

Cartoon Artistic Images in Contemporary Japanese Sculpture

Tianwei Zhang^{1, a}, Xiaohua Huang^{1, 2, b*} and Yueyun Shao^{3, c}

¹*School of Design, Ningbo Tech University, Ningbo, 315100, Zhejiang, China*

²*Faculty of innovation and design, City University of Macau, Macau, 999078, China*

³*Zhejiang Fashion Institute of Technology, Ningbo, 315211, Zhejiang, China*

^a*1609214985@qq.com*, ^b*hxxhznblgxy@163.com*, ^c*284700323@qq.com*

**corresponding author*

Keywords: Contemporary Sculpture, Contemporary Art, Cartoon, Styling Design

Abstract: After thirty years of development, Japanese sculpture art has an important position in China and even in the world. However, due to the influence of society, economy, and culture at that time, people have a certain degree of insufficient understanding of art forms. This paper takes Japanese contemporary sculpture as an example to study its cartoon image. From the point of view of modeling design, this paper analyzes and summarizes the representative significance and value concept, which provides reference and reference for modern creation. From the perspective of spatial layout, this paper expounds the morphological characteristics and expression techniques used in contemporary Japanese modern sculpture, and finally puts forward some suggestions and development directions for contemporary sculpture in China.

1. Introduction

Sculpture and cartoons are originally two different fields. Sculpture is a traditional concept of modelling field, while cartoon is a contemporary art with conceptual significance. Japan, known as the "animation kingdom", is the largest animation exporter and production base in the world and its animation industry has had a profound impact on the national economy. Therefore, animation cartoon, as an art form with strong popularity and consumption consciousness, has a great influence.

Modern art is becoming increasingly popular, which is inevitable due to the influence of the consumption era. The word "popular" means that it is easy to understand and meets the aesthetic

needs of the public. Art has been integrated into popular culture for a long time. Taking Nara Yoshitomo's new pop art as an example, its main features are its popular and symbolic artistic language and connotations. The reason Japanese contemporary art can make outstanding achievements at home and abroad is not only the value of art itself, but also the capital circulation of the art market under economic globalization. Cultural globalization has played a key role in the development of contemporary art. It is precisely because of the communication and circulation between different cultures that the market circulation of art is also an important factor to promote the development of art under the background of economic globalization. As far as pop art is concerned, it was originally an imported American culture, which attracted the interest of the British people and produced a conceptual product.

Because of the globalization of culture, people all over the world have the same social concept. Their recognition of Japanese animation and cartoon industry naturally accepts the cartoon image and spiritual connotations of Japanese artists' works. This paper starts with some works of Japanese contemporary artists and tries to start with cartoon images in Japanese contemporary art, to provide some reference for the development of Chinese contemporary sculpture art.

2. Features of Cartoon Works

(1) Expression: Using exaggerated and concise techniques, cartoon expression is to express the internal characteristics of an object through its external expression. By paying attention to specific details, we can grasp the inner thoughts and emotions of the object, thus making its own characteristics more visually impactful. Exaggeration is the most direct expression of animation art, and the characters in his works are often exaggerated and concise to highlight the essential characteristics of the characters, thus making the characters more vivid.

(2) Personification: The personification technique in animation art often expresses the character in a humanized way with the help of humanized language and characteristics, expresses some thoughts of the author in an interesting and personalized way, and stimulates the excitement of the audience's emotions.

(4) Symbolism: Visualizing the cartoon work on the surface, uses symbolic methods, and through the contradiction between specific images and things, makes the audience deeply associate with them, and causes people to think deeply.

