

# Study on the Modern Lacquer Painting in China

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**Published: 22 August 2019**

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## **Abstract:**

Lacquer technology is one of the traditional Chinese crafts with a long history. With the continuous development of lacquer technology, lacquer painting has developed from decorative patterns on utensils to a special kind of independent art. As a new kind of painting, after decades of continuous development, Lacquer painting's unique artistic language is more varied and has a very broad prospects for development. At present, lacquer painting, like other kinds of paintings, is facing many challenges both in artistic form and artistic technique. Presenting the face of this era with more precise artistic language means that there are essential changes both in creative thinking and in creative methods. The innovation of materials, the change of ideas and the preservation of traditional skills in lacquer painting creation are also the problems that researchers need to think about when they seek the way for the development of modern lacquer painting.

**Key words:** lacquer painting art; lacquer materials; cultural spirit; traditional painting

## **I. Aesthetics View of Chinese Lacquer Painting**

Lacquer has a very long history. According to research, it was used as early as 8000 years ago. In 1978, a lacquerware was discovered at the Hemudu site in Yuyao city, Zhejiang Province of China. It was recognized by archaeologists as the earliest lacquerware in the world. As early as in the primitive society, there's an important relationship between people and lacquer. Nowadays, lacquer painting, as a kind of painting, is separated from lacquer art. The materials, techniques, language of Lacquer painting

have a unique charm. The distinct artistic language of lacquer painting is created by the characteristics of lacquer. In the creation of lacquer painting, the relationship between “lacquer” and “painting” should be well handled, and the restriction of Lacquer painting creation should be changed into freedom, so as to unify feelings, aesthetics and materials. While inheriting traditional crafts, it also has its unique painting language. Many artists are making continuous efforts to create the future of lacquer painting.

### **i. Lacquer Painting materials**

Compare with other painting arts, Contemporary lacquer painting's special character in the various materials, and as time goes on, the types of lacquer materials are increasing day by day. The creation and performance of lacquer painting depends on the understanding of the lacquer materials in details. Up to now, the common lacquer painting materials are natural lacquer (raw lacquer, processed lacquer), mixed lacquer (cashew nut lacquer, various kinds of color lacquer, etc.), chemical paint (polyurethane paint, nitrovarnish, etc.), diluent (turpentine, Tung oil, gasoline, etc.), base plate (wood, plastic, metal plate, pottery plate, etc.), Painting pigments (silver, orange, red sand, titanium blue, titanium white, fluorescent green, emerald, stone blue, ochre yellow, metal particles, propylene pigments, etc.) and various inlay materials (mole, eggshell, shell, gold and silver foil, ore, pearl and metal, etc.).

It should be emphasized that natural lacquer, as the main material of lacquer painting, is cut from the lacquer trees. It has good properties such as environmental protection, heat resistance, acid resistance, wear resistance, good stickiness and so on. At the same time, it also has the beauty of luster. Therefore, it has the reputation of "King of Paints". It can accommodate the texture and color of different materials, and naturally derives brilliant and colorful aesthetic effects in the application of different techniques. Such as crack opening of eggshell, natural color of mole, metallic luster of gold and silver foil, abstract beauty generated by dilution and rheology of lacquer, and texture of various materials, through unique techniques such as grinding, covering, mosaic, varnish, sculpture, grinding and so on, the final effect of lacquer painting is not only visual, but also tactile.

The aesthetic appreciation of material itself is abstract. Different colors, textures and shapes will induce the creator to produce inspiration and urge the painter to "feel and develop". The material beauty in lacquer painting reflects the sensitivity and wisdom of the painter in choosing materials. The use of materials should be closely related to the purpose of conveying feelings and expressing ideas. when they are transformed into visual symbols , materials could be have vitality and aesthetic value.



