

University of Pécs, Faculty of Arts, Academy of Fine Arts

THE MONUMENTAL INDIAN INK PAINTING

**as a lyrical expression and representation of the person' s helplessness,
extradition and pantheistic comfort**

**Doctor of Liberal Arts
Synopsis**

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A painter's claim to unity of meaning in his works

I must agree with Nietzsche, according to whom: 'The refinement and power of consciousness has always depended on the communicative ability of humankind, and on the need to communicate'.¹ I also have to agree with Nietzsche that the subjective state is always changing, '*...the centre of the system shifts incessantly*'¹ and, '*that the supposition of a single subjectivity is probably not necessary; one might suppose a multitude of subjectivities*'.¹ It is consistent to say that I am more than one 'ego' and that this is not a kind of personality disorder; I merely have to reflect on my theories about my art and on myself. The development of my subjectivity might have begun when I saw in a mirror how my astonishing reality cast a shadow on the world. By searching out his 'Ego', the painter both anatomizes memories of the Ego and of humanity and foregrounds the mythical and epic after-image of humanity. The delineation of the dramatic memory of the apocalyptic and surreal world necessarily involves the world of pantheism – and it is the theoretical and visual composition of this on which I ventured.

Identification of the self with the 'nature's way' of pantheism

Why pantheism? Why even landscape? I had to find a method by which to surmount my mundane problems. The traditional pen-and-ink painting similar to Chinese painting became my 'elegy', the lyric expression and delineation of changelessness, and a consolation to my native pantheism. The idealist Schelling regards both nature and consciousness as reflections of the spirit. '*So-called nature is nothing else, but an inscrutable intelligence, hence through natural phenomena – as yet unconsciously – the intelligent character shows through*'.¹ Nature in an objective sense – according to *Fichte's* interpretation – *is living reality: in nature, in the deep recesses of the world dwell activity, life and freedom*.¹ I also needed and need this human freedom, which in view of the above, I could find only in nature. For me the painting of the pantheistic series meant art's and my own onward ambitions, the eternal path, the ceaseless fight for emergence of the innermost 'Ego'. In this resides the *raison d'être* of the work and this series; in the living force of the human spirit trapped in an exhausted body, in the confrontation with death.

The philosophical background of oriental painting

Philosophical background

In China a transitional, asymmetric civilisation evolved as a result of the lack of private property of land. This transitional feature was a block to development, and certain distortions occurred as well. As a result Chinese philosophers took service with the mandarin society, or refusing that, they escaped to an idealized other world, to the past, to an unreal world. Basically, at the same time, this is the problem of the Chinese man. This is how Confucianism and Taoism and the duality of Taoism-Buddhism appear in the field of philosophy. The explanation for the appearance and spread of Buddhism in China is that in the different strata of society there existed a desire for consoling teachings. Buddhism was the first apparently redemptive religion, which dealt with life after death and the relationship of good and bad. Buddhism opposed the inhumanity of Confucianism and it was a more developed doctrine than Taoism with regard to its religious and ethical principles.

Discovery of the landscape

(Subsections: Sacred places; Intimate landscape; Foggy landscape; The concrete and the mediative landscape, Reel-picture Figural pantheism.)

From the viewpoint of the evolution of typical Chinese landscape painting, the liaison between the Chinese artist and nature had a determinant significance. In China the clear and conscious opposition of man and nature had already evolved. Submerging himself in nature helped man find himself and his own inner world. The approach of Chinese art is pantheistic, as it fills the lifeless elements and objects with soul and ascribes magic power to them. Mountains and waters are highly respected. The typical picture of an intimate landscape is of a village, of water, and of mountains. Mountains signify tranquillity, eternity, timelessness. In opposition to this, water is the symbol of motion and of change. The composition of the landscape, whose moods are known to the viewer from poetry, suggests the desire to escape; it is the entrance to a distant world. In the European context, a quite significant representative of panoramic landscape painting emerged, *Joachim Patinir* (1480-1524), a painter from the Netherlands. The creation of the new type of painting (*Weltlandschaft*), the 'World Picture', owes much to the master working in Antwerp. The *Weltlandschaft* expresses the unity of the

universe. The eye roams freely over the huge distances, the landscape of rocks, forests; it passes along the river touching towns, and through the wide countryside cultivated by people who fade into infinity. The figure can hardly be recognised in the landscape. The question arises in a natural way: whether the Weltlandschaft with its metaphysical content is as much the picture of pantheistic self-consolation as in the case of Chinese painting.

