

墨仙尚濤

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尚濤性納，少言，聲磁厚，語緩，謙遜待人。其相堂堂，其人偉岸，北人長居南鄉，得澤國之潤，留心小景，或花或草，或鳥或貓，見真情趣，而不相忘於長川大山，下筆竟有漠北之曠。

尚濤早年就讀中央美術學院國畫系，受教于蔣兆和、李苦禪、葉淺予、李可染諸大家，人物、花鳥、山水無所不能，而以人物勝。六十年代中畢業，遠赴廣州。不幸文革起，飄零而少作畫。七十年代初，形勢稍緩，得以有機會創作，遂畫《演出之後》。畫中兩少女，一小演員，一黎族小女，小女正手捧椰果贈小演員。此畫描繪細膩、神情真切、造型準確，筆墨潤厚，色澤恰當，當年即名震畫壇，為水墨人物畫之代表作品。文革後，入廣州美術學院國畫系，受聘教授，教花鳥，兼教書法。約此時，舍人物，棄山水，專事花鳥，尺幅天地，墨潤筆暢，意深境遠，為世人矚目。及後，年長，為專心創作，入廣東畫院，每日作畫不綴，樂此不疲，以盡餘生之志。


觀尚濤畫，墨勝，筆勝，意勝，尤以墨勝。墨帶筆，筆藏墨，而意在其中矣。唐張彥遠論墨曰：“夫陰陽陶蒸，萬象錯布，玄化亡言，神工獨運。草木敷榮，不待丹礪之采；雲雪飄揚，不待鉛粉而白。山不待空青而翠，鳳不待五色而彩。是故運墨而五色具，謂之得意。”《歷代名畫記 論畫工榻寫》古人所謂墨分五色，於此已見深意。按愛賓所雲，墨之功效，不在色彩，意在色彩，雖草木，雖雲雪，雖青山，盡墨而得意。此話何解？

一解，墨為色，色盡入墨。草木雲雪青山，物像而已，形分大小，色外質內。捨色以求墨，猶捨外以求質，質存墨活，是為活墨，非死墨。墨活，畫焉有不活之理？二解，色為墨，墨以盡色。陰陽陶蒸，草木敷榮，形隱於裡，色表於外，質在其中矣。天寬地廣，萬物存焉，以墨統之，澤潤變化，畫焉有無色之辯？是故墨即是色，色即是墨。以墨求色，色是真色，分別萬物形質，卻返於我心，成於我手。以色求墨，墨彰五彩，神靈巧化，心性合一，墨方為真墨。

尚濤作畫，留心於墨，濃淡乾濕之間，雜半淡不濃半濕不乾之墨。細觀其作，喜作團塊狀，或大黑，有深灰隱於裡；或輕灰，有暗影彰於外。一幅之中，大黑者，深中見淺，猶重中透亮。輕灰者，似絨非柔，必柔中見剛。常論以墨為器，物像之態盡出之。尚濤不以為然，謂墨為畫之底氣，無墨無以成畫。昔黃賓虹者，晚年濃墨染于紙，滿幅煙雲，氤氳立見。賓虹之墨，借水而出，流於筆鋒，碎點為線，連線為皴，入於紙裡，滋潤婉轉，酣暢淋漓。尚濤傾心之，卻以墨帶水，濃墨先行，緩筆引之。墨既下，清水沖之染之，墨自滲化。再下墨，再染，再滲化，如此重疊，墨光漸出。墨有光，猶玉石沉淵，隱約不可測。

尚濤習書，不以書家自許。蓋書乃畫之源，筆之依據而已。南人作畫，畫為主，書為次，以肖似為鵠的。寫生之法，用意莫過於此。尚濤反其道而行之，遵循古制，以書入畫，卻不以書為限。尚濤作畫極慢，緩緩行筆，如錐畫沙。尚濤用筆，中鋒為主，側鋒從之。就書言，尚濤喜碑學，遠帖學，下筆有金石味，用蒼涼枯寂之筆，寫溫婉柔美之物。然尚濤不受碑之約制，緩筆有行草意，用碑之金石帶行草，去疾速之病，用行草之天然帶金石，除做作之弊。由是尚濤筆法立。用此筆法，畫小品而無俗，寫寵物而去媚。是故尚濤居南鄉，專花鳥，卻無此地積習，跡盡北方，雖小景而有大雅。

