



Sculpture-Mask Under the Environment of Chinese Rock Painting Art

LIANG Jiachao^{[a].*}

^[a]Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University, China.

Major: Fine Arts

*Corresponding author.

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Abstract

China is one of the countries where rock paintings were earliest and most numerous found and which has the earliest record of rock paintings.

The artistic form of rock painting, as the materialization of primitive human's aesthetic consciousness, can be treated as a reflection of material and spiritual life of our ancestors, which is what I focus on and keep pursuing. Not only does it reflect the varied and colorful life slices and unsophisticated spiritual world of ancestors, but also it shows the unlimited vitality of primitive art.

In my "sculpture world", sculpture, as a kind of culture and artistic form of expressing and creating great sense of beauty, represent the current reality of true feeling, a kind of direct, pure, original experience.

In this thesis, by explaining the content, form and spiritual connotations of my sculpture work *Mask*, I will describe my sculpture concept and pursuit-current reality.

Key words: Chinese rock painting; sculpture; *Mask*; reality

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INTRODUCTION

Rock painting is a kind of historical records described on the cliff stone. Books of all dynasties in China

mostly recorded the living conditions of emperors and seldom reflected the daily life of people at that time. However, you can see these works on the cliff stones, such as the paintings reflecting social producing, like hunting, grazing, agriculture planting, etc.; the ones reflecting religious belief, like ancestor worship, sacrifice ceremony and so on; and the ones reflecting daily lives, like village forms or dances. Therefore, all of these works on the rock painting have significant meaning.

As the materialization of hominid creating initial aesthetic consciousness, rock painting can be treated as real portrayal or art *coloris* about the material and spiritual life of ancestors as a kind of special artistic form, which is what I focus on and keep pursuing. It reflects the colorful life slices as well as the simple and true spiritual world of ancestors, and the boundless vitality of primitive art.

Actually, it's a hint for me to think: Why are the rock paintings studied and discussed sedulously by researchers spanning the limitation of long history and vast areas? Why does it have such a relative constant permanence? In my opinion, the "relative constant permanence" is derived from the "current reality" of primitive ancestors. The more current and more real feeling can provide us with stronger universality and permanence of surpassing times.

In my "sculpture world", sculpture, as a kind of culture and artistic form that can convey feelings and ideas and create boundless aesthetic feeling, reflects the current reality that I can feel, as well as a kind of direct, pure, and original feeling. In this paper, I will make an analysis and interpretation through my sculpture creation *Mask*, striving to make an extension through it to analyze the inspiration of Chinese rock painting art to my sculpture creation, reflect my understanding and realization to sculpture creation, describe my sculpture pursuit, and display my desirable "sculpture world".

1. ANALYSIS OF MASK COMPONENT ELEMENT

1.1 Chinese Rock Painting Elements in Mask

1.1.1 Rock Painting Introduction

Rock painting, also called rock fresco, cliff painting, rock carving, rock sculpture, carving stone, rock arts, etc., is a kind of artistic form and culture phenomenon existed depending on stone carving in the form of painting or carving. In the early development process of human society, ancestors used stones as tools, described and recorded their life contents and production ways in simple, natural, rough and brief manifestation modes. As rock art derived from the Old Stone Age, the earliest artistic forms of human society show the intelligence and wisdom of ancient human being. We can say that rock painting is a kind of culture phenomenon in the early time of human society, an important element of original plastic art language, an “encyclopedia” wrote by primitive ancestors in picture, and a precious culture heritage left to descendants by our ancestors.

As the oldest plastic art created by human beings, rock art, which condenses the wisdom of ancestors and their vigorous vitality reappeared, is a kind of painting art during the juvenile age of human being, and reflects their original lifestyles, ideologies and modeling characteristic. Our country found and recorded the rock painting earliest in the world with the most abundant amounts. The earliest record can be found at the Volume XI of *Han Feizi* published in the third century BC, similar records can be also found in books like *Shih Chi*, *Notes on Book of Waterways*, etc. Though records about rock paintings were started early in China, in-depth studies didn't start until rock paintings were found in large scale in the 20th century and became a subject.



