

Considerations on Jean Fautrier's Paintings and their Literary Context

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Abstract: In the 20th century, paintings were created as a result of essentially free and subjective activities of individuals. During the transition to modernism, numerous works emerged, painted on the basis of greater subjectivity and more innovative ideas for art. These ideas resulted in a more uniquely subjective and abstracted creativity. In the case of Jean Fautrier, although his early works were based on realism, he also transformed and altered his style of expression, and finally adopted a method of 'impasto.'

After World War Two, a more eccentric abstraction, painting without any form or style, emerged. The resulting works were the products of more arbitrary and independent intentions of painters as individuals. At the same time, it is certainly true that modern art after the 1950s has been criticized in many respects. As abstract modern art diverged from tradition and from the conservative creativity of western painting, art without form became a target for traditional criticism. Jean Fautrier's sequence of works, *Otage*, was an early example of what Michel Tapié named Art Informel. The motif is clearly the threat of violence by Nazism and the victims of that violence; Fautrier's expression is quite impressive and understandable as a product of historical disaster. Inhuman cruelty, deformed in the medium of thick oil painting, claimed a literary context which is inherent in the paintings. However, the essence of the works is possible only when expression is consistent with the literary context. Extreme deformation by Fautrier is clearly a product of the literary predicament which he experienced during the war. Fautrier's trial is regarded as pre-Art Informel, inherited in the trend of abstractionism. Such an idea for abstractionism, different from that of W. Kandinsky or P. Klee, transformed traditional ideas of art into a more indecipherable form and deformed the individual's concept. This study intends to examine the essence of Fautrier's works and clarify the literary context behind his art, from the basis of criticism of modern art.

Key words: Art Informel, Poetical sentiment, Literary context, Impasto, Jean Fautrier

1. Jean Fautrier's paintings as a precursor of Art Informel

The art of modernism may be thought of as the product of a more subjective creativity in the 20th century. Since paintings had begun to represent a more individual vision, expressed both in colours and forms towards the end of the 19th century, it was inevitable that imagination came to be ascribed to individuality, and the subjective creativity of an individual accelerated more progressively and innovatively during the 20th century. However, at the same time, it is important to acknowledge that the heritage of art or

tradition is an accumulation of the cultural background which our forebears nurtured in their cultural age. The independent imagination of an individual is never alienated from tradition. Yet, the torrential advent and subsequent eruption of a new wave of modern art also seems to be the product of the age.

What supported German Expressionism, Fauvism, or Surrealism was the subjectively innovative vision and characteristic imagination of each painter who had been influenced by various factors in the century, ranging from psychological thought, politics and gender, to Darwinism or physics. In the age of the 'individual,' painters who

belonged to some school of artistic ideology presented innovative form, colour, and composition respectively. Emile Norde, Karl Rottruffe, or Ernst Kirchner utilized more 'vivid' colours and independent forms. Max Ernst, a representative surrealist sometimes adopted a technically minute description of a profound image which led to a dream-like illusion. Salvador Dali's works presented a very unrealistic world of dreams where all human desire, fear, envy, anxiety are realized in the paintings, releasing the depth of the naked human mind. Since the advent of modern painting, various possible forms of methodology, imagination, and technique were introduced by each painter. And importantly, some literary context that painters nurtured in their lives as painters could also be recognized. Ernst painted images of the despair and corruption of Europe after World War One. Dali described grotesque images of ugly humans who represented the cruel and foolish landscape of the civil war in Spain. Paul Klee showed more psychological allusion in elaborately geometrical abstraction. Some modern painters succeeded in radiating 'literary context' in their works which can be evaluated as part of the heritage of modern art.

