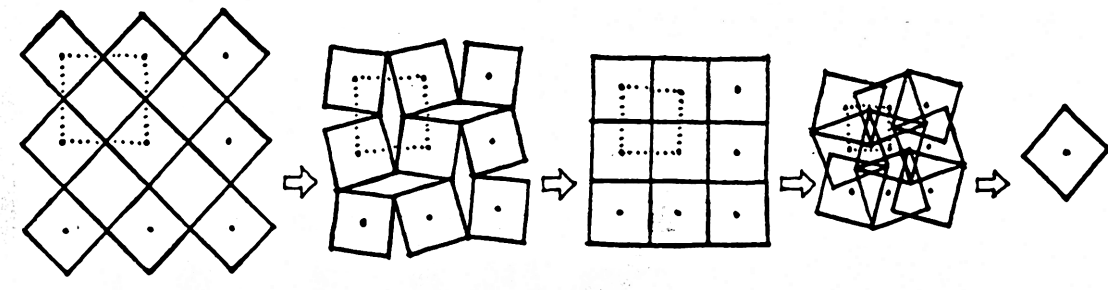


ART

by Jean Charlot



BASIC STEPS — These five Duncan Stuart illustrations, prepared for the Star-Bulletin by Stuart, help in understanding his art. The phases leading to the finished art form are explained in the text.

East and West

Currently held on the University campus, the Festival of the Arts of this Century features, at George Hall, the graphic works of Duncan Stuart.

Concurrently, unrelated to the Festival but undoubtedly an art Event for our community, the East-West Center has brought to Hawaii the famed Chinese calligrapher Chiang Yee.

Both artists, from the East and the West, are exponents of what contemporaries call abstract art. The resemblance stops there.

Even though their works are obviously dissimilar, underlying affinities remind us that man is man the world over.

Man as artist labors hard to extract from the confusing diversity of nature a lesson in order and in esthetics.

Artists may use diverse tools, open divergent routes, create conflicting styles.

Yet the goal of their search remains one.

Stuart's works

In their geometric intran- sigen- ce, Duncan Stuart's renderings bring to mind architectural blueprints, engineering diagrams, astronomical charts, constructions defining the atomic components of matter.

For those who believe that the purpose of art is to pleasantly render pleasurable sights — flowers or nudes, dawns or sunsets — the art of Duncan Stuart may be puzzling.

And for those who believe that the first duty of the artist is to express himself, there shall be food for thought.

Impersonal

Stuart works hard to achieve impersonality. He distrusts the hand that holds the brush as temperamental. To chart beauty he relies on ruler and compass exclusively.

Stuart's disciplined mind works along wholly rational lines. Even thus, the rich complexity of his final drafts remains mysterious, even for an informed onlooker.

To help our understanding of his art, the artist kindly drew for me some five basic steps, illustrated above.

Phase A — We start from a sort of checkerboard pattern, where all squares with center drawn in as a dot will be tagged as "squares." The



POEM — Chiang Yee's brush writing, in small-seal-style characters, of a poem by Tao Yuan-ming

dot-less ones represent space. The "squares" are endowed with orderly motion.

Phase B — Put in balanced motion, the squares close ranks. They keep equidistant, tipping and bowing as it were, to each other.

Space now divides into diamond shapes. Their long axis alternates horizontals and verticals, suggesting a 90-degree motion.

Phase C — Individual squares close rank in a formation that also is a square. What space remained within the all-over figure is annihilated.

Phase D — Tipping mo-

tions similar to those in phase B, and a further closing-in.

The squares now overlap each other. The previous static phase is replaced by dynamic tensions.

Triangles and smaller diamond shapes result from the overlap.

Phase E — Final contraction. All centers coincide. All squares are visually stacked as one.

He rules it

Duncan Stuart rules his home-made universe, expanding or contracting it at will. In some diagrams lines

have been erased. Only dots are seen, situated where lines had met or crossed.

Changes in the width of given lines shift emphasis and weight, or suggest constructions unfolding in space.

Wholly contemporary, Stuart's graphic approach is rooted deep into the past.

We take it for granted that Euclid was a scientist. Chance is that he was primarily a visionary and an artist. Otherwise how could he have fussed for a lifetime with figures that do not look much like anything we know on earth.

After 22 centuries we realize indeed that what Euclid found was of immense substance.

In fact, only within our generation has it been possible to tentatively disengage his antique doodlings from our concept of the universe!

Yee's work

Chiang Yee is known both as an author and as a calligrapher. Signed with a pen name — "The Silent Traveler" — his descriptions of Western lands are widely read.

