

# Impact of the Views in Alberti's *On Painting* to the Status of Artists in the Early Renaissance and Subsequent Artist Schools in the Humanism Context

Xiaoyuan Shi

Guangzhou Foreign Language School, Guangzhou, 510000, China

**Abstract.** Renaissance, the most prosperous era of art creation in the European country, encourages thousands of masters in different fields such as paintings, architecture, sculptures, philosophy, and politics to establish their own theories in their respective fields, which greatly promotes the development of western civilization. As the complete "Renaissance man", Leon Alberti wrote his monograph *On Painting* to illustrate the principle of "true beauty" in different conditions. Most researchers and scholars choose to analyze Alberti by his views on the application of architecture, less on painting. However, in this paper, the author is going to analyze the painting principle, select and arrange some important points in his monograph *On Painting* into answers to several questions or topics in the chapter one below, dividing them into several levels and points, and analyze his influence and impact towards the later centuries, which is a gap and also innovative in the research field in Alberti's art theory. The significance and purpose of this paper are that, only after knowing Alberti's own art theory and its influences on the later art field, we could understand this important part of aesthetic developments and history, which is vital in defining "academy style" in arts. As a scholar who researches the classic history and art values himself, Alberti analyzes art history and theory in the past and proposed theories and art directing guidelines related to the classical art values of complete balance and beauty, which also responds to the Renaissance humanism movement. What's more, his important art genre concept "historia" is about history (historical painting), and his theory and book itself influenced and brings a lot of differences to the art field in later centuries, which is the history changed in art styles and school the author research on. Moreover, illustrating the detailed analysis of Botticelli's *The Calumny of Apelles* and Raphael's *School of Athens*, this paper should be included in the category of art history and Renaissance history analysis. This paper is divided into two parts, including the literature review of the book *On painting* and the ideas proposed about art theory, artists' social status, and stated principles of art. Also, Alberti's ideas and concepts such as the most important one "historia" brings deep influence to the later art field, including the changing cultural focal point, increasing the status of artists, especially painters, restating the classical function of arts, and directing people to focus on great work instead of the genre scene. In these two parts, the author illustrates both Raphael's *School of Athens* and Botticelli's *The Calumny of Apelles* as examples in some parts of the analysis, in order to present a clear and detailed picture of the concrete theory. In the third part of chapter two, the author concludes from the reason and inner logic of the revolution and innovation in the art field Alberti brought and promoted, on the revival of the classical art values but also focuses on the humanism ideals, and use the conclusion to analyze the modern-day art situation we are in, and whether there is a turning point in the future art field nowadays.

**Keywords:** Alberti, *On Painting*, Renaissance Art, Art Ideas, Humanism.

## 1. What makes a good painting and a good artist, according to Leon Battista Alberti's *On painting*?

Renaissance, lasting for more than a century in western history, is a critical period in forming people's ideas and perspectives towards arts in current society. Therefore, since society expects progress in the art field, it is of great importance to review what the ancient scholars proposed about paintings and artists during the Renaissance (Baye, 2009). Leon Battista Alberti, who is a great Italian Renaissance humanist artist, architect, and the author of the book painting theory *On Painting*, contended several points of view arguing "what makes a good artist?" and "what makes a good painting?" (Zurko, 1957). In the following of this paper, the author will list various rules Alberti

considered as principles a good painting should obey and provide Sandro Botticelli's *Calumny of Apelles* as an example to see how his painting follows the rules Alberti offered in his book.

For rules to draw a good painting, Alberti proposed the following views. Firstly, at the start of the Book II, 30, he pointed out that there were three dimensions to consider in a piece of painting: "circumspection", which refers to the space and setting around the outline; "composition", which is the way how several surfaces of the object are fitted together; and "reception of light", which means the variations of lights and colors we observe in painting. A qualified painting should correctly picture the outline, possibly using the technique of "veil". (Book II, 31) To be more specific, Alberti pointed out a special kind of painting, "historia"(historical drawing), which is the "great work of the painter". (Book II, 33) In general, he mentioned that a good "historia" should contain "elegant harmony and grace in bodies, which they call beauty", "surface that joined together that pleasing lights pass gradually", and "no very sharp angles (of shadows)", therefore, creating "handsome and beautiful face".(Book II, 35) To achieve this goal of creating beautiful and graceful characters in the historical paintings, we should "observe the Nature and observe long and carefully how (it) has composed the surfaces in beautiful members", in order to create natural and elegant people in paintings. (Book II, 35)

