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THE MEETING OF THE ORIENT AND THE OCCIDENT

IN MY PAINTINGS

by

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6106

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THESIS EXHIBIT

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INTRODUCTION

The artist's paintings express her concepts, ideals and hopes. Since the creative works of the painter have come out of her entire being, and they involve the extremes of the Orient and the Occident, it is necessary to note here the painter's background, by which her fundamental thoughts are formed.

Born on the ever green, lush island of Formosa,¹ the painter spent her contented, happy childhood under a Japanese controlled society, little bothered by war-time bombing, but protected by her warm family environment. As an imaginative, curious child, the painter sought delight in literature--both Eastern and Western, and fostered her love of nature by her surrounding Eastern cultures--both Chinese and Japanese. She was fascinated by the spirit of such poems as:

Plucking chrysanthemums along the east fence;
Gazing in silence at the Southern Hills;
The birds flying home in pairs
Through the soft mountain air of dusk--
In these things there is a deep meaning,
But when we are about to express it,
We suddenly forget the words.

採菊東籬下
山氣日夕佳
此中有真意

悠然見南山
飛鳥相與還
欲辨已忘言

---Tao, Ieng-Ming²

陶淵明

¹Formosa, or Taiwan, occupied by Japan for 50 years from 1895 to 1945. Returned to China after World War II.

²Translated by R. H. Blyth.

How joyful to sit by the window alone,
Watching the leaves fall, the flowers bloom in their season.³

争如独坐虚窓下
葉落花開自有時

Beneath the cherry blossoms
There are no Strangers

花の陰あかの他人はなかりけり

The snows of yester-year
Which we together gazed upon
Have fallen this year too?

二人見し雪は今年も降りけるか?

Ah, Kankodori (Cuckoo)
My impermanence!

Deepen thou my solitude

うそ我をよむしからば閑古鳥

It is deep autumn
What kind of life
Is my neighbour's, I wonder?

秋深と隣は何をする人ぞ?

The old pond;
A frog jumps in.
Plop.

古池や蛙とどこむ水の音

For me who go
For you who stay--Two autumns.

行く我に止まる汝に秋二つ

碧巖録 八十八
Its Sa

一茶

Basho

芭蕉

Basho

芭蕉

Basho

芭蕉

Basho

芭蕉

Buson⁴

蕨村

At the same time, the painter developed her interest in the Western classics: She was moved by Beethoven's symphonies, Bach's music, works by

³Translated by R. H. Blyth in Zen in English Literature and Oriental Classics (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, Inc., 1960).

⁴Ibid.

⁵The Orient was eagerly taking in the West since the beginning of the current century. Especially, Japan published numerous publications introducing Western Civilization.

Mozart, Brahms, Haydn, Mendelssohn, Tchaikovsky, etc. Paintings and drawings by Da Vinci, Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Botticelli, and numbers of other European masterpieces were her inspiration. In Western literature, she was delighted in reading Greek mythology, legends, plays by Shakespeare, novels and poems by Goethe, Gide, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Heine, Rilke, Byron, etc., all of which were presented to her through Japanese translations and publications.

Thus into the painter's childhood was woven in a particular way both colors and dreams of the Eastern subtlety, Western sensibility and human characters.

However, not until the painter sought further development in the most advanced country in the world--the United States of America--did she concentrate on her rediscovery of herself, recognizing East and West and their influences on contemporary human thought and art. This is the motivation of her study of Chinese art which she inherited from her own country, and the formation and practices of her paintings under the new environment.

THE BACKGROUND OF CHINESE ART

Ancient Chinese Philosophers and Their Thoughts

There are two main figures in the lines of Chinese philosophy. Confucius and Lao-Tzu, who established Confucianism and Taoism, both influenced greatly the development of Zen-Buddhism. These three ways of thought have deeply influenced the Chinese way of life and the aesthetic conceptions of her artists throughout the ages.

However, there also existed the old philosophical beliefs concerning the formation of the universe which influenced deeply the aesthetic conceptions of the Far East. It was considered that the relation of the two principles, the "Yang" and the "Ying," as the source of the universe:

Yang principle: brightness, heat, dryness, hardness, activity, masculinity, Heaven, sun, south, above, roundness, odd numbers, etc.