Picture 2.1
General Cliff Rock Painting

The formed Chinese rock paintings can be divided into north and south systems according to the differences of economic culture and geographic position. In general, the rock paints in Guxangxi, Szechwan, Yunnan, Guizhou, Fujian, Guangdong, etc. can be treated as south rock painting, while that in Heilongjiang, Inner Mongolia,

Qinghai, Gansu, Shanxi, Sinkiang, etc. can be treated as north rock painting.

1.1.2 Artistic Style

Artistic styles of domestic and foreign rock paintings have both similarities and differences. Chinese rock paintings have the characteristics of: strong realistic style; full of mystery and symbol implication; planar composition, disregarding proportion relationship and perspective principle; conducting layout and combination according to specific thought and feeling of inner heart; pursuing childishness, frankness, simplicity and nature.

For south and north rock paintings in China, they come into different artistic forms due to the different living environments and life styles of human being, and further come into different aesthetic psychology. For detail: southern nationality owns wisdoms, implicit and restraining inward psychology, and the artistic forms of its rock painting are always finished by being painted in red, showed in obscure and abstract meaning, paid attention to symbol, and provided people with the enjoyment of mysterious nature, feminine and simple beauty. Northern nationality owns powerful, untrammled, and outspreaded outward psychology. The artistic forms of rock paintings are formed by chiseling and carving, showed exaggeratedly and briefly, paid attention to abstract, and provided people with the enjoyment of extraverted childishness, manly and simple beauty.

The artistic characteristics with original form have strong artistic vitality till now.



Picture 2.2
Helan Mountain Rock Painting

1.1.3 Modeling Characteristics

In general, Chinese rock painting modeling experiences the process from early freehand brushwork to abstraction through simplification, and enters into pattern with decoration features through stylization accumulation finally.

The modeling characteristics of original rock paintings are difficult to conclude as they are different due to obvious time span and regional diversity, as

well as different cultural condition, environment and composition. But we can still conclude common modeling characteristics such as presentation, composition, natural original nature, and symbolism.

These modeling methods used by ancestors during creating rock painting have strong artistic expressive force and influence and can fully express the art charm and ideological implication of rock painting works.

1.2 Mask Elements of Rock Painting in *Mask*

1.2.1 Mask Introduction

As culture carrier, mask contains abundant meanings about historic culture, folk psychology, ideology emotion, artistic beauty, etc., and intensively reflects the economy, culture and art of the times.

There are thousands of years of history for human being wearing masks, but the origin, which is probably started from prehistoric era (the later period of the Old Stone Age), is still a puzzle. The earliest masks might derive from hunting activities, in which people need to wear masks to disguise as the figures of animals in order to close to and hunt animals that are reduced at that time. It can be proved from the bird and beast's hats wore by huntsman.

Masks still have possessed of their special charm and value until now, and they are used in religious rites of original nationalities during folk activities around the world. By using it creatively, we can reveal the contradiction and emotion of people's inner heart besides creating the newness and mystery of modern drama. Besides, people also used it by treating the exaggerated, absurd and special image of masks as major making-up methods, such as Tibetan Opera, Guizhou Nuo Opera, etc.

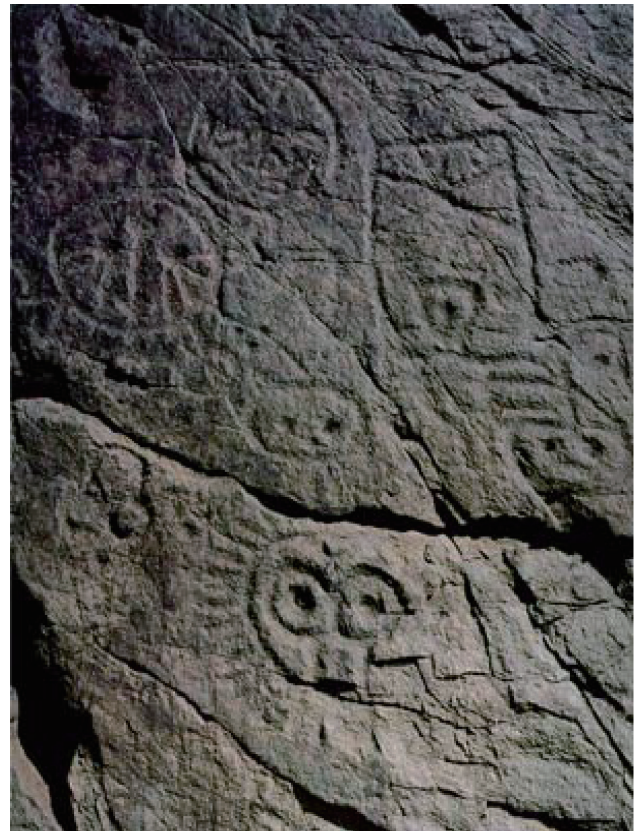
Though masks pass down as a kind of economic, culture and art carrier at present, they are just as the words described in *Chinese Mask* issued by Gai Shanlin: "by arranging the masks through eras according to the era sequence, we can found that the mask forms experience a development law from simple to complex, but the belief degree to it has gradually weakened from ancient to now, and finally it just becomes an art work for appreciation."