What can be seen in the works of Jean Fautrier? In effect, he started his painting career earlier than other painters who belonged to 'Art Informel.' In that sense, he does not belong to the movement, a fact that he himself recognized. There were other painters, namely Jean de Buffet, Wols and Pierre Soulages were artists living in the same age. The term 'Art Informel' was coined by a critic, Michel Tapié, who devised the expression to refer to a form of art which is essentially abstract and with no definite 'form.'¹⁾ Therefore, Art Informel is based on the absolute deformation of an object, the freer use of colours, and intuitive images created by the painter. Given this basis, it seems that the work is a product of the intuition and independency of the painter. This idea for new art took root in America, and was further developed there, diversifying into 'action painting' or 'abstractionism', which in turn partly led to the development of a more general trend of abstraction in the post-war era. It can be supposed that the advent of 'abstractionism' provided modernism in the early 20th century with some kind of conclusion. Although it

is certain that the eccentric expression of Andre Masson or Joan Miró created mysterious forms, peculiar colours and composition, their works also contained various types of symbolism. Allusions to myths, deformed natural materials and animals, symbolized organisms and humans are expressed in their paintings. Symbolization is likely to represent some concrete images, and to convey semantic systems of the literary context of myths. However, there is some distance between works of Art Informel and Surrealism. The difference is surely due to the method of expression and to their 'form.' Fautrier is not an advocator of Art Informel as mentioned, but merely regarded as a predecessor of the movement. However, the form he used seemed to be without any distinct 'form.'

Fautrier was, in his early career, rather a traditional French painter in Europe, but later altered his style of expression. He created his early works in the style of Realism, as did others (Fig. 1). His early realistic style is characterised by dark colours and shadows: In particular, it is recognized that he excelled at using dark brown, black, or gray which seemed to be effective in expressing gloomy, and serious tones on the canvas. Specifically, a cynical expression is found on the face of a figure he described which resembled the style of German Noiezaricheit. In fact, in his works of the 1920s, the lines and approaches to an object were somewhat similar to those of Otto Dix²⁾. Although Fautrier was not directly influenced by Dix, Fautrier simply tried to describe figures or still lives as they were: he sometimes selected a grotesque object such as the carcass of a dead animal, or the corpse of a human with the abdomen cut open. His works before the war never showed light nor beautiful colours or motives. The facial expressions of figures appeared severe and realistically described within a dark and serious atmosphere. Later, the lines and forms gradually became deformed and ambiguous. The decisive factor which converted his expression into such a radical form was World War Two and the occupation of France by Germany, events which tremendously affected his works. The Gestapo arrested and tortured many French people who were suspected of belonging to the resistance. People lived in fear of violence, death, and execution. Fautrier attempted to describe images

of people's expressions as threatened and in terror, as though trapped in a kind of awful preoccupation. People were obliged to live in a state of anxiety, and fear always lurked in their minds. The situation was totally different from that of World War One, in that his country was occupied by the strict coercion and violence of Nazism. The system of control meant that the Gestapo always kept civilians under surveillance and identified people who were suspected of resisting German's authority and who might fight back against Germany. Under such an oppressive society, Fautrier started a series of motif-based works, *Tête d'Otage*, taking the opportunity to use his personal experiences. He persistently concentrated on the motif of 'Otage,' which mean 'a hostage' in English. Later, these works served to provoke and impress critics, thus establishing his reputation.

In addition to this, before he started to make *Tête d'Otage*, he carved a sculpture in 1942, titled *Grande tête tragique* (Fig. 2). Half of the face is scooped out, as though cut off with a sharp chisel. This grotesque head may also be assumed to symbolically represent the havoc caused by the violence of Nazism. However, this work was produced before he was arrested by Gestapo in 1943. Moreover, what is important is that he gradually altered his style of paintings, increasing the layer of oil on paper that was attached to a canvas. Fruits and vessels as still life are given a cubic effect by a method of 'impasto' named 'Hautes Pâtes' in French. This alteration indicates Fautrier's change of mind for creating a new style of expression. He used not only oil, but gouache, paint, paper, or plaster. What can be presumed is that painting by impasto has, to a certain extent, the effect of expressing the uneasiness or fear of a human under a situation of extreme violence. After he sculpted this work, it was in the following year he was targeted by the Nazi police³). The hideous trauma that Fautrier underwent during custody became a decisive opportunity which led to his representative work, the series of *Tête d'Otage*. The fact that works of the same title were painted thirty three times indicates that the experience shocked him to the point that he was obliged to continue to engage in the same motif. The basic composition and image of the motif are almost similar to each other. Among these

