

Gaylord Chan's Way of Painting

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Life is mostly miraculous; when it is married to art, it gets even better. I have been passionate about painting for three decades and have kept abreast of Gaylord Chan's art all this time. I didn't have the pleasure of meeting him until some twenty years later, but his unique style and the deceiving simplicity of the art have always stood out amidst competing styles of modern and traditional art. His is the "unadorned vessel" that is "the omen before the event, the baby before his first cry at birth".

Gaylord Chan is one of the few painters from Hong Kong I truly admire. His personal style neither blindly follows Western trends, nor affects Eastern idioms. He is a man of his own in both Hong Kong and the international context. To appraise such a painter, what is the best angle to take? How can we unravel the depth and richness of his artistic language? What is the best way to interpret the gift his art brings to life?

Gaylord Chan's originality lies in his Way of Painting. He is able to use very simple shapes and colour combinations to bring his art alive and deliver profound messages. Because of the deceiving simplicity and veiled depth, the paintings leave a wide margin of space and time for the viewers' imagination and reminiscence to experience afresh the artist's creativity. His art reveals deep engaging pleasures with casual ease. Lao Tze said, "the great sound is silent, the great Form is formless".

"The five colours blinds the eye, the five flavours numbs the palate". The magic of painting does not come from complexity, but benefits from "the use of emptiness". What makes Gaylord Chan's work so attractive is his measure of exactness. The past thirty years of his career have been rich in production and in variety of contents; for the benefit of analysis I have classified the works into eight major categories: shapes of movement, variations on roundness, the concept of the square, exploration of the line, composition of picture, creation of monsters, sentiments of human nature, rebirth of the landscape. Reviewing these categories I come to appreciate Gaylord Chan's art even more. He is able to paint such humanity into the round shape, and reveal so much sadness and patience in a simple rectangular window. One can sense the vibration of the drum on his canvas, and feel the slow ascension into air of the black object in "Bow Tie". Simple, ordinary things seem to be blessed with life and brought to movement in Gaylord Chan's world.

What does Gaylord Chan's art mean from the point of view of visual art? He has developed a

unique system of pictorial structure. Movement, colour contrast, shading, spatial structure, hollowness and solidity, layering, texturing, are these elements all carefully wrought even when they appear simple and accidental. One can return time and again to his paintings and feel every time the liveliness, the hidden complexities.

Again, as Lao Tze said, “phenomena and emptiness are inter-dependent, difficulty and facility grow from the same source, height is revealed by lowness, sound harmonises with voice, front and back follow upon each other”. Gaylord Chan is able to reveal form with form, and create echoes in the viewer’s mind. He is able to imbue the simplest pictorial element with motion, time, tension, contrast, echo, sincerity and richness. Art made this way is rich in life and substance, feeling and thought.

Gaylord Chan’s Way of Painting is truly that of a master. He turns rot into magic, stone into gold. He has fertilized the cultural soil of Hong Kong with personal insight and wisdom; and he shares his finds with others to help them grow. Gaylord Chan’s artistic achievement is witness to the creativity and passion of Hong Kong in past, present and future years. Under the torrent of globalized culture today, it is ever more important to recognize the outstanding uniqueness of Gaylord Chan’s art as Hong Kong’s cultural icon and its pride.

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