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CHINESE ART SOCIETY, AUSTRALIA

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CHINESE ART SOCIETY, AUSTRALIA INAUGURATION CEREMONY! Celebration, Talk, and Forthcoming Activities!



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{ CAS INAUGURATION CEREMONY }

Ms. Robyn Devlin | Written On Tea Function Centre, Hobart | 21 July 2013

A cold and rainy day in Hobart may not seem like a good sign for two new ventures, but in Chinese culture, since the rain brings the wealth of rice, a rainy day is an auspicious sign. And so it was for distinguished guests and friends attending the double inauguration ceremony held on Sunday 21st July, for the second Written on Tea restaurant and Function Centre and the Chinese Art Society, Australia.

Our host and proprietor Rebecca Cong welcomed us to her new Written on Tea premises in Bathurst Street. The space is bright and inviting, a lovely relaxed setting where Rebecca will soon be opening to serve yum cha. She and her builder have not only created a modern, welcoming place, but managed to pull it all together in time for the double inauguration ceremony; an amazing feat.

To the rear of the building is the Function Centre, which Rebecca has kindly made available to the Chinese Art Society as a gallery, workshop and meeting room. This room is also bright and welcoming, lit by clerestory windows, and hung with works by Professor Wong and other members of CAS. It was in this room that members and guests gathered together, first to celebrate the opening of the restaurant, and then the CAS inauguration.

The official ceremony began with Rebecca welcoming us, and describing her journey as she prepared the new premises. This was followed by an address by the Premier Lara Giddings, who spoke of the benefits to Hobart of the promotion of Chinese culture, in particular regarding the large number of Chinese students that are enrolled with UTAS. Professor Wong then responded.

Guests were delighted and entertained by a vigorous Lion Dance, sponsored by Mr Leo Cui, Northern Representative for CAS and Vice-President of the Launceston Chinese Association. This ended with the Premier Lara Giddings, Professor Wong and Rebecca Cong filling in the lion's eye with Chinese ink, to ensure the venture enjoys good fortune.

We were then treated to some of Rebecca's delicious favourite foods; mingling and chatting among a selection of CAS members' watercolours, and copies of Professor Wong's latest book of paintings and calligraphy.

In the second part of the ceremony, the Chinese Art Society, Australia, was launched by Professor

Wong, President, who spoke of his dream to promote understanding and connection to the universe through Chinese art.

Former Governor, Sir Guy Green gave the opening address, and spoke of the importance and influence of Chinese Art, drawing comparisons and parallels with European Art, in particular the Impressionists.

Professor Wong then gave a talk on Chinese non-brush painting; a little known but long-established field of Chinese Art, where fingers are the main tool for applying ink to paper.

Members and guests were delighted to observe a demonstration of this technique. Professor Wong amazed those present with three works in Chinese ink, done at lightning speed on card and hemp paper. I have seen Professor Wong complete many works in the few years I have known him, and in fact I was meant to provide a commentary while he painted, as I have done so before. However, I had never seen nor heard of the non-brush technique, and it was all I could do to watch as close as possible, mouth open and speechless. Many thanks to Master Wang and members of the Chinese Han Transmission Academy of Esotericism, who recorded the event and provided guests with an overhead and close-up view of the Professor working.

Professor Wong finished by making a presentation of one of his works, a signed piece with three small birds, to Lady Green, as a mark of his respect and gratitude for her kindness over the years.

The day concluded with more of Rebecca's delicious favourite foods, and good conversation with friends and guests.

Members look forward to having a place to meet and display their work, as well as conducting demonstrations, classes, workshops and other artistic and cultural activities. We are very fortunate to have the support of such a talented and respected artist as Professor Wong, who leads us in our goal to share, enjoy and promote our love of Chinese Painting, Calligraphy, Arts, Culture and Philosophies.

Membership is free, and membership forms can be found on the CAS website: www.chineseartsociety.net

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{ WELCOME SPEECH }

Prof. Wong Shiu Hon | Written On Tea Function Centre, Hobart | 21 July 2013

The Premier, Honorable Lara Giddings, Sir Guy Green, Lady Green, distinguished guests, art lovers, members of the Chinese Art Society, Australia, ladies and gentlemen.

Good afternoon, and welcome to this very special occasion. First of all, I would like to thank the Premier, Honorable Lara Giddings, for her kind words and for officiating at the launching of the Chinese Art Society, Australia which has been founded for everyone who has an interest in Chinese art.

After the hard work of all the committee members of the Chinese Art Society, Australia for more than half a year, at last the society has now come into being. I have a wish; that is to share some of my love and knowledge of this traditional form of Chinese art, and bring together people from all walks of life, and all nationalities, who have this common thread, a love for Chinese art.

