

## Chapter- 4 (Hornbill)

### Chapter Name- Landscape of the Soul

#### Writer- Nathalie Trouveroy

- Nathalie Trouveroy, the wife of the Belgian Ambassador to India, is an art historian.
- Nathalie who has done her Masters in the history of art and archaeology, with a specialization in Japanese art from the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium, is pained at the eroding heritage of Delhi.
- Nathalie has been imbibing the cultures of the various cities she visits.
- When her husband was posted in China, she learnt calligraphy.
- She is an accomplished translator of catalogues and art books from Dutch into different European languages

#### Chinese & European views on Art

The writer contrasts Chinese art with European art by recounting two stories about Chinese art and one story about European Art. The Europeans want a perfect likeness, whereas, in Asia, Art is the essence of life and spirit. Chinese art requires the active participation of the viewer both physically and mentally to understand it.

#### About the Characters

**Wu Daozi:** The eighth-century Chinese landscape painter disappeared inside his last painting.

**Emperor Xuanzong:** He admired Daozi's painting but was not an active participant in it.

**Quinten Metsys:** He was a fifteenth-century Belgian blacksmith who changed his profession to become a delicate realist painter and marry the woman he loved.

## CONTENTS OF THE CHAPTER

### Comparison between European and Chinese Art :

- This chapter is a comparative study of European and Chinese painting.
- It touches upon various subtleties of reality and art.
- Art is one of the forms of expression like poetry, music and dance. All these forms of expression have an abstract nature as they can't be defined and have to be felt or experienced.
- The chapter has three important areas of discussion:
  - i. anecdotes related to Chinese and European painting,
  - ii. Daoism and
  - iii. how one of the philosophical doctrines of Daoism called 'Shanshui' is reflected in Chinese paintings.

### An anecdote about Chinese Painter Wu Daozi

- The eighth-century Chinese Emperor Xuanzong commissioned a painter named Wu Daozi to paint a landscape.
  - When the painting was ready, the Emperor was invited to appreciate it.
  - He enjoyed looking at the forests, high mountains, waterfalls, clouds, men on hilly paths, birds in flight etc depicted in the painting.

- But the painter was not satisfied and he invited the attention of the Emperor towards a cave in the painting, inside which, the painter said, resided a spirit. The painter clapped his hands, causing the entrance to the cave.
- Then the painter said, "The inside is splendid, beyond anything words can convey. Please let me show your Majesty the way".
- The painter entered the cave and disappeared. The cave door closed and the painting disappeared from the wall before the Emperor could move.

### An anecdote about European Painter Quinten Metsys

- A fifteenth-century Belgian blacksmith named Quinten Metsys fell in love with a painter's daughter.
  - Knowing that her father would not accept him because of his profession, he secretly entered the painter's studio and painted such a realistic fly on the artist's panel that the master tried to swat it before he realised that it was not real!
  - Quinten was accepted by the master as an apprentice, married his beloved and soon became famous for his 'realism' in painting.

### Meaning of the Tales *Changing your Tomorrow*

- Such stories as that about Wu Daozi are very common in China's classical education. It was through such stories that great masters made abstract concepts concrete.
- Such tales reveal that art has an inner life, meaning or soul.
- Only when one can see that inner life can one understand its true meaning.
- The Emperor had appreciated the painting only from what he saw. He could only see the body of the painting, whereas the painter tried to show him the soul, the inner life and meaning of the painting. Similarly, Quinten Metsys signified illusionistic likeness in European painting.
- The same holds good for the story about the frightening likeness of a dragon to a real one which prevented a Chinese painter from drawing its eye, as he felt that then the dragon would see him and attack him.

