

# The Application and Research of Karlotta Freier Artistic Style in Animation

**Yunxuan Li, Yahe Gao, Mingzhe Zhao**

*School of Design, Xi'an Technological University, Xi'an, Shaanxi, China*

**Abstract:** This study focuses on the unique style of contemporary German surrealist illustrator Karlotta Freier and the strategies and ways to translate it into an animated medium. Freier's illustration style blends the narrative tradition of European illustration with the approach of modern graphic design, using fine lines and vivid color blocks to outline a surreal world of imagery that is melancholic yet warm. The first part of the article provides a systematic analysis of Freier's style, including her visual forms, color schemes, and composition logic; The second part examines Freier's narrative approach, covering three aspects: subject matter, rhythm, and narrative symbols; The third part focuses on the specific means, difficulties and challenges of translating her style from static images to dynamic images, and what innovative solutions there are; This study, on the one hand, provides a set of theoretical tools that can be used to interpret Freier's style; On the other hand, it offers a way to draw on the emotional and poetic narrative perspective of animation to explore the narrative potential of her style.

**Keywords:** Karlotta Freier; Surrealist Illustrations; Animated Adaptation; Visual Metaphor

## 1. Core Visual Features of Karlotta Freier's Artistic Style

With the accumulation of history, the way of constructing time and space with images has continued to develop, although the temporality of images is still reflected in "momentary time", but the spatial expression of images has gradually shifted from "planarization" to the exploration of "spatial depth". During the Renaissance, Western painters sought to create another world in their images, attempting to achieve a sense of reality in the space of the picture by imitating nature. [1] German surrealist illustrator Karlotta Freier turned every

picture into a dreamy story, every stroke her representation of life. Her works are easily recognizable in modern illustration design. She builds on the narrative tradition of European illustration while using the language of modern graphic design to create surrealist illustrations that exist between the poetic and the illusory in memory, and her themes can be summed up as: A surrealistic expression of tenderness and sadness that explores the inner world and sense of isolation of modern people with a private creative approach.

### 1.1 Visual Language: The Expressiveness of Lines and the Simplification of Form

Freier's visual language is characterized by dynamic lines and highly generalized forms. Lively and rhythmic lines: Lines in her picture not only serve to depict Outlines, but also carry the outpouring of paired emotions. She likes to use lines with a sense of retraction, using the contrast of line thickness and the breaking of links to create a sense of rhythm and breathing in the picture, giving the seemingly static picture dynamic tension. [2] Exaggerated character modeling: The characters in the picture are often elongated, such as elongated arms and enlarged limbs. This distortion is not to deuglize the characters, but to enhance the dreaminess of the picture and the artistic expression of surrealism, to make the characters in the picture more symbolic and artistic beyond the shackles of realism. Generalization of auxiliary elements: Auxiliary elements and backgrounds are often summarized in simple graphics, ignoring their details and highlighting the main subject in the picture. This can emphasize the visual center of the picture, allowing the viewer to ignore the superfluous background and focus on the emotional and emotional center conveyed by the picture. The ingenious implantation of surreal elements: Images that do not exist in

daily life in the picture (such as the fish flying in the sky and the big cat king sitting on the throne with a fork) are ingeniously implanted into the picture, making it seem as if it were a reasonable existence in the world as if it were a matter of course, enhancing the dreamy color and spiritual connotation of the picture. Analysis of the work: "Dragon Presents Fortune Treasure" -1 In this work, the dragon is no longer the majestic image of the dragon in our traditional Chinese culture, but is depicted as a gentle and mysterious creature with fine and soft lines. The figures and other animals are concise and expressive, and the mountains, clouds and lanterns in the background are abstracted into symbolic signs. The entire work shows respect for traditional Chinese culture while depicting the traditional Spring Festival. (As in Figure 1)

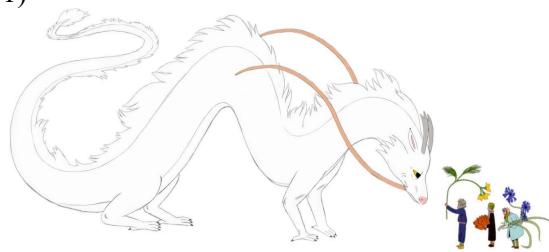


Figure 1. "Dragon Presenting a Blessing Treasure" -1

### 1.2 Color System: Contrast between the Low Saturation Base and the Finishing Touch

Freier's use of color is emotionally expressive, creating a visual identity that is vivid yet steady. The serenity of the dominant tones: She likes to use grayish colors in the picture, such as light grayish blue, grayish green, warm gray and dark blue tones, to create a hazy atmosphere, like an old picture that is about to fade away in memory, or light light and shadow that are faintly visible in a dream. The main colors in the picture are those with a high saturation contrast, while the background is mostly in a grayish tone, creating a soft layering effect. [3] In fact, when two colors appear in the same picture, a contrast is naturally formed, creating the prominent color and the unimportant color. At the same time, our visual instincts stay on the prominent color in the picture, and then look for the next prominent color, and so on until the entire picture is viewed. Among the overall low-saturation colors in her picture, the use of high-saturation bright colors (yellow, red) becomes the visual focus. The use of these

bright colors can not only maintain the original quality of the picture but also prevent the picture from being dull. Analysis of the work: "Dragon Presents Fortune Treasure" -2 The picture is dominated by deep blue and dark green, creating a serene night sky atmosphere. The dragon's body is in warm grey and off-white, creating a soft contrast with the cool background. [4] The orange-red and lantern-colored accents are the visual focal point, activating the image and echoing the thematic symbols of "blessing" and "treasure" (as shown in Figure 2).