1.2.2 Mask Image on Rock Paintings

Human face image rock painting, as an important composition of rock painting art in our country, is an abundant and special art class. Foreign scholars always call human face image rock painting as mask rock painting directly as the most direct relationship between them is that the human face image rock painting is connected with the later masks.

There are wide distributions of human face image rock painting in China, and a large number of them are located in the northern rock painting belt, while nearly no human face image rock paintings are found at the distribution sites of northeast, southwest, northwest, etc., namely edge zones. In the North, they are mainly distributed in the Yinshan Mountains of Inner Mongolia, Helan Mountain

of Ningxia, and the Altai Mountains of Sinkiang; and in the South, they are mainly distributed in General Cliff in Lianyungang, Jiangsu, Huan'an in Fujian, Wanshan in Kaohsiung County, Taiwan.



Picture 2.3
Yinshan Mountains Rock Painting

There are a large amount of human face rock paintings, and the forms and styles are abundant and diversified with the specificity of distributing in different areas and forming system automatically. For classification, Liu Xicheng had described it in his book-*Chinese Primitive Art*: "human face rock paintings can be divided into five kinds, namely human face rock paintings of quasi-circular, sun appearance, square appearance, non-outline appearance, and crest appearance. These five kinds may appear separately, mixedly or together with other images, such as celestial bodies like sun, concentric circles, small circle hollow, stars, etc." These singular and bizarre images reflect an unknown and unfamiliar spiritual world. Abstract forms, like brief lines, geometrized symbols or inexpressible modeling, reflects the natural and rough savagery of primitive ancestors, and their craving dynamics to life, sincere pursuit to religion and infinite longing for life, these forms also show perfectly the strong vitality of ancestors.

1.2.3 Take a New Look at Mask

Conventionally, mask can be treated as a media of transferring from realistic world to the other world with

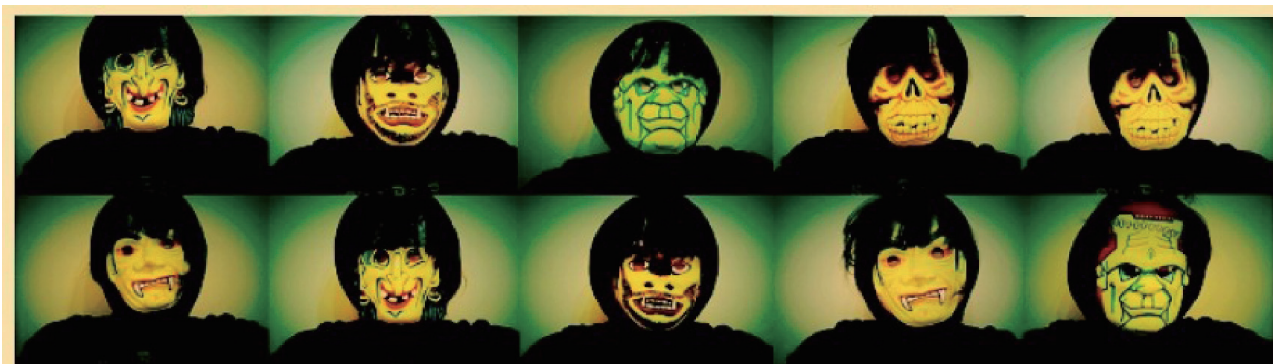
the essence of changing people's appearance or concealing and help the mask-wearing people achieve particular purposes or enter into another kind of state. At present, people have a new look and definition about masks.

