

## 4. Landscape of the Soul

(Nathalie Trouveroy)

### ABOUT THE LESSON

The lesson sees art as a spiritual journey to the inner recesses of the painter's mind. A layman, viewer conceptualizes art on its visual, physical aspect; only the painter can show the way to its soul.

### NOTES

- **Chinese tale about the painter Wu Daozi**
  - lived in eighth century
  - last painting - a landscape commissioned by the Tang Emperor Xuanzong to decorate his palace wall
  - the master hid the work behind a screen for only the Emperor to see
  - the Emperor admired the wonderful scene, discovering forests, high mountains, waterfalls, clouds floating, men on hilly paths, birds in flight for a long while
  - the painter referred to the cave at the foot of the mountain where, according to him, dwelt a spirit
  - he clapped and the entrance to the cave opened
  - the painter told the Emperor that the inside of the cave was splendid and showed him the way
  - as the painter entered the cave, the door closed and he was lost to eternity
  - as the astonished Emperor watched, the painting also vanished from the wall
- **Role of such stories in China's classical education**
  - play an important part; books of Confucius and Zhuangzi are full of such stories

- reveal the spirit of art
- for instance, the story of a painter who wouldn't draw the eye of a dragon for the fear that it would fly out of the painting
- **Delicate realism: true essence of art**
  - supported by the story of Quinten Metsys, a master blacksmith who lived in the fifteenth century Antwerp
  - fell in love with a painter's daughter
  - not accepted by the painter because of his profession
  - sneaked into the painter's studio and painted a 'fly' on his latest panel. The painter mistook the fly for real.
  - admitted blacksmith as an apprentice in his studio
  - blacksmith married his beloved and became one of the most famous painters of his age

- **The aim of art**

- In Europe: to achieve a perfect illusionistic likeness
- In Asia: to capture the essence of inner life and spirit

- **Contrasting inferences from the two stories:**

*Chinese Painter:*

- does not mean to reproduce an actual view
- not a 'real' one: one can view and enter from any point
- gives the audience liberty to travel in it up and down
- creates a path for one's eyes to view the painting from his own perspective and enjoy the deep plunges into it in a pleasurable and leisurely way
- the artist reveals the true meaning of his work by 'showing the way'
- the Emperor appreciates the painting only at its visual level and the artist unravels to him the mysticism of his work by showing the true way



*Western Painter:*

- believes in figurative painting
- wants the audience to view the painting from a specific angle, as he sees it, by borrowing his eyes

- **Chinese Art form broadens horizons**

- unravels itself like a horizontal scroll
- adds dimension of time with the action of slowly opening one sector and then the other
- involves active participation of the viewer, both physical and mental
- gives liberty to the viewer to set his pace at which he will travel through the painting
- does not want you to borrow his eyes; instead, he wants you to enter his mind
- provides spiritual and conceptual space

- **Chinese concept expressed as 'Shanshui'**

- meaning: 'mountain-water'; used together the two words represent the word 'landscape'
- represents two complementary poles: mountain and water
- 'Mountain' is 'Yang': reaches vertically towards Heaven; is stable, warm and dry in the sun
- 'Water' is 'Yin': remains horizontal, resting on the earth; is fluid, moist and cool

- **Daoism - concept of Creation**

- 'Dao' means both the path and the method
- only the artist can show the way to the mysterious works of the universe
- 'creation' takes place through the interaction of 'Yin', the

receptive feminine aspect of universal energy and its counterpart 'Yang', the active and masculine force

- Overlooked third element

- the Middle Void where interaction takes place.
- similar to the yogic practice of '*pranayama*': breathe in, retain, breathe out
- the 'Void' is the suspension of breath where meditation occurs
- Middle Void essential; nothing can happen without it
- the white, unpainted space in Chinese landscape signifies the void

- Fundamental Role of Man

- the medium of communication between Heaven and Earth; the two poles of the Universe
- presence essential, though suggestive
- as the admirer, 'the eye of the landscape', he gives new dimensions through his versatile perspective

- Concept of 'Art brut' or 'Outsider Art'

- initiated by French painter Jean Dubuffet in 1940
- described as the art of the untrained visionary or artists who have had no formal training yet show talent and artistic insight
- work in stimulating contrast to the mainstream working
- did not have a very encouraging beginning but has come to acquire great interest in contemporary art internationally
- 'art brut' or 'raw art' implied works that were in their raw state as regards cultural and artistic influences
- medium for work included everything and anything from a tin to a sink or even a broken down car