Figure 2. "Dragon Presenting a Blessing Treasure" -2

### 1.3 Composition Logic: Planarization Tendency and Spatial Narrative

Freier's composition blends graphic design thinking with narrative spatial arrangement, showing a strong sense of form. [5] Planarization and decorality: Planarization in her works is the transformation of three-dimensional images into two-dimensional forms, emphasizing line modeling and structural simplification, and using generalization, exaggeration, deformation and other techniques to highlight decorative beauty. Her techniques are also reflected in ancient Egyptian murals, Islamic art and Chinese fine brushwork. [6] For example, the procedural treatment of the "frontal law" in Egypt (the side of the head, the front of the shoulders). In her works, she further incorporates the principles of plane composition into modern plane decorativeness, reinforcing the rules of formal beauty through symmetry, balance, and rhythm. In her works she often downplays the perspective variations of objects and uses planarization to emphasize the beauty of form, so her works often present a strong decorative quality. The story of the blank space: In traditional Chinese art, the blank space is not nothingness but an extension of "intention", through which space and emotion are conveyed. There is

also often blank space in her paintings. This blank space is not merely emptiness and nothingness, but a way of expressing the artistic conception, through which the sense of space and the intensity of emotion are conveyed. Unconventional Angle of view: Close-up shots are often used in her paintings to convey emotions through exaggeration. By using top-down, bottom-up, and close-up angles to enhance the dramatic tension and sense of reality in the picture, the viewer is filled with boundless imagination. Visual guidance and balance: Subtly guide the viewer's visual path with lines, color blocks, and the line of sight of the characters, allowing the viewer to build a complete dream story step by step in their mind. Work Analysis: "Dragon Presents Fortune Treasure" -3 The picture has a strong sense of planar decoration, with mountains, clouds, and the body of the dragon presented in clear Outlines. The orange sky serves as the negative space, creating a vast and serene atmosphere. The visual focus extends diagonally from the lower right corner to the upper left corner, and the S-shaped curve formed by the dragon body enhances the rhythm of the picture and avoids the dullness caused by symmetry. (As in Figure 3)



**Figure 3. "Dragon Presents Fortune and Treasure" -3**

## 2. Narrative Style: Emotional Expression and Symbolic System

### 2.1 Thematic Orientation: Modernity Reflection and Emotional Exploration

His works focus on the spiritual situation of modern people, presenting a sense of alienation and a longing for connection. In her paintings, there is a relationship between solitude and coexistence. The characters in the paintings often coexist in the same space but are immersed in their own inner world. This kind of solitude in the group (like a person looking down at a mobile phone in a crowded subway)

also directly echoes the debate on solitude in the modern society of the connected age, where the characters in the paintings are often in the same space. But they are silent in their own inner world, which also reflects the sense of alienation in modern society and the state of personal habit of independent thinking. [7] His works often feature surreal urban scenes that are distorted in a surreal way, with some curved buildings and other atypical spatial layouts suggesting the anxiety of modern social life. In her works, scenes of the past, present and future often coexist, suggesting the changing nature of memory and time. In the painting, the gears of the clock float in the air, and the marks of the gears become the extension lines of the street, suggesting the sense of fragmentation of the passage of time through the alternation of reality and illusion of the lines. This treatment is similar to the concept of "shadow theft", both of which reorganize the logic between reality through unconventional elements.

### 2.2 Narrative Rhythm: Suspended Moments and Quiet Tension

Freier is good at grasping the "critical moments" before and after the action to convey dynamic effects through static images. She refuses dramatic peaks in the picture and is good at showing the moment when the action is about to occur, thereby provoking the audience's speculation and resonance about the plot. [8] For instance, the floating and flowing elements in the picture exist slowly against the rules, creating dream-like beats that amplify the emotional tension. The quiet tension in the picture is presented through the use of large color blocks and a brief background, by placing the subject in front and leaving the background blank to fill the large color blocks, thereby adjusting the narrative rhythm and provoking deep thought in the viewer. The artistic features of Surrealism not only provided the illustrators with rich creative inspiration, but also profoundly influenced their design concepts. Its surrealist style is based on a set of recurring, symbolic visual symbols. Work: Cover Piece for The New Yorker This work, set against the backdrop of New York during the pandemic, depicts watchkeeping in isolation with separate scenes at each window. The blue-toned architectural complex elevates

reality to a surreal allegory, capturing tension in stillness and implicit emotional connections, a typical embodiment of its narrative style. (As in Figure 4)

