

11th Standard -English

Hornbill-Landscape of The Soul Summary

Wu Daozi, was a painter in the eighth century. His last painting was a landscape that he made for Tang Emperor Xuanzong, to beautify a palace wall. Wu Daozi hid his work behind a screen, so only the Emperor would see it. He told the Emperor that in the cave in the painting, at the bottom of the mountain, lived a spirit. He then, clapped his hands, and the entrance to the cave opened. The painter entered the cave and the entrance closed behind him. Much to the surprise of the Emperor the painting vanished from the wall. After that neither was there any sign of Wu Daozi's painting nor was he never seen again.

There are many such stories in China's classical education. The books of great philosophers such as Confucius and Zhuangzi are full of such accounts. These stories helped the master to guide his student in the right direction. They also tell of the general feeling of the people towards art. There is another well-known story about a painter who did not draw the eye of a dragon that he had painted because he feared that it would fly out of the painting.

In fifteenth century there was a story about an accomplished blacksmith called Quinten Metsys. He fell in love with a painter's daughter. The painter would not accept a son-in-law who was a blacksmith. So Quinten crept into the painter's studio and painted a fly on his latest painting. It looked so real that the master tried to squash it away. He then realised what had happened. So he immediately took Quinten as his trainee.

Quinten married his beloved and later become one of the most famous painters of his times. These two stories show that each form of art was trying to achieve: a perfect, impression of similarity in Europe and the spirit of inner life in Asia.

In the Chinese story, the Emperor appreciates the outer appearance in the painting but the artist shows him the true meaning of his work. The Emperor rules over the land but the artist knows the soul. The European painter would want people to look at a particular landscape just as he saw it while the Chinese painter does not choose a single viewpoint. One can enter a Chinese landscape from any point and travel in it. The artist makes a path for your eyes to travel up and down, and then back again, in a leisurely movement. This is even more true in the case of the horizontal scroll, in which the action of slowly opening the painting, then rolling it up to move on to the other, adds an element of time which is not found in any other form of painting. It also requires the active involvement of the onlooker, as his participation is physical as well as mental. The Chinese painter wants us to enter his mind. The landscape is a spiritual and abstract universe.

This idea is expressed as shanshui, which means 'mountain water'. It is used together to symbolize the word 'landscape'. More than two elements of an image represent two complementary poles, reflecting the Daoist view of the universe.

The mountain is Yang. It is depicted upright as if reaching towards Heaven. It is steady, warm, and dry in the sun.

On the other hand the water is Yin that is horizontal and resting on the earth. It is fluid, moist and cool. The basic idea of Daoism is depicting the interaction of Yin and Yang.

While Yin is the feminine part of universal energy, Yang is the masculine. The vital third element, the Middle Void, is often ignored. This is where the interaction of Yin and Yang takes place. This can be compared with the yogic practice of pranayama; breathe in, retain, breathe out, the suspension of breath is the Void where meditation occurs. The Middle Void is indispensable. Nothing can happen without it.

This is the reason why in the Chinese landscape there is white, unpainted space. This is also where man finds a basic role. In that space between Heaven and Earth, man becomes the medium of communication between both poles of the Universe. His being there is vital, even if there is only a suggestion of his presence. Francois Cheng underlines man's importance saying that man is neither lost nor oppressed by the lofty peaks, he is in 'the eye of the landscape'.

It was the French painter Jean Dubuffet who first doubted the theory of 'art brut' in the 1940s. Then only a few were interested in the art of the inexperienced creative thinker. However now the interest in 'outsider art' is growing internationally. This type of art is described as the art of those who have received no formal training, but are talented and have an artistic insight. Their works are inspiring unlike many of conventional ones.

About the same time that Dubuffet put forward his concept, in India an unqualified but brilliant artist was creating a masterpiece in the realm of art. It was Nek Chand, who changed a little patch of jungle into the Rock Garden, at Chandigarh. He sculpted with stone and used recycled material. This is India's biggest contribution to outsider art.

The Raw Vision, a UK-based magazine that paved the way in outsider art publications, wrote about Nek Chand, and his Rock Garden sculpture 'Women by the Waterfall'. The view of 'art brut' or 'raw art' was of works that were in their unrefined state as regards cultural and artistic influences. Nek Chand used everything from a tin to a sink to a broken down car to create a magnificent work of art.

As an appreciation of his art, the Swiss Commission for UNESCO will be honouring him by putting up an exhibition of his works. The five-month interactive show, 'Realm of Nek Chand', beginning October will be held at leading museums in Switzerland, Belgium, France and Italy. According to Nek the greatest reward is seeing people enjoy his creation.