, possessing the concept of form.⁶²

Unlike Beardsley, Goodman holds that if an artwork is meaningful, it must be symbolic, that is, the visual meaning mainly depends on the rules, symbols, conventions, or symbolic system to which the picture belongs. He provides an analytical interpretation for the dispute between form and content by means of the concept of representation, expression and exemplification in *Languages of Art* and his theory of symbol, that is the matter of the relation of the signifier and the signified. In other word, the relationship is more essential or is the foundation of the existence of artwork. To a certain extent, he also acknowledged that the formalist position is meaningful. That is “the pure in art”—“... to concentrate on the intrinsic rather than the extrinsic, the insistence that a work of art is what it is rather than what it symbolizes, and the conclusion that pure art dispenses with external reference of all kinds have the solid sound of straight thinking, and promise to extricate art from smothering thickets of interpretation and commentary”⁶³. In short, the subject of a painting refers to or represents something other than it, which has nothing to do with its aesthetic or artistic significance or characteristics. However, simply writing off the signified will cause a problem, that is, the signifier is not a signifier, but becomes a pile of scattered and unstructured objects or things.

Correspondingly, in *Ways of Worldmaking*, Goodman articulates that accepting the doctrine of formalism, namely, that content is insignificant and should be dismissed, will result in “advocating lobotomy on many great works”; rejecting it, namely, what is important is not what the work is but something it is not, will result in “condoning

⁶² Yudi Liu, “The Type of Art Criticism from the Perspective of British and American Analytical Aesthetics,” *China Literature and Art Criticism*. 3 (2015), 16.

⁶³ Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, 59.

impurity in art, emphasizing the extraneous".⁶⁴ Although Goodman argues that this kind of pure viewpoint could be regarded as both absolutely right and absolutely wrong, this kind of dispute can be clarified with some achievement of theory of symbol and the function of symbol theory in art.

There seems to be only one kind of painting without the signified, as required by formalists. To be accepted by formalists, 'pure' work must be non-representational and non-expressive—everything the painting has, is only its own property and nothing else. Non-representation work, for example abstract expressionism may ultimately perhaps be rejected by formalists and purists, due to that fact that it can express emotions, sentiments and ideas. Expression is a way of denoting external factors. Goodman, presents a hypothesis that by dividing properties into internal property and external property; internal properties are embodied in the painting of non-representation and non-expression, whilst external properties indicate the external such and such. That is, a pure painting without signified has only internal properties and no external properties.

However, Goodman argues that all the painting has external properties, even abstract painting, which because of its shape and color can be shared with other objects and still refer to an external such and such. Consequently, the property of shape, color, size, material and structure which can be classified in form does not indicate the interior of work. He presents an example—*"an ordinary swatch of textile in a tailor's or upholsterer's sample book"*⁶⁵ to explain that form is a relationship of exemplification, varying with the causality and the background. Therefore, according to Goodman even formalist painting is symbolic, and the exemplification of some property of its own. *"exemplification no less than representation or expression is a form of reference"*⁶⁶. In general, Goodman argues that it is correct that representation and expression are not absolutely necessary when stressing form; it is wrong that there is no exemplification of the property in the painting. That is, Goodman holds that, based on analytical aesthetics and semiotics, the pure form that formalists assert is non-existent.

Similarly, another advocate of semiotics, Norman Bryson, argues, in *Looking at the*

⁶⁴ Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, 60.

⁶⁵ Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, 63-64.

⁶⁶ Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, 65.

Overlooked (1990), that painting is not only a pile of color but also the semantic space of symbol; significance emerges between symbols and interpreter; interpreting painting, even facing an abstract expressionist work, is human nature.⁶⁷ In *Word and Image* (1983)⁶⁸, Bryson discusses that images are the converging point of two contrary qualities—the visual and the discursive—in the sense of discourse and reasoning. He holds that signifier is both discursive and figural. The discursive image comes from certain convention and depends on certain textual readings or understandings. The figural image is not conventional and does not reflect text, yet both of them are the object of interpretation. This dualistic interpretation reconciles the two claims of the signified (the content). It puts the signified resorting to text on the discursive aspect of the signifier, while the figural aspect of the signifier does not reflect the text, but at least reflects the external properties argued by Goodman. However, Bryson might be wrong to consider that both are objects of interpretation. To be exact, in painting, the aspect of the signifier that does not reflect text is an innate property, while the aspect that reflects text is derived, which comes from the human nature of interpretation. In painting, the property of the signifier that does not reflect text is not interpretative. It can only resort to perception and direct to the mystical. It is suggestive, continuous and does not have the structural feature of language.

Chapter Summary

Though the perspective of analytical aesthetics, this chapter discussed some fundamental issues in painting language—realism, representation, expression, mark, and the characteristics of the signifier and signified of this special symbol system. In analytical aesthetics, the discussion of art is more logical and linguistic, rather than gathered from experience. Further, semiotics is more closely related to logic and language, so when applying it to the field of art, many elements of sub-symbols and non-verbal symbols in painting will be ignored. Accordingly, the art symbol system discussed by Goodman emphasizes the similarity rather than the difference between pictures and texts. Because for semiotics, all images (pictures and paintings) are objects of concept or cognition, not perceptual objects. However, it is language that provides a model for the analysis of the symbolic system that constitutes art.

⁶⁷ Minor, *Art History's History*, 218.

⁶⁸ Norman Bryson, *Word and Image: French Painting of the Ancien Régime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

Painting language however, is not based on analysis and inference, so it is difficult to provide artistic perceptions only from text. Consequently, in analytical aesthetics, such as Wollheim, there is an emphasis on the function of media in art—from materials to appropriate media. In the next chapter I will discuss various perspectives around the perception of art, emphasized by phenomenological aesthetics. The discussion in Chapter 2 will augment the arguments already made above.

Chapter 2

Painting Language from the Perspective of Phenomenological Aesthetics

This chapter discusses the properties of painting language from the perspective of perception. Based on the research perspectives and methods of phenomenological aesthetics, this chapter can be seen as a comparison to the previous chapter which is based on the logical analysis of language. In the discussions of aesthetics and specific art issues in which phenomenological aestheticians apply the theory of intentionality of phenomenology, some ideas can be refined and excavated to reflect on and formulate painting language.

Just like analytical aesthetics, specific art issues, such as expression and representation, are also the objects of phenomenological aesthetics. The issues discussed in this chapter are mainly based on Mikel Dufrenne's main texts *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* (1953) and the first volume of the collection *Aesthetics and Philosophy* (1976), while also taking into account the views of other phenomenological estheticians. Dufrenne relates and analyzes the relationship between art and semiotics, as well as addressing the question of whether art is a language from the perspective of phenomenological aesthetics. In addition, on some specific issues, although Dufrenne's phenomenological discussion of art starts from artwork, he does not intend to lead his readers into art criticism. Instead, he derives the concept of the aesthetic object from the artwork. He describes and defines the aesthetic object⁶⁹ which gives the artwork a solid and reasonable foundation turning the artwork into the object of study. His research provides appropriate materials and the basis for exploring painting language from perception.

Art Issues in Phenomenological Aesthetics and Analytical Aesthetics

The elaborations of specific art issues by phenomenological aesthetics, such as material, matter, representation and so on, as a prominent study in the twentieth Century was juxtaposed with analytical aesthetics. In essence aesthetic studies in Europe and the United States in the twentieth Century was mainly centered on art

⁶⁹ Aesthetic object is a complex concept in Dufrenne's theory, he used more space to explain it. Yet in this thesis, it can be simply understood as the work of art captured by aesthetic perception.

issues, for instance, in the field of analytic aesthetics, where most scholars, such as Goodman, Wollheim and Danto, devoted themselves to the issues of art representation, expression, fiction, fake, art definition and so on. In the context of the linguistic turn, language mechanisms guided those analytical estheticians' research, just as their academic foundation—analytic philosophy. Dufrenne's discussion of art issues based on the phenomenological aesthetics is not entirely different from the discussions offered by analytical aestheticians, such as Goodman in the previous chapter. The two are seemingly different in appearance, but there is an academic link between the two, that is, the homology of phenomenological aesthetics and analytical aesthetics.

Every kind of aesthetics is the branch of philosophy, or as Dufrenne indicates in the preface of *Aesthetics and Philosophy*, aesthetics can only be formed in philosophy. Aesthetic theory often relies on the theoretical creation of philosophy, the emergence of new aesthetic schools is usually due to the emergence of new philosophical ideas, such as analytical philosophy for analytic aesthetics, phenomenology for phenomenological aesthetics and existentialism for existential aesthetics. In terms of the philosophical soil, phenomenological aesthetics and analytical aesthetics are not necessarily diametrically opposed—they are homologous—although the founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl created something less logically rigorous than analytic philosophy⁷⁰. Compared with analytical aesthetics, phenomenological aesthetics is based more on intuition and certainty instead of logic and analysis. This point is demonstrated clearly when Dufrenne discusses specific art issues, such as the sensuous and matter in *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, and the moment of an artwork's perfection when discussing the language rule of paintings in *Aesthetics and Philosophy*. The logic and rigor of analytical aesthetics, compared with phenomenological aesthetics, is obvious.

For example, in *Languages of Art* discussed in the previous chapter, the fundamental method or the deepest guiding ideology used by Goodman is logic language analysis, or syntactic and semantic analysis of logical structures in pure form. Logical structure is the postulate—the most fundamental and definite basis. Metaphysical assertions without certainty and validity are completely expelled by this method and only in this

⁷⁰ In *Logical Investigations* (1901), Husserl states that he will clarify some vague concepts. From this perspective, Husserl's concerns seem to be very similar to those of the early analytical philosophers.

way can the analysis and the discussion have theoretical significance. And this is one of the reasons that Goodman does not include the analysis of beautifulness and subtlety of specific artworks. In his discussion he relates to aesthetic issues by means of the method of logic language analysis instead. He presents a calm, technical and meticulous attitude when he analyzes representation, expression and notational systems. The judgment and discussion of beautifulness and subtlety in artworks perhaps needs more feeling and emotion, but for analytical aesthetics based on certainty and validity, emotion is not absolutely necessary. Whether the artwork is outstanding or not—the issue of aesthetic value—does not serve any practical meaning for analytical aesthetics. Indeed, to some extent, the excellence and subtlety of the artwork is the research object of the aesthetic, but it is not the object of analytical aesthetics. Without a definitive foundation, analytical aesthetic deduction is not possible.

In terms of representation and expression, Goodman analytically illustrates the similarities and differences between representation and expression by means of denotation and exemplification. Dufrenne instead argues that representation and expression are almost indistinguishable or expression is a type of reference of representation in phenomenological aesthetics, like two sides of a coin to some extent, and they do not belong to aesthetic object or aesthetic perception alone.

There are three elements that enable us to contrast analytic and phenomenological aesthetics. Firstly, analytic philosophers hold that illustration is the analysis of relatively independent parts which can be disassembled from a complex object, so when it comes to every part, it must be concise and clear, like mathematical formulae. For instance, some propositions put forward by Goodman in *Languages of Art* - such as exemplification is possession plus reference. On the contrary, phenomenologists pay attention to the inner connection between things, because they hold that experience is not a gathering of loose and separated sensory facts but a stream. For example, Dufrenne starts the discussion of aesthetic experience with the cycle of aesthetic perception and aesthetic object. As he states that *“it is within this circle that the whole problem of the subject-object relationship is found. The same circle is found in phenomenology, which makes use of it in defining intentionality and in describing the interdependence of noesis and noema”*.⁷¹ (Noesis and noema is a pair

⁷¹ Mikel Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), xlviii.

of concepts put forward by Husserl in phenomenology. In Dufrenne's theory, there is a simple corresponding relationship. That is, aesthetic perception corresponds to noesis and aesthetic object corresponds to noema.)

Secondly, analytic philosophers are not very concerned with the existential and ethical relation between humans and the objective world, namely, judgment on things. For instance, Bertrand Russell argues that when we say something is valuable, we are indicating our own emotions⁷². Alfred J. Ayer indicates more explicitly in *Language, Truth, and Logic* (1936)⁷³ that aesthetic judgment and all other value judgments are nothing more than emotional expressions. Phenomenologists disapprove of such emotionalism arguing that it leads to subjectivism or relativism. Phenomenology is based on the empirical world—the world of inter-subjectivity launched by Husserl. In particular, the phenomenological aestheticians are more opposed to this simple dogmatism of value issue, because part of their work is to study the aesthetic value. Some of them, such as Moritz Geiger differentiate between the fact and value, emphasizing the aesthetic value. Geiger's research is also called value aesthetics or axiology aesthetics. Geiger analyses the properties of relations and significance in an artwork by means of the basic approach of phenomenology. For instance, in *The Significance of Art* (1976)⁷⁴, Geiger holds that the reason why something is valuable is that it has the significance to a subject; something is a kind of value because it has fully acquired this significance. If Geiger's arguments were slightly partial to subjectivism, then Ingarden emphasizes value neutrality or the suspension of value judgment, and further, Dufrenne is totally contrary to subjectivism and emotionalism, emphasizing the value of objectivity when he analyzes the aesthetic value, which embodied in their analyses of artwork. Dufrenne holds that the standards involved in the evaluation of value are just an indication of the existence of objects; the object itself is its own standard. Standard is not a subjective decision; the value of the object is the object itself.⁷⁵

Finally, these different viewpoints towards language resulted in a separation of analytical philosophy and phenomenology. In the scope of analytic philosophy,

⁷² Ramendra Nath, "Bertrand Russell: Ethics," Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/russ-eth/>.

⁷³ Alfred J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1952).

⁷⁴ Moritz Geiger, *The Significance of Art : A Phenomenological Approach to Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. Klaus Berger, (Washington, D.C.: Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology & University Press of America, 1986).

⁷⁵ Mikel Dufrenne, *Aesthetics and Philosophy* (Beijing: China Social Science Press, 1985), 22-24.

philosophical confusion and chaos are caused by the defects of language. Therefore, Friedrich Frege, Russell and Carnap proposed to substitute artificial language for ordinary language. Their research and opinions result in the precise and technical analyses of analytical aestheticians, such as Goodman and Wollheim. Nevertheless, phenomenologists argue that these confusions and chaos largely result from the views and methods of the previous schools rather than language. They believed chaos and confusion could be solved by being intuitive - namely, using the phenomenological method. And this is one of the reasons that Dufrenne's treatise *"forms the apex of forty years of effort in the specific field of phenomenological aesthetics"*, and before him there was a lack of achievement, although it is promising that *"phenomenology holds for the investigation of art"*⁷⁶.

It is true that the attitude of analytical estheticians and phenomenological estheticians towards language led them to develop in different directions. In fact, the basic framework of phenomenology: action—noema (intention content)—object largely benefits from the name—meaning—reference trichotomy put forward by Frege in *On Sense and Reference* (1892), when he differentiates the meaning and reference of a linguistic expression⁷⁷. Dufrenne's discussion of art falls into the category of phenomenological aesthetics because he uses the theory of intentionality of phenomenology, that is, balancing the intentional activity and intentional object which in Dufrenne's terms are aesthetic perception and aesthetic object. Therefore, the two are closely linked, that is, analytical philosophers analyze significance—the meaning of linguistic expression, and phenomenologists analyze intention content, or the meaning of action in a general sense. The discussion of art from phenomenological aesthetics and the discussion in the previous chapter from analytical aesthetics can form a cross-reference to deepen an understanding of painting language.

There are some mutual theoretical links and similar points of view between Dufrenne and other scholars who apply the phenomenological method in researching aesthetics, discussing art issues and analyzing artworks, such as Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Moritz Geiger. The links to Heidegger relate to his taking an intermediate position between phenomenology and existentialism. His theory can

⁷⁶ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, xvii.

⁷⁷ Dagfinn Føllesdal, "An introduction to phenomenology for analytical philosophers" in *Contemporary Philosophy in Scandinavia*, ed. Raymond Olson and Anthony Paul, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1972), 417-429.

be called phenomenological aesthetics—within his study of art and truth in the mid-term, or artistic phenomenology—within his discourse on poetry. With Merleau-Ponty, his aesthetics is a relatively special phenomenological aesthetics, represented by his painting theory. His theory could be termed painting aesthetics—this refers to his three main texts, namely, *Cezanne's Doubt* (1948), *Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence* (1960) and *Eye and Mind* (1964)⁷⁸, which indicate his attention to seeing and language.

In Dufrenne's research, aesthetic perception is theoretically based on Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945)⁷⁹ which Dufrenne often cites when elucidating the aesthetic object and aesthetic experience. Merleau-Ponty starts with the seeing of painters, and holds that painters make contact with the world with their eyes and express on canvases with hands and brushes. He develops his theories of vision beginning with the curiosity and study of Cezanne's seeing in *Cezanne's Doubt* into a kind of visual philosophy in *Eye and Mind* which is the apex of his aesthetics. Similarly, Dufrenne starts from the artwork and holds that the artist is the person who thinks with his hands, so he holds that the spirit of an artist is entirely situated in his techniques, just like the meaning of artwork is totally in the sensuous domain.⁸⁰

In Dufrenne's texts, some viewpoints and concepts are taken directly from Heidegger, such as "truth", "use", "saying" and "thinglyness", which Dufrenne often uses in his argument where he keeps their meanings wholly intact. Even some of the examples in Dufrenne's arguments, such as "poem", "tool" and "temple", are highly similar to Heidegger's texts in *Off the Beaten Track* (1950). Heidegger, in the first essay in the collection—*The Origin of the Work of Art* (1936)—makes the phenomenological analysis of an artwork—*Shoes* by Van Gogh. In this essay he highlights one of the features of work-being of the work, that is, the work opens up a world and the work-being is unconcealed and disclosed. In other words, "to be a work means: to set up a world"⁸¹. Correspondingly, Dufrenne discusses the aesthetic value and aesthetic object, for instance, he comments that Van Gogh's work *Chair* opens up a world to

⁷⁸ These three articles are from the collection of essays *Sense and Non-sense* (1948), *Signs* (1960) and *The Primacy of Perception* (1964) respectively.

⁷⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald Landes (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).

⁸⁰ Dufrenne, *Aesthetics and Philosophy*, 31.

⁸¹ Martin Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, ed. and trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 22.

the source of truth; the world that the work carries is spoken through painting. This world is impossible to say in other ways, because as far as the essence of language is concerned, it cannot be arbitrarily changed and its meaning lies in the sensuous⁸².

Phenomenological estheticians have relatively approximate views. In *The Significance of Art*, Geiger objects to regarding the aesthetic object as a vision or illusion. For example - treating a landscape painting as real scenery. Geiger also objects to regarding the aesthetic object as a complex of various perceptions, for example-treating a painting as a unification of color perception or a unification of form; he emphasizes that there is nothing but the work—a painting. Geiger's viewpoint about the aesthetic object is the same point emphasized by Dufrenne and Heidegger—that is the work-being of the work. Geiger also proposes some concepts, for example, a pseudo aesthetic attitude—spectators are attracted by the subject, theme or skill when facing an artwork, which provides a pseudo aesthetic experience. Similarly, Dufrenne holds a similar position when he analyzes the structure of artwork—in his view the subject is only a pretext. Geiger, also expounds another concept—the attitude outside the aesthetic. Geiger does this by means of two attitudes towards words: One is the ordinary attitude that regards words as media and obtains the meaning behind the word; another is the aesthetic attitude that dismisses the word's real-world reference and emphasizes its sensuous qualities. Similar arguments can be found in Dufrenne's research on art and semiotics and in Heidegger's research on language.