To be more specific, Alberti talked about some rules a good historical painting should follow. The leading concept is "composition of member" (by "member", he meant "limbs and torsos"). Firstly, he claimed that "in the composition of members, care should be taken above all that all the members accord well with one another." According to his saying, "size, function, kind, color, and other similar respects" of the "member" should correspond to grace and beauty, and those aspects ought to correspond with the character's identity, status, trait, and the situation in the painting. (Book II, 38) Secondly, when depicting the skins and clothes, Alberti thought an experienced painter ought to "first sketch in the bones, for they always occupy a certain determined position", which can make its character as natural and accurate as possible. (Book II, 36) Thirdly, Alberti contended the "most difficult thing of all to do" is "to render limbs of a body all alive". He believed that it is significant for the torsos in the paintings, especially the historia, to be in action, and the corresponding color should also be suitable for every part of their body. (Book II, 37)

Except for those points made about bodies, Alberti came up with some ideas on volumes, number of people, emotions, movements, and settings of the historical painting. In Book II, 39, he mentioned that a "historia" must conform in function and size. For instance, it is unseemingly to make some men bigger than others looking from the same distance. Second, talking about the number of characters, he regarded nine to ten people are definitely enough for an elegant setting, and if more, it will cause a mess. (Book II, 40) Thirdly, about emotions, Alberti thought "the same gesture or attitude does not appear in any of the figures", just as the varieties of people he always emphasized here. (Book II, 40) Moreover, another point on the emotion he claimed is that a movement must fill with feelings. (Book II, 41) Last but not least, building up relationships with audiences and calling on their emotions are also important views for the artist. In order to achieve that purpose, Alberti suggested artists "show the movement of a change" and make the setting such as leaves, ropes, and strings on clothes as graceful and natural as possible. (Book II, 42-45)

The previous contents mentioned are the arguments made based on circumspection and composition. Next, claimed by Alberti, talked about the reception of light used in painting a good picture. In Book II, 46, he proposed that the greatest work would be only related to the black and white, which can create a "relief" sense of the painting to make it look real. What's more, a good painter should deal with "in-between" colors observed in our daily lives properly. For example, there is a part of dark color and light color on a particular painting. Of course, this combination of those extremely different colors can "enhance the attractiveness of the painting by its variety and its beauty by its comparisons", but we should always remind ourselves that the overuse of any type of color is fateful damage to the painting. (Book II, 47-49)

At the start of Book III, Alberti finally pointed out some general concepts that he thought all the paintings should follow. A good and seemly painting should be close to "reality", "aesthetic", and

“comparability” to the original object. However, the second one sometimes even weighs more than the third one, due to his keyword emphasized in the whole book: all of them work for elegance and grace. (Book III,52&55)

Lastly, he provided some deliberate suggestions to the new, young painters. Firstly, “do not paint on very small panels, as many do”, since “in small pictures, the greatest mistakes are most easily concealed”, but what an artist should do is to find their weaknesses and make more progress based on them. (Book III,56) Secondly, “when working about to paint a historia, we will always ponder at some length on the order”, and “take some advice from friends”. A painter can only paint after he is clear enough about his ideas. And as soon as he starts, do not procrastinate and do not be impatient. At the same time, a painter should not paint two pictures at the same time since he should “avoid excessive diligence”. (Book III,61-62)

In conclusion, a good painting, according to Alberti, should be elegant and graceful in several aspects; he must master three basic concepts: circumspection, composition, and reception of light, including natural body movements and usage of several colors. Moreover, he made more detailed requirements to paint a historia: movements, volumes, numbers of people, settings, and *Calumny of Apelles* could be a great example to understand and analyze. Finally, he advised painters to be patient and diligent enough, and to ask advice from others more often, in order to create “beauty”.