works, *Tête d'Otage* n°9 (Fig. 3), the most representative one, shows only the left side of the face of a man; the eye seems blurred, the white-based outline of the skull is also obscure, and the feeling of a face deformed by plaster projects the image of crushed or transformed agony and the pain of the man. In contrast, the colour of the background of the face is painted in dark-blue or partly dark-green. The margin between the outline of the skull and the background seems to be almost trembling. This suffocating and silently pathetic expression suggests leaking fluid in the form of venous blood, and expresses the narrow space of the ward where the Gestapo imprisoned both him and others. This face almost completely occupies the center of the canvas. The mixture of gouache and plaster convey the silent existence filled with torment. What impresses most is the impact given by the size of the centered face, and the facial expression obscured by deformation. The concrete expression of a human face is corrupted here. Obvious descriptions of the face or the body are avoided. Since Fautrier had begun to use the method of impasto, this type of deformation was not necessarily a rare case for him. As for another *Tête d'Otage* (Fig. 4), the composition is almost the same as that of Fig. 2. The eye is in a dark hollowed out cavity. The angle of the head is also the same, expressing the helpless image of a man kept in custody, slowly being suffocated. However, as these works were created after the sculpture *Grande tête tragique*, the serious meaning of this deformation is doubled through the method of impasto.

Another example, *Le fusillé* (meaning a man shot dead), shows corruption of form that has progressed more extremely (Fig. 5). Instead of using gouache, this is painted using oils; it is impossible to recognize the head or the body of the man, which has become a mass of oily material. This material seems equivalent to the image of the victim, showing uncertainty of the man's life or death. The thick white mass of oil provokes a fantastically sinister image of the dead, shrouded in silence. Red is scattered like powder on the white mass, projecting the image of blood. Fautrier continued the series of 'Otage' from 1943 to 45, a time span corresponding to the period of Germany's occupation. The awful threat constituted a trauma for Fautrier, who we assume recreated the fear through abstract

deformation by using the impasto method. The distinct form of a human is lost in the process of creating the image of a tortured man. The mass of oil by impasto represents the death pangs of everyman. The motif and expression of *Otage*, the representative one, expresses an ultimate dread of every-person of the earth exposed to an atrocity. The persistent pursuit shows Fautrier's strong intention of expressing the truth of the political oppression. Although it is not certain how many times he witnessed such cruel scenes, he decided to describe the deformed face as the symbol of his motif.

Another example, *Le Massacre*, addresses a similar theme to that of *Otage* (Fig. 6). Yet, the important point is that death is multiplied in the cruelty of massacre. Faces are floating on the whole canvas like ghosts or an illusion. Each face appears deprived of individuality and the right to live as a human. The cruelty of massacre is expressed in calmness; they show submissively calm expressions, because death is carried out with overwhelming power and violent execution which no one can resist nor survive. Fautrier succeeded in describing silent torment through the characteristic expression of his paintings. And it is important to remember that the prototype of his motif is concentrated in the image of sculpture, *Grande tête tragique*. Moreover, the silent cruelty is the fundamental source of literary context that worked as an incentive for Fautrier's creation of art in the age. In 1945, André Malraux wrote a preface of the exhibition of *Otage* of Fautrier: 'Early art of *Otage* is still rational. These works are made from dead forms which are reduced into the most simple expression by simplified and dramatic lines. Concerning the colours of lead that fundamentally belong to death, Fautrier gradually began to restrict the conspiracy with direct allusions to blood and corpses. Replacing the early colours, other colours have emerged from the rational bind with torture. At the same time, lines that seek expression do not replicate tragedy, but appear on that devastated profile. There are no longer lips which are transformed into veins, and eyes which stare at nothing. This is the world of a hieroglyph of torment (Jean Fautrier: 17).⁴⁾

This suggestion in a sense established his reputation as a painter. Having lived and witnessed the tragedy that befell

France during harsh times of war, he created "a hieroglyph of torment" which could express the universality of human torment. Deformation, impasto, and the image of a hollowness where human rights are non-existent could express human agony, torture, and tragedy in a new way. The literary context of the tragedy was represented in the expression of death pangs. Fautrier succeeded in depicting such literary context and human angst through abstraction that had almost lost its distinct form. The expression of death pangs is consistent with formless abstraction.