Ying principle: darkness, cold, wetness, softness, quiescence, femininity, Earth, moon, north, below, squareness, even numbers, etc.

All phenomena result from the interactions of these two cosmic principles. Even today, the meteorological associations remain strong. The alternation of day and night, the yearly round of the seasons through alternating phases of heat and cold, growth and decay; all these represent the "Ying" and "Yang" in eternal interplay. In painting, the mountain enveloped in mists recalls the union of these principles.

Therefore Chinese philosophy, as well as morals, is derived from

nature.

Both Confucius and Lao-Tzu were born during the declining period of the Chou dynasty (C. 1134-247 B.C.) which once had achieved a high level of civilization when the seeds of great thoughts were germinating.

Confucius did not institute a religion, he formed a code based on early Chinese rites, ceremonials and social order. "Like Socrates, Confucius was just a wise, old, deep, and often witty thinker. He did not talk metaphysics. He did not talk about the gods, or about life after death. He talked only of this present life and how to live it."¹

Confucianists believed there must be a universal standard of good conduct in society. Its significance lies in political and educational improvement.

In The Great Learning, Confucius says: "First cultivate your personality, then keep your family in order, then set your country in good condition, and then maintain peace in the world."² He also says: "The cultured man knows the importance of righteousness while the mean man knows the importance of gain."³ His student Mencius says: "Riches and honour cannot seduce, power and force cannot bend, poverty and obscurity cannot alter."⁴ Joy of study, joy of friendship, and joy of inward richness are considered to be the joys of life. The teaching

¹Lin Yutang, The Chinese Way of Life (Cleveland & New York: The World Publishing Company, 1959) p. 82.

²Translated by S. I. Hsuing.

³Ibid.

⁴"The Works of Mencius," translated by S. I. Hsuing.

of Socrates is: Know thyself. The teaching of Confucius is: Cultivate yourself, or improve yourself. Thus, Confucianism tried to rescue a decaying social order from a practical standpoint, in a positive way.

While on the other hand, "the Taoist looked at the world with cold eyes, cared little for regulating the conduct of life, less for gain, profit, fame, ambition. Life in close harmony with Nature was the only real life."⁵ The Taoist was a complete individualist. Lao-Tzu, the advocator of quietism and inaction says:

The earnest man
Sets up no deed,
Lays down no law,
Takes everything that happens as it comes,
As something to animate, and to appropriate,
To earn, not to own,
To accept naturally without self-importance:
If you never assume importance
You never lose it.⁶

Be utterly humble
And you shall hold to the foundation of peace.
Be at one with all these living things which, having arisen and
flourished,
Return to the quiet whence they came,
Like a healthy growth of vegetation
Falling back upon the root.

. . . .
. . . .

He who is open-eyed is open-minded,
He who is open-minded is open-hearted,
He who is open-hearted is kingly,
He who is kingly is godly,
He who is godly is useful,
He who is useful is infinite,

⁵Chiang Yee, The Chinese Eye (London: Methuen & Company, Ltd., 1960), p. 73.

⁶Bynner, Witter, The Way of Life (New York: The John Day Company, 1944), p. 26.

He who is infinite is immune,
He who is immune is immortal.⁷

Lin Yutang, in his The Chinese Way of Life writes: "Lao-Tzu, the founder of Taoism, is one of the wittiest of the world's philosophers. His book, The Tao-Teh Ching, consists of epigrams and contains only five thousand words. Lao-Tzu taught the strength of weakness, the winning qualities of humanity, the danger of overweening confidence, the benefit of "lying low." (He who knows does not speak. He who speaks does not know.) He says:

I have three treasures;
Guard them and keep them safe;
The first is love.
The second is, Never Too Much.
The third is, Never be the First in the World.

Through love, one has no fear;
Through not doing too much, one has reserve power;
Through not presuming to be the first in the world,
One can develop one's talent and let it mature.⁸

All these teachings by Confucius and Lao-Tzu set the basic patterns of Chinese life, the family system, religious and philosophic ideals which, in short, are regularity, order, harmony, by the end of the Chou dynasty. The basic principle of those philosophical thoughts, that human happiness and prosperity are the result of a proper adjustment of man to his environment, does not quarrel with modern social science. Above all, its thorough-going humanistic temper has a great deal to offer the contemporary complex world.