(5) Decorative: Cartoon art works with ideal colors are usually not bound by fixed colors, but decorated with appropriate ideal colors according to the author's imagination. Cartoon is a kind of foreign culture, which attracts the audience's attention to exaggerated images, varied narratives, imagination, and creativity of creators. It has its own special aesthetic ideas and expressions.[1]

3. The Application of Cartoon Symbols in Japanese Contemporary Artists' Works

3.1. Murakami Takashi

Murakami Takashi, a contemporary Japanese artist deeply influenced by Japanese cartoons and cartoons. Image plane on the surface looks like a doll and a toy model. It is cute, interesting, violent, and has a strong cartoon color, but it is actually a manifestation of Japanese cultural connotations. In 2017, Murakami Takashi's "MISSKO2" was sold for HK\$ 22.9 million at the Spring Auction of Contemporary Art held by Sotheby's. (Fig 1)

In 1997-1998, Murakami Takashi produced two famous cartoon human body sculptures, which became the most controversial and the highest auction value among Japanese contemporary artists. He designed them into three-dimensional toys that can be disassembled freely, and then put them in the assembly line of Hiropon Factory. (Fig 2) Haruki Murakami's works are very successful, both

academically and commercially. He was the first person to grasp the social problems and academic value of cartoon and successfully promoted it to the height of his work. Taking this as the language platform of conceptual art, he grasped the most sensitive words in society, successfully crossed the plane, three-dimensional and behavioral fields, and successfully entered the mainstream artistic vision of Europe and America, which had a profound influence on young Japanese artists.

Take a neutral attitude towards Murakami Takashi cartoons, neither criticizing nor praising them. He didn't participate in animation creation, and he didn't put forward any ideas about the future of cartoons, but his greatest contribution was to make the public realize the alternative value of cartoons again. Murakami Takashi said, Super Flat represents a kind of non-hierarchical and unified mass culture in Japanese society after the war. The flattening of Japanese manga and animation today is an extension of Japanese traditional art. Murakami Takashi showed his unique Japanese cultural charm to the world with his works.[2]



Figure 1. MISSKO2



Figure 2. Mr. DOB

3.2. Nara Yoshitomo

Another artist who is different from Murakami Takashi, in mid-March 2018, Japanese artist Nara Yoshitomo's personal art space NSYARD was officially opened to the public in Tochigi Prefecture, Japan; The just-concluded exhibition "Nara Yoshitomo: Ceramic Works and Others" in the new space of HQueen's Pace Gallery displays a series of ceramic sculptures, oil paintings, and paper products created by artists. Among them, 12 ceramic sculptures are particularly eye-catching, and they continue Nara's iconic image of children. In Nara Yoshitomo's work, the iconic "big-headed children", animals and monsters combine fantasy with reality. His casual brushwork and childish images add a sense of cynicism and detachment from reality to his work. (Fig 3)

Nara Yoshitomo has formed his own symbolic artistic image. He always insists on emotional description, blending fantasy with reality, and has formed his own strong image features of integral modeling, difficult narration, random painting, and strong colors. Nara often places lonely and quiet children in an empty space where the light seems to be weak, thus forming the unique situation of her work. The ideas conveyed by Nara's works are his unique ideas. From his works, we can feel the cultural elements of the masses, and it has had a certain influence on the unconscious desire of human beings long ago. During the growth period of Nara's fine arts, Japan's economy took off, and under the impact of various foreign fine arts ideas, cultural development produced a new Japanese pop art with local characteristics.

Nara Yoshitomo's creation forms are various, such as easel painting, picture book creation, installation creation, creative design, and sculpture art. Here, the connotation of his sculpture art is mainly expounded: Nara Yoshitomo uses a simplified and abstract symbolic shorthand language of modernism. The sculpture works of Nara Yoshitomo and Nara Yoshitomo are highly consistent with other artistic creations in content and shape, and they are still his unique images of children and animals. In sculpture, the images of children and animals are simpler, and pure colors give the statue a dreamlike beauty of life. There are many clay sculptures in Nara. In this kind of work, many of them are creative ideas on the theme of brain. He doesn't know how he did it either. In his opinion, the brain is the core of the body, and the five senses are used to output expressions. He wants to express the main spirit through his whole brain. If the work is big enough, other decorations will become decorations to balance the whole work. (Fig 4)



Figure 3. Nara Yoshitomo's Sculptures



Figure 4. A scene of Nara Yoshitomo Sculpture Park

4. Summary of Cartoon Phenomenon in Contemporary Japanese Sculpture

Japan's cartoon market is large, with strong creative strength and a large readership, and has the largest cartoon publishing volume in the world. When a cartoon catches fire and accumulates a large number of readers, it will be quickly put into the production of movies, series, and derivative works. With the development of animation culture, subcultural phenomena such as "Meng Culture" and "otaku culture" have emerged, which shows that animation is an indispensable part of Japanese life. As a result, cartoon image has become a favorite theme of contemporary Japanese artists[11].