However, it is necessary to consider the validity of expression by abstraction. It seems that Fautrier's transformation of an object or image led to a description of an essentially mental entity, the torment of people. In his case, transformation or abstraction overcame realism. The motif of war, of the cruelty of humans in historical paintings is frequently adopted by painters. They dealt with the motif, describing the disaster of war, the torment of horrified people, based on the facts of history. They regarded war as the most evil and ugly violence among human activities. Jacques Callot presented a series of ghastly scenes of the Thirty Year War in the Epigraph series, *Miseres et les Malheurs De La guerre*. Francisco de Goya depicted the massacre of Spanish civilians by the army of Napoleon in *El 3 de Mayo de 1808*. Eugène Delacroix painted a scene of the massacre of Greek people by the Turkish army (*Scène des massacre de Scio* (1824)). Otto Dix left many works which persistently depicted the real cruelty of war on the front lines through grotesque expression. These paintings directly express the facts of history. Therefore, the importance of description is placed on the vision and recognition of historical facts by the painter. This vision, combined with the mode of expression of realism, steadily created the literary context which exists behind these works. The literary context of wars almost always proclaims the cruelty, merciless tragedy, and evil violence caused by the ugly reality of war⁵⁾.

In the case of Fautrier, the literary context engendered by the fear of Nazism was deeply ingrained in his consciousness, and becomes an incentive for creation. He persistently dealt with the motif '*Otage*' (Hostage) or '*Massacre*,' which does not have a direct impact on

the context of war. Extremely obsessed with compulsive images of horrible torture or execution, Fautrier introduced the innovative method of impasto into his works. Since the form as a painting is corrupted through peculiar abstraction combined with thick painting materials, the implication of the literary context is difficult to detect without a clear recognition and understanding of the context of war, and the artist's intention for his creations.

This is the crucial point. Fautrier is certainly the precursor of Art Informel. He involuntarily created an innovative method. His intention was to depict the distress

of people, and the gasps in the throes of death suffered through cruel political violence which deprived people of human rights and respect. His method is consistent with expression. Abstraction is needed to describe the torment of people's emotions and anxiety which emerged as a real facet of historical events. Transformation of an object and image are the natural product of his transition in creating art. Nevertheless, the method of abstraction has difficulty; if it does not have an explicit literary context, universality can not be expressed.



Fig. 1
Nature morte 1925 Huile sur toile
85×116 cm Collection particulière
Courtesy Galerie Di Meo



Fig. 2
Grande tête tragique 1942 Bronze
pinté 34.8×17.2×21.1 cm Centre
Pompidou, Paris



Fig. 3
Tête d'Otage n°9 1944
Gouache avec des médiums, gypse
sur papier marouflé sur toile 73×
60 cm Ohara Museum Art



Fig. 4
Tête d'Otage 1944
Huile et pigments sur papier marouflé sur toile 64×
54 cm The National Museum of Art Osaka



Fig. 5
Le fusillé 1943-45
Huile et pigments sur papier marouflé
sur toile
38×46 cm Collection particulière



Fig. 6
Le Massacre 1943
Huile sur papier marouflé sur toile
114×146 cm Collection particulière



Fig. 7
Les pommes à cidre 1946
Huile et pigments sur papier marouflé sur toile 65×92 cm
Collection Fondation Gandur l'Art, Genève, Suisse