On the other hand, the obligation of so-called artists, according to Alberti and the humanism value during the Renaissance period, is to pursue the extreme beauty and self-perfection of themselves and the painting. Therefore, Alberti also contained some virtues that a painter should own if he wants to be considered an eligible artist.

As he raised in Book I, there are several technical factors a good painter should be familiar with. Firstly, he must understand that “he will become an excellent artist only if he knows well the boundaries of surfaces and their proportions”, and he should ask someone more knowledgeable on this point. Plus, an excellent painter “has leaned thoroughly to understand the outlines and all the properties of surfaces”. Rudimental concepts of circumspection and composition should be remembered and practiced many times, and only in this way can they establish a solid foundation to become good artists. (Book I,12-13) Secondly, a painter is permitted to use some method to supplement his painting process, such as the veiled method to depict the surface. Alberti said that this question always faced some controversies here, but he insisted on doing so since it will not affect the originality of the painting and will be a great tool to help a new artist to grasp the sense of “elegance”. (Book II,32) Thirdly, they ought to carefully learn about the “composition of members” and every proportion of torsos. What’s more, if they can “seek from nature” and try to imitate the outlines, colors, and compositions of nature at the same time, it is more likely for those new painters to paint more natural and vivid pictures. (Book II,36 & Book III,55) Third, a good painter should pay more attention to their thoughts, even more than his observations. He ought to think about the relations between surfaces and lines; outlines and lights and so on. A painter should “prefer those in painting which leave more for their mind to discover that is actually apparent to the eye”. (Book II,42) Lastly, Alberti pointed out two special techniques good painters should obey: “every defect in a picture appears more unsightly in a mirror”. Therefore, painters can use a mirror to adjust their use of light and color drawing in those paintings. (Book II, 46) The second suggestion is that “you should always have before you some fine and remarkable model which you observe and copy”. It is a useful practice for painters to imitate some great artworks, and this can make their own techniques better. (Book III, 59)

Considering ways to find the inspirations and illuminations of painting subjects, Alberti also provided practical suggestions for all the painters: learn from geometry (which is the foundation of circumspection), poetry, and orations (which are the origins of some historia). (Book III,53) What’s more, poets, orators, and other men of letters should be the painters' best friends and they should have conversations a lot since painters can “not only obtain excellent ornaments from such learned from Homer how best to represent the majesty of Jupiter”, but also provide them more attentive to learning than to financial gain. (Book III,54)

Lastly, Alberti talked about several virtues a good painter should obtain. In Book II, 29, “a mind intent on the gain will rarely obtain the reward of fame with posterity”. He persuaded people do not draw for fame and reputation but for purely improvement of talents and pursuit of satisfaction. People who paint for wealth and vanity will achieve nothing. What’s more, a painter “first of all, is a good man, well versed in the liberal arts”. A good painter should contain great virtues and gifted talents of arts, in order to accomplish their goal of creating real beauty. (Book III,52) Eventually, at the end of the book, Alberti gave out his last suggestion: “Nature gave to each mind its own gifts; but we should not be so content with these that we leave unattempted whatever we can do beyond them.” He believed that the gifts should be cultivated and increased by industry, study, and practice. Talent is important, of course, but hard-working and self-motivation are also the necessities to pursue to be a good artist. (Book III,60)

In conclusion, Alberti illustrated some concepts that he thought a good painter should obey, including aspects of painting’s details, origins of inspirations, and virtues of the painters themselves. As a completely equipped humanist, painter, and the author of a book about art theory, he offered a number of thoughts to show us how Renaissance people consider painters and paintings, what is the definition of “beauty”, and a way our artists in current century can pursue or think about. What’s more, there is no one had researched and proposed a system of theory so detailed about the art and painters’ principles until Alberti appeared. His theory is practical and concrete to every part and detail in the painting, covering three levels of contends, and every suggestion to young painters is available and valid. He developed a set of research methods on the cognition of beauty, which is of great significance to the later understanding of beauty.