In addition to entertainment, comics can express grand themes, and at the same time, they have unparalleled heroism and extraordinary power to save the world. Since 1997, *Astro Boy-A Suit*, created by sculptor Yanjianyi Ya, is to show the living space of human beings through the animation created. A creepy image is extracted from the famous cartoon *Astro Boy*. Wearing protective clothing and sensors, the ruins of the city destroyed by the Chernobyl nuclear accident, the ruins of the Osaka World Expo, the great desert in Africa, and the real "future ruins" in the coastal areas of South America made people realize the truth and horror of the nuclear issue.[3]

Cartoon art reflects children's education most intuitively. In the adult society, children are vulnerable groups and marginalized groups; in the world of cartoons, children are the most important and important[12]. Their bodies are thin, their knees are bent, and their bodies seem to fall down, all of which show that their growing space is unprecedentedly unstable, and they are facing the invasion of a powerful adult society. Adults pay too much attention to children, which limits their range of activities. Therefore, the sculptor Yasushi Hatata's work is his representative, and he groans in pain. Although the children created by Yasushi Peng are not very likable and even

insane, their images are very convincing, which is a common feature of teenagers suffering from mental illness.[4]

Cartoon custom has spread in modern Japanese sculpture from many perspectives. The existence of comics in Japanese society can't be replaced, and the phenomenon of animation also exists in Japanese culture. The artists mentioned above, with their explorations, prove the existence and development of cartoons in the contemporary Japanese art ecology (Fig 5, Fig 6).



Figure 5. 2012 KAWS × "Astro Boy"



Figure 6. 2019 Painting "Jade Cartoon-Astro Boy"

5. The Influence of Japanese Cartoon Contemporary Art on China

Nara Yoshitomo, as the representative of Japanese contemporary artistic achievements, is worth learning from China. The first thing is to discover your own artistic expression. China has a long history of traditional art, but the development of modern and contemporary art is only a few decades. Faced with the impact of numerous art information, modern sculptors in China have followed the development of the times in order to occupy a place in contemporary art culture. Cartoon modeling is a strategy with low investment and quick results. It has popular symbolic significance in materials, colors, modeling, etc. With a simpler and clearer image, the work can be recognized by the audience in a short time. However, at present, increasingly artists have not formed their own artistic language, and their creations have some western colors, which makes the international image of China's contemporary art blurred. This is due to the blind pursuit of "trends"[13].

Modern sculptures in China can be described as multifarious, but in recent years, cartoon images, like a flu, have quickly spread all over modern sculpture in China, and their influence scope is gradually expanding, with more cartoon figures appearing in front of us. In terms of modeling, cartoon sculpture broke the innovation of traditional sculpture in materials, style, form, etc, and brought a brand new visual effect. On the one hand, cartoon sculpture can inject fresh vitality into China's sculpture. New breakthroughs have been made in sculpture materials, language, form, and vision, breaking the classical style of traditional sculpture. However, on the other hand, contemporary sculptors are mainly influenced by the commercial profits of the art market, and their sculptures are often just empty shells, ignoring their inner spiritual values, so they are more interested in the beauty of vision.[5]

Cartoon sculpture breaks through the classic style of traditional sculpture in shape, so that the audience can enjoy not only great figures and real sculptures, but also child-based sculptures and lovely ideas. Cartoon sculpture is superior to traditional sculpture in creation time and process. Cartoon sculpture is more popular in the art market, and its sales scope is wider. Therefore, the development trend of contemporary cartoon sculpture is increasingly obvious[14].