Chinese art is not merely a form of art, it is also a form of education, a form of morality and even a form of religion. I firmly believe that love for Chinese art will help people - the art lovers, to become educated, to have morality and to be religious. Lovers of Chinese art will become good

people and are good people. Lovers of Chinese art will make a contribution to the stability of the society which we all need.

Through the love for Chinese art, people will understand and tolerate one another, people will live with others peacefully and in harmony. Love for Chinese art will bring the heart of all people together. People will have solidarity! All will become one!

We have lots of plans for the future, for instance, to give talks on Chinese art - all forms of Chinese art; to give lessons in Chinese art, to hold discussion groups on Chinese art, to give demonstrations on Chinese art etc., just to cite a few. We will try our best to promote Chinese art and to cultivate harmony among people - all sorts of people, through cultivating love for Chinese art. I don't believe the slogan; "art for art's sake", I only believe that "art is for the sake of education and morality". In the past, all Chinese artists advocated the same opinion. In short, art leads eventually to morality and to harmony between man and the universe. I really hope that lovers of Chinese art will eventually come to the stage of harmony between human beings and the universe. That is my wish, the primary purpose of founding

the Chinese Art Society!

Today I am very happy because today is the day of the inauguration of the Chinese Art Society. I am particularly happy because the launching of our society is being held here, a very beautiful home, which is the Function Centre of this new restaurant - Written on Tea Restaurant. Thank you Rebecca for your support. Most of the future activities of the Chinese Art Society will be held in this Function Centre; this is really good, isn't it?

I look forward to seeing you all here for our forthcoming activities.

Once again, I would like to thank the Premier and all other distinguished guests for attending the launching of the Chinese Art Society. Last but not the least, I would like to thank Mr. Leo Cui, Vice President of the Chinese Community Association of Launceston and Proprietor of Tasdragon for bringing the Lion Dance group and musicians from Launceston to celebrate the occasion.

Thank you.

{ OPENING SPEECH }

Sir Guy Green | Written On Tea Function Centre, Hobart | 21 July 2013

I am delighted to have been asked to speak at this inauguration ceremony of the Chinese Art Society, Australia.

I congratulate Professor Wong Shiu Hon on his excellent initiative in founding this society. He and Mrs. Nancy Wong have made great contributions to bringing Chinese culture to Tasmania and this Society will be a valuable vehicle for lifting even further our understanding and appreciation of that culture especially in the visual arts.

I think that it is intrinsically worthwhile to encourage and enable people to better understand and appreciate cultural traditions different from their own. That is especially so in respect of the study of Chinese art. Studying Chinese art not only introduces us to different art forms but, because of its connections with Chinese philosophy and literature, Chinese art also provides an entry point for better understanding Chinese culture generally.

Studying Chinese art lifts our horizons and introduces us to new ways of seeing things and new ways of visually representing them. An example is the impact which the exhibition held by the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery in 2009 of the works of the Patron of this Society, Professor Jao Tsung-i, had upon the people of Tasmania. The exhibition attracted tens of thousands of visitors and generated a great deal of interest on several levels. Some viewers were struck by affinities they could see between Professor Jao's paintings and Australian watercolour landscape paintings while conversely others were interested in the differences in the way in which the two schools treated similar subjects. Of particular note was the interest shown in the calligraphy sections of that exhibition. Even though many viewers were unfamiliar with Chinese calligraphy, the exhibition introduced them to the grace and intrinsic aesthetic appeal of the characters and prompted them to learn more about the history and different styles of Chinese calligraphy.

Introducing western audiences to Chinese art also fosters cross cultural comparative studies which not only enhance mutual understanding between cultures but can also deepen understanding of one's own culture.

Whole books have been written about alleged similarities between Song, Yuan and early Qing painters on the one hand and western artists including Rembrandt, Claude Lorrain, Vincent Van Gogh, Paul Cezanne, Paul Klee

and Jackson Pollack on the other. While I recognise that while similarities of that kind can be rather superficial and of little significance, sometimes they can be of real interest. Studying how artists from one cultural tradition develop similar techniques or arrive at the same destination as that reached by artists from a totally different cultural tradition with which they have had no contact can reveal the existence of fundamental qualities common to all visual arts traditions.

Productive comparisons can also be made between the philosophical approaches taken by Chinese and Western artists. An interesting example is the extent to which Western and Chinese landscape painters seek to be representational in their paintings and how they regard the distinction between the actual landscape and that which is depicted in a landscape painting.