Dufrenne, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty all discussed the issue of material, expression, language, description and representation respectively and partially at a different angle. In comparison with Heidegger's view on artwork where the artwork is the disclosure of truth and the being of beings in essay *The Origin of the Work of Art*, and the distinction and revelation of language he made in speech *The Way To Language* (1959)⁸³, Dufrenne's theory of art is more specific. In comparison with Merleau-Ponty's attention to the issues of expression and vision, the confluence of vision and philosophy, as well as the exploration of language based on the vision of the painter and the mute expression of the artwork, Dufrenne's perspective is more focused.

⁸² Dufrenne, *Aesthetics and Philosophy*, 25-28.

⁸³ Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. P. D. Hertz and J. Strambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 111-138.

Art, Language and Semiotics

In the context of the linguistic turn, the studies of linguistics and semiotics gradually become an approach that stretches to many fields. In the related texts that investigate the relationship between art and language with the method of phenomenological aesthetics, Dufrenne's texts have reference value. The issue mainly involves three overlapping and independent fields—art (including painting), semiotics and linguistics, among which the semiotics and linguistics Dufrenne involved himself with refers to the views of Saussure and Barthes⁸⁴. Dufrenne's discussion begins with the question of whether art is a language or not. On this point, unlike Goodman, Dufrenne first discusses whether art and language have similarities and differences from a broader perspective. Yet Goodman studies art as a symbol and language directly in *Languages of Art* and does not argue if art is a language but skips it, due to the natural affinity of analytical aesthetics and linguistics.

Regarding language, Saussure and Barthes both consider language as the center of semiotics. Barthes even thinks that semiotics should be subordinate to linguistics. Dufrenne does not object to investigating art with the method of semiotics or bringing art into the category of semiotics. Dufrenne holds that art itself can be juxtaposed with language and has equivalence as an entity⁸⁵. He uses the terms code and message to match the term language and speech in Saussure's synchronic structuralist linguistics, which reflects Saussure and Barthes's influence on Dufrenne.⁸⁶ However, the study of the synchronic language structure made by Saussure was based on the dualism of signifier and signified as well as language and speech. Due to the underlying relationship between linguistics and phenomenology focusing on intentional content⁸⁷, We can see that Dufrenne's research based on the theory of intentionality of phenomenology (paying more attention to relation rather than entity) is more suitable than Saussure's, for discussing the language property of art appropriately and accurately. That is whether the artwork is a speech with some

⁸⁴ As a school, the basic point of view of Saussure and Barthes has been mentioned in the last section when it comes to Goodman's semiotic view. In addition, the term that Saussure and Barthes used is semeiology which is different from the term semiotics used by Peirce and his school. Semiotician John Deely considers in *Basics of Semiotics* (2009) that these two terms have different implications respectively but they are often mixed, and the semeiology of Saussure school has a certain defect, so he is more inclined to C. S. Peirce's semiotics. In view of this thesis is not on semiotics, the two will not be distinguished but unified into the term semiotics.

⁸⁵ Dufrenne, *Aesthetics and Philosophy*, 73.

⁸⁶ Barthes discussed if these two sets of conceptions (Code-Message, Langue-Parole) are equal in the first chapter of *Elements of Semiology*, finally he chose to identify with Saussure's point of view—the two are equivalent.

⁸⁷ Føllesdal, *Contemporary Philosophy in Scandinavia*, 417-429.

kind of code. Or more precisely, whether the artwork can act as a medium of language between the sender (artist) and the receiver (viewer).

According to Heidegger, an artwork is an existence of utterances or sayings. Nothing which we call an artwork is self-secluding and wordless. In *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger argues that a work of art must mean the occurrence of a statement or expression. This means there must be a language existing, plus the artworks are usually considered to convey such-and-such to the viewer. Therefore, in appearance, this creates a possibility and reason—considering art as an object of semiotics and studying it with the special model of . Language is the most complex and universal symbol of all the expression systems, it is typical and can be a model of all the branches of semiotics⁸⁸. Either through an artwork speaking or through establishing a language model counterpart in the artwork, we are led to the concept of a language of art. Moreover, in the reality of artistic appreciation, there seems to be certain codes and rules, only with the familiarity of the code and rules of discussing art can the meaning be conveyed. Language is a framework system organized by signs according to certain syntax. Compared with speech, it is dominant, stable and normative, - according to the definition of language and speech distinguished by Saussure. According to Dufrenne's understanding—language is demonstrated in the entirety of speech, it provides a common rule for every kind of speech, thereby these speeches constitute a homogeneous entirety⁸⁹. Regarding whether there is any vocabulary and grammar in art or if there is a system and rule hiding in the entirety of artwork, Dufrenne holds a negative attitude. He argues that the artwork is the result of individual creators, creative practice is anarchic⁹⁰. Thus, according to Dufrenne's view, horizontally, language is generated in the lateral communication of speeches, yet there is no horizontal communication in artworks. In fact, in terms of the relatively consistent style and features at various stages of art history, it is hard to say that there is no horizontal communication between artworks. If there is horizontal communication, there must be systems and rules as well as the analogues of vocabulary and grammar. Also, vertically, Dufrenne argues that there is no consistency and continuity of a language on the succession of different styles of genres in the development of art history, the difference is more the rhythm of life

⁸⁸ John Deely, *Basics of Semiotics* (Estonian: Tartu University Press, 2009), 172.

⁸⁹ Dufrenne, *Aesthetics and Philosophy*, 82.

⁹⁰ Dufrenne, *Aesthetics and Philosophy*, 82.

than the law of development⁹¹. Dufrenne assumes that if the signal of language appearance could be found in art, it would be just like finding the appearance of language in speeches⁹². Basically, the logical basis of this assumption is that discarding those non-perfect artworks is like dismissing those speeches that are irregular and not understandable. A certain inevitability still remains in the artworks. But Dufrenne argues that this inevitability is different from language or it is not a syntactic relation of structuralist linguistics: the inevitability in artwork is the moment when the artwork reaches perfection. In this inevitability, the highest purpose of the combination and application of the elements of a work, such as color and scale, is to seek perfection, and this is unlike the combination of words in terms of syntactic relation which is to express a clear concept or intention. There is no so-called artwork perfection in this kind of language application. Inevitability in creation is felt as the sensuous instead of the logical, deductive or discursive.

There is nothing in common between inevitability and the compulsion of language, or in Dufrenne's term—code. He gives an example about the speaker and the poet, which is similar to Heidegger's argument of poetic language, to illustrate it—the speaker uses the correct words and syntax to express, yet the poet uses the words that sound right to say something unexpected, and the syntax can be disorganized. The right significance for poetry is given by the right sound⁹³. Perfect artworks are created by a minority of artists and the creation of every piece of work is an independent exploration which relatively excludes the influence of other works, so it is hard to avoid discarding the classics and rebelling against orthodoxy on the way to perfection. It is hard to say that a piece of artwork is a speech made up of language. In practice, this example cannot illustrate Dufrenne's viewpoint about the independence and the rebellion against orthodoxy of artwork. His viewpoint works at the macro level. Once the scope is narrowed down, for example, within in a specific genre, not in the whole category of painting, then the rules and mutual influence will appear. So the perfection is in a system not within a single work.

Correspondingly, the inevitability of guiding the artwork to perfection and the inevitability of standardizing speech to make it clear do not belong to the same category, because diachronically, language adheres to a clear logic, and synchronically,

⁹¹ Dufrenne, *Aesthetics and Philosophy*, 82.

⁹² Dufrenne, *Aesthetics and Philosophy*, 83.

⁹³ Dufrenne, *Aesthetics and Philosophy*, 82-84.

language adheres to a clear framework, what language expresses must be a meaning outside itself, the inevitability of speech is the logic and framework. Yet, according to phenomenological aesthetics, artworks are related to perception, expressing their own world of meaning, and this is the inevitability of artwork.

Can artists speak through their works? Ordinary language, namely, the speaker's way of making a statement, is an analytical statement—the meaning of signs is determined by the logical relationship between signs, in which the meaning of each sign and the sentence made up by these signs is clear and definite. But poetry and works of art are not a clear description of facts or a reflection of intentions.

According to the distinction made by Heidegger in *On the Way to Language* (1959), there are three types of languages—natural language, formalized language and essence language. The first two languages can be referred to as analytical languages, both deviate from the nature of language, resulting in the silence of the language itself, only the third is pure and poetic language—the saying and unfolding of language itself rather than delivering an information (the purpose that Heidegger discusses language is for being—“*it brings beings as beings ... into the open ... where language is not present ... no openness of beings*”⁹⁴, but it does not impede to illustrate the property of language which makes the artwork state). Thus, poetic language is the language that listens to itself. Accordingly, the language of art is a pure language or essential language instead of the research object of linguistics. In other words, the saying of the artwork cannot be defined by Saussure's concept of signifier and signified. And Dufrenne argues that art cannot be defined in scope like because it is simultaneously closed and open; it is closed because it is not suitable for translation, it is open because it is suitable for association.

To a large extent however, it cannot be denied that artists “speak” through their works. And since artwork can be included in the research object of semiotics, as Dufrenne recognized, then it cannot be denied that the artwork is a sign. That is, representing or implying another thing by one thing, just like language and its referential content, the two can be separated. On this point, Dufrenne holds that there are only false words and false syntax in painting, on which he has a similar view with Susan Langer. Langer discussed the characteristics of art language, that is, it has

⁹⁴ Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 46.

no words and no syntax, from the perspective of semiotics aesthetics or art semiotics in *Mind* (1967)⁹⁵. She argues that art does not have ready-made signs or rules that can combine various components. For her, artworks are always uncertain—art does not represent a concept or the specific things that a concept refers to and also does not convey the meaning beyond itself. But there is an exception in artworks, namely, the works use the natural language defined by Heidegger or discursive language (regarding the works as artworks from the perspective of art history instead of from the definition of Goodman and Danto). For instance, in *Ways of Worldmaking*, Goodman mentions that there is a category of symbolic painting in representative paintings, like religious paintings. In this kind of painting, for example, both the doves and the halos have the clear meaning, or like the ritualistic gestures and expressions in art that are discussed by Gombrich in *The Image and The Eye* (1988)⁹⁶, where viewers can understand a clear meaning through the combination of such images. That is, these artworks are signs, the content they denoted is not in the painting, in other words, when the viewer understands the referential content, the painting is dispensable. This falls into the scope of iconography. The work as an artwork disappears on its own after it has completed its mission. Its value is only embodied in the use of consumption, the reason why is that the works are only regarded as useful objects rather than aesthetic objects.⁹⁷ An obvious example is that some viewers will try to read and understand a painting, and few of them will care about the painting itself after learning the doctrines or stories the painting refers to, because it is not an aesthetic object at this time. Or at least, just like the examples of “stone carvings ... of the cathedral ... the Dogon religion from their masks”⁹⁸ given by Dufrenne in *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, that is, the object of the aesthetic and the object of the signifier have not been separated in this case. Therefore, what artists say through their works is not the object signified by the works in such a situation.

Then, how do artists speak through their works and what do they speak? As mentioned earlier, Dufrenne holds that the code in art is free and it cannot express universal semantics—each piece of work has its own semantics, thus, any translation is not equal to it.⁹⁹ An artwork can hardly be used to deliver message and argument,

⁹⁵ Susanne K. Langer, *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling*, ed. Gary A. van den Heuvel (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).

⁹⁶ Ernst Gombrich, *The Image and the Eye: Further Studies in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (London: Phaidon Press, 1994).

⁹⁷ Dufrenne, *Aesthetics and Philosophy*, 22.

⁹⁸ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 114-115.

⁹⁹ Dufrenne, *Aesthetics and Philosophy*, 106.

but can convey experience and arouse responses. The work will build a full meaning when it is finished, or conversely, when the meaning is complete the work is finished. Artists do express themselves in their works, but Dufrenne argues that it is more self-presentation of artists by their works than expression, artists do not talk about themselves through their works, otherwise they can use words.¹⁰⁰ It is an unknown process by which artists construct meaning each time through their works. It is not like constructing a house step by step through the use of plan drawings. In contrast, the plan for an artist is indistinct, hidden and not obvious in the artist's mind. There must be something unique emerging in the constructing process, which is exactly what works need to accomplish. Nevertheless, once the work is finished, it forms a closed and replete entirety of meaning. Artists need not and have no right to get involved their works again once they are complete. Even though the study of an artwork might refer to the artist who created it, in that case, *"the creator then in question is the one whom the work reveals, not the one who historically created the work"*¹⁰¹. Accordingly, the more essential issue is what the works speak instead of how the artists speak through their works.

What the artwork speaks, borrowing Heidegger's view, is central to the being of work, and this also reflects the concerns of phenomenological aesthetics. Facing the works directly is also the standpoint of phenomenological art analysis, which is different from art historians. Especially for figurative paintings, like religious pictures or paintings that express an event. What the work speaks is an inescapable issue as far as the being of work is concerned. What the work speaks is not the discernible images or references or title. Paying attention to the figurative world depicted in the work is equal to paying attention to the world, if so, the work becomes transparent, which means denying the being of work; and if the object in the painting is compared with and relates to the real object, the being of work will be weakened, too. Such a way of viewing and perceiving works still falls into the category of materialist theory of reflection—the reason or value of the work lies in bringing the deductive and grey rational to light and making the rational colorized and visualized. Thus, Dufrenne argues that the mission of painting does not mean something being accomplished in a single utterance, but in viewing. The relationship between the painting and what the painting expresses is different from the relationship between word and concept and what the painting expresses is the painting-itself, instead of denoting something.

¹⁰⁰ Dufrenne, *Aesthetics and Philosophy*, 111.

¹⁰¹ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, xlv.

And painting refuses to compare with another object—the real object, so, the degree of resemblance is not the criterion of quality—this is far different to the accuracy of words as the standard of speech quality.¹⁰² The title of an artwork is not a narration or a hint of the subject or concept, or even a guide for the viewer. The theme or idea contained in a work, if there is one, is based on the being of work, rather than opposite. Dufrenne argues that the title is just an incentive or a cause for an artist. If artists wanted to state a meaning, describe an object, narrate an event, clarify a theory or advocate a morality, they would turn to ordinary languages, the language of nomenclature and argumentation.¹⁰³ An artwork neither makes the rational visualized nor makes the concept emotional so as to make itself easier to accept, doing so would make the artwork implemental and verbal—when meaning is conveyed, words disappear. And this is exactly what the phenomenological estheticians, especially Heidegger and Dufrenne, argue against. Artworks are not symbols of a concept, so they do not indicate the artist's stand. Dufrenne gives an example—a miserable scene of torture painted by Robert Lapoujade. He argues that the work does not indicate whether the painter objects to the executioner, only the tortured flesh trembles in the work; Lapoujade painted peaceful nudes as passionately as he painted tortured flesh.¹⁰⁴ The meaning conveyed by the work belongs to the work and lies inside the perceptual, which can only be grasped in perception. The meaning is read directly from the object, instead of the exegesis and inference beyond perception. In regard to the subject and object, or aesthetic perception and aesthetic object, in the common act of both reciprocal return, the subject accepts meaning without reservation, the completeness of meaning means that it all lies inside the sensuous—the signifier is all. Dufrenne holds that this meaning cannot be elucidated, elucidation must be achieved through explanation and verbal language, yet the language of painting cannot be interpreted.¹⁰⁵ In fact, if this kind of meaning can be elucidated by verbal language, the work is dispensable. Each piece of work is a sign with high density and repleteness that has been illustrated by itself, the world of work does not consist of deduced and differentiated components. Instead this pure language has its own meaning and its own entire purpose.

The speech of works depends on what kind of perception the viewer uses and the

¹⁰² Dufrenne, *Aesthetics and Philosophy*, 94.

¹⁰³ Dufrenne, *Aesthetics and Philosophy*, 111.

¹⁰⁴ Dufrenne, *Aesthetics and Philosophy*, 111.

¹⁰⁵ Dufrenne, *Aesthetics and Philosophy*, 114.

response of viewer. Only aesthetic perception can correctly grasp the language of art. The response of the viewer in aesthetic perception is what the artwork is aimed towards. Correspondingly, Dufrenne argues that aesthetic perception—an extreme perception is a type of perception which is only willing to act as perception; it is not affected by imagination or understanding, which tends to lead imagination from one point to another or fit objects into conceptual certainty in order to master it, because general perception tends to engage in intellectual activities and initiate practice, seeking truth about the object in the relationship between it and others. Aesthetic perception seeks the truth of the object—the truth that is directly given in the sensuous.¹⁰⁶ This discourse and definition about aesthetic perception by Dufrenne is obviously affected by Merleau-Ponty's discussion on perception—a perceptual experience that is neither empiricism nor intellectualism, but has a sort of open and vague characteristics; and the discourse about the revealing of the artwork is closely related to aesthetic perception which is directed towards art and based on intentional analysis. Phenomenological reduction can be illustrated by such aesthetic experience. Because for the viewer, the object is the object perceived through aesthetic perception and also, the world of the viewer, is the world of aesthetic objects.

The truth of an object or the meaning in the sensuous proposed by Dufrenne is actually a field contained in the work, and this field is the sensible form of expression of the artwork. When the speech of artwork can only be grasped by the perceptual, it implies that, at this moment, work does not disclose the truth outside itself, It does not serve as the function of logical symbols in ordinary language, but is the original occurrence of truth (proposed by Heidegger). In other words, it is the presentation of works' property that can be perceived, instead of using works to make contact with beings. Thus, it can be said that the artwork is divided into two layers—the layer of sign and the layer of semantics. The sign layer is easier to be guided to the interpretation of the content, that is, the work is interpreted into some kind of concept, idea or assertion, but this is not appropriate because we are neglecting the work-itself. According to Dufrenne's differentiation and analysis between art and language (discussed later), making the sign layer a technical analysis similar to linguistics may not reach the speech of work, so the real semantic layer can only be the meaning in the sensuous launched by Dufrenne or the "created being" by

¹⁰⁶ Dufrenne, *Aesthetics and Philosophy*, 53.

Heidegger.

