

# Beauty and Its Elements

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Theme: [History](#)

*Everybody likes beauty, such as the beautiful things and beautiful people. It seems that humans are born to possess the ability to appreciate beauty, even though not so many people had ever thought about what it is. Obviously the sense of beauty, and the ideas about beauty had rooted into people's daily life long before Aesthetics appeared as a well-established sub-discipline of philosophy. Art is the notable representative of this discipline.*

It is certain that humans developed their sense of beauty, one of the prominent features of human feelings before they developed their logic of thinking. People also had mastered the essential skills in creating beautiful things before the theory of Aesthetics came out. I feel that the human civilization spent thousands of years in practicing art, while developing theories to interpret their art work, in a way agreeable to sensible people, not excluding the possible failure in their endeavor. Those critics might have tried to guide artists in their process of art creation, however, mostly worked out as a guide for appreciation or evaluation of art, because artists are always quicker than the critics, bestowed by their inborn sensitivity and ability to catch that artistic intuition from life. A new art style appeared usually after the economic, social or religious reforms, or science and mathematics discoveries, or birth of new philosophies.

The flourishing of art and literature during European renaissance period was not only due to the humanist rival of the ancient Greek culture, but also because of the influence of the new ideas appeared in the religion notably represented by Saint Augustine, as well as in discoveries in natural science and mathematics that provided the premises for the appearance of classic realism painting style, represented by da Vinci, and Michelangelo etc. who applied the one point perspective according to optical principle of human eyes, and used the shade and light effect to create the realist image. This period lasted almost four centuries. The capitalism in Europe matured around the same period after the industry revolution, coming along with it the global colonization, which brought great wealth to the capitalist, as well as the material improvement to people's life, while it also irritated some upright intellectuals and artists, who got disgusted with some of the side effects of the economic growth and capital colonization. Those artists started searching for new artistic elements and inspiration for their art creation. Then appeared all genres of western modern art one after another, such as Fauvism, Impressionism, Post-impressionism, Expressionism, Cubism, Futurism, Abstractionism, Dadaism, Surrealism, etc al, under the influence of a new trend of philosophies.

The work of those modern artists had encountered various resistance and attacks from the traditionalists, since it seemed either weird, ugly, or mysterious and confusing to traditional artists. However, the most significant ones eventually survived and even shined at their own time, and until now. Now days, culinary art became very popular, in which style, the way to display the art pieces, matters equally important as the art work itself, which combined with latter to create a modern art concept that is what truly matters. When Duchamp was

displaying a urine tub in the museum, which idea could be disgusting to a lot of people, it was inevitably accepted as an art piece by people with avant-garde mindset and thus created an unforgettable anecdote in modern art history. Is that also beautiful thing? But according to many philosophers, art is creation of beauty. Duchamp even added the mustache to the picture of Mona Lisa, seemed an irony to the ordinary artists. However, this was just one of the modern art styles, Dadaism, the art to protest, and marked this period of human art history by boldly showing their frustration about this more and more complex society and their struggle to reach for something new and different, and also by leaving such questions to people as what is art and where the art is leading us.

Beautiful things should not be difficult to find. We could give many examples which people with sensible faculty all agree to be beautiful, however, it may not be able to be defined by one certain concept. The pity is that modern people have fallen into the habit to define any philosophical terms in a fixed formation influenced by the numerous discoveries in science and mathematics in late centuries of last millennium, which could be accepted in any other domains, but not in defining what is beauty. Those discoveries and creations brought new inspiration to the artists on one side, while constrained the thoughts of some art critics on the other side.

Kant argues that the kinds of 'cognition' (i.e. thinking) characteristic of the contemplation of the beautiful are not much different from ordinary cognition about other things in the world. The faculties of the 'understanding' of people's mind is responsible for concepts, and that of 'sensibility' (including our imagination) is responsible for intuitions. The difference between the two is that in the case of aesthetic cognition, there is no one 'determinate' concept that pins down an intuition. Instead, intuition is allowed for some 'free play', and rather than being subject to one concept. Simply put it this way, the human's sensible faculty made the intuition possible, and the sense of beauty is aroused by intuition, as intuition is allowed for some freedom to do some playful "games" in the mind, purporting to reach a status of harmony with other related concepts in the mind, if necessary, and leads to the best pleasure possible.

Thus, we have obtained the basic idea about the sense of beauty, which is a feeling of a biological being who possesses the faculty of sensibilities. When one says something is beautiful, it doesn't simply mean this thing possesses "beauty" as its attribute, but also means this very person has the normal sensibility according the general understanding of our society, and/or to the common sense of this particular culture. It explains that evaluation of art involves two parts: the person who executes evaluation as the subject, and the piece of art to be evaluated as the object. And the sense of beauty can only be produced during the process of positive interaction between these two parts.