## Basis of Chinese Paintings

- Chinese paintings are based on the philosophy of Daoism.
  - Dao means "path or way"- the way into the mystery of the universe. The Emperor may rule over territories, but the artist alone knows the way within. Life has no meaning unless we undertake the inner, spiritual journey.
  - When Wu Daozi said, "let me show you the way", he meant the way to the inner meaning of art or mystery of the universe.
  - This is the spirit of Chinese paintings.
  - They do not reproduce an actual view but use a real landscape to say something more.
  - A Chinese painter, therefore, wants the viewer to take plural viewpoints to enter into his painting and travel in it.
  - He wants our active participation, not only physical but also mental.
  - His landscape is not a copy of a real landscape; it is a representation of an inner the reality, a spiritual and conceptual space.

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## What Daoism Is?

- According to Daoism. this universe is complementary poles, namely, **Yin** (feminine) and **Yang** (masculine).
- Interaction of these two the universe. meeting point. called the Void" also holds great significance, though it is overlooked.
- This can be compared with the practice of pranayama; breath in, retain. breathe out- the 'retain' part is the "Middle Void, where meditation occurs. This void is essential; nothing can happen without it.

- In Daoism, a landscape is called SHANSHUI (SHAN= mountain, SUI= water); however, it does not represent the real landscape; it is the Daoist view of the universe.
- To understand Chinese paintings, one must understand Daoism.
- So the mountains and water in the Chinese paintings are representative of and unpainted space is representative of the Middle Void where the interaction between Yin and Yang takes place.
- Man is the medium of communication between the complementary poles of the universe and you can see his presence too in the Chinese paintings.

## CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

- Chinese paintings are abstract as they can't be defined and have to be felt or experienced.
- In contrast, there is an illusionistic likeness in European painting.
- Their contrasting nature is explained through the anecdotes about
  - Chinese Painter Wu Daozi, who disappeared inside his painting.
  - Another Chinese painter who did not want to paint the eyes of the dragon for fear that the dragon may attack him on seeing him.
  - Belgian painter Quinten Metsys, who painted a realistic fly to marry the woman he loved.
- Chinese paintings are based on the philosophy of Daoism, which says that life has no meaning unless we undertake the inner, spiritual journey.
- Chinese painters want the viewers' active participation, not only physical but also mental, while viewing their paintings.
- According to Daoism, the interaction of two complementary poles, viz. Yin (feminine) and Yang (masculine) makes the universe.
- Man is the medium of communication between the two complementary poles, i.e. their meeting point, and you can see his presence too in Chinese paintings.

## Vocabulary (Word Meanings)

### P -34

landscape –scenery; commissioned - ordered especially ;  
Sire- a respectful form of address to a king or emperor  
Dwells- resides or stays; Spirit- a supernatural being  
Your Majesty - respectful way for saying 'you' to a king  
not a trace -nothing noticeable  
classical education – Education in ancient times  
disciple -a follower of a teacher or guide  
anecdote - a short entertaining story about a real person

### P-35

Dragon- a mythical monster which breathed out fire  
Flanders - a region of modern-day Belgium in Europe  
Master blacksmith- the skilled person in the blacksmith trade  
sneaked – moved secretly  
panel- flat board on which a painting can be made  
delicate realism- the quality of the art which makes it seem delicate  
Apprentice- a person was taken to learn a skilled practical trade  
beloved - one who is loved  
form of art - structure, pattern, or scheme followed in shaping an artistic work  
Illusionistic likeness - technique deceives the eye using pictorial methods to deceive the eye  
figurative painting- representation of a piece of art, through the eyes of the creator's  
imagination  
horizontal scroll- painting on a paper which has been rolled up horizontally  
  
conceptual space- relation with the abstract instead of the factual representation required  
for the understanding of concepts

Shanshui- the Chinese word for 'landscape'

complementary - combining to form a complete whole

Yang - the Chinese word for 'active and masculine'

Yin - the Chinese word for 'receptive and feminine'

receptive - willing to receive or willing to accept

Middle Void - space between two elements of an image where they interact

Pranayama- Hindi word for 'conscious awareness of breath'

conduit - channel or means

eye of the landscape - a link which leads to the true meaning of the landscape