That distinction has been recognised by many Australian landscape painters. Phillip Wolfhagen says that for him representation is a point of departure: the picture is a product of his engagement with his subject rather than a picture of the subject itself; Fred Williams described himself as painting pictures not of the bush but from it and Lloyd Rees said that while his pictures were inspired by the landscape they had an inner life independent of their subject matter.

Observations like that resonate strongly with the traditions of Chinese landscape painting which emphasise that the artist does not primarily seek verisimilitude or naturalism but the "inner reality" of the subject. That is epitomised by the canonical statement of the "six principles" of Chinese painting formulated by the sixth century Chinese art historian and theorist Xie He in which rendering a likeness of the subject is subordinated to invoking and conveying what is usually translated as the "spirit resonance" or essential vitality of a place or subject.

Another fertile field of comparative study is the inclusion of texts and calligraphy in Chinese painting. The use of words in western art is unusual but this aspect of Chinese art encourages us to recognise that a painting can have both cognitive and aesthetic functions. It can also reawaken interest in western approaches to art which have been largely forgotten. For example archaic Greek pictures not only contained Greek letters but in some, remarkably, those letters do not form words at all; so there we have examples in early western art of the ultimate use of characters - not as

components of words but as aesthetic images in themselves.

Another quality of Chinese art from which we could learn is the breadth of the skills and knowledge possessed by its exponents. In Western cultures we don't have counterparts to the scholar-artist who paints, draws, composes poetry, philosophises, and writes which you find in classical Chinese art. Something like that sort of person was found in western societies even as recently as the 19th century but since then there has been an increasing tendency - especially in academia - to specialise and to place different kinds of artistic and intellectual endeavour in distinct categories or even silos. Interaction with Chinese art and its exponents might prompt a re-evaluation of that tendency.

Another benefit of establishing a society like the Chinese Art Society, Australia is that it could help to reinforce and sustain the tradition of Chinese painting.

Earlier this year I had the privilege of participating in an international seminar in Hong Kong about Cantonese opera which, coincidentally, was also organised by Professor and Nancy Wong. One of the themes which emerged from that seminar was that during the 1970's and 1980's, when Cantonese Opera in Hong Kong and mainland China was being overtaken by other forms of entertainment and the performing arts, it was flourishing in the Cantonese diaspora in places as far apart as Singapore, San Francisco, Vancouver, Sydney and Darwin. In fact Cantonese opera is having a renaissance in Hong Kong and elsewhere but had that not been the case those international centres could have helped to ensure that this art form continued to flourish. The existence of a society such as the Chinese Art Society, Australia could also perform a similar function in respect of classical Chinese art.

But ultimately the most compelling reason for being a part of this Society is that it introduces members to an interesting, attractive form of art, the gaining of knowledge of which or even a slight proficiency in will give them a lifetime of satisfaction.

I extend my best wishes for the success of the Chinese Art Society, Australia.

Thank you.

{ NON-BRUSH PAINTING IN CHINESE ART 中國「非筆繪畫」藝術 }**Prof. Wong Shiu Hon**

(Talk given at the Inauguration of the Chinese Art Society, Australia on 21 July 2013, Sunday, at the Written On Tea Function Centre, Hobart, Tasmania)

(I)

Brush painting is the most important type of painting in Chinese art. But there is another type - what we call "non-brush painting" - a kind of painting without using the brush, but using other kits or tools.

Brush is the most convenient tool in Chinese painting and brushes can be made of various kinds of material, e.g. goat hair, wolf hair, horse hair, and a number of other kinds of animal hairs. Brushes can also be made of plant tissues. There is a kind of well-known brush, which is made of reed. Artists have been using this kind of brush since the Ming dynasty (1368 - 1644). My great teacher, Prof. Jao Tsung-I is very fond of using this kind of brush, mainly for doing landscape painting and Chinese calligraphy. But so far I have not tried to use this sort of brush.

Non-brush painting, as I have just said, involves using other kinds of painting tools other than the brush. But what are these tools? It involves using many different kinds of materials, for instance, human hair, beard, finger, hand, foot, plants etc. just to mention a few. The most important thing is that they are not brushes - the usual form of brush we use in Chinese painting. But, you may say that these tools are used as a "brush"! In fact you are quite right! It is absolutely correct to say that these tools are used as a brush or they take the place of a brush.

Out of these tools in non-brush Chinese painting, the most significant one is undoubtedly the use of "fingers". Hence we have what we call "finger painting". In Chinese it is called "指畫" or "指頭畫", meaning "finger painting" or "finger tip painting" respectively.