- Nek Chand - an untutored genius

- renowned for creating a heavenly world sculpted with stone and recycled material: the Rock Garden at Chandigarh



- recognised as India's greatest exponent of Outsider Art
- his Rock Garden sculpture 'Women by the Waterfall' featured on the anniversary issue cover of the issue (Spring 2005) of 'Raw Vision', a UK based magazine pioneering in 'outsider art' publications
- his art recognised as "an outstanding testimony of the difference a simple man can make when he lives his dream"
- to be honoured by the Swiss Commission for UNESCO by way of a European exposition of his works
- "Realm of Nek Chand", a five month interactive show held at leading museums in Switzerland, Belgium, France and Italy
- A modest and humble person, finds his greatest reward in seeing people walking through his garden and enjoying his creations

### GLOSSARY

- commissioned - engaged someone to do something; ordered something to be made or done
- immense - big in size; huge
- splendid - beautiful; magnificent
- astonished - surprised
- vanished - disappeared
- trace - sign
- revealing - showing; exhibiting
- anecdote - a story; an account of an incident
- contrast - opposite in nature
- native - a resident of the nation; a local inhabitant
- dragon - Chinese mythical animal which was ugly, monstrous, and spat fire

- sneaked - entered silently
- swat away - strike away
- illustrate - explain something visually
- illusionistic likeness - similarity which looks like an illusion
- delicate realism - refined reality, realism essence of which can be lost easily
- essence - the most important quality of a thing
- figurative - having symbolic or suggestive meaning
- scroll - a roll of paper or parchment for writing
- dimension - measurement; viewed aspect
- conceptual - relating to an idea or concept
- receptive - ready to receive suggestion;  
abstract understanding
- complementary - completing or supporting somebody or something
- notion - idea
- void - vacuum
- retain - keep
- conduit - pipe or water way
- lofty peaks - high mountains
- visionary - a foresighted person or spiritual leader
- veiled - covered; not clearly visible
- contemporary - belonging to the same time
- insight - deep understanding
- stimulating - exciting
- mainstream - main line
- propounding - offering solution; explaining meaning



- dizzying heights- great heights
- testimony - proof
- exposition - explanation; something brought about in detail
- realm - kingdom; area; sphere of existence or activity

### SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

*(to be answered in about 40 words each)*

- Q1. Contrast the Chinese view of art with the European view with examples.** *Or* **(Textual)**

**How is the Western view of art different from the Chinese view?**

The Western and the Chinese art forms reflect contradictory views towards art. Whereas the European art aims at achieving a perfect 'illusionistic likeness', the Chinese art views art as the reflection of inner life and spirit. The European painter wants his audience to look at the landscape drawn by him exactly how he sees it from a specific angle. The Chinese painter, on the other hand, lets our eyes enjoy his art as per our subjective inference.

- Q2. How was the Emperor's view different from the view of the painter Wu Daozi?**

The Tang Emperor Xuanzong's view was in sharp contrast to the perspective held by the painter Wu Daozi. The Emperor appreciated its outer appearance whereas the painter viewed it at the spiritual level. He unravelled the inner recesses of his soul through his painting depicting the mystery of the Universe. It was beyond the Emperor to comprehend his painting.

- Q3. What do the painter Wu Daozi's words 'Let me show Your Majesty the way' convey?**

The painter's words are reflective of the Chinese view of art which aims at projecting the essence of inner life and spirit. The

Emperor appreciates the painting only at the physical level. He is not able to go beyond its material appearance. When the painter requested the Emperor to let him show the way, he wanted to reveal to him the true meaning of his painting which lay beyond the physical world, unravelling the mysteries of the 'realm of the unknown'.

**Q4. What significant role did the Chinese folk-lore play in its classical education?**

The books of great maestros like Confucius and Zhuangzi are full of anecdotes that highlight the Chinese view of art visualising it as an unravelling of the spiritual reality. Such stories helped the masters to guide their disciples in the right direction.

**Q5. What is the comparison drawn between a classical Chinese landscape and a horizontal scroll?**

A classical Chinese landscape and a horizontal scroll both allow the viewer to view an art-work from his own perspective and at the pace he desires. Both aim at broadening horizons of art extending beyond the confines of the material appearance. A classical Chinese landscape lets the viewer enter it from any point and then travel in it, back and forth, in a leisurely movement. A horizontal scroll also adds a dimension of time, allowing the viewer to travel at his own pace.