Yu Qiuyu said: "mask, as a kind of culture heritage, has its specific value and function. With the features of low consumption, it has the characteristics of slow vanish, just like simple things can possess longer vitality than luxury things. The rough, savage and simple things always can achieve their sublimation and resetting under modern conditions and acquire new features and new lives..." It is true that the tangible mask, which can be used for hunting, sacrifice, acting and the like, might have "sublimation or resetting". And masks indeed have "new features and lives", namely intangible mask under modern conditions.

Everyone has a mask, an intangible tool to help you hide your true appearance. Mask, as materialization expression of spirit and symbol of inward world, brings us

with strong psychological hint effects. The face covered by mask might be sad, fragile, strong, ugly, pure or even strange to yourself. We just use the masks to query, conceal, hide or pretend ourselves.

Eugene O'Neill, famous American dramatist, said: "people spend their external lives lonely intertwined by others masks and spend their internal lives lonely with the pursuing of their own masks." In fact, it's very sad to live under such condition. What are we living for? Why do we spend our lives under such tired and hypocritical state? This kind of self-perception can't be understood by others, we may feel unreasonable if saying these words to ourselves, and feel useless if telling others. We may feel loss, hesitated and lonely if removing the mask and protection and can only secretly cry in the corner...It's a big question for us to think when we can find the original true and inward self as well as the lost beauty.



Picture 2.4
Originality Mask

2. SPIRITUAL CONNOTATION ANALYSIS OF MASK

2.1 Spiritual Connotation of Rock Painting

Rock art, the conscious or unconscious, direct or indirect manifestation mode is a kind of illustration that people strive for living. Rock painting is not only presentative art activities but also hides profound meanings among its simple lines, images and symbols in the primitive times. It might be the record of original social lives, the symbols to help explain religious activities, or the expression of psychological state and emotional world...

As the same time, being not subjected to any culture or thinking pattern, ancestors just created their rock paintings through their visual perceptual cognizance to human, nature and their relationship, and these paintings directly reflect the realistic situation and living conditions of human beings at that time. The direct transfer from life to art re-appears the original entity truly, observing the authentic things of human beings, making art and living

conditions of human mentality, emotion, etc. has more direct connection, and making rock painting, as a kind of artistic creation form, truly bear and interpret the spiritual connotation of ancestors. At the same time, rock paintings also reflect simple artistic spirit, namely the harmony between human and nature, and pursue initial state of oblivious of subject and object; they closely connect with our lives, pursuing plain and nature style. Through them, we can observe the nature features of primitive ancestors and simple, natural beauty and profound inward spiritual shackles, which reach perfect unification at different time and space.

2.2 Interpretation about the Spiritual Connotation of Mask

Without the constraint of rationality, primitive ancestors just make their artistic creation by making the frankest and the purest performance about the most direct perceptual experience to nature using the materials and methods they can use. Through the external extreme exaggerated and distortional appearance, we can see the inward mysterious

charm and spiritual connotation of original rock art.

Feng Junsheng said in his book *Chinese Rock Art* :”the appearance of artistic phenomenon, as a development result of artistic logic, must have its profound social life foundation and reflect the social political and economic lives on spirituality. The reason for modern painting art reflecting original art is that the spirits of modern and original arts have some common points.” So it is surely true, and I just want to transmit such “common points” in my works-*Mask*, not only show the childish and simple mask image and artistic form with constitution feeling, but also display the “modern rock painting spirit”-the current reality that can be felt, and the direct, pure and inward feeling.

Seeing from connotation, works-*Mask* displays rock painting image with strong vigorous vitality and spiritual symbolized appearance in modern way, which a kind of modern understanding about the ancient thinking methods, aesthetic standard, life delight, social custom, etc.. Mixing modern new element in original rock paintings is a new annotation or continuation about original rock paintings with modern vision. Such continuation doesn't simply copy and transfer the appearance, but studies and displays the spiritual connotation. Show the thinking about self state, the relationship between human and surrounding environment, and the abstract feeling about introspection of modern social reality in the form of specific sculptures, which might express the thinking about the state of modern people: a little indifference, ego, utilitarianism, spiritual emptiness, isolation, disguise...; might express self-centered human beings destroying the environment arbitrarily and going far away from the natural environment; or might express the human variability in society, changing self identity, role and orientation all the time. The works-*Mask*, by using mask combining pillars as manifestation form, expresses “rock painting spirit” from the view of modern people by mixing and modeling the past and present time.

