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In the past, Bali had its carefree and beautiful scenery, and kind-hearted traditions. It still has them, but to a much lesser degree. What about the future? This would be very hard to tell! This is because the mellow nature of Oriental culture has already been nibbled away by the arrogance of Western civilisation.

Frankly, Western material civilisation has indeed provided a lot of enjoyment in life. Its scientific inventions have contributed considerably to society. However, the purity of the human soul has been polluted and peaceful temperaments have been ruptured. You need to endure some oppression unwillingly, you have to commit acts that betray your conscience, you have no opportunity to lose yourself in nature, and you are unable to be with your good friends throughout the year. Where has freedom gone? Where has it gone?

For the sake of washing away the accumulated melancholy of city life, recovering long-lost innocence, and gathering new and interesting subjects, a few of us made a special trip last summer to pay respects to the Last Paradise. The trip was not wasted. However, it is a shame that a year has passed before we have managed to arrange and exhibit our works today! This is not due to the paintings but the artists. We have been busy, not with painting, but with juggling the demands of life!

In Memory of Huang Binhong

Late autumn last year, we lost Xu Beihong (徐悲鸿), an artist well known to the public. Late spring this year, a shining star of the art world fell from the sky, plunging our community into despair and mourning. With so illustrious a name and so esteemed a standing, Huang Binhong (黄宾虹) is the very person we seek to remember.

Binhong was not as well known as Beihong in Nanyang. Even if people knew him, it is not certain if they understood him. In fact, his artistic aspirations were an accumulation of the merits of past and current masters, a unique style that could very well be the peak of artistic perfection in the history of local art.

The subject of Binhong’s paintings was predominantly landscapes. Flowers and plants were occasional. As for figures and animals, there were none. Although his subject matter was not wide ranging, his techniques were specialised and perfect, which strengthened the artistic depth of his works. Whenever we look at Binhong’s paintings of landscapes, we feel the care, precision and intensity in his placement of each tree, stone, hill, and valley, including the drifting clouds and the adorning village huts, boats and bridges. One item more and the composition will look too busy; one item less and the composition will seem too simple. The majestic breadth and magical charm of his works owe to the fact that he was well travelled and widely read. The most profound element of Binhong’s work would have to be his brush techniques, which display elegance in vigour, free spiritedness in tradition, grace in bold and unrestrained lines, and gravity in complex and fine dots.

It is a pleasurable pursuit to ruminate upon Binhong’s paintings. We often see the rise of uneven mountainous peaks and disorderliness among the rocks. At a quick glance, the chaos seems uncontrollable. However, on close scrutiny, we see that the earth is fresh, the rocks are sturdy, the grass and trees are moving, and the waterfalls are gushing. Not only are the movements of each element different, they are vigorous and fresh with life. It is especially through the creator’s paint strokes that we see pleasantness and sincerity.

Binhong’s use of ink is so unique that there is no comparable other. Most artists would be content if they could control the thickness of their ink. Binhong’s ink,
however, should be analysed in terms of the colours of all objects in the world, investigated alongside the intrinsic spirit of nature, and explored as the artist’s character. This is also the main reason our local paintings can stand proudly in the world. Concretely speaking, Binhong is not content with displaying the average consistency of ink in his work. In the course of applying ink onto the painting, his technique and application result in the effects of splashed ink (泼墨), burnt ink (焦墨), accumulated ink (积墨), aged ink (宿墨), and the remarkable attainment of various objectives. These ink effects are sometimes hard to distinguish because they are transient, requiring one to examine them patiently until one reaches an understanding, which one is even then unable to vocalise. An artistic objective that has reached this level is considered to have attained its peak. The contemporary European landscape artist, Utrillo, displays some traits that are similar to Binhong’s paintings. It can be said that Binhong was not alone in his quest.

From past to present, there have been countless painters. However, those who are able to leave a legacy and who are worthy of emulation are few. What are the causes? There is a difference between an artisan and an artist. An artisan is merely a person with skills. He labours but does not contemplate and is therefore mediocre and ordinary. His contribution to humankind ranks the lowest. An artist is different. Not only does he need to have practised techniques, he must also nurture and possess in-depth knowledge, good character and an inquisitive mind. Only then can he create monumental works. Binhong is a true model for artists. I remember how 20 years ago, when we were colleagues at the Shanghai College of Fine Arts (上海美术专科学校), we organised a large-scale painting and calligraphy exhibition. I often invited Binhong to speak at exhibitions. He shared many valuable ideas concerning the art of our country and spoke eloquently on art trends in the West. Whether it was Fauvism or Cubism, he gave a very clear analysis. Hence, it was not by chance that he had a firm reputation in China’s art circle.

Now Binhong has passed on and we know that his art shall live eternally. However, given the time that we have spent together, how can I suppress the grief in my heart?

HUANG PAO-FANG AND HIS EXHIBITION OF INTERIOR DECORATION

The Brussels World Exposition opens on the 17th of this month [April]. Its scale is grand, with up-to-date exhibits. It gathers the best of science and art from all over the world, demonstrating to a high degree the application of human intelligence and a deep desire for peace, thus making it a glorious moment in history.

One week from today, we shall personally participate in another spectacular event. Its scale is not as grand; nonetheless, its scope is not pedestrian. In fact, its main objective corresponds with that of the Brussels World Exposition — for pure art and practical life to complement each other. The event that brings much joy and energy to the people of Singapore and Malaya is an exhibition of interior decoration curated by Huang Pao-Fang (黄葆芳) that opens at the Victoria Memorial Hall.

This exhibition will go on record as a pioneering event in the social activities of Singapore and Malaya as it will significantly transform the old notions people have towards life and the arts.

Contemporary art masters such as Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Georges Braque, Raoul Dufy and Georges Rouault engaged in art studies in their earlier years but concurrently practised applied art with painting in their later years. Picasso established a pottery workshop and was involved in every stage, including glazing. Many batches of his cups, plates and bowls are exquisite and unique in style, and have earned praise from buyers. Matisse renovated the interior of a cathedral in Nice, southern France. From the ceramic bricks on the ground to the pulpit, the engravings on the wooden door to the cape worn by the priest, Matisse’s designs are full of good cheer and vivid feeling, sweeping away the cathedral’s past gloominess and darkness. Braque’s designs of carpets and floral wallpaper are simple and elegant, exuding a different appeal that made his works popular with both homes and businesses. Dufy’s speciality was in painting screens with bustling scenes that brim with happiness. Rouault specialises in painting stained glass using bright and dazzling colours. These artists produce such works in the hope of liberating art from its ivory tower and bringing it to the streets. They bring life to mundane daily utensils by imbuing them with a sense of artistic liveliness. In this way, everyone is able...