And his books on art — "The Chinese Eye" and "Chinese Calligraphy" — have done much to narrow the assumed chasm between Eastern and Western esthetic attitudes.

Chiang Yee's art is deeply rooted in Chinese culture, as deeply as was El Greco's in Byzantine culture. And like El Greco, Chiang Yee is an artist in exile.

He finds himself unable to gather in his hand even a fistful of Chinese soil. This gentleman scholar cannot quench his spiritual thirst out of China's waterfalls, or philosophize facing its native mountains.

Chiang Yee has no use for ruler or compass. He fully trusts for tools human bones and sinews, the motions of the wrist, and fingers that hold the Chinese brush vertically.

Add to the brush the other treasures of the calligra-

pher: paper, ink and ink-stone.

Add also a joss stick as a means to commune with departed masters.

As to the flowing cup of wine celebrated in poetry, I doubt that Chiang Yee, an inspired artist, needs its added inspiration!

At first sight, Chinese calligraphy seems freedom itself, a freedom patterned after that of nature.

Brush strokes

The brush strokes of the trained calligrapher bend like grass in the wind, twist like wild orchid leaves, are resilient like pine needles, or grow firm as bamboo stalks.

This freedom is real but, underlying it, the artist keeps in mind a sobering grid of compositional lines, never actually traced unless it be at the kindergarten stage.

These guiding lines are the

rule that gives to freedom its spice. They are the upright poles that the vine needs to grow against and spiral its tendrils about.

These secret lines come into the open only in characters of a most antique cast, those referred to as in the seal style.

The seal style illustrates the mysterious passage from picture writing — not unlike that of some North American Indians — to writing proper, with phonetic values.

Even when executed with brush and ink, seal characters should remain faithful to their distant origin: a line incised on bone or turtle shell or, in a slightly later version, engraved in bronze.

Illustrations

I reproduce Chiang Yee's brush writing of a poem by Tao Yuan-ming, executed in the small-seal style.

A second sample of Chiang

Yee's calligraphic art strongly contrasts with the sober freedom of the first.

The antique style of incised script taught the brush restraint. The grass-writing style emphasizes, indeed exasperates, the unique possibilities of the brushstroke.

In this second, sample, the stakes that fenced in the ancient script are thrown aside. The vine grows wild, shooting its tendrils explosively!

The text that Chiang paraphrases with elastic lines is a basic saying of zen, "The shadow of the clouds and the sound of the wind."

Understanding a text is not needed to appreciate the art of calligraphy. However, we may delve on the meaning of this one without fear of weakening our esthetic enjoyment. For the saying can be summed up as "Nothingness."

Climax

A fragment of fresco dating from the 9th century depicts a chan monk blinded by revelation, shading his eyes from the excess of light from above, suddenly trust upon him as the startling climax of his lifelong meditation.

The artist follows a similar spiritual discipline. When it comes, the moment of illumination finds him brush in hand, ready to record it.

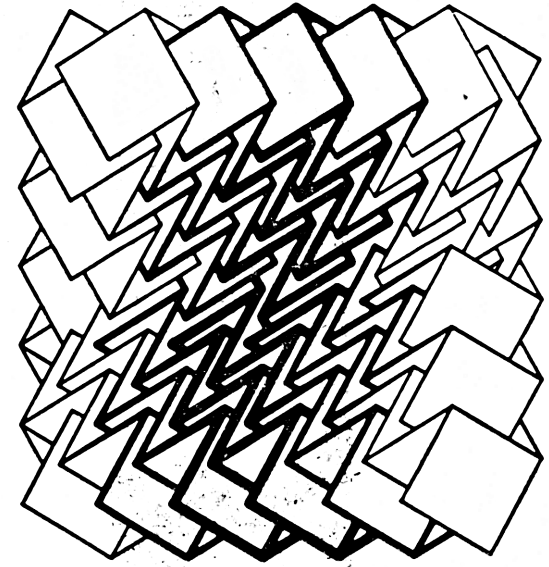
In this beautiful calligraphy, Chiang Yee has compressed both of the truths that rule the art of the gentleman artist.

He must know it all, his hand and wrist trained as rigorously as the body of an athlete, his mind full of minutiae of knowledge concerning the achievements of ancient masters.

By the same token, as the moment of inspiration is thrust upon him, the true artist must forget it all!



ZEN — This is a Zen saying in grass-style characters by Chiang Yee



PATTERN — This is a graphic work by Duncan Stuart, one of his drawings at the University of Hawaii's "Festival of the Arts of This Century."