**Figure 1**

## **ii. Lacquer Painting techniques**

Material and technique have always been inseparable. Lacquer painting production techniques are very complex, from the bottom plate, scraping ash, painting, shade drying, grinding, polishing, cleaning, there are more than a dozen working procedure, each of which is testing people's mind, sharpening people's patience. In addition, the decorative techniques of lacquer painting are more abundant: meticulous and elegant description, full of gold and silver with "golden stone flavor", colorful and beautiful mosaic, smart and fluent splashing paint, ghost axe magic wrinkle paint varnish, relief texture stacking paint, etc. In terms of technological means, there are painting, pasting, stacking, engraving, dyeing, spraying, wrinkling, covering, patting, rubbing, filling, grinding and so on. The lacquer techniques in Chinese Ming Dynasty's ancient book "*Xiu Shi Lu*" are even more "incomprehensible with thousands of literary works". There are more than 800 kinds of lacquer techniques in Ming Dynasty's ancient book "*Xiu Shi Lu*". Every technique measures people's artistic foundation and aesthetic feelings. The whole process of lacquer painting is not only the unity of eyes, hands and hearts, but also the unity of looking for lacquer's core and painting's core. Modern Chinese lacquer painting is more common decorative techniques such as color painting (nature lacquer painting, gold and silver painting), abrasive painting (varnish, dill painting, cover paint), mosaic (screw inlay, metal inlay, eggshell inlay, bone and stone inlay), engraving paint (engraving lines, lime embellishment or carving filling), stacking paint (shallow pile, thick heap), etc. Lacquer painting decoration techniques are incomparable to other kinds of paintings. Lacquer painters need to fully grasp the advantages, characteristics, and study and adapt in practice, in order to discover the mystery of them. (Figure2)



**Figure 2**

### **iii. Lacquer Painting artistic language**

The most precious thing in art is the characteristics. Lacquer painting is a painting creation with lacquer as the main medium. So the originality of lacquer painting is spirit of lacquer. Spirit of lacquer is the most fundamental artistic language that distinguishes lacquer painting from other kinds of paintings. Because the natural lacquer has a unique amber tone after being refined, the color paint prepared by it also has a yellowish-brown color, which is a layer deeper than the color powder before being added to the lacquer, so the dark pattern of lacquer painting color makes most of the works elegant, implicit and mysterious. The light and dark layers of lacquer painting are related to polishing. The longer the same color is polished, the brighter color will be. On the contrary, the darker color will be.

In order to meet the requirements of lacquer painting technology, we should choose subjects which can give full play to their special skills according to the characteristics of lacquer painting. Lacquer painting material, color, luster, texture constitute the inherent advantages of the decorative field, so decorative style is a common and important form of expression in lacquer painting. The "decorative" language of lacquer painting is different from realistic and abstract painting style. Realistic painting is based on scientific and rigorous perspective and anatomy, abides by the aesthetic concept of "imitation theory", and forms a vivid representation of objective reality. The object of lacquer painting can only be achieved by means of technology. Due to the limitation of technology, lacquer painters usually simplify, deform, exaggerate and strengthen the object, creating a decorative form different from reproducing nature and objective description. The inspiration of abstract painting comes from subjective idea or rational analysis. The most essential modeling elements, namely point, line and surface, abandon the influence and restraint of objective objects. Some aspects of the modeling elements of lacquer painting are based on points, lines and surfaces, but they do not simply represent points, lines and faces as the

only modeling elements. Thus, the essential difference between lacquer painting and abstract painting is maintained. Lacquer painting between realism and abstraction should not only draw on pure painting language properly, but also take into account the characteristics of lacquer art and the styles of lacquer decoration.

Lacquer painting emphasizes the artistry of materials, highlights the unique value of technological means and objective materials, and emphasizes the modern design thinking. The combination of the technology and materials makes the art of lacquer painting more modern. Lacquer painting inherent characteristics and advantages, coupled with the creation of different practitioners, make modern lacquer painting presents a variety of aesthetic features and expression ideas. (Figure3)



**Figure 3**

## **II. The Present Situation and Problems of Modern Lacquer Painting in China**

### **i. Relationship between Drawing and Technological Properties of Lacquer Painting**

Drawing is the artistic commonness of all kinds of paintings. It is both concrete and abstract, and drawing starts from the artistic language in painting and involves all factors of painting. Drawing is not only the core performance of the work, but also the expression of the spirit of the picture. The artist's performance in painting is the main content, and the feeling of the viewer is also a part of the drawing.