Humans have known the essential skills of creation of art for a long time. There is a proverb says: Art lies in concealing art and that beauty and honesty can never agree. In order to be honest, people are generally required to stick to the truth of the things, where the well-defined concepts and logic are applied, which are the jobs of another faculty of human mind, but the classical realism is built on the illusionary vision of people tricked by the realism painting techniques. The volume of the image and depth of the space that people see from the two-dimensional painting art are nothing but an illusion, and obviously not real. Plus, it is better to look at it at some distance than facing up onto it by inches, in order to get that ideal image desired. Nevertheless, most people like that painting style, since it suits the way of human's eyes. It would be easy for people to tell the beauty of a classic realism painting than of a post-impressionism one, an abstractionism one, or a Chinese literati's

painting. It takes some aesthetical training before people came to appreciate the new style of beauty created by the modern painting techniques, and meanwhile, training in traditional Chinese culture is required to understand and see the beauty of the Chinese scholar's art. However, it was not that those non-professionals simply couldn't see anything good from those art works. Some abstractionism art and Chinese literati's art may not be comparable to the former classic style in the sense of realistic presentation of images, but they have another type of beauty, that is the beauty of imagination associated with the freedom to unknown, available only from the art that had come through the ingenious maneuver of the master's hand and mind.

Chinese people like to say that people need nice apparel just as the statue of Buda needs a gold finish. People need to dress nicely in order to attract the other sex, and gain the respect of their friends and colleagues, that is to say, to make the latter feel pleasant to be with them. A statue of Buda in shiny outfit in the temple would attract a lot more prayers than the one in shabby clothes. That explains the psychology of ordinary people in daily aesthetics. It works on many occasions, and came with it of some painting styles that emphasize on the visual effect of the art. Nevertheless, I am afraid that it is not the final beauty.

There is another proverb that says beauty's sister is vanity, and her daughter is lust. Obviously, the shiny, colorful, extravagant things with fancy formality would feed to some people's taste on beauty, as those things could excite and please them. Sexy pose of women and nudes are another popular source of beauty in humans, which are associated with the people's biological need and the sub-consciousness of their mind. I guess this proverb had enlightened many artists in their art creation.

However, there is also one proverb that says the fair face needs no paint. I guess many Chinese painting artists, especially the literati's painter would agree with this. As their painting work emphasizes on the simplicity, purity, and a natural elegance without much need of ornaments or decoration. It also suits with many western modern art that focus more on ideas and concepts than colorful presentation.

I would like particularly mention one saying by our ancestor here that is: beauty's tear is lovelier than her smile, which had bothered me greatly before, because it is against the basic definition about beauty that is to bring the pleasant feeling to people. However, when we take our time to look into some greatest art works, whether in painting, or literature, or music. We may find some of the tragedies from the theatre, the blue music, the saddest painting work would produce the most striking feeling in the audience, by making them sad, weeping, but finally the extraordinary happiness arose from deep of their heart, after that amazing chemistry connected between them and the art, and the sudden release of that unbearable emotional burden that had probably been hanging on there for long time, without being noticed before. That is the beauty of tragedies. All grow-ups have gone through unfortunate life experiences themselves or seeing their dear ones doing so, and would be more likely to understand that beauty.

In addition, one very popular proverb says: beauty is in the eyes of beholder. When one is in love with another person, he would undoubtedly see the other one as a beauty regardless what her real look is. In this case, the appreciator already has a pleasant image in his mind, which only waited to be triggered by that particular person associated with that image. It explains that beauty is not just about skin deep. Appearance only matters to some degree in

producing the sense of beauty. Have we heard that a beauty without virtue is like a flower without fragrance and virtue is fairer far than beauty. These ideas existed in almost all cultures.

And one proverb directly defined virtue as the beauty of mind, which means that virtue itself is just one kind of beauty. Among virtues, goodness or kindness is the most mentioned one. People believe that goodness charms more than mere beauty, as if goodness is a higher level of beauty. Since the beauty's taste is pleasure, then we may say that goodness could cause stronger pleasant feeling among people than superficial beauty which is more focus on appearance. Furthermore, similar to goodness, grace is equally important to arouse that sense of beauty among people. Graceful people are nonetheless elegant, but pretty and stylish people are not necessarily graceful. Grace is shown in each move and manner of people with unspeakable charms shining out from a magic source hidden inside them, to silently influence and please people. As a matter of fact, grace is more lasting than beauty in its general meaning, mere beauty may fade and blast, however, grace will last with handsome appearance gone. We may say that it is another higher level of beauty.

