

# Aesthetic Embodiment of Surrealism in Modern Design

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**Abstract**—As the trend of thought in literature and art of western bourgeoisie in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, surrealism originates from France and has extensive influences. The concept of surrealism and its artistic practice are analyzed and the application and influence of surrealist works in modern design are teased. Surrealist works different from traditional types of visual arts convey different values and meanings. Meanwhile, the artistic forms and concepts are understood and explained from many perspectives to promote its better development and innovation in modern design.

**Keywords**—modernism; surrealism; design aesthetics

## I. INTRODUCTION

As a school with the longest activity time of modernism through half a century, surrealism pays attention to the development and application of new skills and the performance and explores as well as expresses inner world. Its artistic practice exists in people's heart, expresses people's potential consciousness to create novel and shocking works. Compared with western artistic works before the 20th century, it subverts tradition and opens a new path.

## II. GIST AND PERFORMANCE OF SURREALISM

Surrealism is a school of modernism. Its artistic creation pursues deliberate anti-logical and anti-rational artistic tendency through excavating subconscious force. It takes "surreal" and "super-reasonable" dreamland and illusion as sources of artistic creation and addresses the surreal "unconscious" world can break the tether and reveal true objective facts.<sup>1</sup> Intuitionism of Burgring, a French philosopher of subjective idealism and "subconscious" theory of Freud, a Austrian psychopathologist lay philosophical and theoretical foundations for surrealism, which tremendously influences the tradition opinions on art.

The creation of surrealism adopts "self-conscious writing" and "automatic writing".<sup>2</sup> They stress writing must be absolutely true and pure unconscious activity without art processing and forms of logical thinking. In writing, poets rapidly record things spring up in their mind. Words depend

on occasional combination. They even use some letter or symbol to replace if no existing vocabularies can express. Anti-logicality is a characteristic of their creation. Most are difficult to understand and fail to conform to syntactic structure and law of logical thinking. Some become word games.

For surrealist artists, things and combinations in reality are insufficient to express their fancy dreamland, sub-consciousness and fantasy. They have to find new images. For example, some use organic biological forms to create pristine sceneries and images to leave deep impression on people; or explore new combinational relation and inclusion relation between things and allocate different things together oddly. Therefore, according to personal preference, artists try to be unique and build new pictures, like "the eight immortals cross the sea and each shows his special prowess". They develop artistic world with strong personal style.

## III. APPLICATION OF SURREALISM IN MODERN DESIGN

### A. Design Works of Surrealist Artists

In order to highlight the individuality and avoid similarity and reduce commercial atmosphere of advertisements of music record, magazine cover, art festivals and world expo, renowned painters are specially invited to design through painting forms. Most surrealist artists have performed work on it. They apply technique of pure artistic creation to commercial design to expand the scope of art concept.

Dali and Miro participate in plane design in person. Creation concepts and techniques of painting are transferred to plane design without impediment. Dali expresses unique talents and styles in description of temperament and interest. In order to obtain illusion of creative inspiration, surrealist masters work according to their ability. Dali pulls in his belt to enter the hallucinatory state. In the imaginary space, whimsicality, gruesomeness, eroticism and mystery, theoretical analysis and wild fantasy pass comprehension. These images are so strange but seem so absurd and dreamlike "Fig. 1".<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Zhai Mo. Surrealism [M], People's Fine Arts Publishing House, 2000

<sup>2</sup> Lu Yingxiang. Research on Aesthetic Ideology of Surrealist Paintings [D], Shandong University, 2008

<sup>3</sup> Yang Tiantian. Influence of Surrealist Paintings on Environmental Art Design [D], Henan Normal University, 2011

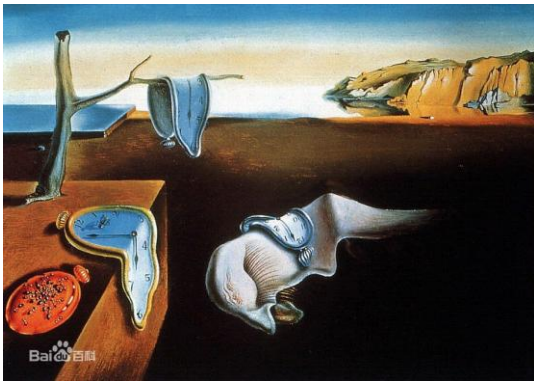


Fig. 1. The *Persistence of Memory* Salvador Dali.