**Q6. Explain: 'delicate realism' and 'illusionistic likeness'.**

The creative impulse is the primary force in all works of art. It is the thrill of creation, the excitement of making something new, which initiates the artist to tread the path of creation. The motivation is always from 'reality' but he blends the reality with his own illusions of the concept. The concepts 'delicate realism' and 'illusionistic likeness' in fine-arts refer to the quality of the artist to present his illusions with a touch of reality so that a



common spectator can relate with it and appreciate and enjoy its aesthetic beauty.

**Q7. What is the western concept of 'figurative painting'?**

'Figurative painting' is the traditional form of western painting which stresses on the relationship between an object or visual element and its background. The figure usually dominates the ground, and the composition is a relational one. It occurs in both classically and dynamically balanced compositions. Many Indian artists like Tyel Mehta and Manjit Bawa have adopted the genre in a modified way.

**Q8. What does the term 'conceptual space' imply?**

A good piece of art is never confined to the artist himself. It has a life of its own which lasts long after its creator is dead and forgotten. Instead of confining his art work to his own visual imagination, the artist creates space giving dimensions to his creation from where the spectator can enter and view and infer his art work from his own perspective. The artist, thus leaves spaces letting the viewer participate in the art, physically and mentally. Hence, the white unpainted space in Chinese landscape becomes significant.

**Q9. Explain the concept of 'shanshui'. (Textual)**

'Shanshui' literally means 'mountain-water'. Used together, mountain and water represent the word 'landscape'. Instead of representing two elements of an image, they represent two complementary poles. The mountain is the 'Yang' which reaches vertically towards Heaven, stable, warm and dry in the sun. The water, on the other hand is 'Yin' - horizontal and resting on the earth, fluid, moist and cool. The concept of 'shanshui' is close to the Daoist concept of Universal creation which is an outcome of the interaction between 'Yin' the

feminine aspect of universal energy and 'Yang' its active and masculine counterpart.

Q10. When and where does Man acquire a fundamental role in the process of creation?

Or

What is the importance of Man between 'Yang' and 'Yin'?

Universal creation is a result of a celestial interaction between 'Yang' symbolically suggestive of 'Heaven' and 'Yin' suggestive of the cool and fertile 'Earth'. However, the point of interaction or the 'Middle Void' is important, for it is the point where the interaction takes place. This is the point where meditation occurs giving a whole new concept to universal creation. Man acquires a fundamental role at this point of ecstasy for he becomes the mediator and communicator between the two poles of the Universe.

Q11. What does the notion of 'art brut' or 'raw art' imply? (Textual)

The concept refers to works of art that did not abound in highly sophisticated cultural and artistic skills, but were amateur or in their raw state as regards cultural and artistic influences. It involved a wide spectrum of material, for anything and everything from a tin to a sink or a broken down car could be used as a medium for this work of art. Mr. Nek Chand, one of the greatest exponents of this art-form, has taken it to dizzying heights with his incomparable Rock Garden in the creation of which he has actually lived his dream.

Q12. What do you understand by the term 'outsider art'? (Textual)

The genre of 'outsider art' has been described as the art of such artists who have not received any formal training, yet they show inherent talent and artistic insight. Outsider art had a modest beginning in the 1940's. However, today it is recognised as the fastest growing area of interest in contemporary art.



Q13. Who was the "untutored genius who created a paradise" and what is the nature of his contribution to art? Or (Textual)

Who is recognised as 'an untutored genius' and why?

Mr. Nek Chand is recognised as 'an untutored genius', for he is renowned the world over as one of the greatest exponents of 'Outsider art'. The Rock Garden of Chandigarh, which is a masterpiece of sculpture of stone and recycled material is a product of his ingenuity, and his biggest contribution to the genre of raw art.

Q14. How has Mr. Nek Chand been honoured internationally?

Or

Mr Nek Chand's art has won him international acclaim. Cite textual evidence in support of this statement.

Mr. Nek Chand's art has been lauded on the international level. The fiftieth issue (Spring 2005) of 'Raw Vision', a UK based magazine pioneering in 'outsider art' publication, has featured Nek Chand and his Rock Garden sculpture 'Women by the Waterfall' on the cover of its anniversary issue in recognition of his contribution to the outsider art. The Swiss Commission for UNESCO has honoured him by organising a European exposition of his works and an interactive show 'Realm of Nek Chand' at leading museums in Switzerland, Belgium, France and Italy.