3. CREATIVE PRACTICE OF MASK

3.1 Creative Process of Mask

3.1.1 Grasp Overall Style

Primitive ancestors, lived in vast land of China, make use of readily available stone, clay and other materials to display their simple life, religious belief and true feeling, and form the earliest sense of sculpture; Depicting image through different tools to score, carve or paint on rock surface with mineral pigment is the earliest sense of painting. Chinese sculpture and painting in the common background of this period are gestated and gradually formed into a simple, restrained, realistic implied abstract, practical with adornment style, so is the works *Play*'s overall style.

Mainly based on observation of the impression and certain sentiment and imagination involvement, art image formed by subjective conscious processing and beautification is different from objective entity objects. Like rock art, the art image of works *Mask* can be said to be a kind of conscious subjective expression and re-creation of objective basis with sublimated meaning.

Works *Mask* admires and follows concise and spell able characteristic of Chinese rock painting. Deriving from feelings and adopting concise, short, direct and pure language, it usually brings people simple and elegant artistic enjoy. At the same time, just like rock painting, it isn't fettered by objective image, but pursues efficiency in sculpture language to achieve artistic state and spiritual satisfaction. In other words, it aims at expressing sentiment and meaning for the purpose of simpler and purer artistic creation, but not paying excessive attention to complex stunning effect. As stone animals at the Tomb of Huo Qubing take “imitate appearance by its original shape” approach: make full use of rock natural appearance, only make minimal artistic processing, not preoccupy with similarity in form of appearance, process stone animal sculpt in this way to achieve concise, spell able effect and freedom of space, and give the viewer certain imaginary space. I expect works *Play*, just like Chinese rock painting, deserves to be appreciated carefully by viewers to enjoy its unique artistic effect and taste its extraordinary artistic charm.

3.1.2 Analysis of Structural Form

Artistic creation body is inevitably expressed in certain form. However, the analysis of form is just a relative concept, not an absolute mode.

Though artistic expression forms are many and varied, the art theory is the same. For example, horizontal analogy is made here, there's a very subtle difference between excellent and mediocre works in calligraphy art especially cursive art, word structure, lift or press of writing brush, thicker or thinner, longer or shorter, lighter or heavier.....These subtle differences reflect the author's comprehending and mastering ability to structural form, and these differences can be observed in singer artist's mastery of up-and-down vibrato and ornament length, which randomly processed in actual sing. Tightly control by rational consciousness is impossible, and it is also a natural outpouring. And singer artist's mastery of structural form is able to be reflected in vibrato and ornament.

Specific to works *Play*, main mask absorbs nutrient from human face image of rock painting to show mysterious image with different form, different expression, and no ears. It conveys thoughts, will and sentiment by personifying infinitive natural power like primitive ancestors. Simple modeling, childish line and geometric pattern are adopted to express clumsy elegance and mystery. There are nine pillars in the works, in addition to considering the overall composition, I want to take the meaning of the most,

biggest and highest, for nine in Chinese traditional culture means maximum with supreme status and is used to describe sons of dragon not only as a imaginary number also as a noble number at the same time.

As a whole, masks are relatively primary, complex, tortuous, and flexible; Pillars are relatively secondary, concise, direct and unified. These two are a unity of opposites, complementing each other and constitute works *Mask* together.



