

The Departure Moment of the "Delay Concentration" Program ——A Profound Conversation between Photography and Painting

Ma Jun

School of Fine Arts,
Nanjing Normal University

I tended to get frustrated in the past when I took pictures of my loved ones. It was like Roland Barthes who had never had any anticipation for photographs since he never managed to “see again” his mother in them. He tried in vain to recall the outline of his mother's face. It's not as clear as the illusion of what it took to look at a “substantial” photograph. Tracing back to the time we were in love, when I used to draw pictures of my loved ones and it looked like him before it accurately took the shape.

The recollection of these two events at the same time produced a most wonderful sensation. It is believed by Rodin that photography would lie while art was realistic, and it was. Photos that are regarded as reality by most people are actually more "virtualized" than what they think of as "art of virtuality", where the concepts of virtuality and reality are transformed by 180 degrees. This is obviously contrary to what is commonly understood as "greater precision by mechanical reproduction".

I started to learn painting by accident when I was in the second grade of primary school and engaged in paint portraits at the very beginning with little experience of childhood painting. In spite that the work at that time was far from shape-accurate, the elderly gentleman of Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts praised my likeness and said that my style was like Agrippa and Marseille. After attaining my wish to be admitted to the major of painting in university, I diligently practiced my skills and focused on the refining of certain details, such as whether it

was possible to paint the left eye and right eye simultaneously with both hands, just like taking photos. Nevertheless, there was only one pen point falling on the paper in sketching. Upon turning to the teacher for help and jointly conducted inquiry on this, I found the preciousness of such resignation with the ultimate reason for the insolubility of this problem, which, however, planted the seeds for my reflection in the future.

Despite that it looks like we are just looking up to observe and immersing ourselves in painting in sketching, certain vital work is also under way, namely the preservation and rumination of impression. It can be said that the mastery of painting techniques depends more on such ability of "impression preservation and rumination". For all that the decline of impression occurs naturally in the process of painting and it is impossible to capture it in a moment like a camera, the accumulated thought process of painters' understanding of objects over time helps them finally retain the contour and color that actually constitute the objects and thus acquire something beyond the eyes.

The exploration on the relationship between painting and photography has never ceased since the initiation of the history of photography, and there have been the emergence of schools such as pictorial photography or photographic painting. I have been thinking that there has be a way to offer a profound conversation between the two in the first place, which will be the result of the conscious benefit of painting to photography rather than the harvest in despair of the latter. In addition to formally combining portrait photography and portrait painting, the ambition of carrying out this experiment is to realize the unprecedented collision and integration between painting and photography by virtue of the persuasive power of portrait painting process (delay) on portrait photography picture (concentration), so as to promote the realization of various desires in the past. I'm sure that the excitement of the moment is entirely from the vision of the results instead of curiosity, which is bound to lead to new thinking.

I. Unlikeness

1. Beware of the Scam of Impression Slice

With its unprecedented and coincident representation of the objective world, the appearance of the camera compelled painters who were still dedicated to resemblance portrait to either retire in the 19th century or turn to areas beyond the reach of photography, hence resulting in the emergence of modernist painting. Even though a favorable shift in the history of painting, the other side of the story is that photography is not so easy in some way and thus in fact their worry on this is redundant. The tree or house it frames may not surely to depict the photographer's emotions; Its accuracy fails to prevent the varying quality; It can snapshot a person without realizing the exact likeness.

Frequently I receive complaints about the fear of taking photographs by a friends around, who, when come out of the selfie booth, tend to say that, "oh my god, how could I be so dull." The person in the photo looks more like a criminal in police custody than the person they know. Despite that it's easy to generate such fear, it's rare that some of them pose questions on beauty. Nowadays, a number of pictures without any likeness with them are saved in people's photo albums. In addition to the deliberately lying part (such as inferior photography), the instantaneous reproduction ability of photography manages to capture certain abnormal moments, that is, some images that are regarded as more pretty than our normal selves. The sheer numbers of photos in the album that don't in any likeness with us even encourage us to take more of them and throw a good deal of money at them. Its consequence is that we tend to sign with confused memory upon reviewing them when we get old: "it's good even though photography has turned me into a medium, anatomical and meaningless human being." Nevertheless, the true images of us are still substituted by the ones in these photos.