Coincidentally, in this field other terms, such as “meaning in the sensuous” (Dufrenne), “created being” (Heidegger), “unrealistic complex” (Sartre), “schematized aspects level” (Ingarden) and “the voice of silence” (Merleau-Ponty), that are emphasized by phenomenological aesthetics are also focal points of Chinese aesthetics and painting theory. Namely, to some extent, phenomenological aesthetics and Chinese traditional aesthetics (or neo-Confucianism) have a high degree of exterior similarity, which is neither structural nor purposeful. Chinese traditional aesthetics pays attention to criticism and conclusion, which falls into the category of pure empiricism, that is, it is not based on the outcome of close speculation of scientism and conceptual analysis. Like phenomenology, Chinese aesthetics also stresses suspension, but it has different foundations and prerequisites from phenomenological aesthetics which stresses analysis and deduction before resorting to intuition. Chinese traditional aesthetics is a kind of temperamental self-cultivation of scholars and a means to achieve a certain ultimate personality, while the purpose of phenomenological aesthetics is to reach a kind of essential law of aesthetics. Both of them have fully thought and discussed about the issue that is beyond the inherent meaning of logic and formal structure, in other words, the issue that is beyond language-itself (including art language). The viewpoints and discourses of Chinese traditional aesthetics and painting theory will be discussed in a later chapter.

A viewpoint of Dufrenne gives art the most appropriate position in semiotics so far. He argues that the importance of semiotics will be better reflected if it is not included in the category of linguistics, when he discusses semiotics and linguistics.¹⁰⁷ In *Aesthetics and Philosophy* Dufrenne mentions a viewpoint of Barthes that semiotics can indicate the differences between language, in a narrow sense, as a sign system and other sign systems. Through the classification of these different sign systems in the category of semiotics, Dufrenne holds that there is indeed a place for art in semiotics, that is, the center of the classification is the field of linguistics, the two ends are the field of sub-linguistics and hyper-linguistics respectively. Language, in the field of linguistics, using code to convey message is the best place for meaning. In the field of sub-linguistics, it includes the systems which do not bear meaning yet;

¹⁰⁷ Dufrenne, *Aesthetics and Philosophy*, 74-80.

a sign is just a signal that needs to be passed and distinguished instead of a certain meaning carrier, emphasizing distinction rather than understanding, like a sign for parking on the road; or sometimes there are codes but no message. To the contrary, in the field of hyper-linguistics, there are messages without codes, or the codes are not strict and the message are ambiguous. In such a field, the meaning is very rich, but it cannot be disassembled according to the code, and then meaning becomes expression. Dufrenne holds that art is the best representative of the field of hyper-linguistics. To some degree, Dufrenne's perspective and approach of analyzing the property of art by semiotics are similar to Goodman's arguments in *Languages of Art* mentioned in previous chapter, which interpreted the theory of art symbolism from the perspective of analytic aesthetics, because one of Goodman's purposes is to distinguish and discuss the relationship among language, image and other sign systems; and just like Dufrenne holds that there are only false words and false grammar in painting, Goodman also argues that the vocabulary of image does not exist.

In the practice of art, the reason that there are no words and grammar used by artists is that art is not a kind of object language—a language for linguists which can be disassembled and distinguished when it is studied and analyzed. By disassembling the language into different units, such as phonemes, morphemes, sense-groups and so on we are able to convey various meanings. This disassembly can be carried out in real speeches and possible speeches, between which is the relationship of paradigm. Dufrenne borrows an example of Saussure to illustrate the relationship of disassembly and paradigm: the pillars of a temple have a real connection with the rest of the building, like the beam, but its form also calls on us to compare it to other column types. In this example, the connection between pillar and beam refers to the connection relationship between various morphemes and sense-groups in real speeches, and the other column types refer to the possible speeches, just like syntagme and system proposed by Barthes in *Elements of Semiology* mentioned in the previous chapter.

In language, the units have systemized differences and can be replaced so that meaning changes. For instance, the difference between “a” and “d” in the writing system given by Goodman in *Ways of Worldmaking* explains the systemized differences, namely, there is no writing between “a” and “d”, or such a shape of

writing sign is either “a” or “d”. Comparing this instance of writing system with Goodman’s syntactic density and semantic density in the aesthetic symptoms of an artwork, mentioned in the previous chapter, can reveal the differences between the two sign systems. In painting, Dufrenne argues that there is no field of painting which can constitute a language for speech of painting, in other word, painting does not have a system which is composed by differential components, or combinable and contrapositive words.¹⁰⁸ In other words, the components of a painting- color and line cannot be differentiated systematically. It is impossible for a painting to be disassembled into a number of meaning units, the change of hue and the length and direction of a line are a dense impenetrable combination. There are visually distinguishable differences between these components but not distinguishable differences of meaning. Dufrenne argues that the components in painting are not restricted by the relationship among themselves but restricted by the relationship between them and the whole work.¹⁰⁹ These components constitute the certainty and inevitability of the work according to the requirements of the work instead of according to the rules of a particular code. Dufrenne admits that painting is the process of compiling and arranging various components according to certain rules, which is similar to using a language, yet he interprets it as a phenomenon that allows these structures and components to disappear into what they are constructing once the work is completed.¹¹⁰

Meaning in the Sensuous

In general, with regard to the relationship of art and language from the perspective of semiotics, the two have a certain degree of structural. Within a certain range, both art and language are orderly and rule-compliant in composition. If art is equivalent to a kind of language, it is not like the composition of language components; yet it is possible that art can achieve some of the functions of language, or the original function of language according to Heidegger's wording. Dufrenne fully reflects his view and method of phenomenological aesthetics in analyzing the language property of art, and is different from the stand of Saussure and Barthes.

First of all, what the artwork conveys or speaks is the sensuous that is felt or seized by aesthetic perception. This is one of the basic themes of phenomenology. That is,

¹⁰⁸ Dufrenne, *Aesthetics and Philosophy*, 95.

¹⁰⁹ Dufrenne, *Aesthetics and Philosophy*, 95.

¹¹⁰ Dufrenne, *Aesthetics and Philosophy*, 97.

to put external things in brackets and suspend so as to return to the thing itself. In phenomenological aesthetic theory hidden entities and laws which are beyond the sensuous are harder to recognize. Dufrenne proposes that the sensuous lies in the intentional movement between aesthetic object and aesthetic perception, in other words, the aesthetic object and aesthetic perception blend with each other and become very close. This is different from the methods of Saussure and Barthes, language operates as an entity object and there is clear distance distinction between subject and object. Dufrenne emphasizes relationships, while Saussure and Barthes stress entities. So, Dufrenne's that art does have code, yet the code is neither distinct nor strict, it only acts in the experience of viewers and the creation of artists.¹¹¹ That is, if it is not for the requirements and structure of the works, the code itself is hard to be perceived. The viewer does not need to connect the object which is perceived from the work with the object which is known or measure the differences. What the viewer perceives is only the work itself and its inevitability.¹¹² On the contrary, in Saussure-Barthes' linguistic theory, the value of the signifier lies in a clear referential relationship with the signified; accuracy of words is the criterion of real and qualitative speech. Nevertheless, Dufrenne's analysis is also inseparable from these traditional linguistics. For instance, from the relative freedom of unit combination in linguistics proposed by Barthes and Jakobson, Dufrenne argues that artworks are at the top of this hierarchy of freedom, so the language of art invents its own syntax ceaselessly and the rules are not as mandatory as in ordinary languages.¹¹³

Secondly, in discussing art and semiotics, Dufrenne always uses the issue that the meaning is given in the sensuous as a clue, namely, the meaning of the artwork or aesthetic object lies entirely in the sensuous. In the intentional cycle of phenomenology, aesthetic objects are always perceived by aesthetic perception, and aesthetic perception always moves toward aesthetic objects, which is a process of reciprocating movement. The meaning of the aesthetic object is grasped by the perceptual. In Dufrenne's opinion, the meaning is not that which resorts to reasoning and uses the rational as a tool, it cannot be found in concept, for it is not generated by thinking. Aesthetic objects and aesthetic perception define and reflect each other, which is a common behavior of being the subject for each other in aesthetic experience and is manifested as a diachronic process. Saussure's linguistics however

¹¹¹ Dufrenne, *Aesthetics and Philosophy*, 101.

¹¹² Dufrenne, *Aesthetics and Philosophy*, 102.

¹¹³ Dufrenne, *Aesthetics and Philosophy*, 106-107.

is a model that is dual, synchronic and closed and meaning is formed in analytic, inferential and inductive ways.

Finally, Dufrenne's view of art language, from the perspective of phenomenology, is largely influenced by Heidegger. Although Dufrenne does not directly mention Heidegger, it can be discerned that many of his views come directly or indirectly from Heidegger's elaboration of the being of artworks and the opinion of poetic language, in which the most obvious one is Dufrenne's view on the property of poetic language. Dufrenne's viewpoint on art language when he discusses the meaning in the sensuous appears to be basically the same as Heidegger's. According to *Off the Beaten Track* (1950), *On the Way To Language* (1959) or *Poetry, Language, Thought* (1975), Heidegger tends to equate art with poetry in his research, or in brief, he considers that art is essentially poetry. In *The Origin of the Work of Art*, the artwork is figured as a kind of authentic and essential language which is as alogical and irrational as poetry. Both can disclose the truth of things and suspend daily thinking—the thinking model of dualism, accordingly lead into a world of pre-concept, pre-logic and pre-symbol. This world is the home where the human dwells—the “earth” and the “world”, which is mentioned by Heidegger four times and one time respectively when he describes the peasant's shoes¹¹⁴ by Van Gogh in *The Origin of the Work of Art*. In terms of Heidegger's view of language, his description of Van Gogh's shoes is not art criticism. Heidegger does not think it is what Van Gogh aims to convey, because the same description can also be applied to other people's works. The reason Heidegger did this is to draw out the concept of “earth” and “world” from artworks, in order to illustrate the original authenticity and essence of language (art and poetry). “World” is the home where human dwells on “earth” and where the truth presents itself, and where the beings are what they are as well. Here, world and earth are not the objectified world and objectified earth. The language that builds the objectified world and earth is instrumentalized language—the language that belongs to linguists and semioticians, rather than pure

¹¹⁴ The text reads as follows: “A pair of peasant shoes and nothing more. And yet. From out of the dark opening of the well-worn insides of the shoes the toil of the worker's tread stares forth. In the crudely solid heaviness of the shoes accumulates the tenacity of the slow trudge through the far-stretching and ever-uniform furrows of the field swept by a raw wind. On the leather lies the dampness and richness of the soil. Under the soles slides the loneliness of the field-path as evening falls. The shoes vibrate with the silent call of the earth, its silent gift of the ripening grain, its unexplained self-refusal in the wintry field. This equipment is pervaded by uncomplaining worry as to the certainty of bread, wordless joy at having once more withstood want, trembling before the impending birth, and shivering at the surrounding menace of death. This equipment belongs to the earth and finds protection in the world of the peasant woman. From out of this protected belonging the equipment itself rises to its resting-within-itself.”

and essential language specified by Heidegger. In the objectified world and instrumentalized language, the being is concealed and hidden, only art and poetic language can unconceal this non-objectified home of being, which lies behind the beings—this is called “aletheia” (unconcealment). The property of art language analyzed by Dufrenne, to some degree, reflects Heidegger’s view above, although Dufrenne did not use this view for the purpose of aletheia. Essentially, art language is different from conceptual thinking, and what the two speak and face are different worlds; the latter faces a dualistic, practical and experiential world, while the former faces a world of pre-dualism and pre-logic language. Art language cannot be presented in any form as a conceptual thinking. This can also be corroborated from Dufrenne’s viewpoint of naming things when he talks about poetry. Dufrenne holds that the arbitrariness of naming is a false question.¹¹⁵ This is very different from Saussure’s assertion of arbitrariness between signifier and signified based on objectified and dualistic approaches—when the name in language defines the object, it forms an independent and closed system that separates itself from the named objects. Dufrenne argues that things are self-naming in communication with the human. Signs that name things are not created by speakers.¹¹⁶ About this viewpoint of Dufrenne’s, Heidegger has a more fully and detailed discussion in *On the Way to Language*. Heidegger argues that in naming the word makes the thing reveal itself, and that humans accept and comply with the requirement of language; words and objects are not a corresponding relationship like in the metaphysical view of language, but words bring things as they are into the open. Poets name things and poets write poems according to poetic appeal—they listen to and comply with language itself, “*language itself is poetry in the essential sense*”¹¹⁷. Therefore, for Heidegger and Dufrenne, poetic language or essential language and art are isomorphic and homogeneous. Both can take the human away from the objectified world built by daily language that has forgotten the nature of language. In the non-objectified world, meaning has already revealed itself to the human before symbolic language and logical reflection. It is called “meaning in the sensuous” by Dufrenne and “the revealing of truth itself” by Heidegger.

Dufrenne did not go so far as Heidegger did in the thinking of poetic essence of language, because his work is based on the basic concepts of

¹¹⁵ Dufrenne, *Aesthetics and Philosophy*, 118.

¹¹⁶ Dufrenne, *Aesthetics and Philosophy*, 117-118.

¹¹⁷ Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 46.

Phenomenology—emphasizing intuition and description rather than reasoning and speculation. Heidegger's mid to late views of art and language disclose and confront a technical world constituted by positivism, rationality and experience, having the peculiarity of anti-modernity. For example, Heidegger argues that *"what is the earth ... this perhaps very precise determination of the stone is a number ... color ... is gone ... though such destruction may be accompanied by the appearance of master and progress in the form of the technological-scientific objectification of nature, this mastery remains, nonetheless, an impotence of the will. The earth is openly illuminated as itself"*¹¹⁸. On the contrary, Dufrenne does not overly deny the logical mission of language. For instance, he draws lessons from Wittgenstein that logical language also shows the logical form of the world when displaying sentence structure, and it also enables humans to face things themselves.¹¹⁹ It could be said that this is one of the reasons that Dufrenne provided so much space for technical analysis and comparison among semiotics, linguistics, language and different categories of art.

Presence, Representation and Understanding

Upon issues on such as representation and expression which cannot be avoided when it comes to the language of art, Dufrenne offers his phenomenological interpretation in *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*. He does not discuss matter, subject, representation, expression and affection for the sake of art language, but from a practical point of view. When compared with analytical aesthetics, Dufrenne's discussion can be regarded as the phenomenological interpretation for these factors. For instance, unlike the methods of linguistic analysis used by Goodman when discussing issues like representation, Dufrenne still discusses these issues under the reciprocating concept of intentionality, that is, representation and expression are both the objective characteristics of aesthetic objects and the subjective response of aesthetic perception. They are not part of one side alone but the catalytic reaction between aesthetic objects and aesthetic perception. In addition, Dufrenne's interpretation of the sensuous, an important concept in his theory, is that the sensuous occurs at the intersection of the sensor and the sensed; and *"the sensuous is an act common both to the sensing being and to what is sensed"*¹²⁰, which also reflects the intentionality. Dufrenne discusses phenomenological art

¹¹⁸ Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 24-25.

¹¹⁹ Dufrenne, *Aesthetics and Philosophy*, 118.

¹²⁰ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 48.

language mainly by analyzing the structure of artwork (including matter, subject and expression) and aesthetic perception (including presence, representation and understanding). In short, matter, the sensuous, subject or represented objects and expression in the aesthetic object respectively correspond to the presence, representation and understanding in aesthetic perception. Compared with Goodman, Dufrenne's analysis allows artworks to have different dimensions in language. The sensuous and presence lead to the analysis of matter within the structure of the artwork.

Matter is one issue that Goodman does not deal with in *Languages of Art*. This is because the characteristics of the language analysis of analytical aesthetics and the discussion of art language within the whole book is based in semiotics—all images are seen as pattern-based, just like the characteristic of language or handwriting, and all images are symbols. So, it is reasonable that Goodman overlooks the substance property of the works of art. Dufrenne however, invokes linguistic properties within matter. This linguistic property in artworks, cannot work without attending to the concerns of substance property or matter.

The issue of matter is originally divided into two levels, the materials and the matter, by Dufrenne. For instance, in paintings, the material refers to the pigments as chemical products and canvases, yet the matter refers to the colors, or further, the splendid and jumping colors in the painting seen by the eyes. Dufrenne holds that the aesthetic object—the artwork perceived by aesthetic perception—is the presence of the sensuous, *“what is painting, if not a play of colors; or even a historic building, if not the sensuous qualities of stone, ... If the ruin is still an aesthetic object, it is because in it the stone remains stone, its very erosion manifesting its stoniness”*¹²¹. The general view of Dufrenne and Heidegger with regards to matter and the thingliness of art is identical, yet in illustrating the relationship between material, matter and the sensuous, Dufrenne's statement seems to be contrary to Heidegger's. For example, Heidegger states that *“the temple work, in setting up a world, does not let the material disappear; rather, it allows it to come forth for the very first time, to come forth, that is, into the open of the world of the work. ... All this comes forth as the work sets itself back into the massiveness and heaviness of the stone ... and the naming power of the word”*.¹²² But Dufrenne holds that *“the Albi*

¹²¹ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 86.

¹²² Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 24.

Cathedral is not built of bricks, or the Petit Trianon of marble ... in the sense that shoes are made of leather and certain tools of steel".¹²³ In fact, here Dufrenne highlights the peculiarity of the sensuous, that is, that matter can only be converted into the sensuous when the artwork as an aesthetic object and aesthetic perception mutually open up to each other. Otherwise matter is just the materials, just like shoes are made of leather, or in Heidegger's words: *"Because it is determined through usefulness and serviceability, equipment takes that of which it consists into its service. In the manufacture of equipment—for example, an ax—the stone is used and used up. It disappears into usefulness. The less resistance the material puts up to being submerged in the equipmental being of the equipment the more suitable and the better it is"*¹²⁴. In brief, the leather in shoes and the stone in the ax are skipped over by perception as the signification, and perception directly heads for practicality or knowledge, for stone is at most an object waiting to be cognized. Dufrenne states that what interests perception in the object *"is its substance as a thing, that by which stone becomes stone and can serve for building, ... Art, on the contrary, rejects any distinction between matter and the sensuous: matter here is nothing other than the depth of the sensuous itself"*¹²⁵. Therefore, as an artwork or an aesthetic object, the Albi Cathedral for example is not thought of as being built of bricks, otherwise it becomes equipment, like a stone ax. When the materials as the carrier of the sensuous turn into matter by means of aesthetic perception we have an aesthetic object or the presence of the sensuous, that is, the materials *"are present in order to appear and to compose an object of contemplation and not an object of use"*¹²⁶. Artist's make efforts to transform the material into matter in artwork, therefore, like Heidegger, Dufrenne argues that *"these materials become aesthetic by advertising themselves instead of keeping themselves hidden, that is, by displaying all of their sensuous richness"*¹²⁷. Ultimately sensuous qualities adhere to the materials; and these qualities in Dufrenne's opinion, consist of harmony, rhythm and melody (Dufrenne used these three words in paintings and all other works of art, not merely music) which can form a certain pattern and special language. Consequently the sensuous is a dominant purpose of artworks as aesthetic objects, rather than its property; and the sensuous is not clarified and obtained by the way of sign, inference and signification, but captured by aesthetic perception.

¹²³ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 302.

¹²⁴ Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 24.

¹²⁵ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 86-87.

¹²⁶ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 303.

¹²⁷ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 303.