2. Consideration of criticism of Abstractionism or Art Informel

Many years have passed since critics decisively suggested that the method of modern art had devastated the essence of art, and as a result it became no longer possible to create art in the era of post-modernism. Such criticism suggests that the tradition of art and its heritage in Western culture came to a halt entirely after World War Two. Even if it is partly true that the proponents of modern art were willing to create something remarkably innovative beyond traditional art in the 'pre-modern age' (in this case, from the end of the 18th century to the middle of the 19th century), in effect, extreme abstraction or subjective imagination brought about a kind of chaos and confusion which severed the inherited tradition and cultural spirit. As many suggest, abstractionism of modern art falls into what may be described as a negative spiral, in which art works must progress into ever more eccentric and fantastical forms, unable to escape from the spiral as it continuously pursues stronger eccentric subjectivity. Arguments proposed by some German critics show clearly understandable explanations on their views of art (particularly based on Western paintings.) They are critical of artistic activities of post-modernism, suggesting that they had lost the validity of creation of art. For example, Heinz Friedrich points out that the effect of 'art' had changed from 'catharsis' in the Greek era into 'grotesque' in modern times. The idea of grotesque is derived from the extremely subjective and innovative imagination of modern art. Hans-Georg Gadamer indicated that modern art had rapidly transformed into something 'un-understandable' through the process of dissimulation of reality, until a point was reached where nobody could gain an understanding of the meaning of the works. The effect of dissimulation was the result of abstractionism that had become too subjective. In a sense, Gadamer's suggestion is valid, and it is reasonable to think that this kind of viewpoint implies that modern art in the middle of the 1950s had reached a dead end, and could only produce works of self-satisfied imagination. Their opinions are a direct criticism of the self-complacency of abstractionism, or Art Informel. At

least, the general view on this matter accepts opinions such as those given by Gadamer or Friedrich. Thirty years have passed since these suggestions were presented, and it seems this dead end continues in the 21st century⁶⁾.

Another view from Herbert Read, who sharply criticized the period of modern art in the middle of the 20th century, may also be referred to here. He explained various aspects and issues concerning art in the 1960s. In his argument, he worried about the limit that Western painting faced after the war, based on a deep insight into the ideas of Chinese art. Comparison of Western painting with Chinese (or Eastern) traditional art is effective in providing insight into the essence of expression in modern times. Western painting is primarily based on the tradition of Greek and Roman art, taking into account the ideas of beauty and atheism. Sophisticated realism, describing an object as it is, is a foundation of Western art. Such style of realism based on strict objective depiction was established during the 17th and 18th centuries.

However, in the East, ideas regarding the artistic paintings of China or Japan were different. When one thinks about the essence of painting, as a comparative source, Chinese art or that of Japan serve as good examples. Chinese painting, especially beautiful Chinese-style landscape painting or ink wash painting, thrived during the era of the Northern Song dynasty. It was much admired in the courts, and was inherited by each reign of the following dynasties until about the age of the Shin dynasty. Although Chinese painting also puts importance on describing the essence of an object, it also includes more philosophical implications. '書画同源,' the term of art, means that poetry, calligraphy, and paintings have a common root in their creation. In other words, painting is an act of orchestrated art. As this term suggests, painting indicates not only the depiction of a landscape, but also the expression of other factors inherent in an object. Depicting the real outlines of mountains, temples, streams, trees and mist, a painter aims to understand the fundamental truth of nature which the landscapes present. Therefore, the artist is required to have sensitive insights and meditation on the scenes he tries to depict. Traditional Chinese paintings, as well as India-ink drawings, are acts of creation by painters



Fig. 8 荆浩 匡廬圖
National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan



Fig. 9 郭熙 早春圖
National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan

who explicate objects through insights and observations of nature. Elaborate and correct depiction is mixed with subjective-objective consideration of landscapes. The rich imagination and expression found in Eastern paintings are different from those of Western art in the way nature is approached (Fig. 8)⁷⁾.

On the other hand, H. Reed, who has a profound knowledge of Chinese paintings, gives credit to the action painting of Jackson Pollock. He thinks the works of Pollock result from emotion, or energy of creative ‘spirit’ which are also common to the ideas of Chinese paintings ‘氣韻生動⁸⁾.’ It is not clear that the energy of action painting is equivalent to the spirit of Chinese art, but Reed at least recognizes the validity of the ‘emotional’ power of Pollock. He does not accept incoherent paintings which fall into self-complacency, but understands the method of abstraction, or surrealism.