Figural pantheism

According to the European way of thinking the human body itself is something that we take pleasure in looking at, and we admire its depiction in paintings or photos. The human body can not be transformed into art by directly copying it; it is only the starting point of an artwork and an association of ideas. The delineation of the human body can convey the innermost core of human existence: happiness, sorrow, ecstasy, suffering, death, and consolation. However in oriental paintings, the idea that the body can be delineated realistically, as a subject of contemplation, has not arisen.

My approach to painting

From the start, I mainly went in for rational thinking: the rational representation of landscape. What I was interested in was the balance of shapes, the continuity of rhythm, the arrangement of dark and light elements of a picture. My guiding principles were order, expediency, harmony. This representation was simplified further by limiting the range of colours. Then suddenly I could not find any means of artistic innovation. I fell into the trap of schematism. Having been guided by theoretical writings on Chinese painting (Kuo Zso hszü and Tang Hou), and gathering inspiration from the studies of classical landscape painting, I produced the 'My Wanderings I.', an ink painting. The picture symbolises the course of my own spiritual journey - my 'elegy' which may not be put into words. The formal paradox of mountain and valley leads the beholder (myself) through the different scenes of his journey or rather his vagabondage. This picture meant for me, probably, first that a mystical, platonic sort of self-knowledge is indeed possible.

Delineation of great perspectives

With the monumental picture 'My Wanderings II.' I had a different intention. I wanted to get a better insight into the inner structure of landscape, and this picture belongs to the category of 'Überblicklandschaft' (transparent or perspicuous landscape). I made it so that the landscape was seen more from a height and evoked a feeling of infinity. It was also more illustrative than the earlier picture. Mostly this was due to the stippling technique that I used. My intention was also to express duality. On the one hand I wanted a wider view of the landscape, and on the other hand I wanted to send the viewer on his way with the figure of the wanderer in a way similar to a 'moving panorama'. Which landscape is the 'more successful'? The one in which we can travel, live, reside in, or the one which opens up a distant view of nature, of the world? In spite of the huge distances only a very small part is suitable for roaming and living in.

The notion of the world spirit flowing into nature

The Chinese painters were not concerned about the individual details or forms; their aim was to express their entire relationship with the world through landscape. The idea of the world spirit flowing into nature is the approach, according to which man is merely a tiny, hardly visible grain of sand in the whole scheme of things. In this landscape and in the Chinese approach to the world, the place of man is different from that in the European. The man is not the centre of all, and measure of all, but alongside other elements (plant, animal, mountain, water etc.) a constituent of nature. Man is only a small point, a tiny grain of sand on a landscape of towering, immense mountains.

The mountains-trees, brightness-obscure, greatness

Going around repeatedly certain mountains, sensing the trees, the brightness, greatness, the obscurity of the forests merge into each other due to the pace of the galloping rider, and as a result, we meet with a series of transparent events. The pedestrian never senses such a thing. He always sees only the framing contours of the given object or mountain, tree etc. In opposition to this the galloping rider sees these framing contours in motion, so several lines appear of the the same object side by side and they capture the experience. The final form of the mountain will be entire only by the projection of each side on the other. Man has to feel in himself all the power and regularity that there is to be seen in nature.

Rhythmic structure in landscape painting

It is beyond doubt that for myself, for the real 'Ego', the flowing and whirling world of forms that evolve in my pictures, time and again dissolve the torments, and agonies. In seeking for the 'clear source', the ancient energies and forms lead me to what purification is possible. I needed and still need such a prophetic power, which on the one hand can create forms for monumental, irrational tensions, and on the other hand which can transform these purely formal elements so that their 'visibility' is almost a connection between the sensibility of the beholder and the other world of the picture. I shall continue to regard nature as a 'grounded canvas' on which I can mete out the material of my 'Ego'. This is the reason why there is no frame nor any irrevocably closed composition in my pictures. The rhythm entered upon may be prolonged. This is how my recollection and a world in conformity with the needs of another subjective 'Ego' comes together for me.

Space and time

By the end of the series I wanted to achieve the abstraction in the European sense on which western science has been built. The comparison of the two different worlds, the two different approaches meant exciting artistic solutions and certainly opened up new paths to me. First of all I speak about spaces having a special origin and nature. The spaces in painting have a dual meaning. On the one hand, the picture is an individual object, one parcel of space, as it were; on the other hand it is the world of forms superimposed on the object (painting). The spaces formed by my imagination 'speak' to the viewer only when certain conditions are met. They are the emotional responses arising also in the viewer, so they are not the primary consequence of objective contemplation. The viewer is often able only to make sense of them if he is also moves in front of the picture and, at the same time, tries to move back in time, passing through the spatial plane which symbolises the ephemeral nature of man.