Within aesthetic perception, matter and the sensuous can be indistinguishable, because *“the sensuous is produced once and for all, fixed on canvas, ... the sensuous is the very substance of the work. Just as a painting is made up of colors and music of sounds”*¹²⁸. Further to this: a *“flute is nothing but the name given to that sound. The sound itself is the matter ... we are not referring to the instrument but to the materiality of the sound. Likewise, when painters speak of matter, they are not concerned with a chemical product ... but with the color itself apprehended in its thickness, purity, and density”*¹²⁹. Accordingly, the essential sensuous qualities of oil paintings derive from its oily materials, and this is manifested by artists consciously or unconsciously. From the 15th century when oil painting came into being until the emergence of 20th century modern art, there is a process of self-evolution in oil painting, or a process of making the aesthetic qualities and sensuous nature of its matter constantly develop well and display fully. In this process, painting constantly seeks and develops suitable subject matter, schema, technique, layout of light and shadow, and ways of seeing, in order to manifest an all plentiful sensuousness while expressive force gradually appears. In oil painting, fine and closely woven brushstrokes, clear contour and planed surfaces create the clear and bright sensuous qualities of matter. The sensuous qualities of oil painting are also reflected in its development—Classicism, Baroque, Neoclassicism and even Impressionism all of which germinated from Jan Van Eyck’s oily material which dries slowly and transits different colors softly. This can be illustrated by borrowing some pairs of precepts for paintings from the Renaissance and Baroque period formulated by Wölfflin in *Principles of Art History*, from the perspective of form and style. Although Wölfflin does not fully represent the characteristics of each period (for example Raphael also has some painterly works, yet La Tour’s works have fixed contours), in his precepts of linear-painterly, plane-recession and absolute clarity-relative clarity, the latter manifests the sensuous better than the former. In other words, the sensuous qualities of works present themselves by means of arrangement of a number of factors—a necessary and ingenious cooperation to form an ensemble. For instance, compared with Raphael and Holbein, Rembrandt and La Tour’s works are not dominated by fixed contours—the lines are not clear, complete and distinct; the contours are blurry, the different mass and color gamut permeate and fuse with each other; the mass and the color patches become the main part of the picture almost

¹²⁸ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 35.

¹²⁹ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 87.

without any independent shapes with fixed boundaries; mass emerges from dim color patches but not too protruding, and still closely integrated with its background; the overlapping of pigment layers and brushstrokes, and the layout of mass and shadow neutralize the plane and strengthens the recession. In Wölfflin's view, painters of that time discovered a beauty of darkness that submerges the mass and shape. With regard to these kinds of painting qualities, Gombrich proposed Rembrandt, in *The Story of Art* (1950). In addition to the illustration of Rembrandt's paintings and the paintings' background from the points of view of art historian, Gombrich states that his paintings give firstly the impression of dark brown, but these browns contrast with several bright and shining colors, making the light almost dazzling. However, from the viewpoint of subject and scenario, Gombrich holds that the reason that Rembrandt did this was to strengthen the drama of the scene, instead of simply generating these visual effects. Wölfflin also interprets paintings almost purely in terms of form and style in *Principles of Art History*. Partly, he attributes the changes of pictures in different periods—from one style and form to another—to the national culture, zeitgeist and the impact of paintings on paintings. In addition, there are still many other explanations for the characteristics of the picture in the 17th Century, for instance, David Hockney postulates that the beauty of darkness that submerges the mass and shape on the works of Caravaggio, La Tour and so on is the result of the use of secret optical devices by painters in *Secret Knowledge* (2001)¹³⁰. These kinds of pictures can also be attributed to technological progress—a large number of lenses and mirrors were produced, which taught painters a new way of seeing. Nevertheless, compared with the sensuousness of matter, these factors are external, the internal factor of these changes is the presence of the aesthetic qualities of matter, that is, the sensuous chooses to demonstrate “the browns contrast with several bright and shining colors, making the light almost dazzling” in Rembrandt's paintings. Other examples can also illustrate this point too. For instance, technically, whether the artist was glazing or using impasto, the reason lies in the fact that while the painters were familiar with and mastered this kind of material, they were also dominated by this kind of oily material to manifest its aesthetic sensuousness. For example there is a twinkling granular sensation in Vermeer's works, there is deep color that settles at the gullies of sticky pigment in Rembrandt's works, the thick or thin layer of color in Velazquez and Degas' works, right up until Impressionism fully manifested the sensuous qualities of

¹³⁰ David Hockney, *Secret Knowledge: Rediscovering the Lost Techniques of the Old Masters* (Thames & Hudson: Viking Studio, 2001).

matter's thickness, purity, and density.

According to Dufrenne's theory, matter belongs to the aesthetic object. If only analyzing properties such as matter, representation, expression and signification of works with regard to their sensuous qualities, phenomenological aesthetics would have no fundamental differences from other aesthetic analyses and art theories methodologically. Therefore, intentionally, Dufrenne launches the concept of presence within aesthetic perception, making perception dynamic between the subject and the object. In terms of the meaning of the aesthetic object, this is inherent in the sensuous.

In this kind of thinking, meaning is experiential rather than comprehensible. Dufrenne holds that perception has a plane *"in which presence to the world is realized and in which there is manifested an ability to read directly the meaning borne by the object"*¹³¹, that is, the plane of perception perceives the object that itself is the signifier and with its own meaning through experience. Dufrenne borrows a concept—body—from Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the plane of the pre-reflective to illustrate the plane of perception and presence¹³². *"The object that I perceive is revealed to my body insofar as my body is myself"*,¹³³ as Dufrenne states. That is, things are presented to the body at this plane of perception, both belong to one category, *"objects do not exist primarily for my thought but for my body"*¹³⁴. Presence is located both in the common act of the sensing being and what is sensed—the presence of subject and the presence of object, or the object and body present themselves to each other, in which the subject and the object are not yet distinguishable. Consequently, the aesthetic object (artwork) presents itself to the body at first, the meaning inherent in the sensuous must be perceived by the body. The function of the body is definite—*"the meaning of the word—at least of the poetic word—is understood only by means of the resonance it awakens, and the movement it induces, within me. The experience of signification occurs through the experience of the sensuous virtues which the word has for the mouth proffering it or for the ear hearing it. Hence the body is always linked with perception"*¹³⁵. This is

¹³¹ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 336.

¹³² The body proposed by Merleau-Ponty means the whole perception world, yet Dufrenne restricts it on the subject of perception merely.

¹³³ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 337.

¹³⁴ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 337.

¹³⁵ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 341-342.

close to the openness and unconcealment that Heidegger proposes.

Dufrenne is obviously influenced by Heidegger on the issue of presence: *“for the work of art, it is a matter of passing into a concrete existence where appearance is equivalent to being”*¹³⁶. Dufrenne argues that initially *“the sensuous is not caught and elaborated by means of signs”*¹³⁷. Signs that can be analyzed have an abstract existence and signs that have perceptible expression have a concrete existence. The difference from abstract to concrete is a measure of the fullness of a work’s being, and is the transition *“from being to appearance”*¹³⁸. Yet art itself is different from concept and will never be an abstract existence, so it is *“a concrete existence where appearance is equivalent to being”*. Similarly, for Heidegger, in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, *“being”* is open and clearing, and the *“world”* and *“earth”* proposed by him also can be another interpretation of Dufrenne’s *“the presence of the sensuous”*. *“World”* is the being-field of the plane of the pre-reflective in which the subject and the object are not yet distinguishable; world opens itself up in works, *“rising-up-within-itself the work opens up a world and keeps it abidingly in force”*¹³⁹. This involves the relationship of the work-being and the world. Heidegger states: *“to be a work means: to set up a world”*¹⁴⁰; *“the setting up of a world is only the first of the essential traits of the work-being of the work”*¹⁴¹. Here, setting up a world means making the world be the world. And *“earth”* is *“that in which the arising of everything that arises is brought back”*¹⁴²; *“the earth is the essentially self-secluding”*¹⁴³; and *“that into which the work set itself back, and thereby allows to come forth, is what we called ‘the earth’”*¹⁴⁴. Accordingly, the earth here is equivalent to matter defined by Dufrenne. The earth comes forth as matter comes forth in works, it is the works that *“bring it (the earth) into the open as the self-secluding”*¹⁴⁵. Therefore, the presence of the sensuous between matter and the body is almost synonymous with Heidegger’s setting up a world and coming forth of the earth. On the side of aesthetic perception, presence makes the body become body. On the side of the artwork, presence is in the matter of works and opens to the body from

¹³⁶ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 36.

¹³⁷ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 35.

¹³⁸ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 38.

¹³⁹ Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 22.

¹⁴⁰ Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 22.

¹⁴¹ Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 23.

¹⁴² Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 21.

¹⁴³ Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 25.

¹⁴⁴ Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 24.

¹⁴⁵ Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 25.

self-seclusion, in order to be what it should be.

This process or manifestation is the sensuousness itself. In other words, the sensuous is generated through presence between the matter of work and the body, thus it becomes a relatively independent aspect of the aesthetic object. Because of the independence of the sensuous, meaning can be inherent in the sensuous, and further, through the sensuous, generates representation and expression. Consequently, with regard to art language, the sensuous in works is the fundamental language of the pre-logical and non-objectified world. The object represented and the world expressed are not prior to or beyond the scope of the sensuous, but the sensuous generates a part of its own meaning and field by way of presence. So, the sensuous is independent, not the property of the object.

Secondly, subject (representation) and expression in artworks correspond to representation and reflection in aesthetic perception. For representation and expression, Dufrenne holds that the two cannot be clearly separated; they are overlapped. Both are inseparable from the sensuous, *"art is not limited to an exhibition of the sensuous"*¹⁴⁶. An artwork must have signification and expression if art operates as language. The sensuous *"can be sufficient unto itself and bear its own meaning within itself without pointing to anything else"*¹⁴⁷. Representation or subject provides the sensuous with assistance, representation helps stimulate and coordinate the sensuous, and unify the signification of the sensuous. Dufrenne states that *"the subject is no more than an 'occasion' or a 'pretext'"*¹⁴⁸, so we cannot judge the artwork according to its subject. Further, he goes on *"the represented object must appear to result from the demands of the particular painting in which it figures"*, only in this way is the painting *"not a sign which points to something else"*¹⁴⁹.

With regard to expression, it is the expression of the aesthetic object as a whole, that is the expression of the sensuous. Where expression can reach is not beyond the scope of the sensuous. To recognize expression, Dufrenne holds, on the one hand, that expression can be reached by means of the reflection on subject. But he states *"a landscape painted by Cezanne acquires the depth of a sign which points to nothing"*

¹⁴⁶ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 310.

¹⁴⁷ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 310.

¹⁴⁸ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 315.

¹⁴⁹ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 117-118.

*other than itself ... The painting must be understood in itself. We must restrain our understanding as much as our imagination, to discover in the painting the depth of facticity*¹⁵⁰. This understanding of expression is difficult to control, and easy to deviate from, because in terms of subject, representation is inexhaustible; in terms of expression, its meaning is vague or profound. On the other hand, expression that is without structure and schemata cannot be objectively defined by analysis—*“expression is a quality ... qualities do not allow themselves to be either decomposed or composed”*¹⁵¹. That is, some features in paintings such as figures, composition, colors and the skills of description of details are repeated, yet these features are identified just because the expression of the whole work acts on the spectators at first. If these features were isolated or put into another painting, expression would be lost—these features are not the factors that form and produce expression.¹⁵² Accordingly, only through aesthetic perception can expression obtain its highest form, instead of analysis, because through aesthetic perception, *“the aesthetic object is grasped in its unity and with all its meaning”*¹⁵³.

The sensuous is the foundation of representation and expression. In terms of expression, *“expression appears more adequately the more adequately the sensuous appears. Art can express only by virtue of the sensuous and according to an operation which transforms brute sensuousness into aesthetic sensuousness”*¹⁵⁴. In terms of representation, *“what speaks in this world (artworks) is not so much what it represents as the sensuous qualities which are the means of representation. It is Van Gogh's brush-strokes and colors which express despair and love, not the bedroom or the wheat field he depicts”*¹⁵⁵.

Chapter Summary

The above discussion on the basic issues of art language of Dufrenne, such as matter, representation and expression in *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, as well as the discussion on art and semiotics in *Aesthetics and Philosophy*, are all related to language and sign, but from different perspectives. If we regard the artwork as sign, then its feature is that *“the signified object is first of all unreal”*¹⁵⁶, that is, the object

¹⁵⁰ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 325.

¹⁵¹ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 327.

¹⁵² Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 328.

¹⁵³ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 329.

¹⁵⁴ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 137-138.

¹⁵⁵ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 137.

¹⁵⁶ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 116.

represented in works can be absent or nonexistent. Goodman came to the same conclusion when he mentioned representation from the perspective of symbol without entity in reality, like Pegasus. Or in other words, the “realness” of representation has nothing to do with reality, but with aesthetic perception. The signification of works *“does not imply that the represented object imitates an object or an event in the world. It merely means that something is being represented or proffered, even if that something is not identifiable”*¹⁵⁷. And Dufrenne argues that the value of work is not related to the subject—the value of represented object, which is a correction of classical aesthetics,¹⁵⁸ and illustrates his view on the special relationship between signifier and signified of art signs. In addition, the signification between the signifier and the signified in art is different from signification in language signs, which can be called expression. The route of signification in art differs from language signs—the signifier skips the signified and returns to the signifier-itself, the signifier or aesthetic object refers to itself, instead of *“a sign which points to something else”*¹⁵⁹. Consequently, the representation of work “speaks” something. The signification of work is expression which makes the thing represented return back to the presence of the sensuous based on matter—in other words, there is a return to the work itself.

From the perspective of sign and language, Dufrenne shares some main points with the argument presented in Langer’s *Feeling and Form*. For instance, with classification of language types, classification is divided into language that resorts to understanding and language that resorts to perception.

Dufrenne’s phenomenological interpretation of artworks, especially paintings, can basically be understood as the de-limiting of images. This is one of his important qualities, which makes his phenomenological aesthetics closest to artworks. In essence he believes that what is painted results from the requirements of painting itself, not others. Dufrenne pointed as far as possible to the depth of art even within the restriction of a logical system of words. In the mutual negation and neutralization of the real (frame, canvas, paint) and the unreal (the object depicted in picture)¹⁶⁰, he proposed the concept of aesthetic object, leading to matter and the sensuous,

¹⁵⁷ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 119.

¹⁵⁸ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 117.

¹⁵⁹ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 118.

¹⁶⁰ Dufrenne uses the terms “the real and the unreal” to illustrate the aesthetic object in an example of opera. Here, the two words are transferred into paintings according to their corresponding meanings.

which is a marked distinction from others and provides the arguments for the construction of a painting language.

Chapter 3

Painting Language and Issues of Specific Work in a Case Study

Based on the discussion of fundamental issues such as representation, expression, realism and so on in the first two chapters, this chapter investigates the physical media factors that constitute painting language embodied in particular artworks through form, style, formalism and traditional Chinese aesthetics theory. It is divided into two sections. The first section discusses some of the issues in the analysis of the painting language of a specific work, taking an exhibition in National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) and formalism as the examples. The second section discusses the painting language in my own studio-based works and the layout of exhibition.

These two sections demonstrate the matters of method and pragmatics in the analysis of works and realize a paradigm of discussion and definition of painting language's media level by means of eight studio-based works and the exhibition.

The Matters of Analysis of Specific Works

Arthur Danto holds, in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (1981), that theoretical discourses often fail to intersect with the most absorbing, entrancing and important part of art, and it is hard to get a valuable insight into art from those analyses.¹⁶¹ Based on my personal experience and understanding of Danto as a painter, “the most absorbing, entrancing and important part of art” is the core of artworks—painting language; and “the valuable insight into art” can only be achieved through art practice or the direct experience of painting language—that is by being a painter. Danto's argument is representative, and the painting language I discuss is similar to the mortar between these theoretical bricks made by different theorists.

As an analytical aesthetician, Danto's insight into art is highly argumentative, mainly discussing the field of painting—*The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (1981), *After the End of Art* (1997)¹⁶² and *The Abuse of Beauty* (2003)¹⁶³. That is, he does not

¹⁶¹ Arthur Coleman Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 55.

¹⁶² Arthur Coleman Danto, *After the End of Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

¹⁶³ Arthur Coleman Danto, *The Abuse of Beauty: Aesthetics and the Concept of Art* (Chicago: Open Court, 2003).

discuss the subtleties of the appearance of the artwork like Goodman. Danto does talk about painterly distortions in post-impressionism, specifically the works and the striking brushstrokes or crude drawing of Paul Cézanne and Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin and Henri Matisse's flat coating of pigments in a paper *The Artworld* (1964)¹⁶⁴. Whilst the paper presents important observations on painterly attributes, the purpose of his discussion is to argue Reality Theory against Imitation Theory. (Reality theory refers to the idea that art presents reality; imitation theory means that art creates illusion.) Further, Danto holds that art will eventually be philosophization, that is, generally he responds to Hegel's absolute idealism and his views in *Lectures on Aesthetics*. Generally speaking, in *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (1986), Danto argues that the development of art will eventually exhaust the existing art concepts and then end in philosophy, although he does not deny that the art creation which lacks meaning and historical importance will continue;¹⁶⁵. According to Danto, Duchamp's work can be said to imply that art is already a vivid form of philosophy.¹⁶⁶ It should be said that from an analytical esthetician's way of looking at art and the expectations of art, his argument is appropriate and consistent with the facts. For example, the winter Exhibition of Cai Guo-Qiang' *The Transient Landscape* in NGV 2019 as a phenomenon can be a footnote of Danto's opinion.

Three works of Cai were exhibited in the exhibition with eight terracotta warriors—*Murmuration*, *Transience* and *Pulse*. (Here I only make factual statements and do not judge the value.) The most important factor in the three works is the trace left after the ignition of the gunpowder and Cai admits that he is fascinated by every uncertainty of the traces of gunpowder. For example, *Murmuration* is 10,000 suspended porcelain birds that have been burned with gunpowder, the shape of which is similar to the three-dimensional ink landscape, meaning or echoing the Mt. Li where the Qin Emperor' Mausoleum is located. Cai interprets it as the chasing of the soul of the Terracotta Warriors, or the floating shadow of the Chinese Empire. It can also be said that it is the mirage of the heterogeneous cultural illusion in the era of globalization. The work is inspired by the momentum of the terracotta warriors, namely speed, energy, complexity, chaos and restlessness, which avoids the cultural nostalgia that is limited to exotic style in the Terracotta Warriors exhibition. Cai

¹⁶⁴ Arthur Coleman Danto, "The Artworld," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 61, No.19 (October 15, 1964), 571-584

¹⁶⁵ Arthur Coleman Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 84.

¹⁶⁶ Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, 16.

