

Tradition, Individual Style In Tseng Yu-Ho's Works

This review of paintings by Tseng Yu-Ho (Mrs. Gustav Ecke) was contributed by Jean Charlot, visiting professor at the University of Hawaii and internationally famous artist. The exhibit opened Tuesday at Gump's and will remain through April 15.—
The Editor.)

The paintings of Tseng Yu-Ho, in their balance between a willing obedience paid to tradition in their form and a release of individuality inherent to the ink stroke style, raise for an occidental critic a pertinent query as to the possible confusion that exists among the partisans of our modern art between originality and greatness. Some critics advance that the clue to quality is, for a picture, to strike us as unlike any picture ever painted before. This goes counterwise to the fact that pictures are man-made, and that man's life is stolidly rooted in a locale and a culture, even today, when speed and forced migrations tend to upset the premise.

"Inescapable similarities between men suggest that, in pictures also, we should look for the cements of a common usage; why shy away from objective rules? Traditions are far from arbitrary, embodying as they do a wisdom decanted through centuries of experience.

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"The paintings of Tseng Yu-Ho are not content only with the acceptancy of ancient tradition. Tradition is there, however, from the choice of subject-matter, mountain peaks, gnarled pines, riverfalls, to the most minute line created at one stroke with a swirl of the brush to describe a single blade of grass. One may follow in this exhibition the steps by which the young artist rises from natural sights to symphonic grandeur. In the small notations of the countryside, charm of tints and tranquility of repeated horizontal lines suggest a morning stroll through mists, whose slow rising reveals translucent suggestions of forms conjured from the ever-present reality of space.

In the larger, upright scrolls, however, gray gives way to assertive blacks; the gentle notations of nature are orchestrated now into complex motives. An epic air ties together tortured trees and craggy rocks; the ascending vertical of a rising peak is answered by the descending, vertical white ribbon of a mountain waterfall. Delectable is the mastery of textures that oppose each other or blend with each other to form chords or assonances. A semi-dry brush stroke is transformed into the crevices of an aged pine-trunk as the hair of the brush separate in individual trails on the crinkled surface of an ancient paper that adds its own mellow texture to the painted texture. Grass tufts acquire a quasi-organic animation as each blade folds under in mimicry of spider legs. The staccato of moss patches and the sostenuto of orchid leaves strike each its personal note, both plastic and philosophical. Reserves even are meaningful, where the paper left intact becomes mist, snow or water.

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"Unlike oil painting, where ruse may masquerade as inspiration, where scumbles, glazes and varnish, all conspire to doctor a weak initial concept or to heal a deficient start, Chinese ink painting, with nothing hidden, nothing stated twice, with no possible stutterings, looms as a medium even more difficult than fresco. Matured by slow thought and repeated communions with nature, its execution must nevertheless be lightning-quick. As the brush flashes its curves and zig-zags, as the plastic rhythm grow on paper, musically, but quicker even than music, no craftiness, no conscious thought even, has time to deflect the motion of

wrist and fingers. The artist cannot here, as he does with less exacting techniques, fake knowledge or greatness. From depths such that words may never probe the brush brings up subconscious moods, innermost states for which pine, bamboo, plum-tree and orchid act as species of tuning forks, to prove or disprove, harmony between the painter and the universe."