重墨以存筆，存筆以盡意。張彥遠雲：“守其神，專其一，合造化之功”。又雲：“向所謂意存筆先，畫盡意在也。”《歷代名畫記·論顧陸張吳用筆》然尚濤意勝，以構成經營之，造化之功，取畫面之點線面而巧以應對。先師李可染，積墨成片，守筆如金，大山長水，構而成之。尚濤志不在山水，偏於一隅，卻有先師情懷，花鳥蟲魚，經營有致，位置大小，持旁守正。中古宗炳，論畫有雲：“聖人含道暎物，賢者澄懷味像。”“聖人以神法道，而賢者通；山水以形媚道，而仁者樂。”“聖賢映于絕代，萬趣融其神思。余復何為哉，暢神而已。”《畫山水序》宗炳此語，道盡千古畫學之意趣。畫如聖賢，通達仁義，物像含道澄懷，融其情思，全在於暢神。神暢而萬物通幽，天人合一。尚濤深明此理，是故志在花鳥，不在花鳥，經營擺佈，左顧右盼，染墨運筆，瞻前思後，在意，在趣，在神思貫通，而達於至極矣。

古有李白，人稱詩仙。仙者，自然天性之別稱，所謂“綺麗不足珍”（《古風》之一），所謂“別有天地非人間”（《山中問答》）。尚濤志在花鳥，求者天然，積墨守筆，通靈達意。三勝中，以墨為最。每每玩墨而有心得，猶入仙境，棄絕綺麗，別有天地，世遂稱其為墨仙。墨仙尚濤，南鄉北韻，小景大雅，金石行草，持旁守正，游於物而不滯於象，始於含道而終於達意。舉目寫意花鳥，成如尚濤者，海內正不復有幾！

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Shang Tao, Immortal Sage of Ink

Yang Xiaoyan

Shang Tao is collected, quiet, and honest, and speaks methodically with his deep, magnetic voice. A sturdy man of integrity, this northerner who has long resided in the south has absorbed its fecundity; he notices the wonder in details, be they of flowers or grass, birds or cats, yet he does not forget the spectacular rivers and mountains that lend his style a northern expansiveness.

Shang Tao studied at the School of Chinese Painting, Central Academy of Fine Arts, under masters such as Jiang Zhaohe, Li Kuchen, Ye Qianyu, and Li Keran, becoming skillful in portraits, flowers and birds, and mountains and rivers, adept especially at portraiture. After graduating in the sixties, he left for Guangzhou. The misfortune of the Cultural Revolution limited his productivity. In the early seventies, political trends started to shift, and he took this new opportunity to paint *After the Performance*. The painting features two teenage girls, an actress and a Li minority, with the latter gifting the former with a coconut. It was painted with attention to detail, the expressions are true to life, the style is precise, the inkstrokes are broad and full, and the color is appropriate, taking the art world that year by storm and becoming a representative work of portraiture in ink wash painting. After the Cultural Revolution, he became a professor at the Guangdong Art Institute, teaching bird and flower paintings and also calligraphy. At about this time, he left portraiture and mountain and river paintings behind to focus on bird and flower paintings; his works were great in scope, fluid in brushwork with full ink, and profound in conception, garnering attention. With maturation, and to focus on his work, he entered the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, with the happy life goal of painting every day.

Looking at Shang Tao's paintings, one is struck by his excellence in inkwork, brushwork, and conceptualization, especially inkwork. The ink leads the brush, the brush hides the ink, and therein lies the concept. Zhang Yanyuan of the Tang dynasty says of inkwork, "When yin and yang are sublated and worldly phenomena are variegated, words are useless in the face of masterful painting. The blooming of plants needs not red ink for its color; floating clouds and snow need not lead to be white; mountains need not be green to be lush; the phoenix need not be colorful to glimmer-when the colors are manifested in ink, that is achievement" ("On Painting and Brushwork," *Notes on Painting Techniques and Thought*). This is the underlying meaning of the old saying, "Ink has all colors." According to Ai Bing, color is not the function but the spirit of ink, and on its own it can depict plants, clouds and snow, and mountains. How should we understand this?


One way is to see ink as color, and all color as inhering in ink. Plants, clouds and snow, and mountains are all but phenomena, whether large or small, with outer color and inner essence. Leaving color to perfect ink is to leave the outer to perfect the inner; when essence is preserved, the ink lives, and so we call it live, not dead, ink. When ink lives, can the painting not live as well? Another interpretation is to see color as ink, and ink as expressing all color. When yin and yang are sublated and plants bloom, form resides within, color is external, and essence lies inside. When ink, with its varied tonalities, envelopes all of creation between heaven and earth, how can one say that the painting lacks color? Thus, ink is color, color ink. When one pursues color with ink, what one pursues is true color, which separates the form and essence of all things, but contains them within oneself and is achieved through one's own hands. When one pursues ink with color, ink amplifies color, the spirit becomes operative, one is at one with one's nature, and ink becomes true ink.