Guo-Qiang and his team used the title *Murmuration* to insinuate concrete to abstract form and from ancient times to present. *Transience* consists of two parts—the four stages of peony from germination to decay recorded by gunpowder on silk and a flower-shaped white porcelain installment burned with gunpowder. Cai says that the symbolic meaning of peony provides a guarantee of cultural significance for the work, and, emphasizes that the material of the work (porcelain) implied the loss of the flower and the fragility of life, which is a metaphor of the Qin Empire's short life and echoing the theme of the exhibition. Cai explains that in the two parts of this work the wilted flowers trigger the contemplation that life is hallucination, yet death is source; and the burned porcelain installation is the tomb of beauty, the manufacturability of which is destroyed and sublimated into art. He states that the shape of the porcelain installation echoes the shape of the Emperor's Mausoleum and Mt. Li, as *Murmuration* does. The third work, *Pulse*, is a gunpowder drawing which was ignited at the center of the giant sheet and the gunpowder burned both to the left and right. The image of *Pulse* is similar to the mountains and rivers on the earth, symbolizing the blood and vitality of the earth and representing the mountains and rivers of central China. The connection between *Pulse* and Mausoleum and terracotta warriors is Fengshui¹⁶⁷ on which the site is selected, according to the work's profile. Cai's three works attempt to form a dialogue with the Terracotta Warriors across ancient and modern times. From the introduction of the work and Cai's own commentary, the dialogue is established, both in the echo of the work's form and geomorphology and the borrowing of the ancient Chinese divination study, as well as the symbols, representations and meanings appearing in the text. That is, the copywriting, the idea that Cai wishes to express, or the textual decoration of the work all play their part.¹⁶⁸

It is worth considering that the texts (the expositions of the works) and the works do not seem to be necessarily related. (Here is the thinking about works and phenomena rather than judging). If the content in the text is called an idea or a concept, then it does not necessarily belong to a certain work. That is, without the work, the concept and expression still exist and can be passed on to the viewer to cause thinking; correspondingly, the physical works retreat as an interpretation and illustration of the idea and become a vivid form of concept. To some extent, Danto's

¹⁶⁷ Fengshui formed during the ancient Chinese Warring States Period is a geomantic omen theory for site selection based on yin-yang and five elements.

¹⁶⁸ The interpretation of the work and the words of Cai Guo-Qiang mainly come from the introduction in the exhibition hall, NGV.

view is that art ends in philosophy and is footnoted by contemporary art.¹⁶⁹ However, this does not deny the artistry of these works, because according to Danto's definition of art in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*—it is an artwork as long as it conforms to both “aboutness” and “meaning”. In Cai's works, the meaning is reflected in the text, and aboutness, in addition to the text narrative, refers to a morphological connection (landform). In fact, aboutness must be implicit in meaning and may not be reflected in the work. Danto's two definitions of artwork are generally similar to the concepts of denotation and exemplification launched by Goodman in *Languages of Art*. They belong to the analytical aesthetics school. The reason why the meaning of Cai's works are in the text and the text provides the guarantee that it becomes an artwork, is because it is difficult for the viewer to obtain a relatively consistent meaning from the work in which the core medium is gunpowder. That is, the uncontrollable and unpredictable nature of burned gunpowder makes it difficult to obtain an accumulative relationship with an audience (operator and viewers) at a socio-cultural level. In comparison, from the angle of history, painting media and technique have an evolutionary superposition with emotional penetration and a closer relationship with an audience. As far as expression is concerned, obviously, the controllable, socio-cultural accumulative and regular way could be a more effective expression, just as simply expressing feeling is not equal to art, as Langer explains in *Feeling and Form*. Nevertheless, this is only a comparison of differences, regardless of pros and cons or good and bad, and this comparison is only valid within the scope of the narrow topic of painting language discussion. Putting aside this point, it would be meaningless to compare and discuss the artworks of different materials and features. (Because most of these comparisons will become a contest of interest, especially in the endless new medium that is constantly changing rules and can be interpreted infinitely. After all, the purity of painting and that contemporary art characterized by theatricality, inter-medium and site-specificity is essentially opposite.) In general, according to the Danto's definition, an object is an artwork as long as it presents meaning in an interpretation.¹⁷⁰

Compared with the works of Cai and with Danto's argument, figurative painting seems to be a product of the pre-modern art period in the current postmodern or contemporary art era, or “the era of post-history” to quote Danto. It is true, at least

¹⁶⁹ Nevertheless, an art ended by philosophy envisaged by Danto is not entirely the current concept-centered art. Besides, Dufrenne also questioned this phenomenon when discussing art and language which I mentioned in chapter 2.

¹⁷⁰ Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, 125.

from the perspective of art's progress or art narrative, that there is a connection between figurative painting and postmodern art. The "perceptual equivalent" that could only be made in painting was replaced by other technical means such as photography and digital means. Thus, a series of theories and schools appear in Aesthetics and art theory, such as the formalism of Fry, Bell and Greenberg which tries to strip the non-essential elements of painting. While Cassirer and Langer's symbolism takes the perspective of semiotic structuralism and the rise of phenomenological aesthetics and analytical aesthetics. With this trend painting moves towards a more philosophical path. So with regard to the evolution of the painting itself and corresponding theories—from being faithful to sensory experience to seeking expression, self-exploration, and so on—the discussion of the physical media and the technical level of the painting itself (organization and arrangement of materials) is not sufficient. The reason why it is not sufficient is that painting is ineffable in nature, which is why even the holders of "art ontology" and "art essentialism" rarely discuss it. For instance, phenomenological aesthetics and analytical aesthetics, especially analytical aesthetics, avoid the analysis of specific artworks. This is due firstly to, the limitations of the method, and second, the avoidance of being caught in an unproven argument. In other words, in their opinion, it is meaningless to discuss a proposition that is neither analytic nor synthetic. Danto provides some interpretations of individual works in *Andy Warhol* (2009)¹⁷¹ and Merleau-Ponty also has a large number of texts related to Cézanne's work, but in general these artworks are more like an opportunity or pretext for them to express their own thoughts, just like Dufrenne holds that the subject of a painting is only a pretext of the artist. Admittedly, there are discussions about physical media factors, yet the discussions are difficult to be defined as a system or, in a non-scientific paradigm, the thing discussed are only a fact, not argumentative and universal. The conclusions do not fall easily into any category of conformity, self-consistency and convention theory. It seems to be a matter that can only be discussed at the phenomena level, or it is a problem that is completely confined to art practice? Once detached slightly from the description of the phenomenon, it immediately becomes an issue of philosophy and aesthetics. The deficiencies and existing problems—description of the phenomenon and subjective interpretation—of the analysis of the physical media factors in painting language in specific works can be briefly explained by the following examples.

¹⁷¹ Arthur Danto, *Andy Warhol* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

As stated in the introduction, among the many schools and methods of modern and contemporary art criticism and theory since the 20th century, it is formalism that did the in-depth study and analysis of the specific artwork-itself. The studies by other schools have a certain distance from the work-itself. For instance, the study of iconology starts from the work, yet the final conclusion is not on the work-itself. In terms of formalism Fry, in his analysis of Cézanne's work, is an example which has high-density formal analysis, for he has both deep thinking about basic elements and an emphasis on emotional elements of design. Fry presupposed two concepts—"sensibility" and "intellect"—in his analysis of Cézanne's works. Generally speaking, his analysis is based on a viewpoint that Cézanne uses intellect as a framework to integrate sensibility to form a work. Here, representation is not a purpose but a means. Putting aside his formalistic aesthetic theory framework, such as the basic discussion of the status of form, line and color, and their functions of emotions and stimulating imagination etc, Fry's analysis of the forms, colors and composition of Cézanne's works in *Cézanne: A Study of His Development* (1927) discusses the physical media factors in certain works. For example, in his analysis of the landscape *Maisons au bord de la Marne* (1894), Fry holds that through the treatment of the river bank, Cézanne showed his extraordinary power to capture and interpret that slightly modulated sensibility. This riverbank seems to be useless for formal design, but by extending the mysterious changes in tone and color, Cézanne sets it as a solid and effective factor in the structure. The symmetry of the picture is not precise but a dynamic rather than static balance. There is nothing arbitrary or deliberate in the depiction of these huge and concise masses, and also there is no suggestion to reinforce some kind of graphic concept. Colors are full of expressiveness and reflect inexhaustible changes.¹⁷² Another example is *La Route du Château Noir* (1903), Fry states that the planes in the painting are intertwined, but do not endanger the vivid and smooth relationship among the planes. This work indicates that Cézanne applies his advanced plasticity concept very well. In terms of color, Fry states that Cézanne can freely converse tonality like a musician and his painting is not an model of nature but an modulation.¹⁷³

From the above two cases, an observation can be drawn: that Fry's formal analysis of specific works is generally a description of the phenomenon plus personal feelings

¹⁷² Roger Fry, *Cézanne: A Study of His Development* (London: Hogarth Press, 1927), 61.

¹⁷³ Fry, *Cézanne: A Study of His Development*, 75.

and speculations about Cézanne's creation. This has a lot to do with his emphasis on the subjectivity of criticism, however, the biggest problem with this type of elaboration is that it is not an inevitable derivation. This kind of comment or analysis lacks certainty and is not entirely aimed at the certain work. Namely, changing the scene description, the analysis could be suitable for another work, or even another person's work. In addition, there are other issues worthy of questioning and consideration in this kind of work analysis. That is, when the analysis is not systematic enough the reliability of the discussion is questionable. For instance, Fry mentions the painting medium many times in many texts, such as visual language, sculpture language, visual language of imagination, language of abstract form and so on, but he does not give a detailed and rigorous explanation of these concepts. Roughly, he uses these definitions at the conventional sensory level, approximately referring to lines and colors. Another example is his setting and definition on intellect and sensibility. Fry's formal analysis of Cézanne's works usually comes down to the role of intellect, to some extent, he regards intellect as the artist's perception and understanding of the relationship between all individual shapes in the composition. In *Cézanne: A Study of His Development*, Fry uses the contrast between Cézanne's outline and unlined impressionist works to demonstrate the role of intellect in Cézanne's works. However, it is difficult to argue that only Cézanne's outline can explain an intellect call and there are other 'sensibilities' at work. In *Last Lectures* (1939), Fry exemplifies what he means by "sensibility". Compared with straight lines drawn with ruler, freehand lines have sensibility, while straight ruler's lines have no sensibility for example. His explanation is that straight lines do not express anything except the closest distance between two points, yet the freehand line guided by the brain can provide the information of the artist's neural control and the state of his mind at that time.¹⁷⁴ From me there is a question: since Fry thinks that Cézanne calls on intellect to deal with sensibility, why are the factors processed by intellect once again presenting sensibility on the painting? After all, Fry never denied this sensibility trait in Cézanne's paintings. In turn, how did he conclude that Cézanne innovatively used intellect from this sensibility trait? The sensibility trait in a freehand line indicated by Fry is correct for most viewers, because compared to the ruler line, the viewer can get more 'feelings' from it. But this is just a feeling, intuition and speculation, or a statement of facts and feelings of experience, lacking demonstration. On this point, it is clear that Goodman's comparison of Hokusai's

¹⁷⁴ Roger Fry, *Last Lectures* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1939), 22.

lines and graph lines as a means to convey an analytical aesthetic approach (aesthetic symptoms) is more arguable and convincing (see Chapter 1). I believe Fry's cognition and view on Cézanne and his analysis are personal subjective descriptions. Cézanne is also a painter favored by phenomenologists, including Merleau-Ponty, Dufrenne and other scholars and artists with phenomenological views, such as Alberto Giacometti. They hold fundamentally the opposite argument from Fry's. That is, they argue that Cézanne's painting of "epoché" and "to the things themselves" are in opposition to Fry's "intellect use". The more analysis of the methods and physical media is used for specific works, the more difficult it is to confirm or verify.

In addition, Fry's formal analysis is somewhat inconsistent in definition. For instance, he holds that form refers to a rhythmic abstract form that stimulates a detached aesthetic response and that this falls within the scope of pure aesthetic experience. He also believes that color is an integral part of form rather than attachment of form. So for Fry form is a general reference of natural shapes, forms and structures—geometric shape, yet representation is considered as a non-form factor. However, the form and representation of a painting cannot be separated. After all, there are no hard geometric shapes in figurative painting, and the lines with 'sensibility'—an integral part of Fry's analysis on Cézanne—appear on figurative paintings. The "double nature of painting" proposed by Fry refers to the fact that figurative painting is both a colorful surface and a three-dimensional world similar to the one we live in. In this respect, form and representation are not two different factors, but two sides, which is more like the relationship of "real" and "unreal" in the artworks proposed by Dufrenne (see Chapter 2). The above discussion is not to deny Fry's analysis, for *Cézanne: A Study of His Development* (1927) and his other texts are a milestone for the analysis of painting forms and an analysis of the psychological personality of Cézanne. But it is necessary to indicate the shortcomings and deficiencies of the methods and conclusions when referring to the physical media factors of a certain work.

Fry makes achievements in the discussion of some physical media factors. For example, he emphasizes the importance of texture in Cézanne's paintings, which is indeed an issue that can only be highlighted by means of art practice. In *Cézanne: A Study of His Development* (1927), he holds that depends to a large extent on the artist's handwriting and the habitual curve drawn by his brushstrokes; Cézanne gave

up the practice of brush-sweeping, but built the shapes through uninterrupted, thoughtful small brushstrokes, which are strictly parallel, almost completely straight, and gradually rise from right to left and especially have nothing to do with the outlines. In addition, Fry's elaboration of the meaning and quality of lines and the construction of the necessary forms of lines has a unique academic aspect that only art practitioners can pay attention to and consider. However, the discussion of these factors immediately becomes a description of phenomena and an expression of personal feelings and speculations once they are put into a specific work. That is, it is reasonable to do so in art criticism, for art criticism emphasizes opinions and feelings, but it is debatable or unreliable in academic study and argumentation.

After Fry's formalist analysis, other scholars emerged with theories, such as iconology, New Criticism, semiotics and structuralism. These theories in my opinion hardly ever reach the core in the analysis of particular works or the discussion of media factors involved in painting. For example, Leo Steinberg integrates the formal analysis into the second layer—iconography—the stratification of artwork by iconology. Aside from his theoretical summary, his analysis of certain works can be illustrated by the following examples. In *Other Criteria* (1972), Steinberg develops an analysis of the form and iconography of a set of fifteen works by Picasso—*Women of Algiers* (1955), he elaborates on the movements of the figures in these fifteen paintings and the originality of Picasso's cubist works. Another example is Picasso's *Sleeping Woman* (1904), Steinberg states that Picasso painted the 23-year-old painter himself ... he seems to be neither at work nor at rest, but deeply involved in an inaction—seeing a sleeping girl. Then there is a vivid description of the two figures and the environment in the picture, and finally the speculation—her brilliance hints at the great joy of the body; and his consciousness becomes a state of exile.¹⁷⁵ Steinberg holds that the vertical spectator and the reclining sleeper are a means for Picasso to constantly determine and re-determine his canvas, paper or engraving base. Because no matter how a pair of figures in his drawing are shaped as lovers or sisters or artist and model, they all mark a basic geometric shape; they are perpendicular to each other and parallel to the edge of the canvas, extending to fill the picture, so the horizontal and vertical lines are constantly materialized in a long-lasting personification process.¹⁷⁶ Although Steinberg mentions the emotional projection of the subject of the picture,

¹⁷⁵ Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 115.

¹⁷⁶ Steinberg, *Other Criteria*, 114.

he still thinks that the design of composition plays a decisive role—the form's stipulation at the bottom of the work. From the above examples of Steinberg and Fry, it can be concluded that form, as one of the factors of painting language, can only be concretely described in certain works.

Apart from form factors, lines and textures as the more specific factors in painting language are emphasized in the discussion of formalists, yet related discussions usually are detached from a certain work. For example, as mentioned earlier, Fry's analysis of brushstroke and line quality was at the time novel and groundbreaking for the eyes that are accustomed to the perfect picture of classicism. In *Cézanne: A Study of His Development* (1927), Fry states that Flemish painters were confined to a hypocritical surface that was finally finished by processing, rather than using a more expressive approach. It is this that makes Rembrandt a model of excellence, for he fully revealed the expressive potential of materials in his later years. So, nothing is inert to him. On the contrary, the material is infiltrated by ideas so that every particle on the painting becomes vivid.¹⁷⁷

Handwriting, matter or thingness and other elements with independent aesthetic values are roughly opened after Impressionism. Before Impressionism, most painters would regard covering 'handwriting' as a necessary step. For example, Delacroix and the Impressionist painters highlight the handwriting in their paintings, which are often regarded as rough and unfinished to classical aesthetic eyes. Even in the 20th century, some scholars consider that the individual lines and layers of color in painting have no aesthetic significance. For example, Jean-Paul Sartre in *The Psychology of Imagination* (1940) holds that their function is nothing more than to arouse an absent object.¹⁷⁸ However, Fry believes that the texture of painting is the product of technique and the effect of brushstrokes, instead of the product of depicting objects. All visual elements must serve the form; color, texture, lines and strokes all contribute to the plasticity of the form. This viewpoint of Fry clearly shows the essence of painting language. Painting language is not a neutral and transparent tool for representing objects, but the form is its ultimate goal. Further to this, the painting language itself is its own purpose.

From my own cultural perspective, that of traditional Chinese painting, these

¹⁷⁷ Fry, *Cézanne*, 151.

¹⁷⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Psychology of Imagination* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948), 275.

elements are considered to have independent aesthetic value, especially in the context of painting language. The study of brush wielding, brushstroke, half-dry stroke and so on in traditional Chinese painting began in the 12th century, and there are many painting theories on them, for instance, the use of ink by Guo Xi (1000-1090), brush wielding by Guo Ruoxu (12th century), transferring the calligraphy brush wielding into painting by Zhao Mengfu (1254-1322), and a large number of artworks—literati paintings—display them.

The viewer pays considerable attention to the drawing process, action, the control of the brush (the shape of the brushstroke) and the physical media (the effect of ink and water on the paper), rather than the painted image. Therefore, in terms of painting language, this can be regarded as the difference of the origin of the two kinds of painting, Chinese and European. Although some scholars oppose emphasizing the particularity or difference between Chinese and Western painting, such as Craig Clunas in *Pictures and Visuality in Early Modern China* (1997)¹⁷⁹, other scholars try to discuss these obvious differences. For example, Bryson in *Vision and Painting* (1983) argues that Chinese painting always emphasizes the visibility of painting process through brushwork, while European painting always conceals this process.¹⁸⁰ Bryson talks about the painting process, but in fact, his argument also indicates the independence of these elements in Chinese painting. In this respect, Chinese painting has more accumulation, and the spiritual core of its discussion is closer to phenomenological aesthetics.

It is not only Fry that focuses on the works and techniques that expose the brushstrokes and actively explores the expressive potential of materials. For example, the formalist critic Clement Greenberg talks about a so-called pure painting. In an essay *Modernist Painting* (1961), he articulates that “realistic, illusionist art had dissembled the medium ... the flat surface, the shape of the support, the properties of pigment—were treated by the Old Masters as negative factors that could be acknowledged only implicitly or indirectly. Modernist painting has come to regard these same limitations as positive factors that are to be acknowledged openly”¹⁸¹. In another example, Steinberg demonstrates a deep understanding and perspective on

¹⁷⁹ Craig Clunas, *Pictures and Visuality in Early Modern China* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), 6.

¹⁸⁰ Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1983).

