



# The Fun of Ink Art — An Analysis of Pu Guochang’s Artistic Expression

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**Abstract:** Since the 1990s, Pu Guochang has been continuously focused on exploring and innovating ink painting art. His creations integrate Eastern and Western artistic traditions with modernism, constantly breaking through and innovating in form and content, forming a unique personal art system. He took regional culture of Guizhou Province as the starting point, combined folk art and traditional literati painting elements, skillfully absorbed the essence of western modern art, and built a rich and colorful interesting picture through freely wielding ink and color. His works are innocent and free spirited, full of childlike charm, and contain profound philosophy and meaning of life, reflecting the harmonious relationship between humans and nature, and humans and society. Pu Guochang not only has originality in brush and ink skills, but also constantly explores the multidimensional relationship between humans and the world in artistic content. His artistic practice demonstrates a passionate pursuit of life and a profound reflection on the essence of art, injecting new vitality into contemporary Chinese ink art and becoming a model for integrating tradition and innovation.

**Keywords:** Pu Guochang, interesting themes, artistic expression, Guizhou Province

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## 1. Introduction

Zou Yigui, a painter in the Qing Dynasty, once wrote in his album “Scenery of Mountains and Rivers”: “There are many unique mountains and rivers in the world, tourists often quickly forget after watching. However, the mountains and rivers in Guizhou are particularly interesting. People do not view mountains and rivers, while the scenery of mountains and rivers seemed to rise up to view people, with special charm, attracting countless literati to visit and appreciate. Visitors are reluctant to leave when they are viewers, and even after a long separation, they still remember them.” From this, the unique cultural characteristics of Guizhou region can be shown.[1] The landscape of Guizhou is different from the majestic mountains and rivers in the north, as well as the stretching mountains and waters across the Jiangnan region. Guizhou has beautiful natural scenery, combining tranquility, smoothness, wonder, danger, steepness, and magnificence. The humanistic characteristics of Guizhou are characterized by simple folk customs, diverse ethnic groups, ancient and peculiar traditions, and profound cultural heritage, providing rich themes and unique cultural connotations for Pu Guochang’s ink painting creation.

## 2. Exploration of interesting themes

In artistic creation, Pu Guochang emphasizes the concept of “accidental gains”, where ink and color blend together, creating a seemingly effortless yet uniquely meaningful style. He drawn inspiration from folk art and integrated them into ink painting, breaking through the limitations of traditional literati painting such as indifference, emptiness, and coldness. He unified the “material interest” of the objective world with the “emotional interest” of the subjective world, depicting vivid images and full of wit and humor. In recent years, Pu Guochang’s works have placed greater emphasis on spiritual connotations, gradually simplifying the composition style and highlighting the Guizhou style of free and unrestrained. Pu Guochang is sincere and loves life, but the complexity of interpersonal relationships in real life leaves him at a loss. He is not good at words and communication, and art has become his channel of communication with the world.

In the “Everyone” series works, the artist explores the relationships between people, people and society, people and machines, and people and materials, including an interpretation of “people” and the increase of many cultural symbols, as well as symbols related to reproduction, a physical image. The intertwined and densely packed lines in the paintings are his profound experience of the complex interpersonal relationships. The series of “Hair and Beard” and “Golden” created by Pu Guochang connect hair and beard together. Hair is innate, while beard is acquired. The connection of innate and acquired matters is a symbol of wisdom. The colors in the picture are more concise, symbolizing that the painter, after experiencing the complexities of life, is more concise in art and more calm in the face of life. It can be clearly seen from the series of works “Everyone”, “Golden” and “Abstract” that Pu Guochang is returning to art itself while exploring the cultural significance of art. The painting works retain the traces of brushwork during the creation process, and ink painting art allows him to freely express his inner world. His works are mostly based on inner instincts, primitive energy, or subconscious inspiration.