Meanwhile, "this philosophy of living has had an inestimable

⁷Ibid., P. 77.

⁸Lin Yutang, The Chinese Way of Life (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1959), p. 85.

influence upon Chinese art; it has enabled those who profess it to identify themselves with all forms of Nature as they paint."⁹ One of the reasons for China's admiration of landscape lies in its bond with the philosophy of Taoism.

Buddhism was introduced to China from India in the Later Han (C.A.D. 25-219) period. Toward the end of the fourth century it was widely accepted by Chinese people at a time of particularly acute suffering. Its rejection of the world, its promised paradises, and its teaching of bodily forgetfulness made irresistible appeal to the common people as well as to the cultured classes. The Buddhist doctrine of transmigration teaches that life is a cycle (Nirvana) of deaths and rebirths, that people are punished for what they did in a previous life and will be punished for what they do in this life, that this cycle is misery and an endless whirl of illusions, and that salvation is by escape from this cycle. This belief results in tenderness to animals and prohibition of the killing of all life. It also resulted in the flourishing of Buddhist art in the early Tang period (C.A.D. 618-907).

Zen-Buddhism, one branch of Buddhism, grew steadily in China as Buddhism declined. Zen means contemplation, and was originally introduced from India in A.D. 526. Not only did Zen combine with Buddhism and Taoism, but it also merged with Confucianism, and became an important source of inspiration of Chinese art. "The Zen Buddhists' training was centered on the methods of that self-control which is the essence of true

⁹Chiang Yee, The Chinese Eye (London: Methuen & Company, Ltd., 1960), p. 77.

freedom. Freedom once attained left all men to revel and glory in the beauties of the whole universe. They were then one with nature, whose pulse they felt beating simultaneously within themselves, whose breath they felt themselves inhaling and exhaling in union with the great world-spirit."¹⁰

In conclusion, the main basis of Chinese art was Confucianism. It provided a sound ethical system, but it left little room for imagination. Taoism and Buddhism opened before the people the door to a fresh, new, strange place; they cultivated nature lovers; they encouraged simplicity and harmony, and they saw life as a whole, which resulted in the indifferent attitude of Chinese artists to figure painting and the depiction of everyday human affairs as their subject matter in painting. The fruit of all these three philosophies is a broad and noble mind. It is the artists' expression of personal nobility that Chinese especially look for in a painting. It is in the relation of man to nature that the painting of China and Japan has sought and found its most characteristic success.

Mr. Laurence Binyon, a great lover of Chinese Art, writes in his The Flight of the Dragon:

Innocent and intense delight in the original beauty of fresh blossoms, in the dewy green of water-meadows, in the shadowy leafiness of great trees, in the eye-reposing blue of remote mountains, is evident in numberless pictures of the earlier schools of Europe; but there these amenities of nature are but an episode.

¹⁰Kakuzo Okakura, Ideals of the East (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, Inc., 1921), p. 162.

It is a far different spirit which animates the Asian Landscape. In these paintings we do not feel that the artist is portraying something external to himself; that he is caressing the happiness and soothing joy offered him in the pleasant places of the earth, or even studying with wonder and delight the miraculous works of nature.¹¹

In the east, it is not man's earthy surroundings, tamed to his desires, that inspires the artist; but the universe, in its wholeness and its freedom, has become his spiritual home. But with us, for how many centuries was man regarded as lord of the earth, the centre of the universe, and the rest of nature as but existing to minister to his needs and his desires.¹²

Therefore, to Chinese artists the highest effort of art was to suggest infinity, the infinity that belongs to the free mind of man who understood the continuity of the universe, who recognized the kinship between their own lives and the life of animals and birds and trees and flowers, and expressed their emotions and experiences, not directly but allusively, under the guise of pine, flower, or bird.

Chinese artist--painter, poet and calligrapher

Painting, inseparable from music and poetry, was given another name as voiceless poetry. A traditional Chinese artist was considered to be not only a painter, but also a poet and a calligrapher.

During the Sung period (C.A.D. 960-1279), at the height of Chinese art, there existed numbers of literary painters, most of whom were scholars and officials. They established the Southern School of painting, and in playing with ink sought a deep communication with the spiritual

¹¹Binyon, Laurence, The Flight of the Dragon (London: John Murray, 1959), p. 19.