(II)

Today I would like to concentrate on or emphasize "finger painting" because its importance just runs second to "brush painting". "Finger painting" has a long standing history. As far as historical records are concerned, it started in the Qin dynasty (221 B.C. - 207 B.C.), i.e. more than 200 years before the birth of Jesus Christ. The record says:

The First Emperor of Qin started to build a stone-bridge across the sea. The god of the sea was willing to be the main pillar for the bridge. The Emperor was so grateful to him and begged to see him. The god said, "I've got an ugly form, so please don't portray me. If you promise what I say, then I will come out to see you." Then the Emperor went out to the sea as far as forty miles from the shore. All his followers dared not do anything, but one of them secretly portrayed the sea-god with his foot.

Strictly speaking, it is not the beginning of "finger painting" because the portrait of the sea god was done with the foot! Can we call it "toe painting"? Just for convenience, we can regard it as some sort of "finger painting" - using the "finger" of our foot! At least, the foot

is one of our limbs.

In fact, I am inclined to believe that "finger painting" started as early as the Neolithic period (7000 B.C. - 1600 B.C.). Why? As we know, during the Neolithic period, painted pottery was produced. Though some sort of simple brush had been invented, I really think that sometimes the potters would have used their hand or their fingers to paint their pottery objects. It is so natural and so convenient! Since there is no concrete evidence, I don't want to go deeper into this issue.

Then, when did finger painting actually start? The earliest historical record we could find today is of the Tang dynasty (618 - 907) and the earliest artist who practised finger painting was also from the same period. His name is Zhang Zao 張瓘 who was active in the 8th century. The record says:

Zhang is especially good at painting trees, rocks, mountains, and rivers. . . . He only used worn out brushes for his paintings or touched the silk with his hands for the paintings.

From this record we can see that finger painting was born at least as late as the mid-Tang period, i.e. the 8th century.

In the same dynasty, the Tang dynasty, there was an artist called Wang Mo 王默 who did not only use his hands but also his hair to paint. It is recorded that when Wang Mo was drunk, he dipped his hair into the ink with his hands and painted on silk. Another record even points out that Wang Mo did his painting with the splash-ink method "by using his feet and hands!" Wang Mo was probably the first Chinese "action painter", quite similar to those artists of abstract expressionism of the west in the mid-20th century. As early as the 8th century, China had already had a Jackson Pollock (1912 - 1956) or even quite a few Pollocks!

It may be interesting to know that in the later periods, i.e. after the Tang dynasty, there were a number of well-known finger painters or even non-brush painters. There was a famous painter by the name of Mi Fei 米芾 (1051 - 1107) of the 11th century. When he did a painting, he "did not only use a brush, but sometimes used the tissues of paper, or the tissues of sugar cane, or even the seed-case of the lotus." Though the record does not say that Mi Fei used his hand to paint, I still believe that he had used his hand. By using the materials mentioned above, it should be quite natural and reasonable to use his hand at the same time when he painted.

In the same period of Mi Fei, i.e. the Song dynasty (960 - 1279) there was an artist called Li Jue 李覺, who, when drunk, just splashed or poured ink onto a piece of silk and produced a painting. Another artist by the name of Chen Rong 陳容, was the most well-known dragon painter in the history of Chinese painting. It is recorded that "when he did dragon painting, he splashed ink onto a piece of paper or silk, and the ink at once became clouds; he spurted water out of his mouth and immediately the water turned into mist. When he was

drunk, he took off his turban from his head and dipped it into ink, then with his ink-soaked turban he touched the piece of paper or silk at random. Finally he completed his painting with a brush!" I have a very strong inclination to believe that the above mentioned artists also used their hands at the time when they used those unusual materials or tools. Just think, when they painted they were often drunk! At least, they can be regarded as the pioneers of "finger painting"!

(III)

At this stage I would like to point out that there were quite a few well-known artists of "finger painting" in every dynasty after the Song dynasty (960 - 1279). Without doubt, the most well-known and outstanding artist in "finger painting" was Gao Qi-pei 高其佩 (1660 - 1734), an artist of the Qing dynasty (1644 - 1911).

Gao had created a legend in "finger painting" in the history of Chinese art! He had achieved and made great contributions to this form of art. He was the most brilliant star in this field and his influence was far-reaching.

Gao began to paint when he was eight years of age. For a few years he concentrated on "fine brush painting". He worked so hard that he became weak and often got sick. When he was seventeen he started to learn "finger painting" from a colleague of his uncle, who was then a high-ranking official in Guangdong province. His teacher was Wu Wei 吳韋, an artist who specialized in "finger painting". But unfortunately no art work of Gao of this early stage has been left to posterity. The earliest artwork of Gao now in extant are those he painted when he was twenty three. They are in an album (12 pieces) and are housed in the collection of Liaoning Museum in China.