Figure 1. Series of Cat - 29 248cm × 124cm Paper Ink 2017



Figure 2. Series of Hair and Beard - 3 68cm × 136cm Paper Color 2001



Figure 3. Series of Golden - 9 68cm × 136cm Paper Color 2008

The series of works “Watching Fishes” and “Fishing” are representations of the artist’s own image, and the artistic expression gradually moves from the exploration of form to the depths of the heart, making Pu Guochang’s paintings more natural, authentic, and free. In the “Cat” series of works, the image of cat is simplified and vivid, and the spiritual temperament of cat is vividly portrayed on paper. The artistic expression of artist are full of childlike charm, which is inseparable from the influence of his frank and pure personality, as well as the Guizhou’s ancient folk culture. In the “Mosquitoes” series works, mosquito is a symbol that does not have the noble image in traditional literati paintings. Mosquitoes are commonly known as pests, however, Pu Guochang exaggerates and promotes them to enhance their vitality. They hover in mid air, overlooking all living beings, silent and lonely. They are vulnerable to the wind, but reveal a solitary and arrogant aura and intangible power. This is an external manifestation of the artist’s spiritual world. In the loneliness of life, Pu Guochang became increasingly sensitive, gradually shifting from promoting the power of life to safeguarding his own spiritual home.



Figure 4. Series of Mosquitoes (1) 248cm × 248cm × 4 Paper Color 2020



Figure 5. Series of Mosquitoes (2) 248cm × 248cm × 4 Paper Color 2020

### 3. The innovation of painting skills

Years of printmaking skills and research on Guizhou Laran technology have made Pu Guochang stand out from the crowd since entering the field of ink painting. He integrated Chinese and Western cultures as well as ethnic artistic traditions, broke the traditional brush and ink language of literati painting, and embarked on his own artistic career. He used contrasting colors and brushes to freely express himself in his creation works, dedicated to the study of the flatness of ink painting art, analyzing the changes in form and the separation of form and spirit. Pu Guochang's brush and ink language is innovative, with points, lines, colors, composition, and shapes in his paintings being rough yet rigorous and regular.

Pu Guochang's original "Pu's techniques" has never appeared in the historical development of Chinese painting. His brushwork is lively and dynamic, and is a dynamic way of brush using. Traditional Chinese painting emphasizes the use of calligraphic brushstrokes, the smoothness and naturalness of brushstrokes, as well as the artist's own cultivation. The emergence of the "Pu's techniques" has given contemporary ink painting creation new content. It no longer enters the standardized symbol system like traditional brush and ink, and should not only be a formal language of painting, but also express the deep connotations of the painting scene. In recent years, Pu Guochang has applied extreme colors such as magenta, yellow and cyan in Chinese painting. The saying goes, "repeatedly carving, returning to simplicity." This extreme simplicity has instead given rise to Pu Guochang's unique color system.[2] The purity of colors, the transformation and abstraction of images, and the separation and recombination of structures trigger the exploration of the uniqueness and mystery of the Guizhou Plateau.

Pu Guochang's painting and calligraphy are always combined together. His calligraphy combines the feeling of life, and his brushwork appears very lively. The words and paintings complement each other, and calligraphy is an indispensable part of his works. Calligraphy are abstract lines. The lines created by Pu Guochang are lively, bouncing, zigzagging and winding, which is a concrete reflection of the storm in his spiritual world. In the "Golden" series of works, the golden lines, textures, and strokes that connect men and women convey the emotional entanglements between them and explain the intimate re-

relationships between the characters. The transformation of artistic images is mainly achieved through lines. As a medium of expression, his lines are short, sharp, unique, and distinct, and closely connect with brushstrokes, connotations, forms, and spirits of the paintings. He used a lot of lines in his paintings, and many of his works are composed of lines and circles, full of childlike charm. From brush and ink to lines, due to his appearance, the boundary between the Eastern and Western lines was broken. Pu Guochang's works include some symbolic language, such as mechanical object symbols, folk symbols, and body symbols. These symbols are interwoven in his paintings, integrated with the images, and expressed through brush and ink lines, forming a high degree of harmony with the artistic taste of the author.[3]

#### **4. The artistic expression of ink painting in Guizhou Province**

In recent years, Pu Guochang's paintings seem to have returned to the early state of human art, using simple water, ink, paper, and brush to construct a primitive and barbaric art world for us. He, who is innocent and brave, insists on his artistic creation and maintains a rebellious spirit in art, which also determines that he will construct his own art history in his own artistic world. Pu Guochang's art is special, it contains a kind of power and spirit. His art has an indescribable beauty that needs to be savored and appreciated slowly. He appears gentle on the outside but rebellious on the inside, pursuing freedom. However, painting with "freedom" requires not forgetting his original intention and high passion, because freedom always breaks rules. With a devout heart, he devoted himself to studying and spent years exploring ink art, breathing in the natural world, and exploring the fun of life. Pu Guochang's art is a manifestation of his personality. He is spontaneous and easy-going, and in his own artistic world, he travels freely. The mountains, rivers, and people of Guizhou, as well as the local customs, have nurtured his soul living on a pure land. He is an artistic elf from the Guizhou Plateau.

