

# Preface on the Five Volumes of My Watercolor Paintings

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Nearly forty years have gone by in what feels like the blink of an eye. Looking back, there is joy and there is feeling of losses. I am pleased to see that four hundred pieces of relatively satisfying works have been accumulated over the years, each displaying its own feature and creativity, reflecting changes in my sentiments, for these I still cherish and find exciting. At the same time I am caught by surprise how quickly time has passed – some of these works are now old dreams from 20, 30 years back – a testament of how fast life goes by.

During late 1960s, I was a Physics student at the CUHK, full of ideals and passion for the country and society. As I did not feel the pursuit of science could be directly related to the struggles of people, I developed a keen interest in art. Upon graduation, I started working as a teacher, and I was lucky to also be painting under the instruction of watercolor artist Chan Zaoze. Unfortunately, a few months later he had to devote his time to his business, and my self-study began. My earliest works showed a deep concern for living conditions of the people, frequently portraying working sites, street corners, boat homes, and post-disaster scenes. The Chinese philosophy saying of “literature as a vehicle to convey the morals” represented my creative philosophy at the time.

In the 70s, I was in a frenzy with painting. I painted many works of metropolitan scenes, also I created a series of Ink and Wash style large-scale paintings in watercolor. It included a lotus series, which explored various concepts and methodologies in expressions, in a pursuit to integrate the Chinese Humanism philosophy and the artistic styles from the west. Extensively I studied collections from China and the world, to immerse myself in the art of brilliant painters in the history as well as modern times. I loved the western Impressionist and Expressionist styles, but I also aspired to the other-worldly romanticism of Ba Da Shan Ren and Shi Tao, found infinite inspirations from Zen and Tao Te Ching, and I was completely won over by the profundity and depth of Chinese art and culture.

Perhaps it was an influence from my science training in the past, I enjoyed taking time in reflecting, experiencing and analysing different outstanding works and their styles, trying to understand their essence through comparison and contrast. My subject of study could be from the east or the west, local or foreign, ancient or modern; it might be in any art form, be it oil painting, watercolor, ink and wash, engraving, design, advertising, photography, or film, regardless of the artistic style – real or abstract, modern or post-modern... I tried to understand and capture the essence of all works outstanding and inspired. Some of these eventually became part of my own artistic values, and guided my appraisal of art; some went into my painting style, enriching it with Chinese Humanistic ideas as I pursued the harmonious integration of human and nature, as my imagination took flight between the celestial and the earth.

After the refinement and development in the 70s, gradually I entered the ‘grey and blue’ period in the 80s, and produced a series of landscape painting of different sizes. I had much pleasure in applying my own interpretation and expression into the paintings, coloring the atmosphere of mountain ranges, the spirit and air of sceneries, and the thoughts on the universe as my heart led me. The lights and shadows of the mountains, the assemblage of forests, streams quietly meandering through picturesque places, the mystic atmosphere of the earth, birds flocking

into the forests... all of these had been captured in watercolor at the tip of the brush. The creative process often inspired the sublimation of spirit and sentiment, as well as the refinement of ideas on painting. The process was mixed with bliss and struggle - I was delighted to reach new arenas and struggled when breakthrough was hard to achieve.

My painting style in the 80s tended to be darker and favoured the colors of grey and blue. On one hand that reflected my pursuit of integrating human into the environment, my affinity to nature and the expression of the soul, with the underlying sentiment of retiring to secluded nature, as many Chinese artists and poets in history aspired. That was a deviation from the 70s, when I painted with the mission to convey morals. On the other hand, it was also a reflection of a dark and disappointing time in my teaching career, which eventually ended with the new pursuit of further studies. Although I tried numerous times to resume painting, the suffocating sorrow reflected in the painting was painful and recurring. Meanwhile I became increasingly focused on my academic research, and painting came to a complete stop from mid-80s throughout the entire 1990s.

Owing to the encouragement from colleagues in the Art Faculty, I picked up my paint brushes again in the 2000s, thus my dream in art was rekindled. I was delighted to discover that I had left the 'grey and blue' period behind, and once again felt the endless possibilities in expression, colors and painting techniques. I was filled with joy and motivation of creativity, to continue pursuing new artistic arenas and to reflect and ponder upon matters in the universe.

Using the leisure of summer holiday, I reorganised the paintings in the last four decades, and was surprised to find over 600 complete pieces. After careful selection, I found nearly 400 pieces particularly close to my heart, most of which in watercolor. Except for one part that was displayed in three previous exhibitions (2001, 2005, 2009), most of these had never been publicised. Here I would like to give special thanks to photography artist Wong Kai Yu for photographing these works. My daughter Muriel helped to organise the collection into five volumes:

- The first volume "My Mountains" was divided into two parts: "Inspiring & Embracing Mountains" and "Transforming & Performing Mountains". There were over 75 watercolor works in this volume, organized into six series. This volume mainly explored my feeling, association and re-interpretation towards the spirit and presence of some incredible peaks and mountain ranges. In the first part of the volume, I experienced and embraced the soul of the mountains, while the second part portrayed the expression of the mountains' ever transforming personalities.
- The second volume, titled "My Landscapes", was divided into two parts: "Thinking Landscape" and "Searching Landscape". There were nearly 80 watercolor works in this volume, organised into five series. It represented the insights from observation of rural landscapes, forests assemblage, and scenery of the fields. The first part mainly included works of variations or rhapsodic nature, while the second part searched for the rural sentiments and atmosphere.
- The third volume "My Waterside and My City" was divided into three parts: "Wandering Waterside", "Discovering City" and "Viewing Harbor". There were around 80 watercolor works in this volume, organised into six series. The first part included observations of the lives by the waterside; the second part explored my impression of the city and its inspirations, while the third part focused on the experience of viewing afar at the harborside.
- The fourth volume "My Trees and My Lotuses" came in three parts: "Inspiring Trees", "Existing Lotuses", and "Feeling Flowers". The first part expressed my affection for the trees, their style, their charm, as well as what they inspired; the second part was an explorative study of lotuses and the associations with it; the final part was a free interpretation of flowers and plants.

- The fifth volume “My Portraits and My Images” consisted of three parts: “Creating Portraits”, “Being Portraits” and “Conceptualising Images”. The first part mainly consisted of crayon works, aiming to recreate the meaning of human portraits; the second part consisted of charcoal paintings encapsulating the essence of the subject; the last part was a free exploration of various images as one’s imagination roamed free, captured under the form of watercolor and oil paintings.

These five volumes covered the period from the 70s up until 2000s, reflecting the changes in my painting style, but they also documented my journey of exploration of the inner and external worlds. Throughout the years, I developed my own style of watercolor paintings that served as a form of self expression, but I also endeavoured to provide new interpretation of Chinese philosophy and western artistic concepts. This was a pursuit of the harmonious union of human and their environments, appreciation of the inter-relations within nature, through a humanistic soul, using vivid, creative watercolor tone and atmosphere.

Finally, I hope that the works in this collection, as well as the concepts and pursuits they represent, would stimulate my readers emotionally and intellectually. May your experience be one that brings about artistically rewarding enjoyment and unexpected inspirations.