## 2. Significant Content in Alberti’s On Painting: the concept of “historia”

In his art monograph *On Painting*, Alberti proposes an important concept, which directly states the set of principles that he values great art pieces and influenced the artistic ideals of later centuries, causing a deep impact on the later European artists. The greatest work of the painter is the ‘historia’ (Book II, 33). Parts of the ‘historia’ is bodies, part of the body is the member (Book II, 33). Therefore, the historia contains the opportunities for artists to show their techniques and skills in every aspect, from members to bodies, from points to lines. What’s more, since historia has the characteristic of “diversity”, it contains both the background of natural landscape or genre scene and the detailed depiction of human beings or gods, making itself more places to show the skills of artists and creating its own beauty. (Grafton, 1989) The following content will illustrate the detailed principle and rules he sets for the history painting (historia) and explained by Botticelli’s *Calumny of Apelles*.

In general, Alberti mentioned that a good “historia” should contain “elegant harmony and grace in bodies, which they call beauty”, “surface that joined together that pleasing lights pass gradually”, and “no very sharp angles (of shadows)”, therefore, creating “handsome and beautiful face”. (Book II, 35) He believed that it is significant for the torsos in the paintings, especially the historia, to be in action, and the corresponding color should also be suitable for every part of their body (Book II, 37). That’s his request for the bodies in the whole picture. What’s more, considering the background, Alberti points out that the background scene should be corresponding to the content or historical event artists depicted and should be as detailed as possible to fit the scene, creating a sense of harmony and elegance in order to obey the classic principle of Greek and Roman arts.

In the late Middle Ages, the whole set of large-scale paintings was more or less composed according to the structure of “mnemonics”. The structural basis of mnemonics is to juxtapose things at different times and places in a certain order, and set some impressive or irrational pictures in these places, so as to build a “hierarchical closed concept about the universe”. For example, in the early 15th century, Masaccio painted a series of murals on the life of St. Peter in the Capella Dei Brancaccio Chapel of Carmine Church in Florence, which depicted the image of St. Peter three times in the same picture (Gao, 2018).

After the late Middle Ages, especially since the middle of the 15th century, the painting system is no longer based on the juxtaposed multiple times and places, as well as the orderly combination of symbolic and conceptualized specific images. Instead, it reproduces many movable images in a unified space. This kind of means based on perspective and serving for painting narration can be called the "rhetoric" expression, which is based on Alberti's painting principles. Painting gradually moves from the mode of "memorization" to the expression of "rhetoric", which is actually the transformation from medieval art to Renaissance art, and this transformation is closely related to Alberti's interpretation of "historia".

The size of the characters in the medieval picture layout often did not follow the actual proportion but was often distinguished by the importance of the sanctity of the characters. Even in the paintings of Giotto and other masters, there were often disharmonious proportions. Alberti believes that the integrity of picture composition and the coordination of proportions can reflect the ability of a painter, and questions the common expression of painting in the late Middle Ages - which is also one of the basic principles of "historia" (Book II).

It would be a serious mistake if one person in the picture was significantly larger than another at the same distance, just as the size of a dog and a horse in a picture. Moreover, as we can often see, the characters in the painting are in a palace, and their performance is as narrow as being locked in a cage. They don't even have room to sit down and bend down.

Alberti's theory, contrary to the previous "memory" pattern of image organization in the middle ages, makes painting move towards a kind of "classicism" in the sense of rhetoric. In fact, it also forms the basic theoretical source of Renaissance painting. Alberti described the organic integration between the various parts of the painting and the visible surface in the painting. When depicting the reproduction of movement, *Historia* showed its rhetorical significance. "Historia" in the sense of rhetoric is closely related to ancient Roman rhetoric and oratory. It is similar to the ancient orator's epic oratory, an art of expressing appreciation and criticism, although there are no fixed rules (Gao, 2018). The rhetoric of ceremony speech is to delight, impress or inspire the audience, so a smooth and elegant style seems to be the most appropriate.

In order to exemplify it more clearly, author uses the *Calumny of Apelles* as the illustration of these rules.