6. Artistic Thinking in the Face of Cultural Shock

China's contemporary sculpture art is becoming increasingly mature and internationalized, integrating foreign culture with traditional culture. In the process of sculpture creation, the creator should explore and reflect on the traditional culture of China, to truly inherit the cultural spirit. Under the background of globalization, the comprehensive integration of politics, economy, culture, art, etc. is the development trend in the future, and it also provides opportunities for the mutual learning and exchange of cultures of all ethnic groups[15]. However, there are always differences between different national development situations and different development environments.[6] Today, with the continuous improvement of the country's comprehensive national strength and cultural discourse power, China's traditional culture has become increasingly important on the international stage and accepted by people.[7]

All aspects of China are developing rapidly, and the arts are also flourishing. Therefore, our creators must reexamine and think about the new artistic environment brought by this economic and cultural form. By using social concepts and artistic language to explain cultural cognition, and by using international artistic thinking to examine, understand, and grasp its essence, we can create sculpture art that conforms to the traditional culture of China and the characteristics of the times.[8]

7. Conclusion

In modern ceramic sculpture, the application of cartoon art techniques should not only meet the aesthetic needs of modern people, but also combine interest with individuality, be good at imagining and changing the shape and decoration of the works, pay attention to the language features of the materials themselves and the characteristics of the production process, and grasp the inner theme of the works and the feelings of the authors. In a word, the use of cartoon techniques in contemporary ceramic sculpture not only expands the language form of ceramic sculpture, but also makes the diversified development of ceramic sculpture possible, on the other hand, it has a great influence on people's aesthetic value.[9]

Through the application of cartoon artistic images in Japanese contemporary sculpture, this paper discusses its influence on China. In modern sculpture, we must resolutely avoid accepting or completely denying a certain culture. Whether it is a foreign culture or our traditional culture, we need to critically absorb their characteristics and advantages, which is of great significance for our sculpture creation today.[10]

Funding

(Funded Project) Ningbo Institute of Technology, Zhejiang University First-class undergraduate Course Construction, Project No. : NITJG-202078, College: School of Design, Course name: Role Sculpture, person in charge: Huang Xiaohua, Level: University level, Batch: the second batch.

Data Availability

The authors will supply the relevant data in response to reasonable requests.

Conflict of Interest

All authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

- [1] Du Wen. *On the application of cartoon techniques in modern ceramic sculpture creation*. Jingdezhen Ceramic Institute, 2015.
- [2] Wei Ying. *Research on the artistic language of Murakami Takashi's cartoon children's sculpture*. *Literary life*, 2017.
- [3] Wei Zhang. *Cartoon phenomenon of Japanese contemporary sculpture*. *Sculpture*, 2008(6):2.
- [4] Tang Hongbing. *Viewing the modern transformation of Chinese traditional clay sculpture from the prevalence of "cartoon sculpture"*. *Art Observation*, 2010(3):1.
- [5] Guo Meijin. *Analysis of China's Contemporary Sculpture-Taking Cartoon Modeling as an Example*. *Tiangong*, 2017, 000(001):12-13.
- [6] Zhu Fulin. *Thoughts on the present situation of contemporary sculpture in China*. *Yihai*, 2009(1):2.
- [7] Huang Lifu. *Simple and exaggerated modeling language of cartoon sculpture*. *Art Education*, 2010(1):2.
- [8] Guo Dongmei. *Research on the phenomenon of cartoon-like sculpture*. Inner Mongolia University, 2015.
- [9] Meng Qing, Hu Yun. *The Present Situation of Contemporary Sculpture in China*. *New Art*, 2002, 23(4):3.

- [10] Gu Yue. *Images, ideas and my creation*. 2004.
- [11] Zhang Weiyi. *On the road of modern change of Japanese traditional sculptors*. 2021.
- [12] Yin Wuming. *Traditional rebirth-understanding of the development factors of contemporary figure sculpture in China*. *Art Hundred Schools*, 2021, 37(6):6.
- [13] Ren Lin. *On the tendency of cartoonization in contemporary art*. *Avant-garde*, 2021(23):3.
- [14] Jane Garton Castro, Guan Huiyi. *Mixed Identity-Interview with Murakami Takashi*. *World Art*, 2009(1):4.
- [15] Dong Junwei. *Spatial expression of "mind"*. *Art Watch*, 2021(3):2.