During his life time, Gao was believed to have painted over 1000 pieces of finger paintings, but unfortunately most of them have been lost and only about 300 pieces are extant. Most of them are now housed in the collections of a number of museums and art galleries in China and overseas and some are undoubtedly kept in private collections. I have seen a few pieces of Gao's works in 1980s when I visited some museums in China. They were so unusual, absolutely marvellous! I was really fascinated by his works, especially by those huge works! It might not be difficult to do small finger paintings, but it is absolutely difficult to do huge ones. But Gao could do very large finger paintings. Some of his works are as tall as 300 cm! Many of them are as large as 150 cm x 60 cm. Mind you, they are finger paintings, not brush paintings! At this stage, you may be interested to know how Gao Qi-pei learned to do finger painting. This is what he wrote in the inscription on one of his works when he was fifty one years old (1710):

When I was young I loved to do fine-brush painting. Very often, I took a few months to finish one. When I had completed a fine-brush painting, I usually lost a lot of energy, but I don't care. I began to think

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about doing big-brush painting (or impressionistic painting), but after sometime, I noticed that what I had achieved cannot be compared with those works done by masters in the past. I felt very uneasy at heart. One day I took a nap in the afternoon and had a dream. In my dream I was led by an old man into a room. There I noticed that the ceiling, the ground and all the four walls were made of earth. The old man spurted water out of his mouth onto the walls and immediately all sorts of forms appeared! But they all followed the rules of painting and were in fact marvellous! They did not look like any works created or performed by human beings. Then I tried to imitate these forms by using my fingers and luckily I was able to master the skill! When I woke up I tried to recall what I had gone through in my dream. I discovered that every object in the world can be the subject of my paintings. I therefore gave up using my brush and concentrated on "finger painting" for more than thirty years!

We are not sure whether the story related by Gao was true or not. My teacher, Prof. Jao Tsung-I believes that the story was merely made up by Gao in order to make his achievements in finger painting more mysterious. Maybe Gao wanted people to believe that he did not have a teacher in finger painting, and all the skills were inspired by an unusual old man in his dream who was more or less like a god! Gao had made a seal for himself which carried the two sentences "I was taught finger painting in a dream and my dream was generated from my heart" (畫從夢授·夢自心成)。The key point in these two sentences is that all his skills in finger-painting were taught to him in his dream. That indicates that no one in this world could teach him all these unusual skills.

(IV)

Because of the outstanding achievements of Gao, his influences are very great and far-reaching. He had recruited a large number of students and followers. Even his relatives and friends became his students or followers. He was indeed the central figure in the circle of finger painting in the early period of the Qing dynasty, i.e. from the late 17th century to early 18th century. It is especially important in the development of Chinese painting that Gao had exerted immense influence on the Yangzhou artists, especially on those whom we call the "eight eccentrics of Yangzhou" 揚州八怪. Most of them were well versed in finger painting, though their achievements were not as great as that of Gao. But there is no doubt that the painting skills of these eccentric artists were deeply influenced by Gao, no matter in finger painting or brush painting!

You may be interested to know that these "eccentrics of Yangzhou" were more influential to the artists of later generations than Gao. Their influence can still be traced on the artists of modern times. For example, my teacher Prof Jao Tsung-I has been influenced to a certain extent by these eccentric artists. Again, other internationally renowned artists, such as Qi Bai-shi 齊白石 (1864 - 1957), Zhang Da-qian 張大千 (1899 - 1983) were also deeply influenced by the "Eight eccentrics of Yangzhou"! Hence we may say that Gao via the "eight eccentrics" had exerted great and deep influence on many

artists of the later generations.

Finger painting was quite popular in the Qing dynasty, i.e. the last imperial period. One of the main reasons for this phenomenon was because of the achievements and influences of Gao Qi-pei. Another main reason, which I strongly believe, was because of Emperor Shun Zhi 順治, the first emperor of the Qing dynasty. He was very fond of finger painting himself. It is recorded that the emperor not only had a particular penchant for finger painting, he also practised finger painting himself. He often did finger paintings and gave them to his officers as gifts. He sometimes made use of his finger prints and painted buffalos, with great success! So, Emperor Shun Zhi had set up a good example of practising finger painting. That indeed had a great impact on the people around him and even on those artists who tried to get close to the emperor. Finger painting thus became the vogue of the time!

Apart from Gao, there were a number of successful finger painters in the Qing dynasty. According to a book written by an artist by the name of Li Fang 李放 in 1923, there were about 100 artists skilful in finger painting in the Qing dynasty. And all these painters were well known. I believe that in reality there were a lot more, but most of them could not make a name in the history of Chinese art.