Lacquer painting is no exception, with its own unique artistic language and form of expression. The Brush strokes and traces produced by the special auxiliary materials used in lacquer painting are the most intuitive expression of its drawing, the craftsmanship of lacquer is also the unique artistic language that lacquer painting differs from other kinds of paintings. Lacquer material is auxiliary and subordinate to the whole picture, if only the outstanding techniques of consciousness and Lacquer painting will lose its drawing and become a handicraft. The symbiosis of craftsmanship and drawing in lacquer painting makes lacquer painting particularly unique in contemporary painting. The drawing of lacquer painting should be embodied in the creation of ideas on the premise of being familiar with the characteristics of lacquer materials, so that the subject of appreciation can no longer only see the surface but interpret the deeper content through its representation. Therefore, drawing is the basic element of lacquer painting.

Drawing is a very broad concept. It is the carrier of lacquer, visual form, starting from the language of painting, and involves various comprehensive factors in painting. It is a spiritual form, containing the artist's feelings and concepts. It's concrete that artists create special texture from lacquer painting, it's abstract that the viewer can't fully analyze the content that the artist wants to express in his creation. Lacquer painting also has its own craftsmanship. Lacquer painting's craftsmanship is the unique drawing language of lacquer painting. When creating lacquer paintings, we should master the inspiration of lacquer materials, at the same time, achieve the common expression of craftsmanship and drawing, more ideological and artistic expression, so that we can continuously improve, so that viewers can see no longer the "surface phenomenon" such as techniques, but a deeper level of thought.

## **ii. Development of lacquer painting materials and Pluralistic Innovation of Lacquer Painting**

Chinese lacquer painting has been closely linked with materials and techniques from the beginning. The difference between eastern and Western lacquer paintings lies in the use of large lacquer and chemical paint. The difference of main materials and media determines the particularity of Chinese lacquer painting and lacquer painting culture. Lacquer is still the main material of lacquer painting creation in China, and it is particularly important for the research and innovation of lacquer materials. Natural lacquer has unique advantages and is the dominant material in lacquer painting creation. But in the process of lacquer painting creation, we can also use eggshell, gold foil, silver foil, wire and other materials synthetically. With the development of the times, materials can be innovated continuously. With the development of science and technology, chemical synthetic lacquers such as cashew nut lacquer are gradually used in lacquer painting. Compared with natural lacquers, they have faster drying speed, higher transparency, very convenient color mixing and color types, which bring a lot of convenience to the creation of lacquer paints, and also play a very good complement to natural lacquers. It is also helpful to solve the problem of allergy caused by lacquer.

The innovation of lacquer painting materials and techniques will also promote the development of the subject matter, content and artistic expression of lacquer painting. For example, Beijing lacquer artist Zhou Jianshi's innovation is to decorate glass with lacquer, breaking the habit of using wood baseplate for lacquer painting in the past. The bright, quiet and elegant transparent glass, combined with the gorgeous, thick and mysterious decoration of lacquer art, brings new enjoyment and pleasure to people. In the creation of lacquer painting, in addition to excavating its potential, it can also properly

draw the essence of other forms of painting properly and find the similarities between the painting species, so as to enrich the decoration techniques of lacquer painting. Such as brush strokes mottled like oil painting scrapers, the splashing ink of freehand brushwork drives the "splashing paint" technique of lacquer painting, carving and colour matching in engraving promote lacquer's gold and silver carving. These valuable experiments have broadened the freedom of modern lacquer painting form expression. Although they will also attract controversy, they do provide a variety of ideas for the development of modern lacquer painting art.

### **III. Conclusion**

Chinese modern lacquer painting, as an independent kind of painting, inherits the ancient lacquer art and conforms to the development of today's easel art. It has dual attributes of painting and craft. Because lacquer painting has unique advantages in material, technique and art language, it attracts a large number of artists to study it. However, it is far from enough to be absorbed in the study of materials and techniques. Excellent lacquer painters should pay more attention to the expression of spirit and emotion and the innovation of lacquer painting art in their creation. The inheritance and innovation of lacquer painting culture in China needs an international perspective. We should not only strengthen and attach importance to the study of the ontological language of lacquer painting art in China, but also actively learn from global experience and integrate the advantages of the Orient and Occident art. The energy that Chinese modern lacquer painting need maybe come from the comprehensive use of lacquer painting materials, the individualization of lacquer painting language, the deepening of lacquer painting culture, the systematization of lacquer painting theory, the promotion of lacquer painting education and other aspects of continuous diversification of innovation.

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