Plane design created by Miro has many similarities with his pure artistic works. In works of plane design, he is adept in using images created subjectively and sometimes is color, dot, line and painting. The pictures are depicted according to internal feelings and illusion that remind people of images in reality "Fig. 2". Some are transformed to meet needs of composition and pictures. Miro uses fantastic free images and peculiar contents to express mental state and inner world. The imagination and technique innovation create works with different styles and have strong worldwide influence.<sup>4</sup>

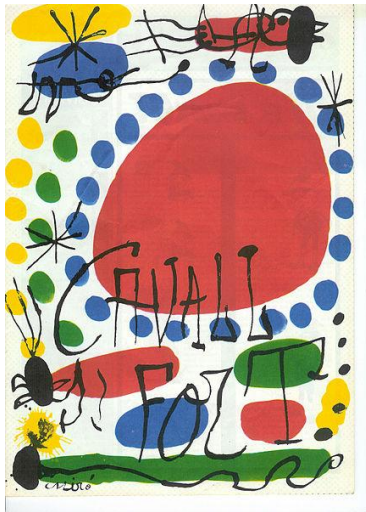


Fig. 2. *Illustrations for Children's Magazines* Miro.

#### B. Design Works under the Influence of Surrealism

Surrealism has obvious influence on visual effects of illustration and layout which embody in ideology and spirit as well as graphic structure and surface. Paul Klee and Joe Miro use curve picture or sculpture with forms like amoeba "Fig. 3". In the 1940s and 1950s, people selected these biological forms to express all modern things, including package design, exterior trim of furniture, glass wares or coffee tables. Graphic designers seek examples of inspiration from works of painters, which show art can provide more

<sup>4</sup> Ran Jian. Application of Surrealist Paintings in Plane Design [D], Hunan University of Science and Technology, 2013.

freedom of expression and less restriction of times for designers.<sup>5</sup>



Fig. 3. Paul Klee Surrealist Painting.

#### IV. REPRESENTATIVES OF SURREALISM AND THEIR MASTER WORKS

The French writer Breton published the first *Surrealist Manifesto*. In 1929, Breton published the second manifesto of surrealism that explains the surrealist artistic ideas in detail. In 1930, Desnos published the third manifesto of surrealism. Therefore, the artistic principle of surrealism is embodied comprehensively and completely.

The creation of Miro deliberately disorganizes normal order of consciousness and expresses instant telepathy through abstract language under the intuitive guidance. Therefore, symbols and simplified images exist in his works to make it free and abstract with childlike breath such as *A Man Throwing Stone at the Bird*, *Dutch Interior Design*. Dali observes artists should record unconscious images accurately so he uses "concretization" to copy phantoms produced by abnormal logical thinking and integrate things totally unrelated, in order to make the picture full of dramatics and bring people visual and psychological shocking such as the works of *External Memory*, *Presentiment of Internal Disorder*.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Surrealism is a pure psychological activity that reflects many secrets in the depth of people's soul. People can understand themselves completely only through expressing potential consciousness, so that all motivations in the real world can be explained.<sup>6</sup>

In creation of paintings like pop art and pictorial poster after the surrealism, we can clearly find the existence of surrealism. With the development of times, surrealism has increasingly extensive application in modern film,

<sup>5</sup> Ran Jian. Application of Surrealist Paintings in Plane Design [D], Hunan University of Science and Technology, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Lu Yingxiang. Research on Aesthetic Ideology of Surrealist Paintings [D], Shandong University, 2008

photography, apparel design and building design "Fig. 4". Designers pursue imaginary pictures with increasingly bold technique and peculiar creativity. The development of science and technology increases the paths and possibilities of surreal design. For example, spray gun and mist sprayer are applied to create high quality pictures with surrealist styles, referring to the positive side. The negative side is also prevailing. Surrealist artists get trapped in passive fantasy when pursuing imagination, so that some works become products of fantasy without emotional participation. Subsequent artists deliberately create some weird and resounding techniques of artistic creation and bring vulgar factors in the domain of art, leading to the chaos of modern art and postmodernist art.<sup>7</sup>



Fig. 4. Surreal Building of Dionisio Gonzalez.

In conclusion, surrealism tremendously enlightens modern design on plane and space creation. People's thoughts and creativity are infinite. People's sub-consciousness, factors in dreams and reality create peculiar, fantastic and weird pictures with abnormal and unreasonable themes. Inconceivable novel points combine beyond the restriction of automatic and mechanical forms,<sup>8</sup> in order to make people create aesthetic visual works beyond relation in reality and cognition through unfamiliarity processing in modern design.

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