Beautiful things can charm people by bringing them happiness with its enormous power that could be beyond the expression of art itself, which might draw much more than people can imagine. Just as if a person with full liberty would become most powerful ever, to some people, that is God. The final goal of beauty is the true freedom, so, to obtain the true sense of beauty is to achieve the true freedom of a person, that is to completely unify themselves with the universe, more concretely, is to follow the law of the universe, and to know what to do and what not to do. The real freedom is not to do whatever one likes to do, but can stop their doing when they are not supposed to do it. Especially in a complicated environment, to stay quietly by carefully listening to the revelation of the universe, or of God to some people, can gain yourself more freedom than act mindlessly.

Humans are originated from the universe, and the universe has created all kinds of models of beauties for them at the time of their birth, only waiting for them to find those beauties through their sensibility. Just like a new-born baby whose sole idol of beauty is its mother, when it is hungry, the mother's breast is the most beautiful; when it needs to be hugged, the mother's arms are the most beautiful ones, and when he needs to be kissed, the mother's lip is the most beautiful. All of those are to satisfy its basic needs for nutrition and love as a baby. When the baby grows up, he would find different beauty idols functioning as his mother's breast, arms, or lips, as his world is growing also. And they have to find out those beauties in order to achieve their freedom as a human. But in order to find those beauties, they need to learn about the universe, that's why human's civilization has developed so many sensible (can not only be felt by our sensors, but also make sense to our mind) disciplines to guide them, just as the mother has guided the new-born baby. The first time when the baby cries because it is hungry, it probably doesn't know where to get food, but the mother knows why and then put the tip of her breast into its mouth, and the cry stops. Next time, the baby would know where to search for its mother's breast when it is hungry. If this baby happens to be a naughty one, and tries to bite its mother's nose or ears to ease its hunger, then the mother probably wouldn't understand that, and would just throw it in its cradle, letting it crying for ever, and think this baby is ugly, because a beautiful baby in parent's eye would behave nicely since the looks of baby are not much different at this stage of their life.

An individual who can achieve his full liberty would be the most beautiful one, and the very beautiful person should be the one that has achieved great liberty. Any one can do it, under

the condition that there is no interruption of other people and other things, just like one of the laws of physics discovered by Newton, that a moved object could keep its motion permanently provided that there is no resistance against it at all. We all know that is not possible, since human is a social being with its own existence based on the coexistence of others., and the world is made of things of duo featured by its adversity. This is the dilemma of beauty, also of freedom. However, if we take all human as a unity, or as one person, then without the intervention of aliens, it would be much more simple, and it is possible for the human species to achieve its freedom to a great degree, and the human society would be so much better and much more pleasant to our senses. Thus the human's beauty as one unity matters most to all, while all humanly beings as parts of the unity also matter in this extraordinary and inevitable task of looking for freedom or beauty. The job of an artist is to create beauty, and to be an idealist, we could all be an artist if we may.

In painting or related arts, there are warm colors and cold colors. The ones close to the warm color spectrum include red, orange, yellow. The ones close to cold color spectrum include green, blue and purple. Nonetheless, there are much more colors in nature or to be concocted by people than the ones mentioned above. People have preferences to different colors, while each color has different impact on their mood and emotions, and gives different psychological suggestion to people. Red color usually makes people feel exciting and happy, which is a color of celebration and associated with passion, power, ambition, courage; orange and yellow colors are cheerful and warm-hearted, and could be extravagant as well delightful, which conveys a sense of achievement or sublimity, also associates with wealth, ripeness and maturity, or hope and desire; blue color represents tranquility, stability, calmness, and loyalty; green brings a peace of mind, also suggest growth, health, freshness and liveliness; purple is a color of dignity, represents wisdom, integrity, solemnity and pride; pink is a very feminine and sexy color, which signifies beauty and love; white signifies grandness, perfection, confidence, and cleanness; dark is a mysterious color which conveys fear, unknown world, also graveness.

One famous painting by Sandro Botticelli, *The Birth of Venus*, just used a light yellow color to paint Venus's naked body, which successfully created a beautiful and lovely goddess of love, which, with her birth, brought love and hope to the world. In the painting of *The Garden of Eden* by Michelangelo, the delightful yellow color of Eve and Adam occupies the center of the work and might indicate the desire of our first ancestors and hope of humans.