In *Calumny of Apelles*, people's sizes are approximately the same, due to their distances from each other. The color and style of clothes correspond to their identity and status: the king wears more attire while sitting on the throne. The nude people on the left are "truth", pointing upwards to God and Heaven asking for justice. The innocent victim is pulled by the "Calumny" and "Fraud" to the king, who has a bearded man in black, which is the "rancor", standing in front of the king to make lies. King ignores the "ignorance" and "suspicious" who speak near his ears and extends his hand to the "calumny" (Levey, 1960). In this "historia", characters' gestures and movements are so natural and elegant. Nobody's faces or movements are the same types. The painting contains ten figures, which also corresponds to the number of figures Alberti preferred. Besides, several emotions are depicted vividly here: despair, concern, gloat, and so on. It shows the most dramatic movement of the story: the part of the judgment and makes the audiences feel intrigued. Also, the magnificent and detailed painting of the palace, walls, and sculptures as decoration elicits audiences' sympathy for the story itself. For those reasons, *Calumny of Apelles* represents nearly all the rules mentioned in the "historia" painting, considered "beauty" according to Alberti's principles.

It includes the challenge from the concept to the media level, which makes later painters make appropriate adjustments to Alberti's *Historia* theory, thus creating the early prototype of modern "historical painting" theory and later academy art school. This is to discuss the basic principles and methods of thematic narrative painting creation before the formation of historical painting theory, as well as the enlightenment to current historical themes and thematic paintings (Gao, 2018).

Moreover, in the process of studying Alberti, we should pay attention to the introduction of historical ideas. It is because he introduced the view of art that beauty is historical, social, and philosophical that makes his ideas shine and are innovative.

### 3. The attitude the public should hold to painters

Before Renaissance, the Europeans were under the control of strict churches or missions, including control of taxes and restrictions on activities, which is the time people nowadays called the “middle ages”. In the middle ages, the social status of artists is low: they were considered as the craft man, instead of the creator of beauty. They had the same social status as goldsmiths and furniture makers (Conrad, 1959). Before the Renaissance, art was regarded as a kind of handicraft industry, and painters were like craftsmen. The patrons who placed orders for them were high above everything else. Painters were only responsible for making exquisite works and could not leave names on their works. Their status was very humble (Liu, 2010).

In the 12th century, this situation has changed to a certain extent, but artists, with the support of the masses, began to sign their works and won the support of powerful people. For example, Petrarca and Boccaccio once wrote articles praising the paintings of Giotto, Simon and others (Liu, 2010). In Alberti's monograph *On painting*, the promotion of the status of painting directly compares the status of artists with that of ancient artists and poets, and promotes their social status to the elite class. In Alberti's book, he greatly encourages the education of art in the whole society and praised art as the supreme role in people's daily life (Book II). The painting contains many forms we recognized, such as sculptures and architecture, since their details planning, and grasp of a portion of bodies or building parts are all included in the paintings' required ability (Book I). *On painting's* publication in the early Renaissance played such an important role in changing the cultural focal point of the paintings and arts, and helped elevate the social status of painters, which was crucial for painters to produce more and more masterpieces in the future high Renaissance due to the improved living condition and social views (Gao, 2018).

Alberti's view on elevated painters is so innovative and groundbreaking. For instance, the relatively low social status could be seen in the contents and inner meanings of Raphael's *The School of Athens*. Accepted the mission of pope Julius II, Raphael painted four frescos at the study of the pope in the church to illustrate how knowledgeable and wealthy the pope was to own mountains of books in his study. Each fresco represents a subject and theme, including literature, philosophy, law, and theology. The *School of Athens* is one of the four frescos that represent philosophy. The whole painting takes the arch of a tall building as the background. On the hall, there are famous scholars from different times, regions, and schools, including former thinkers and current celebrities. They are discussing freely and passionately as if they were holding a ceremony or celebrating a grand festival, filled with the atmosphere of a hundred schools of thought and condensed the essence of human wisdom. In the center are the most important two figures: Plato and Aristotle, who are the most famous philosophers in ancient Greek times. Around them in the picture are mostly philosophers and mathematics, who were mainly respected during that period of time in the Renaissance (Garrigues, 1879). The only way to indicate the painters is to picture them on the faces of the philosophers, and only three of them appear in the *School of Athens*, which indicates the relatively lower status of painters. Therefore, Alberti's wants and claims on elevating the painter's social status are both innovative and significant, which could be researched in its content itself and its influences and impact as chapter 2 analyzed.