The landscape emerging into the world of spirit, as a painted elegy

'Psyche' is a mystic picture, evoking fear, yet it also provides consolation at the end of a period of uncertainty. The vision is the expression of the state in which one subjective 'Ego' abandons the other 'Ego'. This is the state that I am in: the abandonment of the 'Ego'. A tragic conflict arises between the fractured body and the clear-sighted and clearly appraising 'Ego'. In the big forest, among the gigantic powerful trees, new shapes irrupt repeatedly, and though half alive, half dead, they help the suffering back to the world of the living in the

struggle for the self. The sombre picture-poem is one of defencelessness and of the desolation of the individual in the face of catastrophe.

The suffering

Following a long struggle and more than a year's preparatory work I began to paint in 2003 the 'Scenes from The Divine Comedy', an ink series painted by means of a dipping technique. The compositions don't illustrate the Greek ideal of the beautiful and victorious body, able to defeat fate, but the body of the man who proceeds towards devastation. From the viewpoint of my own painting it was important to be able to represent the exemplars of European suffering, with the Chinese approach to nature, together with my own world. The question was whether I could compose a scene using iconographic characters and yet renounce that scene in favour of the vision whose very purpose it is to obliterate the ideal of physical beauty.

Gradually towards the devastation

My advance into Dante's world is gradual. In the cycle the raw bodies cling to each other and fall towards the redness at the centre like puppets giving up all the beauties of the body. The encyclopedic history of human life after the Day of Reckoning comes to an end here. In the pit of The Divine Comedy death is not heroic nor filled with pathos. This suffering with the maimed arm stretched above the head is the total devastation of the damned man. The soul torn out from the head thrown back is also the victim of the body, which whipped it off to hell, so that it has no chance to unite with God in death.

The landscape of the other world

Besides the landscapes providing pantheistic consolation, the 'Überblicklandschaft' or the landscape emerging into the world of spirit, the need to delineate in painting the landscape of the other world unwontedly grew up in me. My world of painting could not break away from the ideas of European and Greek mythology. Once the body has lost its form created by God, it returns to the world of the eternal cycle, that is to say into mere materiality, where finally it dissolves. This motif is the most important element of the human course of life. The body and the soul divide at this point. Different people and different cultures view this process, perhaps differently, perhaps similarly. This final journey happens in another space and surely not in a this-worldly dimension. No living man may see Charon's boat except Dante, who in the third act of The Divine Comedy (The gate of hell) writes about this landscape. According to my understanding of the scene, this is the last journey for the soul, leading it into infinity.

Bridge to the Other World

My wanderings with the dual 'Ego' led to the Empire of the Dead, too; to the depth of the black earth. From the world of my imagination, from dream layers, shapes of bridges emerged. I have always thought that on the way to the other world – besides the boat – there's another manner of getting across which is simply a bridge. It is only the soul which gets to heaven, to purgatory or to hell, while the body perishes. At the resurrection – after a long time – the soul unites once again with its former body. The faith in this means consolation for the Christian man. In Norse mythology, the mistress of the Empire of the Dead is the Goddess Hel, who is simultaneously the Ruler of the Other World, the Empire of Shades. This world is divided from the world of the living by a bridge. This bridge is the Gjallarbrú which spans the river Gjöll and is covered with gold. Actually, who is the hero of my paintings? Maybe I am walking the paths of the Other World in order to bring a message to myself? For me the *Bridge* is the path of the soul, but at the same time it seems that this is man's course of life through the world whose final message is the desire for moral wholeness.

Towards pantheistic consolation

By the last painting of The Scenes from The Divine Comedy the notion of suffering expressed by the body entered its final phase. I had to establish the possibility of pantheistic consolation for suffering man. I depicted the sufferings of European man and the possible ways out for him, in the style of Chinese painting and the approach to nature of the Chinese man, or rather according to his world view. I sought the impassioned energy which helps to achieve consolation in the world view, which is one and indivisible in man.

Wandering years 1970-1975

The 'Wandering Years' is quite an individual work. It is the distillation of my life and wanderings in Thuringia. One can see a series of mosaic-like, short-story-like happenings. According to *Erich Trunz's* Goethe study *'man finds his meaning of life only if he tries to give the right form to his existence among other people, since life is nothing but existence among other people'*. It realises mostly the sultry, gloomy dramatic character of the ballads; the process then, in great poems, stretches out to infinity. For me the picture is a mythic, epic vision evoking the world and reflecting the memory of humanity.

