

# Discuss on the Characteristics of the Color-field Painting's Manifestation Form

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**Abstract:** The Postwar American abstract expressionism artists had generally acknowledged two perspectives: one is that the primitive instincts in human nature, the other is the unconscious mind exists on human beings. These two perspectives are always throughout their art, which tries to explore, reconstruct and create the internal connection. The changes in consciousness causes the transformation of styles. The branches of Action Painting and Color-field Painting are divided in accordance with the discrepancies between the new emerging American abstract expressionism artists in ideals and styles. With led by formalism ideology and in virtue of primitive art and unconscious idea, Color-field Painting seems to present a sublime art in undiscovered realms evoked by a pure structuredness and the color's directness in the two-dimensional space. By rejecting literariness, concreteness and figurativeness and simplifying painting content and painting language, pursuing the color gamut that is color-dominated and complanate, improvising with limitless expansibility and the form of plane composition, a unified spatial area can be created and a self-sufficient, pure and sublime art can be presented.

**Keywords:** The Color-field Painting's; Expansibility; Composition

## 1 Expansibility

The works of the color-field artists definitely show the expansibility of painting patterns and graphic forms. Clement Greenberg considered that the abstract expressionism adopted scale-out as the substitution of longitudinal intense hallucination, traditional painting explores the longitudinal space in three-dimensional space, and modern painting searches for "in-depth" space and spiritual space in two-dimensional space. The expansibility of patterns mainly changes the connotation of traditional easel painting language. Paintings no longer deliberately serve for the design of aesthetic concepts and the objective of imitation of literary image, provide the places of thought activities such as thinking, analyzing and organizing for artists, or overthink the painting in physical media. They, however, should provide the direct record and creative space for artists, in the meantime, endow a more direct performance of materials. For instance, those inanimate materials are endowed with the meaning of life in the creation of color-field painters, including gouache, blending materials, ink, pencil drawing, etching, watercolor, charcoal, papers, acrylics and brushes besides traditional oil on canvas. These materials' expansibility concept has been innovated in the Jackson Pollock's painting idea, and the generation of rethinking about the artistic creation idea of color-field painting has come into being. Instead of using the traditional paintings form with the system of easel, drawing board paintbrush, Pollock laid the canvas on the ground, chose drawknife, trowel and stick as the drawing tools to carry out the free "dripped" painting that generates a kind of thin or thick fluid effects. As for the work show, Mark Rothko claims that the optimal distance that the viewers appreciate his works is about 45 cm. The spacious and simple environment atmosphere and the required dimmed display lighting are designed to the better feeling of the mystique of the works. This pattern's expansibility more extends the expansibility of painting idea, which gives idea great freedom. And this "freedom" essentially possesses the characteristics of directness and purity. Therefore, the following application of integrated materials increasingly come on stage of painting, meanwhile, constantly impact on the creation forms of "easel" painting.

The expansibility of graphic forms mainly changes the extension of the traditional easel painting space, and its area extends to a wall or a larger area, which can be regarded as a piece of entirely unfolded large scale area picture. The opened area has a tension that breaks the margin of picture without restriction of rules and the greater obstruction of outline margin, surpass the normal visual scope that viewers can sustain, aiming to make viewers be surrounded by the paintings the and participate in the overall environment atmosphere. Nothing but the participation of artists and pictures, the pure space atmosphere formed by the simple composition form, the internal and external connection of the space built by pictures and individuals can attract the viewers to "enter" the mysterious picture and conduct the self-sufficient interaction. This is without considering the spatial relation, occlusion relation and perspective relation of foreground and background in pictures, or even no center or the relationship between primary and secondary painting.

In order to achieve visual metaphor of pictures, Steele firstly commenced on the painting patterns of huge creating paintings, and jointly discussed the infinite visual hallucination brought by oversized paintings with Newman. All Newman's works after 《onement 1》 that belong to huge color-field works with conciseness, purity, uncertainty and expansibility generate a limitless mysterious effect.

In order to keep the infinite graphic atmosphere, on each expanding area color, Newman chose the more approximate color to reduce the striking contrast of colors, and make transition of each partial area color with pastel colors. In the personal interviews, Newman said he never set space relationship. Only getting out of the space can his works have a rich connotation in the real sense, as well as he was grateful that he can gradually be beyond rules. The space in his eyes isn't the volume space given by the horizon in front of his eyes or in behind, but the field space with four boundaries out of his sight that he can feel. It is not equivalent to the concept of the space in building volume, and the architectural space differs from painting space. He pursued the sense for the complete space, created paintings in terms of the whole space, abandoned the partial space to create some abstract images and seek his own personality. From the perspective of the space, we can find that all his works have complete top and bottom that is never separated or even confined and compressed within the specified range of sizes. He created all his works by surpassing the size of paintings and relying on his personal space sense.