¹⁸¹ Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” *Art Theory*, <http://theoria.art-zoo.com/modernist-painting-clement-greenberg/>.

the medium factors of painting, like Rembrandt's. He disagrees with Greenberg's view that the old master used illusionism to cover up the medium characteristics of art. He holds that the old masters only discovered ways to remind them of the existence of the painting medium in different ways, including the use of frame, referring to other paintings in hints and quotes, deformations, color control, superficial flashes, and extremely ethereal beauty. In *Other Criteria*, Steinberg mentions Rembrandt's work—*A Woman Reading* (1640) and articulates that Rembrandt not intend to conceal his medium or cover up his art; what he wanted and already obtained was exactly the tension that is clearly pointed out among the materiality of image, paper, brushstroke and ink evoked by him. And such a sketch, from the perspective of style, is an inseparable part of the art of the old masters.¹⁸²

To sum up: When it comes to the discussion of specific works, there will be the following observations. Firstly, the arbitrariness of analysis or interpretation of works. Taking Cai's works as an instance, if the artist himself remains silent, and the materials surrounding the work (strictly speaking, these things have nothing to do with the finished work), such as the pictures and materials collected by the artist for the creation and the artist's written records are not available, the judgment of the works cannot be confirmed. That is, the interpretation is open. The analysis of the work based on the surrounding materials and the artist himself indicates that the independence of the work itself is losing out. The analysis will eventually fall into the category of iconology, if not yet as far as Danto's prophecy—the end of art. In other words, it is not difficult for the artists and the viewers to give meanings and properties to the artworks from the text. However, these analysis and interpretations are relatively arbitrary and lack of certainty, namely, the foundation of the discussion of works is unstable. Consequently, after removing arbitrariness, speculation, uncertainty and inconsistency in discussion of works, the rest is only painting language which is an entity and can be a solid foundation for discussion. Just as analytical aestheticians do not discuss the subtlety of artworks, the analysis of the works is boundless if it is not just an effective discussion of the entity within a particular paradigm.

Second, the theory or the text for the work is only a fact that is in the author's eyes (more precisely, these theories are only empirical summaries and cannot be called

¹⁸² Steinberg, *Other Criteria*, 149.

theory), which is difficult to argue. Therefore, the discussion is not a matter of accuracy and objectivity but a matter of acceptance or non-acceptance, because the property of medium and form are the inseparable part of a multifactorial complex, and there is no approach to break up these factors and analyze their properties individually, as in the case of ordinary languages, or a method to modify variables for analysis. (Maybe the method can be designed, but it deviates from the essence of art.)

Finally, the analysis of media factors in the work is uncertain. In view of the shortcomings of the theoretical part, the analysis of specific works, whether this be media factors such as lines or the overall structure of form lacks certainty. It depends entirely on the emotions and will of the individual making the judgment. From a theoretical viewpoint, the judgment of the language elements of the work is not universal. That is, it can only refer to a certain work. It is difficult to argue with certainty for the inevitability of logical connection with a particular work, because the same expression of connection can also be used for another work. I have shown this through the two examples of Fry's analysis of Cézanne's works mentioned in the previous section. There is also the same issue in Chinese traditional painting and calligraphy theory, even though it has a longer history of media factor consideration and a large number of texts. For example, in a specific work, conclusions about the form of lines and strokes, in addition to tracing the work back to a 'school' and source, are just combinations of several often repeated descriptors. However, no amount of adjectives and nouns can form a scientific tool like the Periodic Table to correspond one-to-one with the factors in the work. It is impossible for each viewer to feel exactly the same in the face of a specific artwork. This type of attempt to characterize or analyze works with adjectives is also common in the discussion of style and form. Taking ancient Chinese aesthetics and painting theory as an example, *The Twenty-Four Moods of Poetry*¹⁸³ by Sikong Tu (837-908) and *The Twenty-Four Moods of Painting*¹⁸⁴ by Huang Yue (1750-1841) are discourses on style, divided into 24 moods respectively and discussed meticulously, without discussion about media. Another example, in *The Beauty of Form and Decorative Art* August Endell proposes a guide for form acting on psychology.¹⁸⁵ The 62 words in the table, such as 'delicate',

¹⁸³ Tu Sikong, *The Twenty-Four Moods of Poetry* (Hangzhou: Zhejiang Ancient Book Publishing House, 2018)

¹⁸⁴ Yue Huang, "The Twenty-Four Moods of Painting," *Studies of Chinese Ancient Civilization*, published May 2012, <http://www.guoxue.com/?p=6194>

¹⁸⁵ August Endell, "The Beauty of Form and Decorative Art," *Art in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Hoboken: Blackwell, 1985).

‘vigorous’, ‘frivolous’ and ‘sublime’, reflect the feelings caused by different forms, such as speed and weight. Yet, the form itself is indefinite; and the concepts in the table are also difficult to clarify. In another example, Wassily Kandinsky once gave the clear definitions of the basic painting elements such as vertical line, horizontal line, yellow, blue and so on. However, in the painting composed of these form elements, the meaning of the element can change due to many factors, just as it is impossible to read poetry by looking up the dictionary and grammar.

The British Philosopher Frank Sibley, whose work was based in analytical aesthetics, has some reflections on the matter: that there is hardly a logical inevitability between such interpretative and evaluative discourse and the object works. He holds that there is an issue in the use of the term “aesthetic concept”. For him the core rule of the aesthetic concept is that it is a negative condition-governed or rule-governed—it cannot be defined by necessary and sufficient conditions. This is different to a positive condition-governed object which often refers to aesthetic concepts such as “grace”, “balance” and “tragic” are harder to refer to with regard to a certain object, argues Sibley in his paper *Aesthetic Concepts* (1959).¹⁸⁶ The aesthetic concept has a great degree of tolerance in terms of semantics. But it is difficult to discuss the core of painting with such words, and as mentioned above, there are some problems in the basic patterns of the pragmatic description.

So far, it is clear that painting language is difficult to discuss by means of written language—proposition and logic at the physical level—logical language cannot reach its essence. There are natural flaws in the analysis of the physical factors of painting.

Similarly Wittgenstein held the view that aesthetics and ethics are indescribable and transcendent due to the boundaries of language as explained in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921). He later put forward the theory of ‘language-game’ in *Philosophical Investigations*. By doing so he denied that the picture theory of language in *TLP* is analogous to the pragmatic deficiency of discussing painting.¹⁸⁷ Painting language is an unspeakable world and cannot be translated into ordinary

¹⁸⁶ Frank Sibley, “Aesthetic Concepts,” in *Contemporary Philosophy of Art: Readings in Analytical Aesthetics*, eds. John W. Bender & H. Gene Blocker (London: Pearson, 1992), 245-251.

¹⁸⁷ The matter of language use in discussing painting should be, in the final analysis, a matter to be solved first in analytical philosophy and linguistic philosophy. The description of painting can only use ordinary language, which is different from the description of other disciplines that also use ordinary language. Unfortunately, I do not have time for an extended discussion here.

languages or correspond and display in language, due to the fact that the two are not isomorphic (in this regard, Dufrenne has a more specific technical formulation from the perspective of semiotics, see chapter 2). Painting language is also not in the factual world that accommodates logical necessity. Therefore, the discussion of painting language on a physical level is "speaking that cannot be spoken" which is similar to a famous case of Chinese Zen—"shuo si yi wu ji bu zhong" which means as long as you say an object, you will definitely deviate from it. This mysterious world can only be displayed and spoken by the painting language itself and cannot be transformed into text. In the following sections, I will use descriptive or figurative language as the basic means to approach and discuss the physical factors of painting language, which whilst flawed will allow me to discuss my own research as a painter.

Physical Media Factors, Form and Style in Studio-based Works

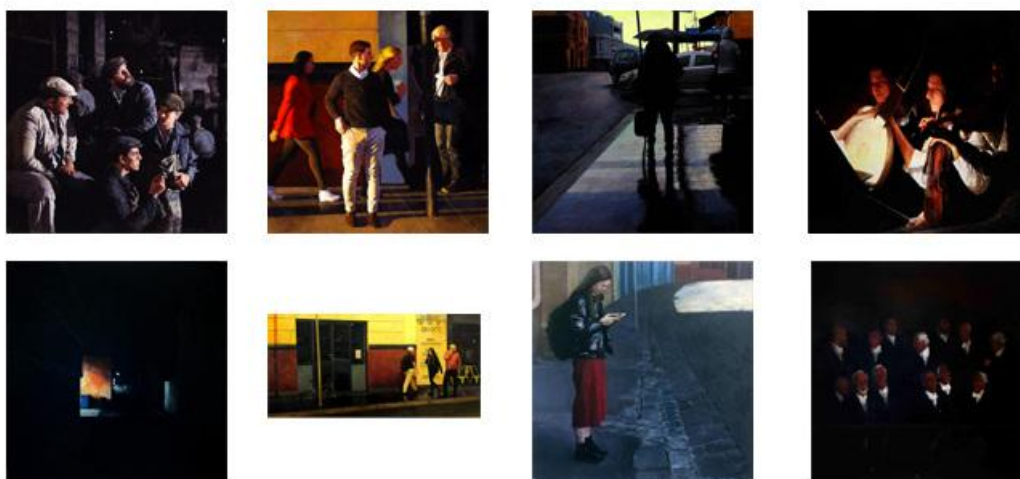
This section will illustrate the media factors of painting language through case studies (my studio-based works), and also establish a dialogue on the practical level about the fundamentals of painting language discussed in the first two chapters.

The practical part of the research project led me to think deeply about the fundamental issues of figurative painting—representation, realism, expression, meaning and matter as well as the visible and touchable elements that constitute the painting, such as plasticity, texture, and lines, which were approached and discussed by means of semiotics and linguistics in the first and second chapter. There are some corresponding methods and literature for the discussion of these issues, which may not be discussed on a specific work, although these issues are initiated by art practice. As a consequence the discussion of the physical part of the specific work and the exhibition can only be described.

All eight works are different from figurative painting and abstract painting in a general sense, even though they are figurative paintings in appearance and the elements I focus on are expressive. These works revolve around the exploration of physical media factors—the combination of color patches, the presentation of brushstrokes, texture and so on, making the expressiveness¹⁸⁸ of these factors outstanding and intensified, instead of being buried in the constraints and offsets of other figurative and abstract factors. With the consideration of these media issues as

¹⁸⁸ Expressiveness is not what it expresses, but its own aesthetic intensity. (See Heidegger and Dufrenne's description of language and matter in the second chapter of this thesis.)

the core, it is logical to concede that have presented such fundamental issues as representation, realism, expression and materials. The works further interrogate the linguistic properties of these media elements plus fundamentals, thus forming the main structure of this thesis. Therefore, the practical part of this project is figurative, but it does not involve the things outside the painting often carried by figurative paintings, namely, it is not narrative and thematic, nor does it aim at describing and representing objects, namely, it is not objective. The works as a body of research are also different from abstraction or abstracting such as the deformation of exploring the geometric form, the splash and daub of presenting materials and processes that express things (mood, sound, experience and so on) outside the work.



Top row left to right: *Untitled 1*, *Untitled 2*, *Untitled 3*, *Untitled 4*

Bottom row left to right: *Untitled 5*, *Untitled 6*, *Untitled 7*, *Untitled 8*

The works *Untitled 1*, *2* and *4* are figurative, realistic or represented and conform to the habit of watching and presenting several figures. Although Goodman has a very refined and technical discussion about the issues of representation and realism, he eventually attributes representation to denotation, based on the tradition of analytic aesthetics and the perspective of semiotics. This is because what can be discussed by his method must be within the boundary of logical language; and there is nothing beyond logical language (see chapter 1). Goodman holds that representative works must be denoted, even if the works are without themes, such as landscape and still life paintings. Yet, these eight works are avoiding this situation. The works have no title, no subject, no relevance to any event. Especially, *Untitled 2*, *3*, *5*, *6*, and *7* which present no particular denoted event —ordinary streets and pedestrians, no dramatic

scenes and light, no expression of self-emotion, making them seem most likely to be bland, plain and unpretentious. In the general sense of expression, it can be said that the image presented in the painting expresses nothing, even if it has reference like Goodman insisted, the signified is extremely vague. Even dismissing the image, Goodman argues that colors and shapes are associated with external things, because their properties are shared with other things. This argument is correct, but it is only effective in understanding paintings (image) in the form of propositions and inferences. However, it is obviously not the proper way to face painting (art). A painting itself is a closed world; and the connection with the outside is cut off when it is completed. So, it is only related to the viewer's aesthetic reaction. In this regard, Dufrenne has a similar discussion; and for the denotation of the factors in the painting, Heidegger's view of non-logical poetic language can slightly neutralize Goodman's viewpoint of denotation based on semiotics. These works have something in common: factors such as image, color, shape, etc. are not denoting a particular thing. *Untitled 1, 2, and 4* echo the discussion of realism by Goodman and Gombrich—there is no such thing as a correct realism; realism is determined by the custom of the painters and the viewer's viewing and interpretation. As far as viewing is concerned, the viewer actually includes the painters themselves. The painter can be called the first-order viewer; the viewer is the second-order viewer; and the painter's observation tools or image sources are the zero-order viewer. The image sources and imaging formations of the three works are different—they derive from different observation and shooting equipment. Therefore, they diverge on the zero-order viewer. That is, the three zero-order viewers (respectively belonging to *Untitled 1, 2, and 4*) do not have a unified understanding of the object or the concept of realism, so it is difficult to confirm the objective degree of the images presented by the three, especially for the painter. After all, they each have different degrees of distortion, sharpening or blurring of the object image, as well as the re-presentation of the color and the blurring of the motion picture after the frame is fixed. The information from the zero-order viewer is input to the painter—the first-order viewer, but how to input the information and how much or less the information was input is not important. The important thing is the output of the painter—using these materials to build a world that cannot be transformed into text. Then the second-order viewer—viewers perceive it. Throughout the process, the concept of realism in the traditional sense has actually been dispelled. So, realism has no uniform appearance. The above discussion can be seen as an enhancement of the

discussion of Goodman and Gombrich from the perspective of art practice.

These works are consistent in terms of the application of painting techniques. As mentioned in the previous section, the relationship between oily material media and people (painters and viewers), as well as the material properties of oil paint and the accumulated understanding what an oil painting is at the socio-cultural level, has been in development for hundreds of years. Maybe it is just a kind of familiarity and tacit understanding, which gives works the illusion of meaning. In these works, only traditional materials of oil painting are used, and there are no other modern materials such as acrylic. The overall preference is to adopt classical techniques such as plasticity with lead white and glazing, such as in *Untitled 4* and *7*. The technique I used did not strictly follow the classical techniques of a certain period or region, for past techniques were actually serving the image, so painters did not work towards a work's "presence". There was no specific interest of plasticity and form for their own sake (except for Rembrandt). The techniques I have used are the embodiment of the limitations of materials and tools—all part of the process of accomplishing a purpose (an image). That is, the greater the limitations of the materials and tools in achieving the goal—the image, the more complex the technique is. In this context, the effect achieved by the technique is not originally a manifestation of thingness like Heidegger holds, but rather a helplessness. Only when an image exits and the art debuts, do the technique and materials have the value of referring to themselves. They turn to the inside of the painting from completing an external task. These works of mine retain most of the classical painting techniques, but the brush-wielding and brushstrokes were more emphasized, and even Chinese traditional brushes were used on a large scale, such as *Untitled 5* and *6*. Other works, like *Untitled 1, 2* and *3* also use Chinese brush in part, trying to display the writing style of a brush or handwriting, glazing with transparent and semi-transparent layers. Only *Untitled 1* highlights some of the texture, and after the glazing, some natural color accumulation is formed. Other works retain the brush design while maintaining a smooth surface to reflect the characteristics of the oily material. In addition to matters, highlighting the intensity of the color itself is also one of the study purposes. For example, the yellow color of the small sky in the upper part of *Untitled 3* contrasts with the large area of blue-violet, and the yellow has both subtle changes and the original purity of the paint.

Untitled 2 and *6* are related to each other. The emphasis is on the juxtaposition of three colors (yellow, red and black) with high purity, embodying the aesthetics of color and material. The two works are far apart in time. In the period after finishing *Untitled 2*, the attempts in practice and the development of idea in the thesis resonate with each other to form *Untitled 6*. That is, the attempt in *Untitled 2* is more effective in *Untitled 6*. Three colors (yellow, red and black) are juxtaposed in *Untitled 6* with high purity and variety of each color patch is weakened. The process is also improved in *Untitled 6*—painting several layers and making it smooth before the last layer of paint. Therefore, the texture of the material itself is better highlighted. For example, the “thingness” of the yellow patch is more prominent than the same patch in *Untitled 2*, and under a condition of high purity, the illusion of color variety arises (the illusion occurs when two brown lines are added to the yellow patch).

In summary, the aesthetic of texture and color ultimately comes down to the artist's application of the materials and its effect on the human senses. This kind of application is a kind of craftsmanship. The combination of craftsmanship and the artist's personal will and the free application within a limited scope can form a personal difference similar to the use of natural language on the basis of the presentation of discourse. (Free application within a limitation refers to the re-use of accumulated skills, handle norms and aesthetic norms, which guarantees the quality of the work, but it does not refer solely to the technical aspects.) Personal differences are also the uniqueness that the painter gradually builds on the painting. Personalized construction necessarily requires a commonality of rules. So that one painter's works can form a deep homology with other painters' works. Only in this way, can an individual work have the possibility of being perceived from the linguistic level; and differences in organizing language between painters- form, will exist and be compared. Further, in the comparison, the result of this technical handle is given more language properties. Technical handle refers to the arrangement of the color block shape, the weight, the turning, the length, the thickness of the brush contacting canvas, the connection between the strokes, the rough or smooth texture, the undulation of the color layer, the rigidity of the edge, the applications of media and so on. These are all derived from the artist's aesthetic perception, handle habits and customs, thinking and experimentation with techniques, and judgment, experience, expression and correction of elements. Therefore, extracting everything that can be separated from the painting, the rest that cannot be reduced anymore is

the material and technique—the record and display of an artist's application of the element. In the eyes of linguistic semiotics advocates, such signs or marks are indicative, such as described by Bryson in *Looking at the Overlooked* (1990)¹⁸⁹ and Bal in *Reading "Rembrandt"* (1991)¹⁹⁰ (see chapter 1), or like Vernon Minor who states that: “everything in art is arbitrary, uncertain, variable: the picture of a tree is really a series of marks or signs arranged on a surface, and the only legitimate way of dealing with a painting is to consider it in abstract or semiological terms, forget the so-called real tree”.¹⁹¹ However, from the perspective of art itself, the way to treat these elements can draw on Endell. That is, in physical details of object, Endell's opinion is different from formalism grasping the form structure as a whole, but focusing on details—eyes track every twist, deposit and change¹⁹². To some extent, it is similar to the emphasis on brush-wielding experience in ancient Chinese painting theory. Emphasis on these elements and brushes, for instance, are reflected in *Untitled 1* and *6*. In *Untitled 1*, the brushstrokes and colors of the middle figure's face are carefully arranged. Similarly, the figure on the left presents the designed traces of palette knife. The brush is used to create the face, for the purposes of plasticity. It fits the turning point of the body, retains the obvious brush strokes, and makes some texture at the turning point. The purpose is to try something between setting brushstrokes and textures—neither the smoothness of the hidden painting process nor the full prominence of texture, but the display of the brush-wielding under careful control, like it is in traditional Chinese painting. In *Untitled 6*, the three figures are painted on a smooth base with Chinese brush, showing the brushstrokes with translucent layers while the outlines retain uncertainty.

