

# Analysis of Visual Elements of Cubism in Western Modernist Art

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**Abstract.** This paper takes Cubism in Western modernist art as the research object, focusing on the analysis of its visual elements deconstruction and reconstruction of expression techniques. The research background is based on Cubism as an important school of modern art, its challenge and breakthrough to the traditional art concept laid the foundation for the development of modern art. At present, there is still a large space for discussion on the analysis of cubism visual elements and its enlightenment in the field of modern design. Through the analysis of the processing techniques and visual elements in Cubism works, we can see that the visual expressiveness in Cubism still has an important role in the contemporary art design creation.

**Keywords:** Cubism; Visual Elements; Modernist Art; Contemporary Design.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Concept and Origin of Cubism

Originating in France in the early 20th century, Cubism is an artistic movement that aims to break through the limitations of traditional painting and explore new fields of visual art. Its artistic pursuit is directly related to Cezanne's artistic view. Hadshi Osborn once said, "Whoever understands Cezanne will understand Cubism." The core idea of Cubism is to decompose an object into its basic geometric elements and reconstruct it through different perspectives to express the artist's unique view of the real world. In the early stage of Cubism, Picasso and Georges Braque were the main representatives of Cubism. They drew on the expression techniques of African art and primitive art to decompose objects into geometric shapes and express them on the screen in an abstract form. Cubist works of this stage were highly decorative. Known as "analytical Cubism". As Cubism developed, artists began to explore new methods of expression. In the "synthetic Cubism" stage, artists recombined disassembled objects to present more complex visual effects, and Cubist works in this stage paid more attention to the combination and interrelationship of pictorial elements, presenting richer connotations. Cubism inspired artists to develop a new understanding of space, shape and color, offering endless possibilities for artistic creation. At the same time, Cubism also had an impact on architectural design, furniture design, fashion design and other fields, contributing to the birth of modern design.

### 1.2. The Development Background of Western Modernist Art

Modern art came into being after the West entered the era of monopoly capitalism and was accompanied by the product of the second Industrial Revolution. It inevitably reflected the important changes in politics, economy and spiritual culture of this era, as well as the extremely complex and rich ideological feelings and profound philosophical thinking of people in this era. [1]

First, in terms of philosophy and aesthetics, since the 18th century, European philosophy has attached importance to individual personality, individual creativity and subject character. At the end of the 19th century, Nietzsche put forward the concept of "God is dead", which questioned traditional religious and moral concepts, and gained greater publicity after entering the 20th century. Influenced by Freudian psychoanalysis and other schools of psychological philosophy, expressionism, Surrealism and other schools of art attach great importance to the expression of the spiritual world of man as the subject. The two tendencies that have always existed in traditional European art -- the emphasis on

rational spirit and the emphasis on emotional expression -- are also expressed in modernist art. The post-impressionist painters Cezanne and Van Gogh respectively became the pioneers of the two trends in modernist art [2].[2]

Secondly, as far as art itself is concerned, the transformation of art history from imitation theory to abstract expressionism and the influence of Oriental and primitive art on modern art are the two important driving forces of modernism art. The concepts of "painting should not be the slave of nature", "painting should get rid of its dependence on literature and history", "the independent value of painting language itself" and "art for art's sake", which have been popular since the end of the 19th century, are the theoretical basis of the modernist art system. Since the beginning of post-impressionism, French art has obviously pursued the abstractness, expressiveness and symbolism of language. From the beginning of the 20th century, this trend spread to the rest of Europe, but the center remained in Paris. [3][3]

Third, in terms of social background, the Industrial Revolution brought the concepts of machine aesthetics, rationalism and pragmatism, which were embodied by art schools such as Cubism, futurism and Bauhaus. The development of capitalist economy changed the relationship between supply and demand in the art market.

