

# Exploring the Aesthetic Imagery of Yan Ping's "Mother and Child" Series Oil Paintings

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**Abstract:** *With the process of history to the reform and opening up, the improvement of living standards, frequent foreign exchanges and the strong humanistic ideas on cultural creation have relaxed the restrictions of female artists in terms of subject matter and content to a certain extent. A series of female oil painters incorporated their emotional attitude, observation of life and experience of life into their paintings. Under this background, a number of female painters emerged with a clearer sense of female subjectivity, a more stable self-style, and a richer and more diversified artistic style. Yan Ping is one of them, the mother and child series is an important theme in her creative process, this series of works from 1995 to 1996, has completed twenty-one works. This paper takes this series of oil paintings as the object of study, focusing on the special expression of the aesthetic imagery of the series, analysing the characteristics of its colour and line, and also discussing the differences in the performance of mother and child themes from the different perspectives of men and women.*

**Keywords:** Female art, Yan Ping, Mother and child, Line, Difference.

## 1. Introduction

Men and women's physiological differences lead to a great difference in their perspectives and priorities in looking at the world. Women and men usually have different understandings and perceptions of the mother-child relationship. In this respect, men are the viewers, while women are the experiencers themselves. This is due to the biological characteristics of women. With regard to motherhood, there is a gap between the tendency of males and females to express it.

As history progressed to the post-reform and opening-up period, the improvement of living standards, frequent foreign exchanges and the strong humanistic ideology in cultural creation have, to a certain extent, loosened the limitations of female artists in terms of subject matter and content. A series of female oil painters incorporated their emotional attitude, observation of life and experience of life into their paintings. Under this background, a number of female painters emerged with a clearer sense of female subjectivity, a more stable self-style, and a richer and more diversified artistic style. Yan Ping is one of them, and the Mother and Child series is an important theme in her creative process. This series of works began in 1995 and was completed in 1996, with twenty-one works.

## 2. The Expressive Influence of the Female Perspective on the Subject of Mothers and Children

Men and women are physiologically different, resulting in often very different perspectives and priorities in seeing the world. Women and men often have different understandings and perceptions of the mother-child relationship. In this respect, men are the viewers, while women are the experiencers themselves. This is due to the biological characteristics of women. With regard to motherhood, there is a certain gap between the tendency of males and females to express.

Oil paintings of mothers and children by male painters often strongly reflect female gender roles, with mothers mostly

depicted as gentle, caring and responsible, taking on the roles of raising children and managing the household. Such depictions reflect society's expectations and values of women's roles. Mothers' responsibility and devotion become important characteristics of their roles as wives and mothers. For example, in Rubens's work *Helen Furman and Her Two Children*, the portrayal of the mother gazing lovingly at her daughter is highlighted, and the image of the mother has long been shown as healthy, holy, and affectionate to eulogise the sanctity and responsibility of motherhood, and the viewer, when reading the painting, is separated from the mother and child by a layer of obvious filters given by the painter and loses the opportunity to get closer to the subject's rich and varied emotions. The viewer reading the painting is separated from the mother and child by a very obvious filter given by the artist, and loses the opportunity to get closer to the rich and diverse emotions the subject may have inside. (Figure 1)



**Figure 1:** *Helen Furman and Her Two Children* by Rubens

In Yan Ping's paintings, what we see more is the mother's enjoyment of the time spent with her mother and child, which is a kind of romance unique to women as mothers. Such performance is based on women's personal feelings as the protagonist, highlighting the enjoyment of mothers in mother-child moments and romantic episodes. It highlights the happiness of every woman, besides the aura of motherhood, for immersing herself in the company and growing up with her children, which is more direct and credible, allowing the viewer to communicate directly with the "mother" herself through the paintings without having to go through a third party's perspective.