The great change could be seen in the later popularity of a type of painting: the portrait in Renaissance. From the 14th century to the 15th century, a vigorous Renaissance movement was launched in Europe. The humanism it advocated was widely spread from the 15th century to the 16th century. It is people who pay attention to the changes in themselves and the world around them, thus completely changing the face of Europe. The appearance of portraits of secular monarchs, nobles, soldiers, wealthy businessmen, scholars, and other people is the expression of people's personal ideas and the growth of their own values in this period. In particular, resolving a self-portrait has far-reaching significance (Liu, 2010). It is not only the expression of the painter's own personality but also connected with the painter's awakening of self-consciousness and the change of social status.

Just like Alberti's theory, "with the continuous discovery of new theoretical concepts, knowledge, perspective, anatomy, and composition", painters no longer think they are humble craftsmen, but

social elites integrating craftsmen, scientists, and painters. In this case, the position, size, and size of the painter's self-portrait in the work began to change gradually.

In Botticelli's "three kings come to worship", he painted himself as a whole body and stood on an equal footing with the Medici family. In the painting, his face looks out of the painting, and his expression is bold, without feeling uneasy and humble (Liu, 2010).

By the time of independent portrait painting in the 15th century, painters had become the protagonists in the painting. Perugino actually created an "independent portrait" and put it on a shelf alone (Liu, 2010). Among them, the painter hung his black hair on his shoulder at a three-quarters angle, showing an aristocratic image, which was also promoted by Alberti's theory and publication of the book.

The improvement of painters' status is not only reflected by the change of self-portrait content and presentation form but also reflected by the relationship between painters and patrons.

With the development of society and life, the social status and knowledge of painters have gradually improved. Therefore, the relationship with patrons has also changed greatly.

For example, the famous painting *the Last Supper* and the famous sculpture of Michelangelo's *David* were all invited by the monastery and the mayor. Only by inviting two prestigious painters and sculptors at that time could they leave two masterpieces of art. In 1534, Pope Paul III said, "I waited 30 years to invite Michelangelo to do something for me." (Liu, 2010). It can be seen that the status of a painter is no longer a humble craftsman who did everything in the past. He needs several jobs but can't leave a name on his own work. Instead, he has a higher social status and is respected by the public.

What's more, from the painter's attitude towards the originality and immutability of his works, we can also see the improvement of his social status. In the making of ancient Egyptian paintings, the decision-making power of subjects, icons, layout, background and posture, details and so on all rested with the authorities, and painters could not interfere in anything. However, in the late 15th century, Benozzo Gozzoli, even at the strong request of the Medici family, whose political status and wealth power reached the peak in the European Renaissance, did not yield to change the two angels in the painting for them. Leonardo da Vinci asked every patron to let himself decide the theme and working time. Titian was the only painter who asked his papal patron to bend down and pick up his paintbrush (Liu, 2010). From those examples, we can see the obvious increasing social status of painters in the Renaissance, due to Alberti's encouragement and theories published in *On Painting*.

#### **4. The influence of On Painting to the Renaissance artists' social status and schools in later centuries**

This chapter includes what the author finds and concludes when researching the influence of Alberti's book and art theory on the later centuries. The important point is that the author will use Alberti's attention to history and research methods to study his own influence on history. Also, in the third part, the author reviews and analyzes the reason and inner logic of innovation of his art theory Alberti makes, and how it will apply to the current art field situation.

#### **5. The overall impact of On Painting to the both the artists and the current and future society**

In the second and third parts of chapter one, the author mentions that Albert strongly praised the well-rounded and beneficial characteristics of arts, especially painting, which helps elevate the social status of painters, making them more acceptable and respected in society. Painters were able to sign their own typical signatures on the paintings, and their names were more widely accepted by the public and the art market. Some painters could have their own workshops and assistants to help with the work process (O'Malley, 2014). Although in the high and late Renaissance

in Europe, artists' social status changed due to several different events, the initial widely social respect was promoted by Alberti's stated ideal of the superior role of painting among all art forms.