¹²Ibid., p. 20.

values of life. The painters were originally distinguished calligraphers and men of letters who interested themselves in painting. The Southern School comprised serenity, gentility, smoothness and more harmony than contrast, while the characteristics of the Northern School were impressiveness, magnitude, heavy and sharp strokes together with greater contrast between light and dark. Those artists preferred to call painting "to write" rather than "to paint." A Sung painter, Chou Shun, said, "Painting and Writing are one and the same art."¹³ To write Chinese characters finely demands a mastery of the brush equal to that of a highly skilled painter, and in handwriting the Chinese believe that the inner personality of the writer is directly expressed. Therefore, 'the spirit which lives in the point of the brush' was highly valued in Chinese art.

Chiang Yee, in his The Chinese Eye cited:

From earliest times, our primitive handwriting was a kind of rough painting, used as a means of expressing thought; written character has never yet been divorced from art; in proportion as it became a representative symbol in place of a primitive and recognisable picture, so the art of writing the symbol itself grew more refined; nowadays, a piece of good calligraphy is ranked as high as a work of art and is as expressive 'pictorially' as a picture; the placing of the characters, the touch of the artist, the life of the strokes, balance, rhythm, design--all these are of first importance to Chinese calligraphy.

On the other hand, our painters do not hold beauty of Form and Colors as their sole object: they lay particular emphasis on an underlying idea, what one may call the 'literary content.'¹⁴

¹³The brush strokes used in writing are the same as in painting, and the same instruments are used--brush and ink.

¹⁴Chiang Yee, The Chinese Eye (London: Methuen & Company, Ltd., 1960), p. 88.

The Emperor Hui Tsung of the Sung dynasty, he himself a good artist, gave examinations to those competing artists and officials. The subjects were often chosen lines from poetry, such as:

I return from trampling on flowers
And the hoofs of my horse are fragrant.¹⁵

The chosen picture showed a horse with two butterflies flying around its hoofs.

Among the most famous of Chinese artists are: Wu Tao-Tzu of the Tang dynasty, a legendary artist who used free bold strokes in his paintings; Wang Wei of the Sung dynasty, the founder of the Southern School and the principles of atmospheric perspective; Su Tung-Po, a great poet, painter and calligrapher of Sung; Mi Fei, a leading landscape painter of the Southern School among Sung painters; Pa-Ta and Shih Tao of the Ching dynasty (A.D. 1644-1911), revolutionists of Chinese art history who sought freedom in their own styles; Chi Pai-Shih of the present century.

These artists worked to interpret nature and purify life. They were never too enthusiastic about the conquest of nature, but on the contrary, through poets and poetic expression, always tried to seek harmony with the great "scheme of things entire." Most of the artists refused to sell their works, but would rather give them away to people who really appreciated them.

Six Canons of Painting

The Six Canons laid down by Hsieh Ho in A.D. 425 have been

¹⁵Translated by Arthur Hart Burling.

accepted and recognized in Chinese criticism ever since. They are:

1. Rhythmic Vitality, or Spiritual Rhythm expressed in the movement of life.
2. The art of rendering the bones or anatomical structure by means of the brush.
3. Creating forms suitable to the subject matter.
4. Appropriate distribution of the colors.
5. Planning and arranging things in their right position.
6. The transmission of classic models. Or, making sketches of various movements from different angles.¹⁶

Above all, the first of these canons is most important; for the others are concerned rather with the means of achieving the end which the first defines.

Through these canons, the Chinese painters did not let themselves become absorbed in expressing their sensuous delight in the wonder and glory of the world, but seized the structure of reality, and fused the spiritual and the material into the final aim of rhythm and life.

Painting media and tools used by Chinese artists

Early in the age of the caveman, pictorial art already existed in China. Color painting was mentioned in the Confucian classics. Even the use of oil paint was discovered at an early date. But Chinese painting in the classical form and style was only made possible after the third century B.C., when the finely-pointed writing brush¹⁷ was first invented and then gradually improved.

¹⁶Translated by Laurence Binyon and Chia-Luen Lo.

¹⁷The Chinese prefer to call it a "pen."