In Yan Ping's 2000 work "Mulan", in addition to the mother's enjoyment of mother-child time, we can also see the embodiment of women's multiple social roles. In addition to being a wife and a mother, a woman is also an independent individual who, in addition to household chores and taking care of her children, is also engaged in her passionate career of creating paintings. The multiple roles are reflected in the paintings, which are cluttered with scenes of life. There are painting tools arranged in an unorganised manner, flowers and plants in the house, the husband who is spending time with the children by the frame, and the artist herself who is spending time with the children among the flowers and plants. (Figure 2)



Figure 2: Mulan

The peaceful coexistence of the different social roles of women is reflected in the different elements of the picture.

### 3. Flower Imagery - the Subject's Emotional Outward Appearance

Flowers are often seen in Yan Ping's paintings. Sometimes as one of the imagery elements of the picture, and sometimes as the main body of the picture. In addition to works dedicated to flowers, it can be seen that her studio is often placed in a large bouquet of flowers. From ancient times to the present day, there have been many literary analogies between women and flowers. This represents women's desire for life and romantic pursuits. She made up for the lack of beauty and romance in life in her paintings. It is rare to see such an expression among male painters. On why she is passionate about the depiction of flowers, she says, "I am a cautious person in life. I always have no strength to deal with bad moments, I run away from things when I can and am very protective of myself. But

there's a very brave side of me that always has to have a say in what goes on, and that's oil painting. It's the one place where I can let loose, like a flower blooming for itself for once. So every time I paint a flower, I do it for myself. I bloom, I flare, for myself for once. My way of comforting myself is to paint flowers. Every once in a while, I paint a bunch of flowers. I paint flowers all for the sake of my own spiritual abandonment, to be happy to let loose and indulge."

As we can also see in her images, the flowers in her images are not as carefully trimmed and selected by a florist for placement, nor are they painted in a realistic manner. From there, they have a strong sense of independence, blooming with abandon and wildness. The blossom and beauty of the flowers are self-concerned, often an independent and non-attached factor in the picture, with bright and simple colors, and frankness in the brushwork. The colors are bright and simple, and the brushwork is spontaneous. The figures are often hidden in the huge flowers in bloom. For example, in her work "Listening to the Wind", a large bunch of pink lilies in full bloom is in the middle of the picture, and the "mother" is enjoying herself, showing half of her face behind the flowers. On the left side of the picture, her child is also shown. Isn't the flower in the middle of the picture a reflection of the mother's state of mind, accompanied by her child? The pursuit of romance and the uniqueness of women's feelings are manifested in her works. These are transformed into an art style with strong personal colors, a way for women to reconstruct the world with their brushes. (Figure 3)

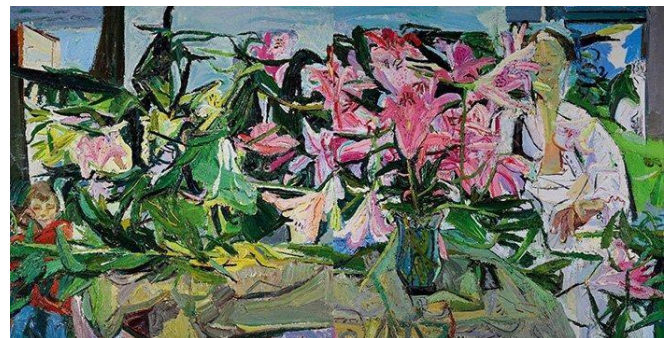


Figure 3: listen in secret to the wind

### 4. Subjective Reconstruction of Colour

Yan Ping once said: "I, a Chinese woman, have expectations of red, for example, pink that is, the state of wilting also has a kind of charming beauty, I love the pink colour system, whenever life encounters difficulties or even tribulations, as long as I see a set of pink, it makes me stay and love the world, it reminds me of a baby's skin, and think of the love that makes all women around the world long for it. It even makes up for the chapter on romance that is really missing in my actual life, there are a lot of paintings in my work where the colour pink has a connection." One of the most eye-catching and absorbing aspects of her artwork is the expressive use of colour. There is a lot of use of solid colors in his images, but it doesn't make them simple or flat. This is due to the diversity and wholeness of her use of colour. She uses more saturated pure colors in her works and adds the use of complementary colors to make the images exciting and passionate. For example, in her 2001 work Mother and Child, we can see the interplay of blue and orange, red and green, yellow and purple, and their inter-colors, complemented by the contrast between