Q15. What is the title "Landscape of the Soul" suggestive of?

Man is the most complex of God's creations. Whereas all other animals live at the 'physical' level, man lives a dual life, both at the physical and the spiritual levels. His physical self views art for sensuous pleasure; however, his spiritual self looks beyond the physical self. The title "Landscape of the Soul" is suggestive of that divine inner beauty of man's soul that 'looks beyond' the concrete world.



**LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS**

*(to be answered in about 120 – 150 words each)*

**Q1. Explain: "The Emperor may rule over the territory he has conquered, but only the artist knows the way within".** *(Textual)*

Promotion of art has always been dependent on the patronage provided to it by the Emperors and the affluent people. It is wholly true, that in order to form and continue a great artistic tradition, the body of patronage has to be extended. Artists in India found their patrons in the Emperors and Nawabs who helped in the survival of the genres. No doubt, the contribution of the Emperors cannot be ruled out for promotion of art, but they were unable to appreciate a creation beyond its outer appearance. As administrators they could rule over territories, but very few of them had the insight and ingenuity to understand an artist's mind. Only the artist could show the way within, unravelling the spiritual depths of his creation.

The statement is beautifully illustrated through the old Chinese tale about the painter Wu Daozi who painted a landscape commissioned by the Tang Emperor Xuanzong. The master painter hid the work behind a screen so that only the Emperor could see. The Emperor admired that landscape for its scenic beauty. However, the painter pointed to a cave saying the inside was beautiful and begged the Emperor to allow him to show him the way. The painter clapped once and the entrance opened up. He entered the cave, and as soon as he entered, the door closed behind. Soon the painting also vanished leaving no trace of the painter's brush. The story conveys that the Emperor, like other humans, could not enter the deep recesses of the artist's mind despite all his capabilities.

**Q2. "The landscape is an inner one, a spiritual and conceptual space".**

**Explain.**

*(Textual)*



Creativity is a means of disciplining the limitless freedom of the human mind. With this exchange we also reconcile our insignificance with omnipotence. Eventually we fuse all this knowledge to moments within the present – traditions within the contemporary, change within permanence, the speculative within the reasoned, the mental within the material. Resolving these contradictions is an essential step towards a deeper self-awareness for an individual.

The landscape or a creative work of art is thus the reflection of the inner awareness of the artist. However, if this awareness was confined only to the artist, the art-work would lose its impact. The excellence of a masterpiece lies in its exalted influence on the onlooker who partakes of their glory and is able to feel the marvels of the power of his thought. This understanding elevates him, inspires him and makes him a better human being. Every artist provides for some conceptual space, so that the spectator can enter the 'landscape' from wherever he likes and lets him enjoy the liberty of making his own inferences without losing the inner and spiritual concept of the artist.

**Q3. "A classical Chinese landscape is not meant to reproduce an actual view, as would a Western figurative painting". Elucidate.**

Both Chinese and Western art enjoy a place of repute and are treasured for the traditions and values they passed on to the coming generation of artists. Though both imitated a genre, they are both varied in their concept.

The distinction between the two art forms is beautifully illustrated by the ancient Chinese tale about the painter Wu Daozi who was not satisfied with the Emperor's appreciation of his landscape on its outer appearance. He insisted on 'showing him the way' because for him his landscape had much deeper connotations. His landscape was not a 'real' one and so he did



not want it to be viewed from a single viewpoint. He gave an inner, conceptual space to his viewer, thus letting him enter from any point and also enjoy the liberty of travelling back and forth.

The Western landscape, on the contrary, insists on 'delicate realism', a perfect 'illusionistic likeness' where the art work is reproduced in an actual view. The 'figurative painting' of the western painter which stressed on the relationship between the object and its visual background, wanted the viewer to borrow his eyes and look at the landscape exactly as he saw it.

The Western landscape thus gives little space to the viewer to go deep into the creative work and travel in it at his own pace to and from the landscape. Unlike the Chinese painting, it is not multi-dimensional, nor does it permit active participation of the spectator.