### **1.3. The Significance and Purpose of this Paper**

Cubism is one of the most important art movements in the early 20th century. It not only exerts a profound influence on traditional art fields such as painting and sculpture, but also plays an important role in promoting the development of modern art. In the process of deconstructing and reconstructing lines, colors, shapes and other visual elements in traditional painting, Cubism creatively presents new visual experience and aesthetic effects. This artistic technique not only embodies Cubism's rebellion and breakthrough to traditional art, but also shows its contribution to the development of modern art. The significance of studying the visual element analysis of Cubism in Western modernist art is to reveal how Cubism creates innovative and modern works of art by breaking down and recombining visual elements. And it can help us understand its artistic creation methods and aesthetic concepts, and more accurately understand its artistic value and cultural connotation. Through the study and reference of Cubism, we can make contributions to the development of contemporary design.

## **2. Approach the Visual Elements of Cubism**

### **2.1. Decomposition: The Disassembly Process of Objects by Cubism**

Cubists decompose objects into planes, lines and blocks of color. This decomposition allows artists to present objects from different angles and levels, thus breaking through the single perspective of traditional painting. The cubist process of disassembling objects is a technique of artistic expression, usually using multiple perspectives and different light conditions, to decompose objects into simple geometric forms such as cubes, cylinders, and spheres to represent the object and its structure. And the use of lines and shadows to represent the surface and internal structure of the object, explore the depth and space of the object. Through these geometric shapes and lines, the three-dimensional form and spatial position of the object are expressed, and the shape and structure of the object are innovatively expressed in the work.

### **2.2. Reconstruction: Cubism's Reconstruction of Objects**

On the basis of breaking down objects, artists reassemble them to form a new whole, forming a three-dimensional, multi-dimensional space. The reconstruction not only changes the traditional expression of the appearance of the object, but also gives it a unique sense of space and dimensionality. This way of expression makes the object in the picture no longer a complete entity, but is made up of many lines and planes. Through the clever arrangement of these flat shapes, the Cubist artist succeeded in achieving another representation of the object space.

### **2.3. Abstraction: Cubism's Abstract Representation of the Real World**

Abstract expressions of Cubism with strong geometric compositions are not water without a source or a tree without roots. On the contrary, it stems from the observation and thinking of the real world. In Cubist works, authors strive to escape the shackles of nature and attach importance to the pure spiritual beauty within their works. The images are highly intuitive, with straight lines and vertical lines being used to express the shapes of objects abstractly, and objects in the real world are stripped of their original context and presented on the canvas in a brand new form. This formal abstraction is realized on the basis of decomposition and reconstruction [4]. [4]Cubist artists decomposed objects in the real world, simplified them into geometric shapes, lines and color blocks, and then abstracted and reconstituted them, making their works have stronger visual impact and ideological depth. To reveal the more internal structure of the object to express the more essential spiritual connotation, and trigger the audience to think and reflect on the real world. Abstract expression has also influenced a variety of artistic schools, including abstract expressionism and surrealism.

### **2.4. Planarization: Cubism's Treatment of Space**

Traditional painting pays attention to the three-dimensional and spatial expression of objects, while Cubism decomposes objects into geometric shapes that artists can freely change and combine according to their needs, forming a brand new visual image. In this process, Cubist artists abandoned the pursuit of traditional spatial expression techniques such as light and shadow and perspective, and instead emphasized the importance of plane composition. As a result, Cubist works exhibit a flatness characteristic, which is not only reflected in the composition of the picture, but also in the form and spatial treatment of the object. This cubist spatial treatment technique makes the space of the art work present a multi-dimensional and dynamic feature.