brightness, purity and intensity. Colour blocks with such a strong degree of contrast can quickly catch the viewers' eyes and attention, creating the aesthetic pleasure of colour collision and bringing a certain degree of psychological disparity. Together with the reasonable position arrangement, it makes the whole picture jump and harmonious. Yan Ping's use of colour language on the one hand reflects her meticulous feeling of life and keeps it as vivid and original as possible, and on the other hand also reflects her research and mastery of Western Nabilism and Impressionism. (Figure 4)



**Figure 4:** Mother and child, 2001

Yan Ping said in "Thoughts Outside the Painting", "The colour palette in my paintings is objective, and this objectivity is not a deliberate imitation of nature, but the ability to add one's own emotions amidst the complexity, and paint something compact and concise. This stage I will continue to have multiple layers in the picture. (Many Chinese people are comfortable in the black and white world of ink, but in the world of colour, they are poor and without ideas, and never even inspired.) Repeatedly searching for that expected unusual colour palette, which is not so-called subjective, but looking for the theme in the rich material world. The use of painting becomes that transformative process of using brush and colour on a flat surface." [1] From this, it can be inferred that Yan Ping's use of colour is not an improvisation, but a depiction after in-depth thinking and painstaking work. From the beautiful colors of the oil paintings, we can deeply appreciate the painter's inner passion, joy or sentimentality, and even feel her attitude towards things, which gives the colors of the picture an unparalleled significance.

## 5. The Practice and Application of Using Books as Paintings in Oil Painting

In addition to the uniquely feminine use of colour, the most striking aspect of Yan Ping's oil paintings is the prominent expression of her brushstrokes. In her paintings, rich solid colors are interspersed with crisp, general lines, and she conveys a woman's desire for freedom with the use of large brushstrokes in the form of iambic pentameter. These lines are

reminiscent. A few lines full of staccato twists and turns convey an infinite sense of panache and mood, which is a reflection of her unique character as a female artist who is open-minded and bold, as well as a high degree of condensation in the form of her brushstrokes.

The forms of brushstrokes in her paintings are quite varied, and apart from the changes in thickness, sparseness and direction, one can also find the characteristics of calligraphic brushstrokes, thus adding a rhythmic and dynamic aesthetic of Chinese imagery to the oil paintings. For example, in her *Mother and Child*, created in 2005, we can see that the outline lines of the mother and the lines of the folds of the clothes in the picture have the golden stone atmosphere of calligraphy. The black lines in this painting are full of "chi chi" and staccato, and the rich colors are full of variations, intermingling oil painting with traditional Chinese calligraphy, which is a unique creation combining western expressive oil painting techniques and Chinese imagery aesthetic pursuit. This style combines the subtlety of the chosen materials and the femininity of the colors, forming the uniqueness of this woman artist. It is an expressive technique found by the fine artist through long-term artistic exploration and practice, and is the spiritual dimension of the art form. It is part of the whole painting and increases the readability of the photograph.

From Yan Ping's paintings, we can see that every stroke has gone through the subjective reconstruction of the painter, so as to complete both natural and without losing the strong feelings and expressive works, the picture of those who seem to be accidental lines and colors, in fact, all through the Yan Ping's painstaking management. She searches for her own feelings in nature, a process that inevitably requires rational thinking, thus forming a symphony of sensibility and rationality, the objective world and subjective reconstruction in the picture. This is a revelation to all painters: break away from endless concepts, resist the temptation of nature, ask yourself what you originally wanted to put on it, seriously feel everything that happens in the world, perceive with all your heart what your primitive feelings desire to happen, and finally turn them into paintings. Over time, you will develop a painting language that is truly your own.

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