**Q4. What is the third essential element in the creation of the universe?**

The author refers to the Chinese concept of '*shanshui*' which literally means 'mountain-water' and put together represents the word 'landscape'. The interaction of these two complementary poles results in great creations of art. The Third element or the 'Middle Void' is the point where the actual interaction takes place. The author compares this point of ecstasy to the yogic practice of '*pranayama*' which calls for a synchronized rhythm of breathing in, retaining the breath and breathing out. The suspension of breath is where one achieves ecstatic bliss; the 'Void' where meditation occurs in the true sense. The Middle Void is an essential and integral feature, for no creation is possible without it. The white, unpainted space in Chinese landscape is symbolic of that height of ecstatic bliss that becomes the fountainhead of all creative works.



**Q5. What do you mean by 'Outsider Art' and what has been Nek Chand's contribution in scaling it to dizzying heights?**

The concept of 'Outsider Art' or 'art-brut' was initiated by a French painter Jean Dubuffet in the 1940s. He defined the concept as "the art of the untrained visionary". The artists of this genre did not have any formal training, yet they exhibited deep artistic insight and inherent talent. The creative works of such artists were in sharp contrast to the mainstream art. 'Art brut' or 'raw art' incorporated works that were in their raw state as regards cultural and artistic influences. The spectrum of material used was wide and varied. Anything and everything, from pieces of cups and saucers to broken sink and cars could be used as the material for this kind of work.

Among the greatest exponents of the genre in India is Mr. Nek Chand who has acclaimed international fame and appreciation for his unique and exemplary creation 'Rock Garden' at Chandigarh. 'An untutored Genuis', he has created a paradise by sculpting a garden with stone and recycled material. This admirable creator-director has taken 'Outsider Art' to great heights. His art has been recognised internationally as "an outstanding testimony of the difference a single man can make when he lives his dream." Many national and international awards and honours have been conferred on him and expositions of his works have been held internationally.

**Q6. Should all art be realistic? Discuss in the light of the write-up "Landscape of the Soul".**

No doubt, realistic painting which emerged in Europe, is highly appreciated for a faithful and minute representation of real places, people and situations, still it is not essential that all art should be realistic. Art is a medium through which an artist gives a free flight to his/her fancy or imagination. True art

handles reality imaginatively and blends the actual scenes with the imagined visions. A realistic painting or writing is only an imitation of things. It is like a photographic copy of reality. Art, on the other hand, should satisfy the aesthetic sense of the viewers or readers by providing beauty to reality.

Moreover, art has the power to present the abstract thoughts and ideas in an abstract manner. Artists can also deal with spiritual depths as is the case of the painters in Asia. The painting of Wu Daozi delineated spiritual aspect of life and was meant only for those people who were spiritually awakened. The Emperor failed to see, as he looked at it only from a physical perspective. Moreover, the purpose of art should be ethical instruction; it should not present life as it is, but as it should be.

**Q7. How does the author reveal that art is not only for aesthetic pleasure but also for spiritual satisfaction?**

**You may discuss:**

- (i) Various forms of art
- (ii) Art for the sake of art
- (iii) Art for spiritual pleasure

**Or**

**What do you understand by "art for the sake of art"? What other purpose of art does the chapter bring to light?**

Art is a very comprehensive term including five fine arts – painting, dancing, sculpture, singing and literary writing. Art has been there in society since its very beginning. But there has been a debate on the purpose of art. Some art critics are of the opinion that the purpose of art is only to impart aesthetic pleasure; they believe that art satisfies the sense of beauty in human beings and provides sensuous pleasure. On the other hand, there are art ideologists who firmly believe that the purpose of art, along with providing aesthetic delight, is the



satisfaction of the mind and the soul as well as the reformation of society.

However, in the contemporary era, the dictum of "art for the sake of art" has lost its popularity. More and more people have come to believe that art is a very powerful medium for the improvement of society. That is why much of art is based on certain values which a writer tries to boost or discourage. The films which also fall in the category of art, are made on social themes with the objective of preaching moral and social values.

The chapter reveals that art is not merely for pleasing the senses, it is also for spiritual upliftment. Particularly in Asian countries, art works concentrate on the spiritual aspects of life. It is well exemplified in the landscape of the Chinese painter, Wu Daozi which is significant only for the spiritually awakened people. Such works reveal the mystical experiences of the artists with which the spiritually inclined people may relate themselves.

The chapter, in this way, shows that though the primary function of art is aesthetic pleasure, art serves very lofty purposes.

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