### **2.5. Comprehensiveness: Cubism's Integration of Multiple Art Forms**

Cubism is characterized by the fusion of multiple art forms. To understand the integration of Cubism's multi-art forms, it can be analyzed from three aspects: the integration of painting and sculpture, and the founders of Cubism, Picasso and Braque, drew on a variety of arts such as African art, classical art and Spanish folk art in the creation process. They not only introduced the sculptural texture in their paintings, but also used painterly lines and colors in their sculptures. This cross-field integration makes Cubist works have unique visual effects; The fusion of abstraction and concreteness, Cubist works often have the dual characteristics of abstraction and concreteness. Artists break down objects and reconstruct them into abstract blocks of color, lines, and geometric shapes. However, these abstract elements also have a strong figurative orientation, so that the audience can feel the shadow of the real world. This combination of abstraction and concreteness gives cubist works a profound connotation; The fusion of time and space, Cubist artists through multiple perspectives, collage and other techniques to break the traditional painting of the single concept of time and space. They tried to integrate different time points and spatial perspectives to present a complex, multi-dimensional artistic expression.

## **3. Cubism's Analysis of Visual Elements in Western Modernist Art**

### **3.1. Extraction and Description of Cubism Visual Elements**

The expression of cubism is the construction of visual elements. According to the works of Cubism and the previous analysis, it can be concluded that the visual elements of cubism can be extracted into shape, color, line, texture, light and shadow and symbol:

Shape: Cubist artists transform objects into various geometric shapes, such as cubes, cylinders, cones, etc., by decomposing them. These shapes are interwoven and arranged in the work, presenting a complex structure. For example, in Braque's "The House of Estaque", objects in the picture are

disassembled into cones and cubes, which are then pushed upward and downward on the picture, forming a unique spatial depth.

**Color:** Cubist works are rich in color, and color metaphors are strong. Artists emphasize the expression of shape and texture through the use of color blocks, the simplicity of colors and the contrast of colors. Most of [4] [5]. Take his work "Crying Woman" as an example. In the picture, the face of the woman is suddenly yellow and purple, which is saturated with the bitterness of dark green, and the hat on her head is so red that people are worried. The distortion and fracture in color is not only a way of expression of color, but also an extremely painful soul.

**Lines:** Lines in Cubist works have a strong expression, which can not only depict the outline of the object, but also participate in the composition as independent elements. Lines present a sense of dynamics in the work, which helps to represent the three-dimensional and spatial sense of the object. When extracting and describing the lines, it is necessary to pay attention to the trend, thickness and arrangement of the lines.

**Texture:** Cubist artists add rich texture to their works by exaggerating and abstracting the surface texture of objects. When extracting and describing textures, it is necessary to pay attention to the distribution, shape and combination of textures, as well as their contribution to the three-dimensional and visual impact of the picture.

**Light and shadow:** The expression of light and shadow in Cubist works is unique. Artists emphasize the three-dimensional and spatial sense of objects by capturing and creating light and shadow effects.

**Symbols and symbols:** Symbols and symbolic elements in Cubist works have important cultural connotations and allegories. These symbols include faces, animals, plants, etc., which can help the audience deeply understand the theme of the work and the mood of the artist. It is necessary to pay attention to factors such as the frequency, shape and position of their appearance.

### **3.2. The Interrelationship and Function of Cubist Visual Elements**

Cubist works of art are usually composed of many interrelated visual elements, which have complex interrelationships and functions. In Cubist works, the most basic visual elements are lines and shapes. Lines are one of the most important elements in Cubist work and can be used to outline an object, as well as to express the texture and texture of the object. In Cubist works, lines are usually not smooth, but have distinct undulation and change. Shape is another important element in Cubist works and can be used to represent the volume and spatial relationship of objects. In Cubist works, shapes are usually not simple geometric shapes, but are made up of multiple complex faces. In addition to lines and shapes, color is also an integral element in Cubist works. Cubist artists usually use bright colors to express the emotion and atmosphere of objects. In Cubist works, color is not only used to fill the surface of the object, but also to express the light, shadow and spatial relationship of the object.

The interaction and influence between line, shape and color, line and shape together express the form and structure of the object, color can be used to emphasize the emotion and spatial relationship of the object, the three together constitute a complete work of art, but also has a unique artistic charm.