After analyzing the effect on painters' social status in the early Renaissance influenced by Alberti's *On Painting*, as a complete humanist, painter, and architecture himself, Alberti restates the function of arts in the classic world such as ancient Greek and Rome. People and the public environment at that time encouraged the production and inspiration related to art creation, instead of the motionless social environment in the art field at the time Alberti wrote his book. However, not completely the same, Alberti pointed out that the public and government should hold a positive and open attitude to encourage art production, but the theme and subjects should be carefully considered. Except the important and superior concept of "historia" he mentioned, he does not pay much attention to the religious pieces as the former middle-age did. Instead, he proposes that the public should focus on the important reality that happened in our past or present, which puts his focal point on the human life instead of gods or goddess in Greek and Rome, and godfather Jesus in the Christianity. That is the significant cross-era change in his theory, which corresponds to the basic humanism ideals that prospers in the Renaissance period. He successfully uses theories in arts to promote the ideological movement of humanism in its early period and elevate the social status of painters and artists, completing his mission as a humanist and as an artist.

## **6. Influences of the important concept that has been proposed: "historia" and "beauty" related principles**

As stated in the second part of chapter one, the "historia" concept refers to the

historical painting, including the paintings depicting important historical events, ancient fables, and other themes that are relatively formal compared to the genre painting, but not so formal as the religious theme. The reason why he largely praised historical painting is that Alberti thought historical painting provides more opportunities for painters to show their skills rather than any type of painting. For example, the body portions, the arrangements of background and foreground, the procession of settings corresponding to the specific event, the usage of colors, and the use of shadow and lights could be all shown in the historical painting. It both includes the landscape painting and painting of figures in motion and in stories, which is the best and most beautiful piece in all types of painting (Book II).

The ideas on historical painting have a great influence on the art values at that time. The historical painting has its own distinctiveness: not so formal as religious painting or painting about gods and goddesses, but is more formal than the domestic and genre painting. Due to this distinctiveness, art values in the current social change gradually. More and more painters favor the relative formal painting style, such as Raphael and Botticelli who were mentioned in this paper before. These ideals also influenced and promoted the formation of the later "art academy style", which is not the specific art style, but the type of art that will appear in later art periods representing the relatively formalized and standardized themes and painting techniques compared to the period of time it is in (Shi, 2017). That is partly because the "grand" and "great" works are more valuable in painters' minds.

Last but not least, there is one significant concept we could still interpret from Alberti's opinion about the arts and beauty through the concept of "historia". He prefers the "magnificent concept" rather than the common genre and domestic scene in the representation of painting, which just corresponds to the humanism ideals in the Renaissance: reviving the classical art ideals, including the devotion and admiration to gods, myths, and deity. Although at that time, the deity is not as popular as that in the middle ages, the more formal concept of history, facts, and truth is praised as the good material and elements to paint on. On the other hand, the domestic scene such as agricultural activity is not completely considered "absolute beauty" according to Alberti. This concept deeply influences the later centuries. The word "Academy" in the art field is used to describe the relatively classical art style in the corresponding time, which is partly influenced by the ideals of admiration for the formal concept proposed by Alberti in the European Renaissance period (Greenstein, 1997). Although it

looks like a limitation to arts content from the contemporary point of view, it elevates the status of painters in the Renaissance period through the standardization of the definition of a good art piece.

In a nutshell, through the newly proposed concept “historia”, Alberti tries to establish a new set of principles to define good arts. Although it might provide some limitations to the art appreciation values, the new concept successfully elevates the status.

Considering the principles Alberti proposed in his monograph explaining the true “beauty”, he sets a detailed, concrete way to decide what is a good art piece or not, which has a great influence on the painters’ values of beauty and the aesthetic values of sponsors and collectors (Jiang, 2022). The art market for painting has been changed due to Alberti’s theory proposed.