Rothko supposed that the purpose of the creation of oversized paintings is to eliminate the restriction of visual margin of the viewers, which makes the viewers join in and more closely experience the certain mysterious power given by color blocks. The extremely huge painting *The UNTITLED* (blue, yellow and green on the red) has a strong tension in silent environment, of which three kinds of rectangular monochrome hazily spread to the margin of the painting without the decoration and limitation of painting frame. The borderless painting frame casts off the control of geometric effect by using geometric rectangle. Indistinct edge line without clear hard edge is an irregular and asymmetrical soft color gamut, which is not limited by the margin of canvas and the maximal size of painting frame, extends outward in all directions, and shows the mysterious effect of the infinite extension area. Besides, the space extension of Rothko's painting is confined to the surrounding space environment, such as the distance between painting and the viewers, the position of the work in the whole exhibition area space on all sides, the exposure intensity of light and the area movement position. It is a very high requirement for works, viewers and the surrounding environment, which mutually serves for the maximum extent of the space and the mysterious atmosphere, makes the viewers experience the power given by the whole calm atmosphere to the greatest extent and the real sense of experience and engagement within the scope of space and feel the work's unique characteristic in the infinite imaginary space.

## 2 Composition

The reason that the color-field painting artists simplify the shape of objects into geometric figure is undoubtedly to deny the natural shape, inherit the geometrical element that European modern artists has stressed, affirm the pure representations of composition, and explore the geometric painting language and the redesign of "flatness" in abstract painting in the intuitiveness of constitution form. If we say "action painting" emphasizes the representation of painting language, it is that "color-field painting" emphasizes composition of painting language. The feature of geometrical language excludes the superfluous, tedious and external restriction and generalizes the pure painting elements such as color block, line and figure of the objective things, and then further design the styles by organizing, scheduling and conceiving. It emphasizes the composition of painting language, of which reduces visual conflict and complicated thoughts and emotions to a certain degree and more triggers the spiritual interaction and philosophical meditation among creators, works and viewers. And this feature coincides with the sublime bourn of pure thoughts that "color-field painting" pursues.

Cezanne is the first one who generalized the objects in nature into sphere, cylinder and cone, which is an enormous generalization in the surface structure of physical image and constructs picture by geometrical factors in aspects of color, form and space. His research theory opened the door for European modern art. Van Gogh is called the pioneer of "expressionism" in pursuit of the sense of pureness of picture pattern and extreme personalization and the expression of imposed personal affection. With the influence of primitivism and seeking for the origin of life and the mysterious significance, Paul Gauguin adopted the flat painted big color block to form a decoration of the inner power of his work, which reflects a freer and more objective color and the concept of composition. The artist of "color-field painting", Newman pointed out in his own article that the decorative style of color plane from Gauguin has paved the way for the abstract art movement of this century. Richard Diebenkorn has admitted that his creation concept of abstract art is mainly affected by Matisse. The painting elements of pictures has been concisely generalized into a picture consisted of flat area shape, precisely refined sideline, scientific method and the methodic geometric shapes. The ordinary natural scenery and concrete architecture in his pictures absorbed the elements of geometrical shape with the form interweaving together under the organization of geometry, bright color attaching to the beauty of geometrical shape. It is the continuation and development of the simple, delightful and elegant style of Matisse and the transformation of a new design style in geometrical form.

The composition of "color-field painting" is also embodied in the flatness feature of painting language. According to Greenburg, in the expanding plane picture, artists draw creation which both freeing themselves from the restriction of picture frame and placing themselves within the maximum visual margin. In an essay *Painting American Style*, Greenburg indicated, "the closed margin locating in the outside the field of view or the edge of artists who are drawing, in this way, the artist can gradually approach to the frame regarded as the results, rather than yield to the frame that is predetermined." He tried to get rid of the literariness of European paintings and the longitudinal depth exploration in three-dimensional space, stressed the development of American style paintings, strongly advocated the "plane itself" of painting. The subject that color-field artists explore is that how to reflect the spiritual profundity in the composition of plane. The basic component that can be seen in the structural logic of Rothko's works is formation in the huge rectangular plane. In an objective way, there are some rectangular color block combinations that mutually stagger in order in the ambiguous boundary, which generates mismatch of rectangle. Every rectangle's hues produce different level in the same plane, which forms before and after difference and depth and endows plane's flatness with the stability and solemnity. The solemnity of this plane draws attention to feel it and produce an unstable mental state in the tension, push viewers to enter the atmosphere of the picture and experience the picture's depth perception in the terra Incognita. In a subjective way, his works can give you a mystic experience of sensory. The plane composition is not the type of geometric composition from Kandinsky and Mondrian, but a very pure plane form

which seems to be indistinct with the change of flexibility of the edge. Its colors of the color block and the back side cover each other, which makes the background color more expressive and seems to emerge from the back side of the color block. Rothko described this exerted background color as “penetrating power” that is attributed to the mystery of terra Incognita as like God which exists or not. It is unnecessary to deliberately express and be visually seen or defined its divinity. This pure fuzzification plane form and color’s change will result in the stimulus of emotion, so as to give the form of plane composition an emotional power.

### 3 Conclusion

In conclusion, “color-field painting” constitutes the pure picture with flatness mainly by means of the shapes and colors of color to liberate color. The works is all about the possibility of how to show color, and the exploration of the exceeding spirit in the terra Incognita in virtue of the expansibility and composition of visual style, which guides viewers to “enter” the mysterious power of color, to find, shape and recognize themselves in the infinite space.

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