The Chinese call the four necessities of the artists "The Four Treasures of the Study" or "Four Precious Possessions." They are: the brush, the ink-stick, the ink-slab, and paper. The Chinese painter's surroundings and equipment are not much different from those of the scholar; usually neat and rather bare, sometimes with hanging scroll pictures or calligraphy.

1. Brush: The bristles are made of the hair of various animals, such as fox, sheep, rabbit, deer, wolf, and mouse-whisker--some soft, some hard and springy, and they all differ in sizes. Each artist chooses his own brushes according to his personality. Some even make their own brushes.

2. Ink-stick: Made from pine-smoke, powdered jade, and gum, or the mixture of burnt pine and burnt oil. It comes in a solid form, moulded in different shapes and sizes. The ink is ground fresh each time on the ink slab, with water.

3. Ink-slab: Made from stone usually upon which to grind and mix the ink. The end is slightly scooped out in order to contain the water.

4. Paper: The early paintings were generally done on cotton, coarse silk, or paper. Finer silk or papers were produced and sized later. Papers were made of vegetable fibers, principally of bamboo. They are rather absorbent which makes it necessary that the artist use great control of his strokes. But after they have been prepared with a sizing alum, silk and paper become practically indestructible. Once completed, the picture is sent to a special 'picture mounting shop'

where it is backed with strong paper, then perhaps mounted on brocade, and provided with handles, or rollers, of wood, ivory, jade or porcelain.

5. Colors: Chinese painters have always used simple colors, of mineral or vegetable origin. From malachite the Chinese painters obtained several shades of green; from cinnabar or sulphide of mercury, a number of reds. From peroxide of mercury they drew coloring powders which furnished shades ranging from brick red to orange yellow. White was extracted from burnt oyster shells; yellow from the sap of the rattan; blue from indigo.¹⁸ The five traditional colors are blue, yellow, red, white, and black. However, many of the Chinese painters preferred to use ink only. A critic says: "The natural aspect of an object can be beautifully conveyed by ink-color only, if one knows how to produce the required shades."¹⁹ Also, "ink complements, but colors supplement, the work of the brush."²⁰ Mastery in ink-painting is rarer than mastery in colored painting.

6. Seals for signature are little works of art in themselves. The artists' names or some commentary words are carved in various styles and play an important part in the composition of the painting. The vermilion paste in a tiny box gives the seal a scarlet impression.

7. Water container--usually of pottery or porcelain.

8. Small dishes which serve as palettes.

¹⁸Petrucci, Raphael, Chinese Painters (New York: Brentano's Publishers, 1920), p. 22.

¹⁹Quoted by Sei-ichi Taki, Three Essays, p. 65.

²⁰Ibid.

CONTEMPORARY ABSTRACT PAINTINGS IN RELATION
TO CHINESE TRADITIONAL ART

Meditation

It seems that in the past few decades, Far Eastern meditation has been more and more acquired by the Western Artists as seen in the preface of Mr. Blyth's Zen in English Literature and Oriental Classics:

Zen is the most precious possession of Asia, with its beginnings in India, development in China, and final practical application in Japan. It is today the strongest power in the world. It is a world-power, for in so far as men live at all, they live by Zen. Wherever there is a poetical action, a religious aspiration, a heroic thought, a union of the Nature within a man and the Nature without, there is Zen.

In search for relationships between man and man, man and society, man and nature; the truth and real meaning of life, many artists today, express in their works a quality of meditation which is inherited in Chinese Zen Buddhist thought. The Chinese conception that a painting is intended to portray an inner reality rather than an outward likeness found its harmony in modern ideas of art. Many contemporary abstract painters in the midst of this age of fear and complexity sought a way to maintain their mental equilibrium and tranquillity by means of an artist's contemplation and meditation. The mental preparation of an abstract artist today can be compared to that of a great Chinese painter Wu-Tao-Tsu (C. 7 A.D.), who was once asked by the Emperor to paint a landscape for him. And so the painter went to Nature. When he returned and was asked for his sketches, he said, "I have it all in my mind."

Inspiration

The contemporary abstract artists, while maintaining a due respect for modern technological and scientific achievement, are able to find their inspirations from nature through their struggles against surrounding materials and arrange them in order--the very order sought among the disorder. Basically, the attitudes of man toward nature in the East and the West are very different. The concept of divine power and the strong interest in human life in the West were unknown to the nature-worshipping East.