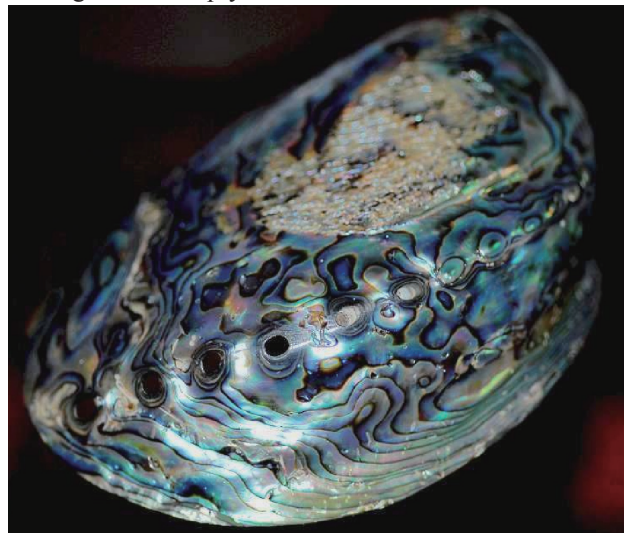
3.1.3 Application of Comprehensive Material

“Three stages on observing mountains” is often used by artists to express the process of grasping skills. Chan master Wei Xin’s well-known saying: “Thirty years ago when I didn’t start zen meditation, mountain is just mountain, water is just water for me; Later after what I learned and had a place to go, mountain isn’t just mountain, water isn’t just water for me; and until now I have got a place to take rest, mountain is only mountain, water is only water for me.” The first stage is a pristine state; sculpture only plays the role of records not influenced by artistic thoughts. The second stage had a “place to go” that is to say: learn to pay attention to art forms, easily make mistake of neglecting essence content to pursue formal beauty. For the pleasure of innovation, constantly think about putting the icing on the cake causing the consequences of putting the cart before the horse and making unnecessary move. It might be beautiful, but the effect of real impressiveness had lost. Then mountain is not mountain and water is not water any more; the third stage is truly realized something: “reality” turns out to be sculpture body. Mountain should be mountain, water should be water, and form is only form which is only a device and medium for the sake of expressing sculpture body. Form is just like clothes that should pay attention to fitness. Oversize, unfitted or gaudy forms will be detrimental to sculpture body. This sculpture may seem to be insipid, but with endless aftertaste. Mastery of form should keep to the point, which should not neglect to deliver the most real and essential sentiment by sculpture while simply focusing on external form.

Form, of course, as one of the important factors to constitute the sculpture, also has its own considerable charm and value. Form and material have a relationship of mutual influence and interaction. Accordingly, “formal beauty” as people often saying, to some extent, can

be interpreted as “material beauty”. Material also has expression, whose application determines methods of processing and final presentation of sculpture.

Main mask of works *Mask* uses the simplest tools to complete initial thinking mark—finished by breaking, restructuring and collaging rust iron and shells. It not only considers its external beauty, but also because iron is the product of human civilization and shell is the representative of nature. Iron is cold, strong and can be reshaped. However, shell is synonymous with tenderness and can record time. By using material texture, combination and its significance, I strive to present a unique way of display and visual experience, investigate sense of form, sense of composition, pursue sense of rhythm in sculpture itself and offer rich content by combining these two. Meanwhile following the example of colored drawing, scoring, relief and other rock painting processing, rust iron and broken shells without polishing are attached to the mask surface with natural concave and convex, upheaval and sink, and cracks of natural marks reserved. All kinds of material textures are combined to achieve image effect and artistic tension. When strengthening the artistic expression and appeal of works *Play*, it also presents its own charm of material itself and reflects real emotional feelings more deeply.



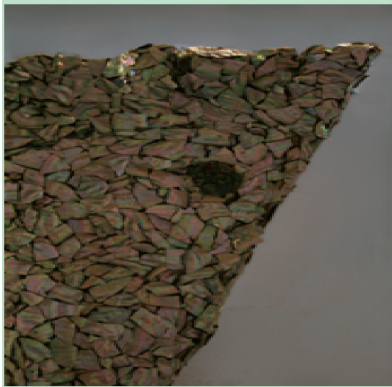
Picture 4.3
Abalone Shell

3.2 Creation Feeling of Play

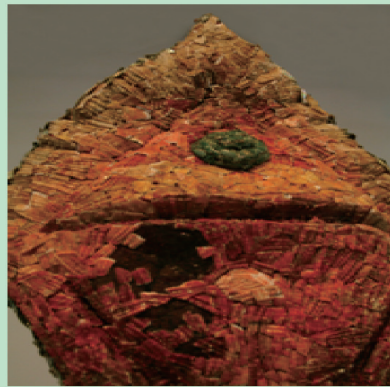
There are various ways of emotional expression and catharsis. Music, Dance, Calligraphy, painting, sculpture and so on, are carriers and play their respective role. As one form of artistic expression, rock painting, the advanced art among low-level cultures, appropriately expresses primitive ancestor’s aesthetic taste and spiritual connotation. Honestly displayed content, idea and yearning on rocks; childish, clumsy, primitive, simple, rough and wide style; true, mysterious, devout primitive