What is common to the ‘spirit’ is the poetical sentiment of ‘書畫同源,’ or the idea of ‘三遠’ in India-ink drawings. Monotonous paintings in India ink do not necessarily require the idea of realistic perspective. The outlined mountains, ridges, valleys, the degrees of slopes of a hill need no correct measurement for drawing. What is important for the painter is to depict the ‘essence’ of the object; that is, understanding geological structures—the abiotic essence—the ridges, the undulation of the mountain surfaces, rivers, valleys, or the movement of clouds, taking account of many biotic essences—various beautiful birds, water, butterflies, tiny figures, and considering the landscape orchestrating these essences leading to expression as a painting and realization of the

painter’s rich insight and poetical sentiment. The idea of ‘三遠’ which was devised by 郭熙 is the approach of a painter that mainly consists of three ‘view-points’: one view is that a painter looks up to the mountains from the foot of a mountain; another view is that he observes a mountain horizontally, observing from the opposite side of another mountain; and one further view is that he understands and draws the whole landscape of mountains. The last vision offers a kind of insight through which the painter can draw profound mountain ranges (Fig. 9.) The importance is not found in realistic drawing, but in the angle and position where the painter stands, and what is more, through the insight and poetical sentiment of the painter. These last two are the same as ‘literary context.’ In Chinese painting, poetical emotion is inspired in the work. Meditation, respect, and poem are combined with the lines, form, and colours in the landscapes drawn by the painter. Thus, it may be supposed that the culture of painting in Eastern art is a synthesized creation: the works are the consequence of literary context. Or rather such poetical sentiment is rather important in the tradition of Eastern paintings; reality of the form is less important, and whole forms are deformed, or abstracted by the literary imagination of the artist. Yet, this also appeared in Western art later: These approaches are in effect, seen in works of Cézanne, or Van Gogh, and this transition led to modernism in the 20th century. The ideas of Chinese paintings, in a sense, seem to be reflected in modern abstraction of Western paintings. Reed explicitly suggested the importance of the idea of perspectives and realism of paintings of both Eastern and Western art.

In the early 19th century, New-classicism, Romanticism, or realism supported the idea of Western paintings. Particularly, Romanticism was idealism which drove the energy of subjective creation by the independent human mind, including literature. It was a movement of artistic spirit based on emotional subjectivity, or intuition inspired by nature, paralleling the transition of history and revolution through the continent of Europe of the age. In painting, such subjectively independent sentiment of idealism enabled painters to create innovative works. Painters like Francisco Goya, Eugène Delacroix, Paul-Gustave-Louis-Doré, Caspar David Friedrich and others are representative of Western art of that age.

Impressionism replaced Romanticism in the middle of the 19th century. More subjective vision and techniques were incorporated by the painter in their expression. More independent and sophisticated techniques were dramatically introduced into the vision, effect, or imagination of their works. And the painter's insight into and meditation on an object were concentrated in the way of expression; that is, each painter pursued a more fundamental and profound mode of expression. The effects of light, reflection, shadows, atmosphere and water or the perspective of space were utilized in the process of painting more detail. Although the motif of historical subjects, or sacred stories or myths decreased, subjective vision and meditation, or poetical sentiment were incorporated into each expression.

It is well known that, regarding modern expression in Western painting, Paul Cézanne altered the conventional vision of realism of the 18th century by deforming realistic

form, or Vincent Van Gogh dramatically changed the use of colour and form. In fact, it is manifest that after Cézanne, Claude Monet, or Van Gogh, or from the influence of Henri Matisse, a cascade of innovative paintings erupted, as if they tried to escape from the conventional realism of Western art. It is not necessary to indicate their innovation here. What is important is that poetical sentiment, emotion or meditation are clearly immanent in their works. Western impressionism conveyed the painter's consideration and subjective sentiment to a notable degree. The artists are inherent innovatively in their elaborate and creative process of expression. Deformation and transformation of an object were necessary; a real mountain is transformed into Cézanne's image (Fig. 10). Elaborate drawings like Cézanne's are recognizable in Fautrier's early works⁹⁾. Fautrier also pursued his method of expression through his career of painting, but he suffered from the disaster of history in his age. Ironically, his pursuit of expression led him to an innovative method of impasto which could express the torment of people in the 20th century. The face of Fig. 11 by Fautrier was deformed into something which nobody can confirm as being a human face or not.