Pantheism in European Art

Avant-garde pantheism

For me, the constructivist theory pertaining to the relationship between the individual and nature had importance. This was put into words by Ernő Kállai in his writing 'Ethics': *'Constructivism ... draws the final conclusions of spiritual relativism, when art seeks its new, necessary ideological standpoint not in a subjective, spiritual way, but in an objective, intellectual way, not moralising that is, but organising: it leaves the question regarding the relationship to nature and it leaves spiritual problems open so that everyone may take up a position of their own.'*¹

The eye withdraws from realistic preconceptions and turns towards inner, mental coherences. According to Klee the aim is: *'to paint primeval pictures, by drawing on the secret source, where the primeval law nourishes growth.'*¹

Towards my imaginary world

Besides my pantheistic world, which I built of real shapes, the imaginary world of forms appeared bit by bit, which set aside the earlier pictorial intention. The forms float in an infinite white space, their position, their relationship to each other is significant from the viewpoint of the purport, or message of the picture. These are landscapes as well, but with forms, shapes of peculiar meaning, sometimes having human, sometimes inhuman shapes. In this landscape the defenceless human cannot any longer find a corner, a valley to live in, and yet, he doesn't want to undertake long journeys any more. However, this pictorial world is as attractive to me as the former one. The imagination doesn't come here to 'have ideas'; it pauses to reflect at certain points, since these are not finished landscapes, only loose landscape-structures arising in the primeval world.

My graphic techniques

Before summarising my own ink-painting technique I feel it is important - from the viewpoint of the significance of one's life-work – to exemplify some of the stages in my artwork. The pitfalls of the workshop stage, or the coming into existence of the artwork - the theoretical and often technical failures - are generally not public; mostly these are the most personal traumas of the artist. Pictures representing phases of my work are: 'The last day at nursery school', 'Meditation I', 'Psyche', 'Rhythm of mountains', 'Imaginary landscape I'.

The dipping techniques

The background and the internal surfaces often need more inking in, in accordance with the intention behind the structuring of the picture; in consequence, I use a monochrome shading. By beginning with the lightest going on towards the darkest, painting one layer then another, drying then partly washing off, I obtain the desired tone effects. There's one solution in case of a too dark tone, and that is a bleaching of the surface.

The polished new ink painting techniques

Half (14 pictures) of the Ph.D. collection of paintings was made using a polishing technique. Why was it necessary? I felt, with the first monumental pictures (1,5m × 3,2m), that relying only on calligraphy, on the artistic effect of split-stick lines, it was not likely that a monumental, mystic ink-painting series would come into existence. On the other hand, in the case of a large size of canvas, the dipping technique was not in question. Undoubtedly, the ink, brush, the split stick and sandpaper are limited as tools of the trade, but by polishing it is possible to obtain a higher aesthetic value and the ink powder from the polishing is a more rewarding material, which might serve me as a resource for new artistic directions.

The handling and brushwork

The technique of monumental ink painting in my case appears in the networks of close ruled lines, one on top of another. Generally, I use three different tones of shading. The bottom-most layer is the lightest, the topmost is the darkest. So in this network system the classic three-range tones merge into each other. The harder and softer forms are opposed, yet are connected to each other and are a distinct segment within the greater lineaments of the

picture. The fourth line reveals the larger coherences and contours in rhythmic relation with each other and help, or at least offer for interpretation, the overall tableau.

World of colours

The use of ink and ink painting presumes in advance a multichrome world of colours, at least in my own imagination. As well as the tones of ink shading, the delicate ink lines, I also mix colours. The 'dense ink' effect is got by mixing ink and walnut tree extract. The colours of the background are rather gentle grey, or greenish-yellowish tones.

Summary

Even the title of the DLA dissertation may be grounds for dispute: whether the rather limited tools for monumental ink painting are the right way to express the states of powerlessness, defencelessness and pantheistic self-consolation. The peculiar mood of the dipping technique and the polished ink painting methods that I evoked provided the lyric, mystic experience, which most appropriately represents my imaginary world. What is this world? What does the landscape mean to me? On the one hand the apocalyptic world recalling the mythic after-image of humanity has come to the surface as a result of the 'Ego' analysis, in which the 'Ego' floats defencelessly. On the other hand the picture created for himself is a pantheistic world where the individual finds his consolation.

The dual 'Ego' existing presumably in the consciousness of every artist - after Nietzsche – 'the multitude of subjectivities' is crucial from the viewpoint of the work, since this is the platonic way of self-knowledge, the amnesia, the soul's reminiscence of ideas from the time before birth. That is: The Good is the key to procreation. It is quite hard for a painter to investigate retroactively his own art, his own works. However, it fills me with pleasure that I could walk over again this spiritual and emotional journey which could have been seen up to now only by the other, the artistic 'Ego' living in me. Now the artistic Ego unites again with the 'Ego' of the writer which consciously discloses the inner human emotions of the artistic Ego and the artistic process. Thus, the 'ethic of subjectivity', in Nietzsche's sense, reunites in me and simultaneously finds relief.

Notes

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