### **3.3. The Expressiveness of Cubist Visual Elements in Works**

Cubism emphasizes the expression of object space, and expresses the three-dimensional sense of objects through the presentation of multiple perspectives. The expressive force of visual elements has been brought into full play. In Cubist works, artists often use distorted and deformed shapes, overlapping lines and various color combinations to express the three-dimensional sense of objects, and use complementary and contrasting colors to enhance the standing of objects. The sense of body, so that the audience can feel the depth of the object from the perspective of spatial relationship. Composition is no longer a simple flat layout, but with depth and layer of the layout.

#### **4. The Influence and Application of Cubist Visual Elements on Later Art**

Cubism has had a profound influence on the development of modern art. It advocates breaking through the space concept of traditional painting, emphasizing the three-dimensional space of objects on a two-dimensional plane, so as to show a more realistic visual effect. The emergence of Cubism not only provided artists with new creative techniques, but also turned painting from a single visual expression to the exploration of the depth and three-dimensional sense of objects. Picasso and Braque, the representatives of Cubism painting, expressed multiple perspectives of objects on the same picture through innovative composition and color application, which made the picture have a strong three-dimensional sense. This new artistic expression technique provided abundant inspiration for later generations of artists and promoted the continuous innovation and development of painting art. The representative figures of Cubist sculpture are Raymond Toussaint Villon and Alexander Archbenko, who used the concept of Cubism to turn sculpture from the traditional expression of a single perspective to the abstract expression of objects. In Toussaint Villon's masterpiece *Horse*, he started with a sketch of a realistic horse rider, and gradually simplified the image in the sketch, and finally the sculpture was just a structure of abstract nature, which became the abstract space machine of *Horse* to express the power of the horse. Archibenko's sculpture "*Walking Woman*", the human body form with geometric entity outline limited three-dimensional expression, thus expanding the expressive force of sculpture art. The appearance of these works made the sculpture art shift from the traditional figurative expression to the space exploration of abstract form; The representative figures of architecture Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier, they used the concept of cubism, innovative new architectural ideas. Mies van der Rohe created a new concept of flowing space by deconstructing and reorganizing the volume and combining it into a free and flexible space in his architectural design work *Germany Pavilion of the Barcelona Exposition*. Influenced by Cubism, Le Corbusier's architectural design work "*Apartment Marseille*" innovates the three-dimensional space layout and structural form of buildings. The appearance of these works made the architectural art shift from the traditional two-dimensional expression to the exploration of space and volume, which provided important enlightenment for the development of architectural art in later generations.

#### **5. The Inspiration of Cubist Visual Elements to Contemporary Design**

As a modern art movement, the core idea of Cubism lies in the abstraction and reconstruction of the three-dimensional sense of objects and spatial relations. In this process, deconstruction and reconstruction of visual elements became an important feature of Cubism, and through the deconstruction and reconstruction of visual elements, new visual effects and artistic language were created. For contemporary design, this is an innovative visual expression technique, breaking through the traditional framework in the long-term design, and presenting a richer and more diversified visual experience.

Cubism emphasizes the expression of spatial relations, and through the deconstruction and reconstruction of visual elements, objects present a richer three-dimensional sense. Contemporary design can learn from this feature of Cubism and pay attention to the play of space concept, so that the design works have a stronger sense of three-dimensional and visual impact. In Cubist works, the interrelationship between visual elements has been greatly emphasized. Contemporary design also needs to pay attention to the collocation and coordination between various design elements in order to achieve the harmony and unity of the overall design.

In short, the visual elements in Cubism provide a wealth of inspiration for contemporary design, including innovating visual expression techniques, breaking through traditional aesthetic concepts, strengthening spatial concepts, emphasizing the relationship between elements and stimulating creativity and imagination. These inspirations have important guiding significance for the development of contemporary design.

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