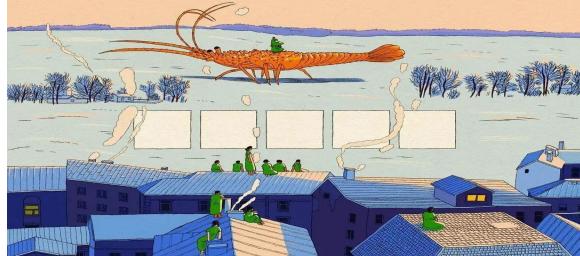


Figure 4. The New Yorker

### 3. Animation Transformation Paths and Aesthetic Translation

Transforming Freier's static aesthetics into dynamic images requires a focus on the continuation of visual language and the integration of the temporal dimension. The first part is the dynamic strategy of visual elements, such as character transformation. When depicting a character, some deformations can be made to the character, such as showing emotional changes, reconstructing the character's organs, unbalanced movements, etc. (A normal character's arm would grow flowers, grass, trees, and the character's arm would turn into a huge radish, This is used to convey a sense of unreality. The second part is scene and transition design, such as distorting the terrain in the picture and then slowly transitioning to the next scene in the distortion to achieve metaphorical transitions. [9] (for example, a pool with a swirling twist gradually transitioning to another scene) This approach can enhance the dreaminess of the picture and the poetic coherence during transitions. The third part is that her narrative rhythm should be adapted to the animation. Referring to her previous painting technique of "frozen moments", when applied to the animation, the animation speed should be inclined to focus on the expression of the overall emotion and the rendering of the charm, and the animation playback speed should not be too fast. This can be achieved by combining ambient sound effects with slow camera movements during animation playback.

### 4. Challenges and Innovative Approaches in the Animation Process

Extending static images to the temporal dimension faces multiple challenges such as

style unification, rhythm control and technical implementation, which require creative means to address. First, the dynamic and static beauty in the picture should be balanced. If there are incorrect dynamic Settings in the animation, it will destroy the poetry and elegance of the original work. And most of the original works use hand-drawn lines and textures, and it is a very difficult task to play them in a consistent style between consecutive frames in the animation. At the same time, the poetic intentions the author intends to convey in the original work - how long the metaphor should be presented in the animation - also affect the audience's understanding of the metaphor in the picture and the smoothness of the entire animation. Finally, the color variations in the original work are very rich, so how to use the limited colors to express the entire plot in the animation presentation to keep the picture style consistent in the plot and maintain the same sense of simplicity as in the original work is also a challenge. [10] Next will introduce some innovative solutions. First, do not let the characters or other characters in the picture wander stiffly, but move on the screen in the order of the viewer's viewing. It's as if we are looking at a famous painting and our gaze follows the painter's composition form and the distinction between the main and secondary elements. Imagine you are looking at a still life sketch and you will first see the main object with the strongest black and white contrast, then the second visual center, then the background and other elements. The same is true in animation, which can be guided by the blurring of the focus of details, changes in light, or adjustments in depth of field. The second is to put the illustration in the animation. We don't have to replicate every frame. We can extract important visual elements from the original work as "style markers", such as extracting representative points, lines, and planes from the original illustration, digitizing these elements, and using these style markers as the style basis of the entire animation. Third, we can categorize the imagery in the picture into different types and then set a screening duration for them. For example, the transient feeling intention (1-2 seconds) appears briefly in the picture, hoping to create such a moment of inspiration. Silent imagery (3-5 seconds) A flock of birds in the picture, fish floating in the sky, etc. can be given a little longer time to

allow the viewer to feel the atmosphere. Philosophical resonances (more than 5 seconds or in a loop) These images are intended to make the viewer resonate with a certain scene in the picture, so they are shown for a long time. When making animations, directors and editors can follow this approach so that each intention can be understood and felt by the audience. Finally, 3 to 5 core color combinations representing different emotions can be extracted from the original illustration for the animation. For example, natural and quiet (light green, dark green) Romantic and warm (fan, light blue) divide the script of the entire animation into different segments based on emotions, and color and render each segment using the corresponding color. During the transition of the scenes, the colors can transition naturally like a musical pitch change. You can also add some solid or bright colors to the overall low saturation of the picture and place them in the climax and visual focus of the animation, just like "off-key" in music, such as a soothing piece of music suddenly adding a high note or a crisp sound, which can capture the viewer's attention while maintaining the simplicity and coherence of the animation.

## 5. Conclusions and Prospects

Karlotta Freier's artistic style provides an aesthetic path for animation creation that emphasizes inner emotions and poetic expression. By analyzing his visual language, narrative features and animation transformation strategies, this study shows that his style not only has the potential for animation, but also helps to expand the expressive dimensions of animation art. In the future, it can be combined with specific creative practices to further

explore the application of its style in areas such as independent animation and experimental short films, and to promote the development of animation language in a more internalized and philosophical direction.

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