Finger painting was so popular in the Qing dynasty, especially in the mid Qing, that it began to spread to Japan and Korea. Artists of these two countries became more and more inclined to this art and some of them even specialized themselves in finger painting. In the 18th century there was a Chinese artist, Shen Quan 沈銓 who travelled to Japan and taught finger painting there. One of his works "Plum blossoms under the moon light" can still be seen in a museum in Japan. Though some art historians argue that finger painting was brought to Japan as early as the Ming dynasty (1368 - 1644), to be exact, in the 15th century, it was only in the late 17th and early 18th centuries (1652 - 1757) that there were official records indicating that finger painting was practised in Japan. On this issue, I don't want to go into detail. I am not an expert in Japanese art and certainly not an historian of Japanese art.

In modern China, i.e. since 1911, as far as I know, there were a few artists practising finger painting in Mainland China, a couple in Taiwan and Hong Kong. It is possible that there would be a few more in other places, but I have no knowledge of any of them. The most well-known and outstanding was undoubtedly Pan Tian-shou 潘天壽 (1897 - 1971) in Mainland China, who was tortured to death during the period of Great Cultural Revolution! Pan was both well-known in brush painting and finger painting. In fact, he was one of the "ten greatest artists" in Modern China. Among these ten great artists, Qi Bai-shi who everyone knows, was one of them. Nearly half of Pan's artworks now extant are finger paintings. Some of them are huge in size and very often fetch millions of dollars in auctions.

One of my art teachers, Master Li could do very good finger painting. When I was a child, I was lucky enough to watch him show how to do a fan painting with

his fingers.

(V)

Now, let us look into finger painting directly. First of all, let us concentrate on the painting skills or techniques in relation to finger painting. Since it is called "finger painting", the most important thing is how to use our fingers. Since more than 90% of the Chinese are right-handed, we can use all the five fingers of the right hand, of course, including the thumb. When doing finger painting, the most important part of the finger is the tip - the finger tip. Every part of the finger tip is important, especially the finger nail and the front part of the tip. The finger nail is crucial for line-drawing. It may be correct to say that an artist skilful in finger painting is the one who can manipulate his finger nail successfully. As to how to manipulate the finger nail or finger tip or the whole finger, it depends very much on the subjects and the size of the painting. It is a bit hard to describe just in words; you will see later when I demonstrate.

As far as skills or techniques are concerned, there are roughly two "schools". One of them uses only fingers to paint, while the other uses both fingers and brush at the same time. To me, the former is the authentic type of finger painting or the "orthodox school" of finger painting. But unfortunately most of the finger painters in history belong to the second school - using fingers and brush at the same time. Even our legendary artist Gao Qi-pei of the Qing dynasty or Pan Tien-shou of Modern China also belong to the second school! Why is it like that? Simply because apart from line-drawing, they also paid great attention to "shading" in the painting. Shading can hardly be done by the fingers, especially in large paintings. That is a very good excuse! But even if they used the brush to finish the painting, they did not spoil the beauty of the part done by fingers in the painting. Sometimes, the part done by the brush adds more beauty to the painting. I think we have to accept this traditional method in this form of art. But when I am doing finger painting myself I always try my very best to avoid using the brush. If worse comes to worst, when I cannot use the finger to finish the painting, I prefer to use other tools to complete the work. My principle is: "Not to use the brush in finger-painting". If one says that my finger painting is not 100% finger painting, then just call it "non-brush painting"!

By the way, most finger painters use a brush to do the colouring of the paintings. It is difficult to do a painting just with fingers. Why? This is because artist has to dip the tip of his finger into ink many times just to draw a line! And it is much more difficult to manipulate the finger than the brush. Some artists have found a solution to this problem. What they do is to put a small piece of cotton under the finger nail, so that it can absorb water, ink or colour. It is really a great help technically, but I think it is a bit "tricky" and it is not much different from using the brush as a tool. Some artists in the past did that. My teacher Master Li also did that! Then how do I overcome the difficulty of shading? I usually stick to my fingers. I may use other methods, but certainly not using the brush!

(VI)

In finger painting, the basic media is ink - black ink. It is also true in brush painting - the traditional

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brush painting. Certainly colours can be used. Colours have been used in finger painting for a long time since its birth. There is no doubt that in most cases colours add more beauty to the painting. Most people love colours and most people love colourful pictures. But I don't use colours for my finger paintings. One of the main reasons is that most of the Chinese colour pigments are poisonous and I am afraid that the pigments may go through the skin into the body if there is a wound on my fingers. The other reason is that if I use colour, I have to wash my fingers very often even if I just want to do a simple finger painting. Hence I always stick to pure ink in doing finger painting.