2. Offense of Photography

In order to get unpredictable results, photographers tend to sneak in unsuspecting strangers by mixing with crowds. Sometimes they get caught by people secretly filmed, who neither have idea about the motive of the photographer nor have access to the images that have been recorded. People are tired of the sound of the shutter shot when they are caught off guard, given that they have become personal belongings of the photographer when they are clearly involved in it. Pierre Bonnard believes that "the absurdity of portrait photography lies in the inevitable degree of offence. The result can be almost barbaric in case that the photographer is not sensitive enough". Samuel Butler makes a more direct complaint: "there is a photographer in every bush, roaring around like a lion looking for someone to devour."²

However, similar problem is also faced by face-to-face photographing. The subjects still has to contend with the relentless act of photography after expressing their desire. Roland Barthes likens portrait photography to a "tournament field". The subject has to play four roles in front of the camera: "the person I think I am, the person I want to be thought I was, the person the photographer think I am, and the person the photographer takes to show off his artistic talent."¹ Everything is at the mercy of the lens of the camera and the hands of the photographer.

At the same time, the subject was posing in panic, which is described by a friend as "Along with the camera came an uncomfortable feeling. It gave me so little time that I hear the click when I was still hesitating with a smile or a little seriousness. So next time I had to turn myself into an image early to avoid any trouble." He ended up tolerating the whole process almost in a state of uneasiness and speculation.

3. Non-likeness

"Photographing" is the process of acquisition, while "image" is the respect for light, which constitute the essence of photography. Photography has long enjoyed a good reputation for its "instantaneity", which has indeed stretched the vision and enabled us to see milk splashing and dead leaves spinning and falling by successfully condensing images that are difficult to capture by naked eyes. When applied to humans, however, this advantage should be an alternative theory.

According to Sontag, people in primitive areas "feared that part of their lives would be taken by cameras."¹ With a similar "vague fear" of the subject, Balzac believed that the body was made up of layers of images, and that each shot would "take one of the layers of the body it focuses on, disengage it and use it up"² rather than create something out of nothing. Thus it can be seen that what the image frames must be a part and the only part of the subject, and what is consumed is closer to the flesh and blood body than the soul. With a click, the camera cuts off the subject's breathe and ruthlessly cuts out a layer or slice. That's it. You can no longer demand insight or experience from a machine.

However, upon recording someone in our cognition, in addition to physical appearance and body shape, we also include their speech and behavior as well as deeper spiritual communication, which will constantly deepen and correct our impression of him/her. It is only in constant motion that the meaning of objects is revealed, and so is the nature of man. When looking at a picture of someone, the preconceptions could be hard to be avoided. Nevertheless, the task of the camera is simply to capture, and all the photographer can do is try to capture a moment that is close to the essence of the subject (provided he fully understands the essence of it). Whereas, the frequent "unlikeness" still demonstrates that "moments should not be relied on in reflecting the essence of a person, which is revealed in a series of actions rather than in a moment".¹

The picture we're left with afterwards is subtle yet not that bad (given that if the person in the photo is not someone they know in life, "it's easy to take the observer in the other direction by integrating and making up for the internal and external phenomena in the photo,"¹ the results can be either bad or good). The scariest of all is the ambiguous reality of a photograph that looks "lifelike," which will indeed divert the image a thousand miles. "I'm afraid they're really going to think I'm such a cynic," a writer friend apparently disapproved of the hasty portrait of him on the flap. "I'd rather have a portrait which would at least sum up the real me in a serious way."

II. Experimental Conception after Returning to Source

1. Value and Purpose of River-crossing (Reflection)



Velazquez of Spain painted for the royal family in the 17th century and won Philip IV's approval for his "first real portrait." At the invitation of the Pope, Velazquez created the famous *Portrait of Pope Innocent X* (see Figure 1), which not only depicted the sensitivity and cunning of Innocent, but also exposed his weak body. "It's greater than likeness," the Pope said with embarrassment when seeing it and did not have the courage to show it to the public in spite of accepting it.