human thought, all these artistic features mentioned above bring revelations to content, form and creation spirit, etc. in sculpture creation. It guides me to absorb pristine

beauty from rock painting and dig profound connotation from modern sculpture art.



Picture 4.4
Part of *Mask*(Back)



Picture 4.5
Part of *Mask*(Front 1)



Picture 4.6
Part of *Mask*(Front 2)

The greatest difference between Chinese art and western art embodies in: Western art is based on sculpture, while Chinese art is based on music. Based on sculpture, it puts emphasis on expressing image accurately, vividly and balanced and harmonious space layout, and bounds to achieve “beauty” for the ultimate target; Based on music, it puts emphasis on cadence and rhythm of intrinsic vitality, it is natural to achieve “rhythm” for the ultimate target. Taking music as an example, music and sculpture share theory in common. Sculpture is made up of plane surface and volume, while music communicates with lyric and rhythm. A great piece of sculpture is just like a beautiful melody. Content just likes lyric which moves people with visual representation; Form just likes rhythm that conveys feelings of graceful, passionate, quiet or heroic emotion, which is an expression of inner feeling and a kind of cultural heritage. Meanwhile, melody of the song is fluctuating wildly, changeful and can also be interpreted as consistency and cohesion throughout the whole melody interpreting the song’s charm and essence; so is the content and form of sculpture, they integrate into the whole, deepen the whole and bring out the best in each other.

Sculpture is an art of emotion. The design, creation and appreciation of sculpture are all based on one’s feelings and thinking activities. As the designing of sculpture requires sublimating emotion into sculpture language, the creation of sculpture also requires combining sculpture with emotion. And to enjoy a piece of sculpture, we need to sense the emotions it conveys with abundant imagination. Therefore, as the carrier of emotion, sculpture stimulates and exchanges human emotion—true feelings, just like the way rock painting reveals itself.

For sculpture, rock painting and other forms of art, the ideological connotation, which is regarded as the essence of art works, can evoke people’s emotions and

touch people’s hearts. Artistic works with profound connotation often provide us a lot of space for imagination. Without verbal explanation, one can obtain abstract emotions with only his eyes, such as quite thinking, beautiful dream, admiration toward nobility, and condemnation toward injustice. Outstanding sculptures are also full of impact and profundity of art. Sculpture not only exhibits beauty, but also conveys emotions and voice of heart. The perfect combination of external form and ideological connotation of sculpture, just like the famous Chinese expression “unity of form and spirit”, is the highest state of sculpture creation.

CONCLUSION

Chinese rock art, to some extent, can’t be equated with contemporary sculpture on ideological content, expression form and spiritual connotation; some people might think that primitive rock art is too simple, too straightforward, and many people wouldn’t like it the same like colorful contemporary sculpture. But this kind of “too simple” and “too straightforward” is exactly the true emotional expression of primitive ancestors without decoration and pretentious emotional catharsis, which is so real and so touching. That is why rock art can play an important role in art researchers, art lovers and even ordinary people’s minds, which is the very embodiment of its unique artistic charm and special value of existence.

Here I advocate and attempt to learn a “rock painting spirit” —the ability to feel present reality, a direct, pure and original feel, and practically develop the spirit to the usual sculpture design and production. In this process, I cultivate my artistic temperament, purify my minds and pay more attention on molding and construction of humanistic spirit. I once saw such a sentence: Value standard is the kernel of culture, and human spiritual cultural heritage is

mainly expressed in rational, logical explicit form, and the thing hidden behind is human's value, emotion, attitude, dream, etc. I think it must be attached to certain carriers like knowledge, customs, and national psychological characteristics. In a sense, Chinese rock art is a perfect carrier, and fortunately I capture and understand the humanistic ideas and creation spirit through it to some extent. This is the biggest harvest for me.

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