There is so much to say about the skills of doing finger painting. For the time being, I don't want to go into details. I always believe that art is not to be talked about. Art is for the eye to see, for the heart to feel and for the mind to think. Talking about, without doing it, is very close to nonsense.

Now let us say a few words on the materials we use in finger painting. In the past artists were inclined to use silk or some sort of materials similar to silk. Next to silk is paper - unabsorbent paper or at most semi-absorbent paper. It was extremely rare that artists in the past used absorbent papers. The main reason is that absorbent papers could easily absorb all the water held by the finger in just a few seconds before the artist could finish drawing even one single line! So they never used xuan zhi (宣紙) or traditional Chinese rice paper, because it is too absorbent and at the same time ink will run uncontrolled on this type of paper. Cotton paper is better and hemp paper is even better as it is not too absorbent. I love to use hemp paper myself. But a piece of really good hemp paper is expensive. A piece of good quality Japanese hemp paper would cost 40 - 50 dollars! Cotton paper is a bit cheaper; we can buy one for just a few dollars.

In fact, it is much easier to do finger painting on unabsorbent papers. It is much easier to control the volume of the water and ink. It may be a good idea to do finger painting on the same type of paper which you use for doing western style water colours. This kind of water colour paper is cheap, just a few dollars for one sheet. But the most important thing is that ink does not run uncontrolled on water colour papers. Pan Tian-shou, the artist mentioned above was acclaimed because he could do finger painting on absorbent Chinese rice papers! He was very proud of this and his skill was really extraordinary and outstanding! I have tried to follow what he did and I am pleased to tell you that I am becoming more and more confident with absorbent papers. But still I prefer to use hemp paper or cotton paper, or papers that are not too absorbent. I have never tried to use silk for finger painting for I don't quite like painting on silk. My teacher Master Li would only use unabsorbent papers for his finger painting. I have never seen him doing finger painting on absorbent papers. Maybe he did not want to take the risk in front of his students.

All subjects can be the theme of finger painting. There is absolutely no restriction to the subjects. As all of us know, there are four main categories in Chinese painting, namely landscape, flower-and-bird, figure and miscellaneous. All these can be done in finger painting. But most of the finger painters in the past chose to paint

simple subjects; that means they preferred to do simple paintings, because it is more difficult and more time consuming to do finger painting than brush painting. To do a large finger painting could easily make one very tired. To me, it is not because of the problem of time, it is the problem of concentration of the mind. One has to be very careful if one does not want to make any mistakes, especially when one wants to do a fine or delicate finger painting. Figure painting is the most difficult category in finger painting. One has to be very concentrated when drawing the face of the figure. I am sure you know what I mean. No doubt, when you do a painting, no matter if it is finger painting or brush painting, you need full concentration and sometimes even 100% concentration. I need that. I simply cannot bear any form of interruption and cannot stand any form of disturbance. My wife, my friends and all my students are fully aware of this "bad" habit of mine!

In finger painting, all subjects can be regarded as difficult and all subjects can be regarded as easy. It entirely depends on the skills of the artist. If you are not a good artist, even a simple bamboo painting is difficult for you. If you are a good artist, you can do whatever you like without any difficulty. You can even do a finger painting of court ladies - a very delicate and elegant type of figure painting.

(VII)

Finger painting is a special type of Chinese painting. When compared with brush painting, it has a number of restrictions.

First of all, it is really difficult to do finger painting on typical Chinese painting paper - rice paper, which is usually quite absorbent. But the absorbability of the paper gives more life to the brush work and ink work. In other words, absorbent papers can make painting look more lively. I do not mean that unabsorbent papers cannot produce such an effect, only that it is more difficult.

The second restriction is that it takes a much longer period of time to finish a large finger painting, simply because our fingers cannot hold as much ink and water as a brush. I have already pointed out this before. To do a large finger painting really makes the artist very tired.

The third restriction is that in finger painting we cannot use colours freely or we cannot make the painting as colourful as we wish, simply because our fingers are not as convenient as the brush, which can handle and mix colours easily. That is the main reason why finger painters place strong emphasis on ink work and not colour work.

The fourth restriction is that we can hardly do a delicate, elegant or fine finger painting, because our finger tip or nail is not as fine as the tip of the brush. The brush tip can be very small and fine, whereas our finger tip or finger nail cannot be like that even if we try our best. I am sure you understand what I mean and agree with me. I sometimes find it a bit difficult to draw the human face or the head of a bird. I have to be extremely careful and pay full attention when doing these subjects. In fact, to do a finger painting one has to be always alert and need 100% concentration. To do a good finger painting makes one very tired. That is my experience. You may

think otherwise.