In addition to the surface elements that can only be described in detail, the formal factors in the works are a complex issue in the language of painting. As mentioned in the introduction, there are many scholars who discuss the form; and there are many conclusions, whether from the metaphysical essence level, the artistic aesthetic level or the technique and medium level. The discussion of form in this section is guided by studio-based practices, so only the conclusions on technique and medium level will be filtered and referenced. For example, Ingarden gives nine connotations of

¹⁸⁹ Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013).

¹⁹⁰ Mieke Bal, *Reading "Rembrandt": Beyond the Word-image Opposition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

¹⁹¹ Vernon Hyde Minor, *Art History's History* (Bergen: Prentice Hall, 1994), 73.

¹⁹² August Endell, “The Beauty of Form and Decorative Art,” in *Art in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Hoboken: Blackwell, 1985).

form in *Studies in Aesthetics* (1957), which arise from objects in all fields, based on the perspective of general philosophy. Among the nine, the following can be reflected in artworks: 1. Form is what determines the content, content itself is not prescriptive, namely, X is X, because of the rules of form. 2. Form is the arrangement and composition of the parts that make up the whole. 3. Form is the way something exists, occurs, or is described. 4. Form is a constant and regular. Another scholar, Władysław Tatarkiewicz, enumerates the 11 meanings of form in *A history of Six Ideas* (1980)¹⁹³, five of which can be embodied in artworks: 1. Form refers to the arrangement and proportion of parts relative to elements and ingredients. 2. Form refers to the appearance of things relative to content and meaning. 3. form refers to the boundaries and contours of the object relative to the material. 4. Form refers to rules relative to freedom and change. 5. Form refers to the routine of the artist's creation.

To sum up the definitions of form by Ingarden and Tatarkiewicz, from the appearance of physical media factors, firstly, form must contain the overall arrangement of the elements (such as unity, balance, symmetry, rhythm, harmony and other standards). Furthermore, form includes regular and some constant patterns (such as the perspective in European painting after the 15th century and the paradigm of landscape painting in the Qing Dynasty of China). Finally, form includes perceivable shapes such as appearance, boundaries or contours.

The above three points, especially 1 and 3—the most intuitive part of the painting (the arrangement of colors, lines and strokes)—are the main objects of formal analysis of the works by formalists. The main issue of formalist analysis of specific works is form itself, in addition to the defects mentioned in the previous section. That is, whether there is the form they rely on, or whether it can be called form. One point that can be agreed is that the form should be a rule that can be extracted from the object and exist separately. Every individual is individual, not universal and cannot be crowned with form. This rule extracted from objects must resort to the rational and intellect, and rules can derive rules without meaning. For example, form language advocated by Carnap on which semiotics builds (see chapter 1) or the metrics of Chinese classical poetry. Form itself is not an object. The form in the works discussed by formalists is only the appearance of the work rather than a form,

¹⁹³ Władysław Tatarkiewicz, *A History of Six Ideas: An Essay in Aesthetics* (New York: Springer, 1980).

because it cannot form a pattern and cannot be separated from the work. According to the inferential, applicable and predictable properties of the form itself, the form in painting (figurative painting, like my works) can only be the perspective and plastic rules (or the application of light and color). Only these two points can exist as abstract rules, others can only be discussed at the appearance level. And strictly speaking, the artist's handle (technique and so on), cannot be called a form. (Consequently, the formal analysis of the work by so-called formalism is doubtful, whether the works are abstract or figurative. Correspondingly, in my eight works, the plastic rule is unified and consistent. The perspective is applied to *Untitled 2, 3, 5, 6* and *7*. Even in the shallow space of the painting, like *Untitled 2* and *6*, the precise perspective is applied, which shapes the construction of the work.

The above is a consideration of form from the factors in the specific works, but if the content of the form in the painting is to be rich, then we should let the arrangement and composition of a picture's parts, the object's boundaries and contours and other individual appearances become the form. Dufrenne builds the theoretical foundation for this. Based on the sensuousness of the aesthetic object, Dufrenne constructs the form in the aesthetic object and distinguishes it from the general form. That is, without the theoretical basis of the sensuous, the appearance factors in the painting cannot be called form. He holds that the form in the artworks has five characteristics. First, form bears the material, blends the sensuous and makes the sensuous have form. Second, form is a concrete and substantial sensuous form of an object. Third, form corresponds to the perception of the aesthetic subject. Fourth, the meaning of form is substantial and non-deterministic. Fifth, form matches its background.¹⁹⁴ Accordingly, under the control of the sensuous, form is not material-free and abstract, and does not correspond to intellect. As Dufrenne notes: *"the form is the factor of truth and immutability in the aesthetic object ... It (form) is that which appears invincibly the same through different interpretations, that which makes the object the same underneath the changing bodies which it assumes. In other words, the form is the truth of the aesthetic object. The form has the virtue of timelessness which belongs to truth conceived as the being of the true"*.¹⁹⁵ Therefore, it can be said that the factors, for example, the contour as a form determines the range of the sensuous, and also indicates the cooperation between the colors as well as organizes and

¹⁹⁴ Mikel Dufrenne, *Aesthetics and Philosophy* (Beijing: China Social Science Press, 1985), 119-129.

¹⁹⁵ Mikel Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 166.

unifies the original materials into the work's sensuousness which bears the matter. In this way, form is embodied in the appearance and is inseparable from the sensuous. It does not resort to logic and intellect but only to the sensation. (Here, the form is not a form of the object represented in the painting, although the outline, color and texture come from the represented object.)

As in *Untitled 5*, the paintings are all composed largely of straight lines, almost no curves. These straight lines come from the represented objects, and the arrangement is based on perspective. The main lines meet at the center of the picture, but these lines are not schemes that require rational interpretation, nor are they the refinement of the alley painted in the painting. Therefore, these lines are not the outline of the represented object, nor the orderly and regular lines like the geometric patterns, but they shape the painting and bear the material. These lines are of themselves sensuous and the form that fixes a patch of orange color which is pure, bright, and textured in the center of the painting; they are also the form that distinguishes the patch of color from the black background. The whole meaning of them lies in this form and the sensuousness it organizes.¹⁹⁶



Top row left to right: *Untitled 1, Untitled 2, Untitled 3, Untitled 4*

Bottom row left to right: *Untitled 5, Untitled 6, Untitled 7, Untitled 8*

Since form can be reflected in the appearance of a specific work, then it will be different in each case. Dufrenne holds that form is: “ ... *clearly immanent in the*

¹⁹⁶ The form discussed in the work is based only on the outermost layer of Dufrenne's form definition, and there are three layers inward, but they are not within the scope of this section.

sensuous, since form is nothing other than the harmonious organization of the sensuous. Style reveals another aspect of form. Style defines a form capable of attesting to the personality which created it".¹⁹⁷ And, he also holds that the style indicates that there are certain pre-conceived personal components in the sensuous composition; form needs to be recognized by style; and style is technique with which artists present themselves.¹⁹⁸ Not only does Dufrenne think that style is in form, but in the existing art theories, form and style are often ambiguous, like Susan Sontag, Gombrich and other scholars, although they have insights into style or stylistics.

If talking about style in my eight works (allowing for the usual usage of style which is not rigorous and clear enough), the style of these works can be said to be unified figurative painting. If distinguishing them, then it can be said that *Untitled 1, 4* and *8* have a style similar to the paintings of the Baroque period, from the perspective of tone, composition and light arrangement; the rest from light to composition and scenes are modern. From the perspective of the sensation conveyed by the materials, *Untitled 4* and *7* have a transparent Tempera style. From the perspective of mood, emotion or feeling that can be caused by the paintings, each painting's style is different, such as the cold and order of *Untitled 2*, warmth and movement of *Untitled 3*. This method of discussing the style based on the aesthetic artistic conception conveyed by a single work is a specialty in ancient Chinese aesthetics and literary theory. For example, *The Twenty-Four Moods of Poetry* and *The Twenty-Four Moods of Painting* (the latter is based on the former) are typical works. These two texts aimed to discuss the twenty four styles in a completely scatter-like way, rather than having logic throughout- focusing on the artistic conception conveyed by various styles, regardless of the elements and methods. The authors use a figurative language to create a sense of image for each style within the genre of poetry, such as "heroic", "dilute", "elegant", "sorrowful" and so on. In *The Twenty-Four Moods of Painting*. The sense of image is actually the scene outside the scene—an implied artistic conception that cannot be analyzed but only experienced from the texts. This indicates that when facing a piece of work, style is often the first thing to be perceived—feeling or mood, instead of form, brushstroke and texture which require further review, perception and observation.

Goodman also holds that the transmission of the sensations or feelings involved in

¹⁹⁷ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 107.

¹⁹⁸ Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 104. 138.

viewing work is related to style. He uses the method of linguistic analysis to discuss the style of the work as a symbol on the basis of semiotics in *Ways of Worldmaking* (1978). He believes that style is related to what is said in the work and how. The focus of what is said is the composition of the style and what is said can change as the way of speaking changes. Obviously, almost the same things often have many different ways of speaking; things that are very different can be said in the same way; and what is said may also be the way to talk about something else. For example, he states that: *"writing about Renaissance battles and writing about Renaissance arts are not different ways of writing about the battles or about the arts but different ways of writing about the Renaissance"*.¹⁹⁹ Therefore, in this sense, *"style comprises certain characteristic feature both of what is said and of how it is said, both of subject and of wording, both of content and of form"*.²⁰⁰ In terms of the emotion conveyed, the way of speaking expresses feelings, he holds that the same subjects *"that use different words and describe different incidents may be in the same style, but they are in different style if one is glum and the other gleeful. Style in general on this view consists of such, and much more subtle, qualities of feeling expressed"*.²⁰¹ Yet, at this point Goodman seems to be not clear enough. He argues that the same subject can be consistent or different in style, and the difference is expressed by feelings, but isn't the sameness also expressed by feeling? Moreover, he claims that feeling and style are necessarily related.

Due to Goodman's semiotic perspective, he regards style as an intrinsic property of the work while the work is a symbol, so the style actually has similar properties to the concepts of exemplification, expression and so on. This is discussed in *Languages of Art*. That is, *"such typical stylistic qualities as a concentration upon setting, a peculiar elaboration of curved forms, a subtle quality of bittersweet feeling, are aspects of what the poem or picture or piano sonata says or exemplifies or expresses. Style has to do exclusively with the symbolic functioning of a work as such"*.²⁰² As mentioned earlier, these eight works do not refer to things outside the painting, but they can succinctly illustrate the style from the perspective of feeling or what is said and the way of saying which shape the feeling. For example, *Untitled 1, 4 and 8* are generally dark toned, and the figures emerge from the dark color or are engulfed by the darkness. This appearance has a direct connection with the works of the Baroque

¹⁹⁹ Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1988), 26.

²⁰⁰ Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, 27.

²⁰¹ Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, 27. 28.

²⁰² Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, 35.

period, and the appearance of Baroque works, which according to David Hockney in *Secret Knowledge* (2001)²⁰³, comes from the way of painting at that time. Therefore, from a technical point of view, drawing on the way of painting at that time or imitating the effect at that time has now become the way of speaking of works. Correspondingly, what is said in the works is not the few figures, but the way of painting in the Baroque period or the feeling conveyed by this way of painting—the style. If the figures in the painting are what is said, then indeed they also have an effect on the formation of the style. The workers and the machines in *Untitled 1* and the musicians and the instruments in *Untitled 4* convey different feelings, forming a slight difference in style and belonging to the first level of style—the feeling that is first conveyed. Further, the figures in *Untitled 1* are mostly painted with flat brushes, emphasizing the trend that strokes fit the body; facial texture is close to skin texture, and clothes adopt a rough texture. Differently, in *Untitled 4*, the figures' faces and clothes are painted with the pointed round brushes; the brushstroke is not based on the turning of the object, but focuses on the interlacing of strokes and the arrangement of different levels; the instruments have smooth textures and bright colors. These factors, which belong to the form level, play a second role in conveying the overall feeling of the painting. *Untitled 1* and *4* are different in style because of the differences associated with painting in detail—the way of saying. And *4* and *7*, if different, are the result of 'what is said', because the way of painting is the same.

When the viewer concentrates on the figures or the whole image, the first level of style is obtained (feeling), and at the moment, other aspects are not noticed, such as brush-wielding and texture. If attention is focused on the formal elements to gain a second level of feeling, the overall feel of painting is ignored. Thus, styles are difficult to break down into different elements for separate discussion. The feeling discussed above is for a single work, yet for these eight works, they are done in the same way of thinking, so their common nature—the way of speaking and the feeling of being conveyed—can connect them together, namely, the style of my works. It can be seen from the works that the different objects painted and different techniques do not necessarily lead to different styles. What forms the style is the implicit form of the painting- the presence of the sensuousness of color, the sensuousness of oil paint, and the formation of the painting structure as well. The discernment and feeling of style is, as Goodman has explained: “an integral aspect of the understanding of works

²⁰³ David Hockney, *Secret Knowledge: Rediscovering the Lost Techniques of the Old Masters* (Thames & Hudson: Viking Studio, 2001).

of art and the worlds they present".²⁰⁴

As an important part of this practice-led project, the exhibition displayed the eight studio-based works at VCA Art Space²⁰⁵ (fig. 9-12 in Appendix 2). With reference to this project being a study of painting language, I exhibited the works in particular clusters, so *Untitled 1* and *4* were in room 2. Room 2 served as both a technique basis for the entire exhibition and a reference to paintings of that period. The materials of *Untitled 3, 6, 5* and *2* came from the same source and were therefore arranged in turn in room 1 and 3. *Untitled 4* and *7* are the same size and the same technique, but due to the difference of what is said, they cause a difference in feeling, which leads to thinking about the source of the style. Therefore, these two works were placed in front of each other and both used soft edged spotlights. *Untitled 8* is similar in style to *Untitled 1* and *4*. As the last painting, *Untitled 8* echoed *1* and *4*, suggesting that the entire exhibition is unified at the media and technique level—the bottom layer of the work is consistent.

Chapter Summary

The issues of physical media factors, form and style in my artworks discussed above are only discussed around the work and cannot really “touch” the work. The core of the issues being discussed can only be perceived through or combined with the original works, instead of merely photos. Without facing the original work, it is difficult to know the real painting language only through the text. And this is the reason that in the discussion of painting language it is difficult to achieve universality, objectivity and consistency only through analysis and elaboration of specific works.

Painting language (especially the media factors, form and style) in specific works can only be discussed by the method of description or concrete analogy. Painting language can only express feelings effectively, but not analyze and explain issues and concepts that are of painting itself. Painting language cannot be discussed within specific scales and rules. Therefore, it is difficult to deduce and develop an abstract, rigorous, concise and universal theory. When one abstractly processes and reorganizes the media level of painting language, it become a purely aesthetic and philosophical issue, thus separating from the perception of the sensuous and thingness in the practice of the work. The illogical expression of technique, handwork,

²⁰⁴ Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, 40.

²⁰⁵ VCA Art Space, 38 Dodds Street, Southbank Campus. 9th July—12th July 2019

manual operations and so on which can only be obtained by facing specific works is ignored. Consequently, the discussion in specific works can only take a compromise approach, such as discussing the media level of painting language under the theoretical framework of analytical aesthetics or phenomenological aesthetics (or under the guidance of a dominant concept). Otherwise, the discussion of painting language can only be a personal feeling and experience, which can neither be well-founded nor questioned, but can only be interpreted and described constantly by using sensory experience to explain sensory experience or explaining the cause through the result. Although the discussion under this theoretical framework still does not fully and effectively touch the core of the media level, it at least helps to define the scope and discussion paradigm of these issues more clearly, so that it has the possibility of further research in the work practice.

Conclusion

The subject of this practice-led research was the study of painting language in figurative painting. That is, from the perspective of art practice, what is painting language and how is it clearly expressed within a practice-led paradigm?

This project was divided into two parts—the studio-based art practice presented by the exhibition and the related discussion and dialogue around works and summary of different perspectives on painting found in the literature. The relationship between the two is equivalent to the cyclical process between sensation and appearance as well as concept and inference.

The basic issues of painting, such as media, form and style in painting language, have been explored and practiced in and through the works. That is, these works revolve around the exploration of physical media factors—the combination of color patches, the presentation of brush strokes, texture and so on, intensifying the expressiveness of these factors, instead of them being buried in the constraints and offsets of other figurative or abstract factors. In the third chapter of the thesis, these factors have been critically elaborated and discussed and the reason for dismissing the boundless external engagement of the works is given. That is, for a particular work, painting language (especially the physical media factors) is the only valid or confirmed value to discuss—the reliable starting point for painting analysis, since painting cannot express conceptual meaning clearly.

Through the analysis presented in chapter 3, the defects of existing analyses of certain works are revealed—in the final analysis, it is a description around perceptual or intuitive complex (a kind of description of sensory experience which lacks motivation), or an arbitrary and uncertain analysis which is based on uncertain sensory experience, such as the examples of formalism and Cai's works in NGV. This chapter also reveals that the limitations of particular theoretical approaches to the analysis of works is not only from itself, but also from the deficiency in language use itself (pragmatic defects of actual written language in describing and discussing painting).

Also, a relatively appropriate expression and discussion mode for painting is given. That is, the final chapter identifies and defines the form, and uses the work as an

example to illustrate the mode of discussion of mixed elements in a specific paradigm or theoretical framework, as well as to differentiate and provide a discussion mode of style through the artworks. In brief, this illustrates how to discuss scattered physical media factors systematically and rigorously through the practice.

The final chapter also includes a dialogue between the works and the issues discussed in the first two chapters. That is, it explains and verifies the issues of representation (denotation) and realism from Goodman and Gombrich, as well as Dufrenne's concept of the sensuous in practice, illustrating the relationship between techniques, materials, thingness and sensibility in specific works and through this specifies the mutually reinforcing relationship between common rules (language), personal differences (speech) and the language properties of painting in art practice, as well as the possibility of style implied in language properties.

The thesis takes the appearance of paintings (namely, the media level of painting language) as the core and logically considers the issues behind these factors. It examines the issues that do not appear as directly in the language of painting, such as the fundamentals—representation, realism, expression and meaning; and the issues that present in the work and can be extracted from the specific works for discussion, such as matter (in Dufrenne's term). The discussion of these issues is mainly reflected in the first two chapters.