Pu Guochang's painting creation are rooted in Guizhou, which has both a horizontal atmosphere of historical connections and a vertical atmosphere of historical origins. Perhaps it is the poetic scenery of mountains and rivers that has created his pure and innocent inner world. Pu Guochang wisely drew upon the regional resources of Guizhou culture and continued to conduct in-depth research on the regionalism of art and its contemporary expression.[4] His praise for primitive life, exaggeration and transformation of artistic forms, and deconstruction and subversion of images in his art are enough to show that the unique folk art of Guizhou has deeply integrated into the blood of Pu Guochang. His paintings are very different from traditional Chinese literati paintings, drawing nourishment from the painting language of Picasso and Matisse, and drawing on modern art and folk art, he broke the "realistic painting style", and formed his own unique artistic style. He was born in Sichuan, studied in Beijing, and finally rooted in Guizhou, therefore he skillfully blended the cleverness and intelligence of Sichuan people, the simplicity and honesty of northerners, and the wild temperament of Guizhou people.

In the long years on the Guizhou Plateau, the mountains and rivers of Guizhou have already imperceptibly infiltrated into his spirit. He has been influenced by the essence of this land for a long time and created his own unique art style, and then influenced the artists of Guizhou for several generations. Pu Guochang's research on the ancient and primitive culture of Guizhou's mountainous areas, as well as his exploration of simple and honest folk art, has made his revolutionary enthusiasm increasingly strong. Ethnic minority embroidery, traditional Chinese facial makeup, and the sun imprint on the face of the Miao ethnic group all sparked his strong interest. "The unique features of a local environment always give special characteristics to its inhabitants", and the mountains, rivers, and people of Guizhou, as well as the local customs and traditions, have subtly shaped his aesthetic soul. By paying attention to life and society, he fully demonstrates his affirmation of life. By depicting reality, sincerely and honestly expressing his feelings, he gradually approaches the essence of art.[5] The profound life experience and rich emotional accumulation have laid a solid foundation for Pu Guochang's artistic creation.

#### **5. Conclusion**

Pu Guochang's artistic practice reflects his unique exploration of ink language and also showcases the profound heritage of Guizhou's landscape and culture. His art is rooted in the nature and culture of Guizhou, and his works combine tradition with modernity, Eastern with Western, through unique brush and ink language, showcasing philosophical reflections on the harmonious coexistence between humans and nature.[6] From the selection of interesting themes to the innovation of brush and ink language, his creation runs through the pursuit of passion for life and profound reflection on the essence of art. Starting from Guizhou folk art, he integrated cultural symbols such as Miao embroidery and traditional facial makeup into ink painting, breaking the limitations of traditional literati painting and opening up new horizons for contemporary ink painting art. Pu Guochang fully embodied his personality and inner emotions in his works, using artistic expression that combines childlike innocence and philosophy to convey a profound understanding of life and reverence for it.

Meanwhile, Pu Guochang's creations emphasize the connection between art and life. He not only focused on the expression of regional culture, but also delved into the relationships between humans and society, humans and machines, and

humans and materials, presenting the complexity of modern society from a unique perspective. His works integrated cultural heritage with personal emotional expression, forming an artistic style that equipped with both times characteristics and universal significance. Whether it's the symbol of aloofness in the "Mosquitoes" series works or the concise and condensed brushstrokes in the "Golden" series works, both demonstrate his profound understanding of artistic language and precise expression of his inner world. It can be said that Pu Guochang's artistic career is a journey of constantly pursuing freedom and innovation. He approached artistic creation with a devout attitude, skillfully combining personal emotions, regional culture, and modern artistic concepts to construct a unique art system. His creation is not only a heartfelt ode to the land of Guizhou, but also an important exploration of the future development of Chinese ink painting art. He use his paintbrush to depict the profound emotional connection between nature and culture, demonstrating how art can show new vitality in modern context.

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