## **7. The reflection we could get from Alberti’s researching method and thought process in forming his own theory**

Alberti’s theory is innovative in its content and method of development, which should be analyzing in his period of time: the early European Renaissance. His theory is both formal and informal, having the characteristic of classical duality in philosophy. Its formality is presented in the most praised concept “historia”, which is related to formal life and event instead of domestic scenes and common daily life. However, it is also informal, since it does not mention anything related to the religion of the ancient Greek or Roman myths. Its innovation is made from the breaking of the past strict requirement and suppression of people’s thoughts and minds in the middle ages, and learning lessons from the long past ancient times, but not copy its thoughts completely. Instead, Alberti pays attention to people's real needs and aspirations in combination with the background of the times and people's acceptance at that time and, therefore, proposes a theory that has been widely accepted and influenced deeply the future art field, and truly facilitates the art’s development, especially for painting.

Viewing back to the modern-day art atmosphere in the society right now, in the face of the development of the market economy and the emergence of consumer culture, art has also moved towards a popular, market-oriented, and commercialized development model. In the wave of marketization, the aesthetic standards of artists and the public have changed, and contemporary aesthetic thoughts have also changed quietly (Cheng, 2021). The art market has changed into two sides: one is facing the market and financial profit, which means the artists have to consider the values and requirements of the collectors, sponsors, or buyers. On the other hand, modern art forms and styles have become freer and stretched out. They do not accept any restriction of forms and lines or the strict theory of composition. Art has become a way to express the feelings and attitudes of the artists, especially in painting.

Then, what could the modern artists do to revive and innovate the styles and forms as the new development and promotion of the art field? Alberti’s theory might be an important inspiration: revive the past and change within the current time. Is it possible to reuse the classical ideals of beauty and balance, but applying in the contemporary context? It will be the “new Renaissance” in the context of the contemporary era.

## Reference

- [1] Katherine A McIver, Reviewed Works: *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy* by Andrea Jane Bayer; *Love and Marriage in Renaissance Florence: The Courtauld Wedding Chests* by Caroline Campbell, *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 62, No. 3 (2009), pp. 918-921
- [2] Alberti, L. and Sinisgalli, R., 2013. *On painting*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- [3] Cheng Nuo. The Survival and Development of Contemporary Art Aesthetics in a Market-Based Environment [J]. *Journal of Shijiazhuang University*, 2021,23(01):147-151.
- [4] Gao Yuan. The Quadrant of History and Theology—Historia and the “History Painting” Theory of the Renaissance [J]. *Fine Arts*, 2018(09):13-16+12.
- [5] Garrigues, G., 1879. RAPHAEL'S "SCHOOL OF ATHENS". *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (October, 1879), pp. 406-420.
- [6] Grafton, A., 1999. *Historia and Istitoria: Alberti's Terminology in Context*. I *Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, Vol. 8 (1999), pp. 37-68
- [7] . Jiang Chi. Observation and Quality - The Aesthetic Carrier and Inspiration of Leon Battista Alberti's "On Painting" [D]. Nanjing Normal University, 2021.
- [8] Levey, M., 1960. Botticelli and Nineteenth-Century England. *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 23, No. 3/4 (Jul. - Dec., 1960), pp. 291-306.
- [9] Liu Jing. The social status of Renaissance painters [J]. *Charming China*, 2010(17): 263.
- [10] M. Greenstein, J., 1997. On Alberti's "Sign": Vision and Composition in Quattrocento Painting. *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 79, No. 4 (Dec., 1997), pp. 669-698.
- [11] O'Malley, M., 2014. Quality choices in the production of Renaissance art: Botticelli and demand. *Renaissance Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (FEBRUARY 2014), pp. 4-32.
- [12] Pepler, C., 1959. ART IN THE MIDDLE AGES. *Blackfriars*, Vol. 40, No. 475 (OCTOBER 1959), pp. 403-411.
- [13] R. de Zurko, E., 1957. Alberti's Theory of Form and Function. *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (Jun., 1957), pp. 142-145
- [14] Rossi, D., 2007. HUMANISM AND THE RENAISSANCE. *The Year's Work in Modern Language Studies*, Vol. 69 (2007), pp. 476-490.
- [15] . Shi Lei. The Forgotten Glory: Reflections on French Academic Art [J]. *Chinese Art Time and Space*, 2017(03): 94-103.