The references which I have interrogated in these two chapters are not written specifically for artists. Therefore, through my painter's identity and perspective, combined with the study of aesthetics, art theory and art history, I have sorted out, screened and analyzed the expositions that serve scholars. The analysis interpreted not only the referenced and quoted books through the prism of practice to make the reference texts closer to practice itself, but also provided a kind of textual criticism and research conducted vertically and horizontally by means of comparison and connection. That is, the factors of painting language which are screened by practical experience are intensively discussed, by filtering out the factors of the isms, clarifying the relationship among image, text and language as well as the relationship between form and content, so as to explain and give the properties, characteristics and scope of painting language as it pertains to painting in practice and establish a field of pure painting language. In terms of understanding painting philosophies in figurative

painting, this field not only contains the possibility of discussing painting effectively, but also clarifies the foundational properties of painting—the sensuous and rejects external engagement.

This field—a field of concentrated painting language for artists—is based on practice instead of being inferential or logical in its formation process and is guided by thinking in practice. In the process of establishing this field, through the comparative study of Goodman, Dufrenne and other scholars, the two chapters clarify the ambiguous concepts of representation, expression, meaning and matter (thingness) from the perspective of practice, so as to use these concepts clearly in the analysis and discussion of painting, and this reveals the respective limitations of analytical aesthetics and phenomenological aesthetics in the study of art. The final chapter proposes a solution for this limitation. That is, to discuss painting effectively is a matter that should be solved first in linguistic philosophy.

In conclusion, the main structure of this thesis is formed both by the discussion of factors that do not directly present in paintings and the discussion of the factors that do directly present in paintings. The questions led by the works are responded to in the thesis, and the works are concrete cases of the issues discussed in the thesis. In other words, the exhibition served as both a precursor and exemplar for the dissertation, as well as a test of the issues discussed in the thesis. What I have done, from a painter's perspective, is to provide a treatise on the possibility of developing a painting language—one that draws from painting itself. The aim has been to establish a field of practical, pure and non-referential painting language counterpoints and so provide a new perspective and mode for thinking and discussions on painting.

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Appendix 1: Paintings Made during Candidature (Fig 1-8)

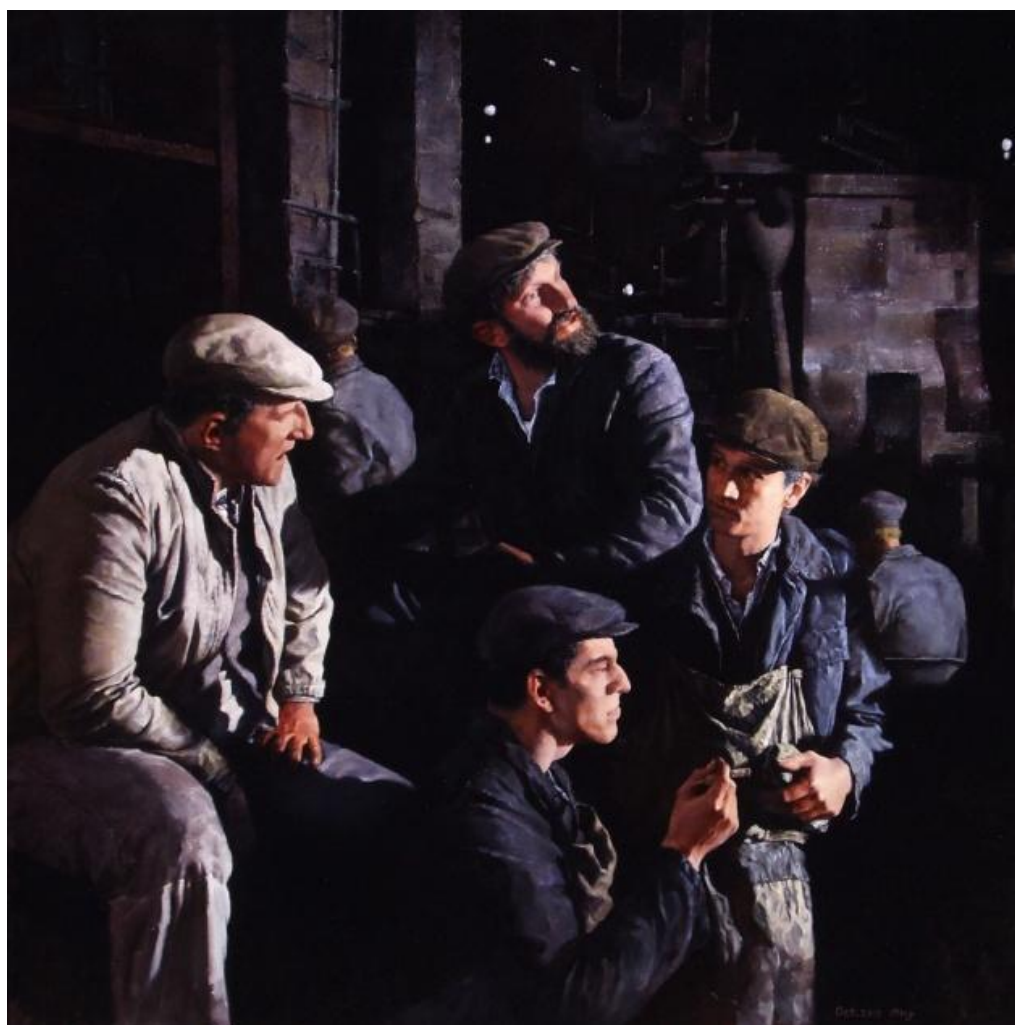


Figure 1. Ming Cheng, *Untitled 1*, 2015, 90×90cm.



Figure 2. Ming Cheng, *Untitled 2*, 2016, 90×90cm.



Figure 3. Ming Cheng, *Untitled 3*, 2016, 90×90cm.



Figure 4. Ming Cheng, *Untitled 4*, 2017, 20×20cm.



Figure 5. Ming Cheng, *Untitled 5*, 2019, 30×30cm.



Figure 6. Ming Cheng, *Untitled 6*, 2019, 90×45cm.

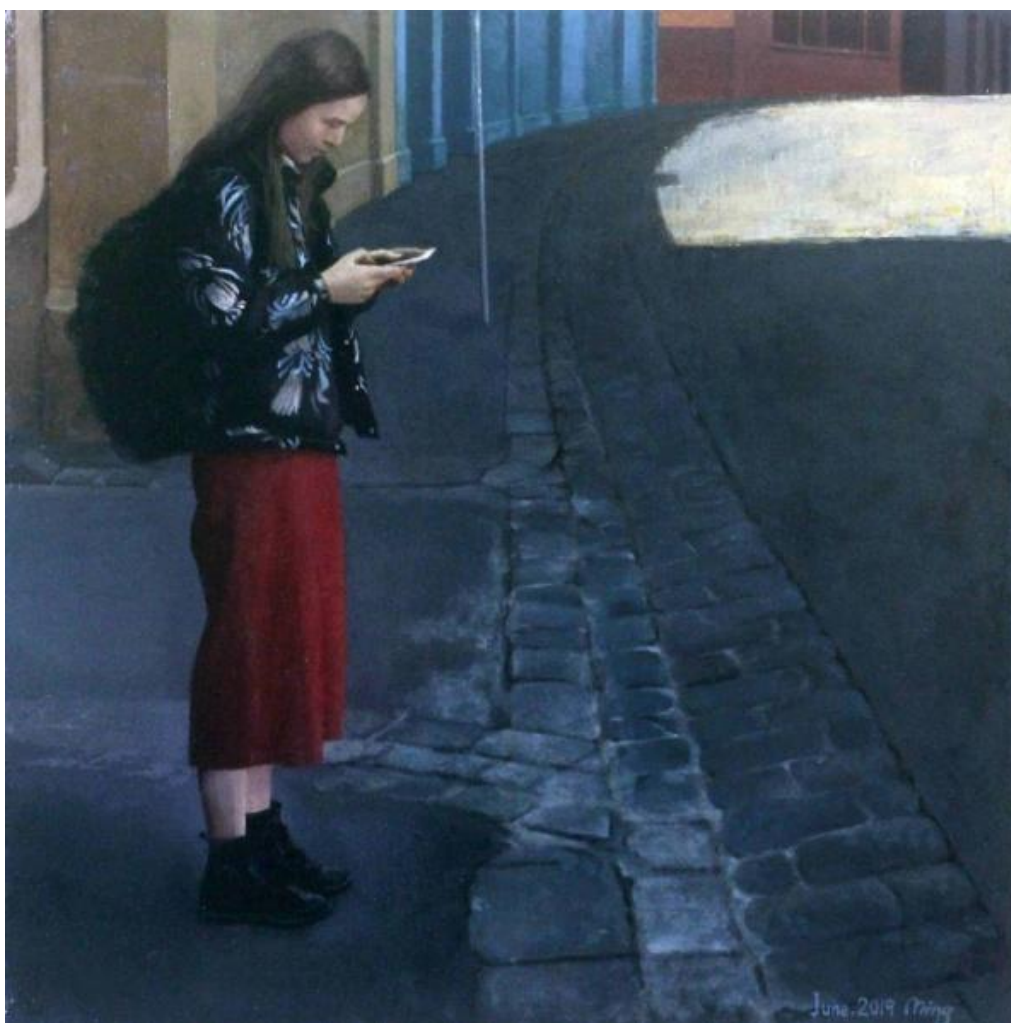


Figure 7. Ming Cheng, *Untitled 7*, 2019, 20×20cm.

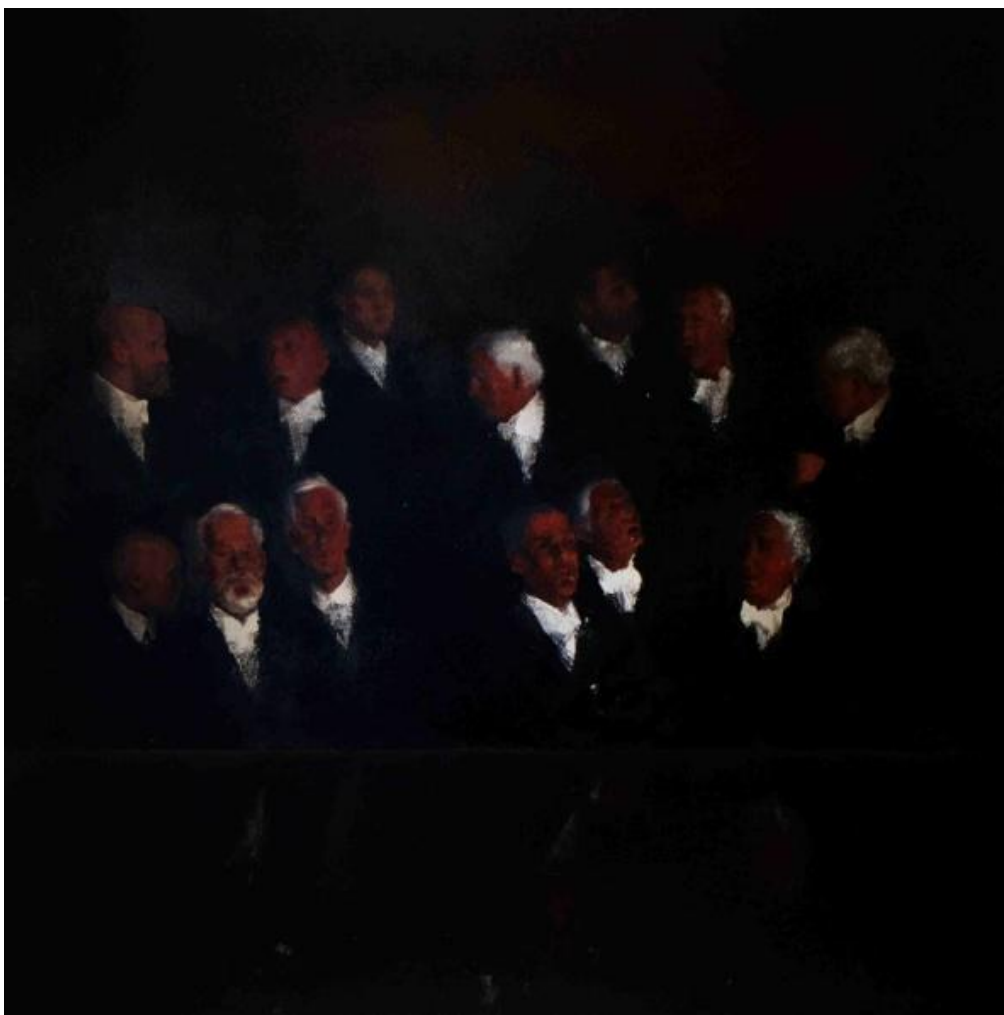


Figure 8. Ming Cheng, *Untitled 8*, 2018, 40×40cm.

Appendix 2: The Gallery Installation (Fig 9-12)

VCA Art Space, 38 Dodds Street, Southbank Campus

9th July—12th July 2019

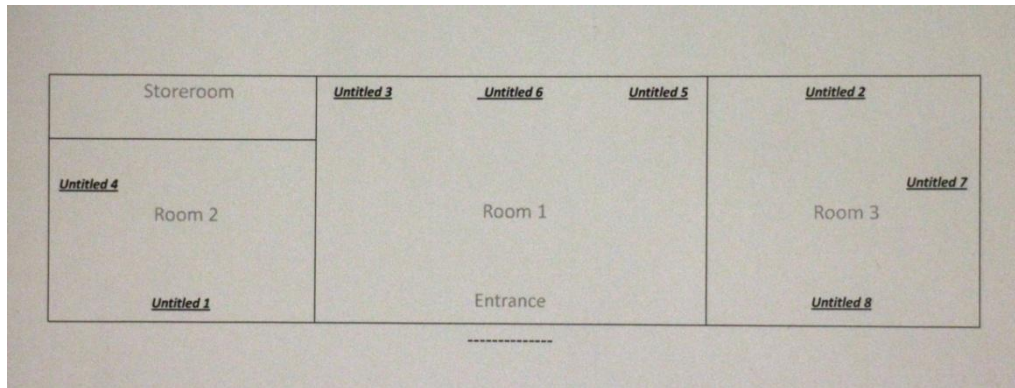


Figure 9. The Exhibition layout in VCA Art Space.

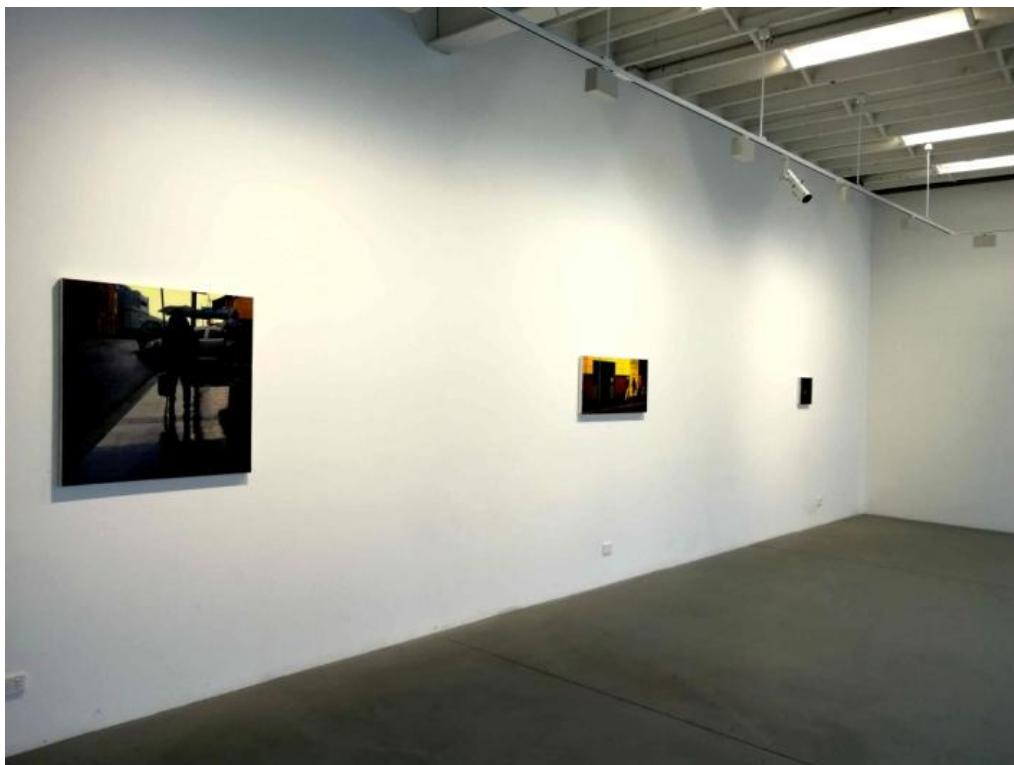


Figure 10. Room 1.

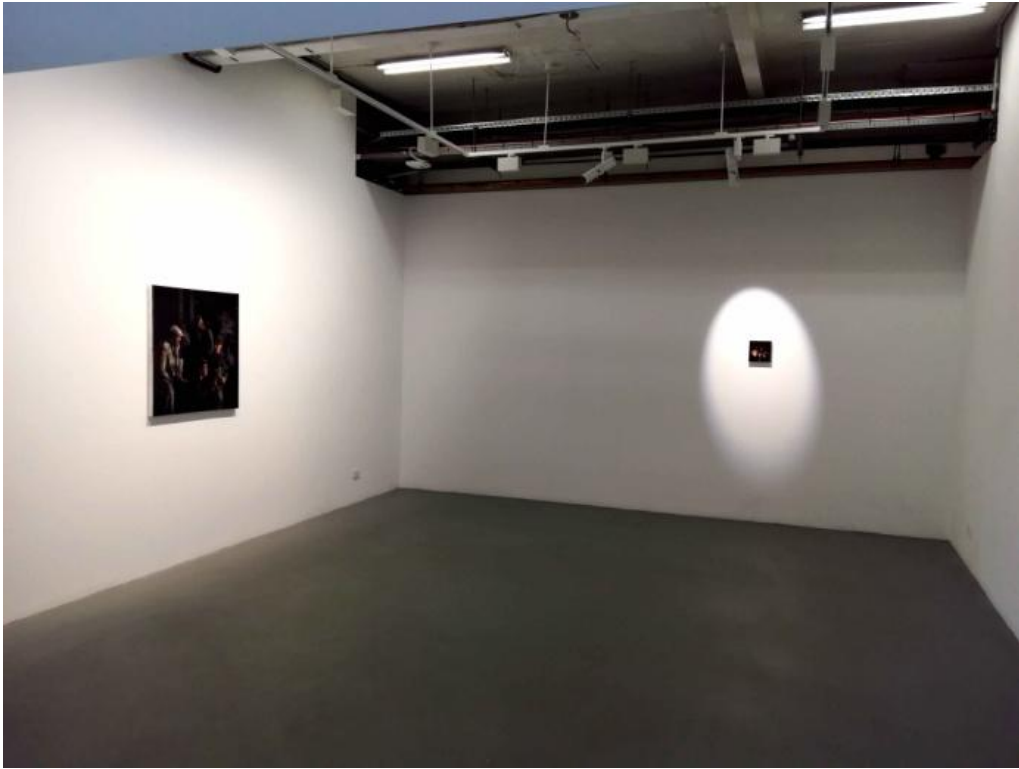


Figure 11. Room 2.



Figure 12. Room 3.