In fact, Velazquez had always adhering to the concept of observation without intervention in painting rather than mixing his own likes or dislikes. Therefore, he could be regarded as having achieved the objective recording like a camera to some extent. For all that he also painted for the poor, he applied the same principle to princes, nobles, or peddlers, that is, to paint as the subjects were. In his quest for authenticity, Velazquez spent much of his time studying anatomy, shape and color, and it was during this long process that Velazquez gradually deepened his insight into human nature. Today, a statue of Velazquez inscribed on a pedestal "In Memory Of A Real Painter" remains in his hometown of Sevilla.

Artistic creation can be compared to crossing a river. Regardless of how turbulent the current is, there is always a great attraction for us to cross over, that is, the courage and confidence given us by the scenery on the other side.

Despite that the original motivation of "river-crossing theory" is to elaborate the relationship between basic skills and creative release, the deeper significance does not end there actually. My conclusion is negative in that it is not only people who have studied

painting that can acquire the art of photography. Just like knowing swimming, people who have studied painting may be advantageous and refer to past experience when they see the river. People who have never been exposed to painting may also have unique thinking about the experience of crossing the river when they jump into the water and struggle. The power of "previous life" in the soul can be transformed into the power of artistic epiphany, which can promote the long-term development of photography art by exerting its supporting role in artistic creation and help you "figure out" faster than others. Humility is the primary condition. Contempt for the "habitual methods of creation" that are common to others is like a "primitive man" in your "forerunner." Different from most primitive man, if you don't frequently complain about the bad feeling of being wet by the river when you cross the river, but can enjoy the extreme wonderful experience like a marathon runner even in the bad environment, it is the so called "mental state of suffering while enjoying", which, if exists in your "previous life", might endow you with the potential of artistic creation.

On the premise of denying habits, the thought of "Tao models itself after nature" is also necessary. Most primitive people did not own bridges or boats when they firstly crossed the river. With a strong desire and purpose to cross the river, they hated that the river hindered their journey and generated the desire to build boats and bridges, the design behavior of which is beneficial to human beings. There is, however, another type of person that must be emphasized here, that is, men of craftsmanship and peasant mentality. With great respect for nature, they enjoy the lifestyle of "praying for heaven" and "thanking the earth" instead of pursuing "transgenic" or "mass production". Such life style in line with the "Tao" is exactly warning us that we should always remind ourselves of "acquiring rather than learning" in artistic creation, which is the demonstration of respect for the relationship between man and nature from the heart.

In traditional paintings, the lack of bridges between the two shores leads to the road seeming to be blocked by the river in front of us, when the only way is to swim across it. On the way from the water to the shore, the river damps the body and brings a thrilling and delightful experience, as well as a sense of insignificance of oneself out of being in it. Thought there is no certainty about what's more important, crossing the river or the process of crossing it, it is obvious that each of the journeys is full of contingency and unescapable excitement, which is what we call the peak experience. There are numerous uncertainties in the ever-changing water that bring people with inevitably fear. However, suppose we only focus on speeding to the other side and ignore the various experiences in the process, our gains including the content to share with others after crossing the river will be greatly reduced.

Unprecedented challenges are met by photography, which build a bridge between the two shores of the river and tempted us to go across it. The bridge is becoming more technologically advanced and we are even welcome to drive there nowadays, which makes

the crossing as easily as walking on firm earth, whereas the crossing seems to be merely the crossing in itself. The lack of elevation in the river makes it difficult for us to notice the difference between the scenery on the other side of the river. As a result, we become frustrated and confused that why is it so difficult to create a photographic work that is as readable and appealing as an outstanding painting?

We have an out-of-body experience of crossing the bridge while our hearts are plunged into the river below and imagine being buffeted, bathed and feeling the sensation of crossing a river when there is no bridge.

The advanced and developed bridge is like our increasingly updated photographic equipment. The more advanced the equipment, the more easily the value of crossing the river will be forgotten, and the much more emphasis on the purpose of crossing the river, which will ultimately leads to the deprivation of the experience of crossing the river. The origin of creation is that whether the photographic way of thinking is applied in the observation of the world and the expression of hearts, as well as whether our hearts are adopted to demonstrate things that move us. On the contrary, the absence of such mentality will lead to the fact that even the purest film cameras and the most professional equipment fail to take pictures related to art. Slow down and ease the shutter speed. Ask yourself why you are doing this before pressing the shutter button and, that is, ask what has moved you rather than producing garbage in disks by simple finger movements. Only by solving these confusions can photography be hopefully turned into a power of art.