Fautrier's sentiment is the pain and torture of the human mind caused by the fear of violence. Abstraction and deformation are the result of the necessity of the process of expression. Form without distinct form, informel, is the product of literary context for Fautrier. This is art of the age and of the transition of history. Abstractionism was criticized in the post-war era, and such criticism is proper to the extent that art was based on self-righteous and self-complacent activity. In that sense, suggestions by Friedrich,



Fig. 10 Mont Sainte-Victoire 1902-4
Oil on canvas 69.8×89.5 cm
Philadelphia Museum of Art



Fig. 11 Tête d'Otage n°23 1944-45
Huile et pigments sur papier marouffé sur toile
27×22 cm Collection particulière, Courtesy
Galerie Lansberg, Paris

Gadamar, or Reed are completely correct. But if abstraction or Art Informel includes literary context, or an adequate representation of the sentiment of the artist, the validity of such works can be recognized.

3. Conclusion

In the art of Western painting, Jean Fautrier can be identified as a painter of pre-Art Informel. His peculiar style, including the method of impasto, greatly influenced later painters of Art Informel. However, his style was not created only for the purpose of innovation which challenged the originality of modern art, but was the result of expressing human existence in his age. People around him had suffered awfully from torture and pain engendered by the disaster of the war. Transformation and abstraction were necessary styles to describe the torment of human souls common to all people of the world. Torment and agony of people cannot but be expressed in such deformed impasto painting or sculpture. Deformation and impasto were inevitably essential mode of expression for Fautrier who tried to describe the true torment of human souls. Such deformed face was necessity to universality of expression.

The importance of Fautrier's paintings, therefore, is the literary context behind the works. Literary context, in this case, is the disaster of the war, the historical facts, and the violence of Nazism. Numerous people suffered the political atrocity; many victims were killed or injured in Europe. The torment was concentrated into tragedy as literary context. As offered in the critiques of Friedrich or others, extreme abstraction in modern art can not be evaluated appropriately. However, this is not the case for the works of Fautrier. The literary context, or cynical sentiment of his viewpoints are effective for the creation of art in that age, and moreover, the context was based on history. Deformation and abstraction involved expression of injured human souls. On this point, Fautrier's informel paintings should be adequately evaluated.

Notes

- 1) Jean de Buffet proposed the idea of 'Art Brut' which was later transformed into English as 'outside art'. The idea of 'Art Brut' presented spontaneous creativity, and the importance of a foundation of pure artistic sense. A French critic, Michel Tapié, influenced by this movement, termed this 'Art Informel.'
- 2) Both Fautrier and Dicks experienced World War One as a soldier in their youth. Fautrier was injured by toxic gas at the front. It is possible to think that the fear of war engendered by this experience affected his art.
- 3) In 1943, Fautriere himself was finally arrested by the Gestapo, and held in jail for four days. After this traumatic incident, he began to create *Tête d'Otage*.
- 4) Jean-Paul Sartre admired Fautrier as 'the most postwar painter.' Sartre thought Fautrier was a painter who realized existentialistic painting. André Malraux, like Sartre, also admired his works by using the impressive expression: "This is the world of a hieroglyph of torment." (Translation of the quoted passage is by the author.)
- 5) It goes without saying that these paintings and painters are critical of the violence and cruelty of war.
- 6) These suggestions presented by Friedrich or Gadamer are the typical criticism of all avant-garde art in the 20th century, which can be applied to not only paintings, but music, ballet, sculpture and others. (Translation of the quoted part is by the author.)
- 7) 荆浩 was a Chinese painter (Dates of birth and death are unknown) who lived in the age of Tang. It is thought that he built the foundation of Chinese landscape painting of North China. 郭熙 (1023?-1085?) was a Chinese painter who lived in the age of the Northern Song dynasty of China. His art is regarded as the most important among Chinese landscape painting.
- 8) 气韻生動 generally means 'Spiritual Resonance.' 書画同源 can be expressed by 'poems and paintings have the same spiritual source.' 三遠 can be expressed by 'Three perspectives.'
- 9) It is not certain how much Fautrier was affected by the style of Cézanne, but early works show his trials which are based on the art of impressionistic drawing.

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Jean FAUTRIER

Fig. 1 Nature morte, 1925

Fig. 2 Grande tête tragique, 1942

Fig. 3 Tête d'Otage n°9, 1944

Fig. 4 Tête d'Otage, 1944 Fig. 5 Le fusillé, 1943-45

Fig. 6 Le Massacre, 1943 Fig. 7 Les pomme à cidre, 1946

Fig. 11 Tête d'Otage n°23, 1944-45

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