The traditional Chinese great artists derived their inspiration from Nature. The abundant sources of beautiful scenery in their own country--great mountains, cliffs, rocks, water, clouds, snow, trees, flowers, birds, animals, etc., were suggested by the artist's imagination in a harmonious and ordered way in so far as they were influenced by their philosophy of rationality and a fine sense of relative value.

However, the West with the coming of romanticism, and among paintings demonstrating man's command over nature, there are signs of emerging quality in contemporary abstract paintings stating consciously or unconsciously the impersonal mystery of the universe, its mighty principle, its manifold manifestations and the secret which unveils itself in the innermost soul of things and matter.

Rhythmic Vitality

In expressing the inner feeling of the individual, rhythmic vitality--the principle canon of all six canons of Chinese traditional painting, has been executed by contemporary abstract artists in their

creative works.

Rhythm can be felt or seen through the movement of elements and when it is found, the life is felt. Although there do exist around us unnatural movements, broken rhythms, yet we carry about in our hearts dimly the knowledge of the perfect rhythm that inspires contemporary artists.

A poem, music, a dance become alive when they contain rhythm. A painting can only be a living creation through colors and lines expressed in rhythmical phrase. Concerning the rhythm in Chinese painting, Mr. Laufer says:

The psychological difference of Chinese painting from our own mainly rests on the basis that the Chinese handle painting, not as we handle painting, but as we handle music, for the purpose of lending color to and evoking the whole range of sentiments and emotions of humanity. In depth of thought and feeling, the great Tang masters, in their symphonic compositions, vie with Beethoven, and in line and color almost reach Mozart's eternal grace and beauty Chinese pictorial art, I believe, is painted music, with all its shades of expressive modulation.¹

This rhythmic vitality can be seen in the works of contemporary Western abstract artists such as Mondrian, Kandinsky, Hans Hartung, Theodoros Stamos, Gabor Peterdi, Georges Stem, Richard Claude Ziemann, etc.

Calligraphic Quality

Calligraphy in China, besides being itself one of the highest forms of art, is in a sense the chief and most fundamental element in

¹Laufer, Berthola, A Landscape of Wang Wei

every branch of it. It is a national taste, a common aesthetic instinct cultivated in every Chinese from childhood up.

Chiang Yee writes in his Chinese Calligraphy:

Every Chinese character, built up in its own square, presents to the Calligrapher an almost infinite variety of problems of structure and composition; and when executed it presents to the reader a formal design the abstract beauty of which is capable of drawing the mind away from the literal meaning of the characters. Many Chinese scholars have confessed that they have almost lost their minds in contemplating the miraculous lines and structures of some of their characters--characters so combined as to introduce indirectly to the thoughts aesthetically satisfying equilibria of visual forces and movements. For there is in every piece of fine Chinese writing a harmony which is a source of pleasure over and above the pleasure of apprehending the thought.²

The abstract beauty of Chinese calligraphy evolved from the simplification and the capturing of the essential shape of the object in nature. Fine calligraphy suggests life, movement, and continuity within each imaginary square. Therefore, the two essentials of good calligraphy are a simulation of life in the strokes and a dynamic equilibrium in the design. Both of these are to be obtained through years of diligent and constant practice by a talented artist. Here, "Rhythmic vitality" following contemplation and both spiritual and physical control, reveals itself in linear movement in ink on paper.

The Western abstract artists such as Paul Klee, Soulages, Mathieu, Hartung, Michaux, Kline obviously inspired by Chinese calligraphy, created a new movement called "organic abstraction," or "calligraphic painting," trying to achieve the first two essentials of good calligraphy

²Chiang Yee, Chinese Calligraphy (Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 108.

which are also the first two essentials of good Chinese painting--"a simulation of life in the strokes and a dynamic equilibrium in the design." This, sometimes has been achieved but often hampered, owing to the different media used and the lack of intimate relationship to nature which is so close to every Chinese character.

conveying her feelings and hopes for life.

The painter does not intend to explain her works individually here, since she believes that works of art speak to us in their own particular language while words fail to convey their real meanings. It is the painter's hope that with the preceding knowledge of her cultural background, personal growth and concepts, one will see in her paintings contemporary emotions and feelings expressed in her unique and dynamic strokes, and the meeting of the East and the West.

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