Those psychological suggestion of colors are not permanent to any person, nor the same to different people. Colors don't carry element of emotions themselves, but only reflect color-associated light waves of different length on human's eyes and cause different neuron reaction in their brain and accordingly produce the so-called color emotions. What people feel about different colors not only relates to the type of color, but also the culture background of the person, circumstance of event, health situation of the color viewer etc. For example, the yellow could also signifies sickness or frailness at certain circumstance, while red could express rage or hints violence, and green associates with weakness and undecisiveness quite often. White is perfection and purity ,but sometimes may suggest arrogance. Pink color is attractive, but can't dissociate with being frivolous sometimes.

Some colors carry strong message of cultures just as people's psychology are greatly effected by their culture background. Ancient Europeans tended to apply white color for their architecture, while Asian people favoured red color to paint the walls or pillars of their buildings or mansions. In some countries of Europe, people can find many antique architectures built by big white marble stones, with huge white pillars holding up in the

front. And in some Asian countries, red or yellow-color painted temples, palaces could be found everywhere in their historical scenery sites or capital cities. European culture has got great influence from Greeks and Italians who reside by the sea and could have been brain-washed by the light blue color of the vast ocean and sky, while Asian culture, most influenced by Chinese people who originated from plains of inland with rich soil for agriculture, and had been seeing the yellow crops and colors of ripe fruits generation by generation, thus take it as a color of wealth and happiness. However, In some western paintings, we may found red color was actually used to depict the outfit of generals or garments of religious figures such as Jesus, Mother Mary etc al, which indicate the power and authority conveyed through this color, but usually it is not the case in Chinese culture.

Different ethnic groups may also incline to the different tones or saturation of the same color. Western culture tend to use bright tone of the colors with high saturation in their visual art, demonstrating the openness of their personality, the brightness in their thinking, the straightforwardness and boldness of their doing. Asian people like to use less light tone of the colors with low saturation in their painting, and very often would add water or ink to the color to make it darker and less bright, which probably reflects the introspected personality of Asian people who don't like to be seen as too sharp or too outspoken in anything they are doing, in a way trying to demonstrate their virtue of modesty. Of course, those Chinese painters are mostly gentry class people or court officials or disciples of ancient saints, and varied from the ordinary artisan people who did all the mural paintings and ceramic decorations.

Beside color, shape is another very important element of painting art, which has square, rectangle, triangle, circle and polygons such as Pentagons, hexagons, octagons. For painters who are trained in western painting schools, they are probably told that drawing or painting images are actually the process of drawing geometric shapes and putting all of them together. At least the beginning stage of sketching is almost the same thing of drawing geometric shapes and then to round the straight lines a little bit to make them have a natural look and a better resemblance to the real image of the object. In traditional Chinese painting, the painters probably don't go through this stage of training, due to the perception that they didn't think the accurate forms are important. What matters to them were the quality and expressiveness of the lines, the composition of the painting and meanings conveyed through the work. Sometimes, colors are not even necessary. Still those shapes were more or less noticeably displayed in their work without their knowing.

Different shapes also have their own psychological suggestion to viewers. Rectangles give people a sense of stability, integrity, and spaciousness. Many objects in our daily life show the rectangle shapes, such as desk, blackboard, bed, walls, doors, etc. Squares are neat and cute, and conveyed a sense of perfectness and centerness. Triangles with one side based on the bottom displays the stableness and strength, such as the Egyptian pyramid; the triangle with one point on the bottom either indicates the threat of danger such as a dagger, or the unsteady situation of impending fall-down. However, sometimes, the over-turned triangle shape could also indicate the fertile pelvis basin of the woman, which is a good sign for the family. Also, triangles with one point directing to right or left side gives a sense of movement such as the road signs. Circles convey fullness and wholeness, or indicate movement of rolling. Such as the moon, the sun and moon cake for the former, and car wheels, balls for the latter. The polygons are used in many things in our life. The patterns of window frames used interlocked hexagons quite a lot while the patterns of design for fibers for bed sheet or the table cover also favour the shape of polygons. Actually the shape of

human face could be done through drawing a vertically lengthened octagon.

Lines of the short or the long; the straight or the curved make different shapes, also directly show in the paintings or designs as an art element itself. Long straight lines show the strength, neatness and steadiness. Short ones or even the ones shortened to be the dotted brush strokes, are lively and give a sense of vitality, motion or texture if applied properly. The curved line is also an indicator of movement, and is used quite often in painting water and clouds in Chinese paintings. The curved line used in painting the flowing bands around the ancient Chinese ladies' shoulders or arms is elegant.

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