When Shang Tao paints, he pays attention to the ink, balancing between thick and thin, moist and dry. Specifically, he likes painting ink blocks, be they black yet hiding dark gray, or light gray outlined by dark shadow. In one painting, in a black block, one sees lightness in depth, as if light shining through heaviness; his light gray blocks are velvety but not soft, since the softness carries rigidity. We often hear that ink can express all phenomena. Shang Tao disagrees, seeing ink as the foundation and sine qua non of painting. Huang Binghong of old, in his later years, used thick ink to create a strikingly smoky atmosphere. Binghong's ink flows from his use of wash, making lines out of spots, waves out of lines, entering the paper to give the work a fruitful liberation. Shang Tao appreciates this style, but his wash flows from his use of ink, slowly guiding thick ink. After ink, he qualifies it with wash

to create a permeating effect. Repeating the ink, wash, and permeation, overlapping again and again, the ink gradually shines through. Shining ink is like sunken jade: blurry and unfathomable.

Shang Tao practices calligraphy without aiming to be renowned; it is simply that calligraphy is the source of painting and the basis of brushwork. The southern style of painting emphasizes painting over calligraphy, focusing on verisimilitude. This is the importance of freehand painting. Shang Tao takes a contrasting route, following the ancient ways in entering painting through calligraphy without being limited by it. Shang Tao paints slowly, like drawing in the sand. His brushwork is mainly straight, sidestrokes being secondary. Regarding calligraphy, Shang Tao likes steles and rejects calligraphy-by-template, and with a style akin to inscription, he uses weathered and solitary brushstrokes to write of warm, soft, and beautiful subjects. And yet, he is not limited by steles, imbuing his slow strokes with cursivity; guiding cursivity with stele inscription removes haste, and using cursive holism to guide inscription remedies the easily overwrought style of the latter. This is how Shang Tao establishes his brushwork. With this foundation, his vignettes are not banal, his paintings of beloved objects unsentimental. Thus is Shang Tao able to live and paint birds and flowers in the south without picking up its habits, instead using northern brushwork to give grace of scope to small scenes.

Inkwork leads to brushwork, and brushwork expresses concept. Zhang Yanyuan says, “To keep the spirit and unified essence is the work of the creator” ; and, “It is said that when one starts brushwork with concept in mind, then the concept will be preserved in the finished painting” (“On the Brushwork of Gu, Lu, Zhang, and Wu,” *Notes on Painting Techniques and Thought*). But Shang Tao excels at conceptualization, developed in design; his achievement as creator is to meticulously organize the points, lines, and planes of the image. His master Li Keran uses liberal ink and sparing brushwork to construct great mountains and rivers. Shang Tao paints not mountains and rivers but small scenes, yet he emulates his master in the development, position, size, and balance of his flowers, birds, insects, and fish. Zong Bing of the medieval period says of painting, “The sage represents objects with Dao; the wise clear the mind to taste of its image.” “When the sage follows Dao with his spirit, the wise are enlightened; when mountains and rivers imitate Dao in their form, the benevolent rejoice.” “The sage is upheld throughout the ages, and the essence of all things are held within his spirit; what more ought I to do than to free my spirit?” (“Preface of the Landscape Painting”). Zong Bing here encapsulates the key to all of the study of painting. To paint as a sage and manifest benevolence and justice, to have one's objects incorporate and reflect through Dao one's thoughts and emotions, one must free the spirit. When the spirit is freed, all things are comprehended, and one is united with heaven. Shang Tao understands this deeply; thus, his focus on birds and flowers is not on birds or flowers, and his development and layout, his resourcefulness, his ink- and brushwork, and his foresight and channeling of tradition are all centered on concept, on essence, on freeing the mind and the spirit, in order to approach perfection.

In olden days, we had Li Po, the Immortal Poet. “Immortal” refers to his essence of nature, thus: “Beautiful things are valued little” (“Poems of Antiquity I”); and: “Such marvelous beauty unfit for the eyes of man” (“Mountainside Question and Answer”). Shang Tao focuses on birds and flowers and pursues the essence of nature; his generous use of ink and sparing use of brushwork expresses his conceptions and spirit. Of his three strengths, he excels at inkwork. He often gleans insight from experimenting with ink, as if entering the land of the Immortals, giving up superficial beauty to reach that land unfit for men; thus, the world calls him Shang Tao, the Immortal Sage of Ink. Living in the south yet painting in northern style, imbuing small scenes with grace of scope, integrating cursivity into inscription, achieving balance in painting, Shang Tao flows with objects without being limited by phenomena, beginning with Dao and ending with essence. Looking around, how few have achieved in freehand and bird-and-flower painting as much as Shang Tao! 

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