



COMMENT ON “CONTEMPORARY ART: CULTIVATING FENG ZIKAI'S TEACHINGS”

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Feng Zikai, an important figure in modern Chinese art history, was both an artist and an educator as well as an essayist. His artistic philosophy had a significant impact on the artistic practices and education of his time, and it has profound implications for future generations. He believed that the purpose of learning art is not just to cultivate painters, but to understand, experience, and appreciate beauty through art, enriching life with love and beauty and infusing it with an artistic spirit (Geremie, 1989). This article will conduct an in-depth analysis, supplementation, and critical reflection on Feng Zikai’s artistic philosophy through three main principles: heart as the foundation, technique as the support, the integration of skill and beauty, and a unique artistic perspective (Xie, 2024).

“Heart as the Foundation, Technique as Support” is a key principle of Feng Zikai’s artistic philosophy, emphasizing that the inner emotions and thoughts of the artist are the soul of the artwork, while technique serves merely as a tool to convey these feelings. This implies that in art education, emphasis should be placed on the experience and perception of beauty, indirectly influencing artistic learning and nurturing a love for beauty, rather than pursuing direct results (Hektor, 2019, p. 535). Art education should not be limited to the teaching of skills but should also focus on the spiritual and character development of the artist. In his teaching diary, he noted: “Art—Heart as the Master, Technique as Support (skilled and capable),” suggesting that art relies on emotion to express the soul (Hektor, 2019, p. 535).

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Another important aspect of Feng Zikai's artistic philosophy is the "unity of skill and beauty." He points out that excellent artworks should represent a perfect combination of technique and artistry. Technique provides the tools and possibilities for expression, while art infuses technique with vitality and beauty. In Feng's view, as artists strive for technical excellence, they must also prioritize the creation and expression of beauty to ensure that their works are visually pleasing in form and rich in content.

However, the artistic concept of "putting the heart first and techniques as the guide" also faces some challenges and doubts. On the one hand, placing too much emphasis on "putting the heart first" may lead artists to neglect the cultivation of techniques, resulting in works that are rich in emotional expression but appear rough in form. On the other hand, in the diversified environment of contemporary art, some artists may overly pursue innovating techniques and neglect the expression of artistic spirit. Therefore, artists should strive to find a balance between "heart" and "technique" when creating, expressing inner emotions while improving their technical skills, so that the two complement each other and promote each other.

Another important viewpoint in Feng Zikai's artistic philosophy is the unity of technique and beauty. He believes that excellent works of art should achieve a complementary combination technology and art. Technology provides tools and channels for the expression of art, while art endows technology with elements of life and beauty. In Feng Zikai's eyes, artists must pay attention to both the expression and presentation of beauty and the process of refining their skills, so that their works are aesthetically pleasing and profound in content.

"The unity of skill and beauty" runs through Feng Zikai's artistic creation and educational philosophy. He stressed that art education should cultivate students' aesthetic ability and creativity, so that they can use these skills to express beauty while mastering skills. He opposed the educational mode of simply emphasizing the teaching of skills, believing that it could only cultivate craftsmen who lacked artistic spirit. In addition, Feng Zikai believed that works of art should have both aesthetic value and practicality, and criticized commercial art with sacrificing quality in pursuit of profit. He advocated the organic unity of practicality and aesthetics, which has been widely used in modern design.

At the same time, "the unity of art and beauty" also faces some challenges and disputes. On the one hand, with the development of science and technology and the progress of society, some emerging art forms and technical means may exceed the scope and criteria of traditional aesthetics, making the definition of "beauty" vague and diverse. This requires us to more open and inclusive attitude when evaluating works of art, and respect the differences of different cultures and aesthetics. On the other hand, in the process of pursuing "the unity of art and beauty", we should also be alert to the emergence of technicalism. Technocracy overemphasizes the power and importance of technology and ignores the transmission and expression of artistic spirit, which may lead to the emptiness and lack of vitality of artistic works.

The “isolated artistic perspective” in Feng Zikai’s artistic concept is a unique concept, which refers to observing things in an isolated state and seeking their true nature (Andrš, 2021, p. 61). He believes that in art appreciation and creation, artists should adopt an “insulated” attitude to observe things and express objects. This “insulation” is not completely divorced from reality, but requires artists to eliminate the interference utilitarianism and possessiveness in the process of creation, and to examine and express the objection in a detached way. Only in this way can the artist truly perceive the essence and inner beauty of things, and thus create works of art with profound connotation and unique charm.

“Isolated artistic perspective” reflects Feng Zikai’s unique understanding of the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity on artistic creation. He believes that art is the only way to reveal the true state of things. Artists need to have aesthetic ability and imagination beyond reality, and express objects in a free and flexible way. In the process of creation, artists should keep calm and objective, avoid personal feels and prejudice, and grasp the essence and internal beauty of things more accurately. At the same time, this perspective is closely linked with Feng Zikai’s “sympathy” concept, emphasizing the artist’s sympathy and love for all things, so that the works are full of humanistic care, which can touch the audience and trigger emotional resonance.

However, the “isolated artistic perspective” also faces limitations and disputes. Too “insular” attitude may make the artist out of touch with real life, resulting in a lack of sense of the times in his works. In contemporary society, artists need to pay close attention to social reality and show the spirit of the times in a more realistic way. At the same time, this perspective may make the work too abstract and confuse the audience. Therefore, artists should seek a balance between “insulation” and “reality” in their creation, maintain a detached attitude, and pay attention to the changes in real life and audience needs.

Feng Zikai’s artistic thoughts not only form a theoretical framework of art education, but also a profound philosophy on life. Through art, he showed his deep understanding and concern for life, society and human nature, and enriched our spiritual world and aesthetic experience. These principles not only have a far-reaching impact in Feng Zikai’s personal creation and educational practice, but also provide enlightenment and reference for later artists. However, in practical application, these principles also face challenges and disputes, which need us to constantly explore and improve in practice.

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