2. Back to the Origin of Painting

We might as well recall the few childhood photographs or early works in the history of photography, which, though plain and simple, can better be described as masterpieces of sketches or painted portraits. The light that seeps out of the darkness is deeper and more stable than the flash of frozen light.

Benjamin proposed the word "aura" in his *Kleine Geschichte der Photographie*: "the process of exposure enables the subject 'live' into the moment of filming rather than 'live' out of it. He seems to have entered and settled in the image during the long time of exposure".¹ The reason "aura" existed in early portraiture photography was due to the limitations of the technology at that time (copper plate has a low sensitivity), which led to the insurmountable darkness. The image of a person in a photograph was the result of long exposure. Being intentional or not, these early photography works that are similar to traditional painting in terms of production time did condense the multi-dimensional images into one dimension. Unlike the absolute capture of moments in today's photography, they are of more resemblance with paintings that reveal the inner continuity of subjects.

Three stages are bound to be included in a complete process of artistic creation, that is, experience, conception and communication, while pressing the shutter can only be included in the third step, before which there is almost no time for in-depth experience, silent observation and emotional precipitation. In addition to causing panic in the subject, the click also confuses the photographer, who may even feel like a failure at the moment the shutter is pressed. In this way, why don't we find out by throwing our minds into the river? It is firmly believed by Faucon that "photography can be developed before photography (the similarity with painting)... Photography continues what painting engaged before it was invented by inheriting the way of thinking about painting creation. Dual research on painting and photography provides my good reason for persistence.

3. Experimental Conception: A Profound Conversation between Painting and Photography

The experimental conception on painting and photography shall by no means be promoted as a creative process of photography (nor can it be promoted due to its non-reproducibility). As an unprecedented in-depth reflection on the relationship between painting and photography, my expectation is that such relationship will run through the entire creative process, which will constantly carry out reflection and expression on the relationship at the same time.

In spite of the concerns and doubts generated in my conceiving of the logic and framework of the whole experiment, it was the interlocking confusion and query that have instructed and verified to me the significance of conducting such an exploration in the first place. With the persuasiveness of portrait painting process (delay) acting on portrait photography picture (concentration), the result it present is bound to offer justifications for subsequent research.

The experimental conception of the deep conversation between painting and photography at this time is itself a major design. The nature of design can be easily inferred literally in the case that its boring concept in the conventional sense is broken. The word "design" can be divided into "assumption" and "planning":

"Assumption" refers to people's idea of changing the world resulting from their dissatisfaction with real life. There will be no meaning other than making the role of a young cynic if such dissatisfaction only stays at the level of complaining, while the designers has the ability to change the features of life.

"Planning" means plans that will determine whether there are solutions. Since it will determine the realization and implementation of the idea, the step-by-step and organized plans should be formulated after the idea of the transformation of real life is generated. Therefore, translating ideas into plans is a reflective process of building cooperation, while plans will form schemes. In view of the fact that any design to changes the face of the world

requires collaboration among design participants, the transformation of ideas into plans is a process of building collaboration and forming schemes. Some ideas have subversive effects on the overall scheme, upon the prototype of which are formed, professional designers in all fields will participate in it and achieve tacit cooperation in the process of the plans being implemented.

Therefore, the intrinsic characteristic of design is to improve the convenience and comfort of the function of life tools through the improvement, transformation or reform of life, so as to bring about the ever-increasing sense of pleasure and happiness in terms of emotions.

This design of the experiment on this unprecedented in-depth thinking over the relationship between painting and photography will be surely conducive in our recording the endless joy and insight that are generated at the origin and the course of the whole thinking process, which, being nonrenewable, might be recognized and respected by artists after years of accumulation. However, that doesn't matter because, as I've repeatedly argued, the most wonderful thing has been finished upon coming up with this experimental design conception!

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About Authors:

Ma Jun is a lecturer at School of Fine Arts, Nanjing Normal University.