(VIII)

One day, a couple of years ago, my wife Nancy asked me, saying "Shiu Hon, since you can handle the brush so well, so easy in doing brush painting, why do you take the trouble of doing finger paintings? Besides it makes your hand so dirty!" I gave her a very short and simple answer, "Brush doesn't mean much to me now. I aim at something more challenging!" Yes, to me finger painting is more challenging than brush painting. I try to manipulate my fingers as I manipulate my brush. I have some experience in finger painting. I began to practise this form of art seriously when I retired in 1998 - the year when I gave up my teaching job and left the University of Hong Kong. I only have 15 years of experience in finger painting. That is not too long when compared with my over 60 years of experience in practising brush painting. In fact, I have not given enough time to finger painting, I need more time to improve my skills in this category.

When compared with brush painting, finger painting has got an unusual kind of beauty - the beauty of rusticity, clumsiness, childishness and very often simplicity. These qualities can hardly be found in ordinary brush paintings. When you look at a finger painting, I am sure you will be fascinated by these unusual qualities of it! Just look at the line drawing, it is "seemingly broken" and at the same time "seemingly unbroken". It is the link between these "seemingly broken" and "seemingly unbroken" elements that makes the painting more suggestive and gives you more imagination. Imagination is one of the elements that creates beauty in art!

Let us take an object from nature to compare, e.g. the moon. No doubt, a full moon at night is a beautiful sight, but a fading moon in the morning is also a beautiful sight. We cannot say or do not feel that because the moon is fading, it is not beautiful. The fading moon is really beautiful! This is a special kind of beauty - the beauty of deficiency; it is the same case with our finger painting. It is like the fading moon. There is a special kind of beauty in it. It is not the full moon which can be compared with brush painting. The same thing is with the weather. A fine day is beautiful, but a misty day or even a rainy day is also beautiful. When you have too many fine days, I am sure you will be longing for a misty day or rainy day. When one has been doing brush painting for too long, one will try something different. We will do finger painting instead. Do you agree with me?

But there is one thing we should bear in mind. That is - "we have to be really good in brush painting first, before we can be good in finger painting." And certainly not the other way round. If you do not believe me, then try to do finger painting first and see what you will get. I am sure that what you do will lead you nowhere!

Let me tell you a fact. All finger painters in Chinese history were both good at brush painting and finger painting and that all of them had established a name in brush painting first before they actually devoted their time to finger painting.

Thank you.

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{ FORTHCOMING ACTIVITIES }

{ AUGUST }

GROUP DISCUSSION

Topic: Chinese Tea Ceremony and Discussion

A short introduction on the history of Chinese tea-drinking will be followed by a detailed talk on different categories of Chinese tea. A demonstration then ensues of the preparation of Chinese tea, which we will then drink. Finally there will be an appreciation of Chinese antique tea pots and cups etc. from the private collection of Prof. Wong Shiu Hon.

Date: 24 August 2013 (Saturday)
Time: 2:00 – 3:30 pm
Venue: Written On Tea Function Centre,
135 Bathurst Street, Hobart
Participants: Prof. Wong Shiu Hon
Mr. Leo Cui
Ms. Rebecca Cong
Enquiries/Bookings: **Mrs. Nancy Wong**
0418914007
chinese.art.soc@gmail.com



Friendship Society)

Date: 30 September, 2013 (Monday)
Venue: Written On Tea Function Centre,
135 Bathurst Street, Hobart
Time: Starts at 7:00 pm
Cost: \$25.00 per person
Enquiries/Bookings: **Mrs. Nancy Wong**
0418914007
chinese.art.soc@gmail.com
Ms. Julie Walters
0406285622

b) TALK

Topic: Imitation and Collaboration in Chinese Art
中國繪畫藝術中之臨摹與合作
Speaker: Prof. Wong Shiu Hon
Date: 19 October (Saturday)
Time: 2:00 to 3:30 pm
Venue: Written on Tea Function Centre,
135 Bathurst Street, Hobart
Enquiries/Bookings: **Mrs. Nancy Wong**
0418914007
chinese.art.soc@gmail.com

{ SEPTEMBER }

a) FREE WORKSHOPS IN CHINESE PAINTING
Prof. Wong Shiu Hon is offering free workshops to beginners in Chinese Painting. Workshops are in 2 sessions, with class size 8 - 12 people.

Dates: 7 September (Saturday)
14 September (Saturday)
Time: 3:00 to 4:30 pm
Venue: Written on Tea Function Centre,
135 Bathurst Street, Hobart
Enquiries: **Ms. Robyn Devlin**
0416141739
robyn.devlin@education.tas.gov.au
Ms. Jan Watt
janw@infonetwork.com.au

b) TALK

Topic: Jao Tsung-I Petite Ecole, University of Hong Kong and the Promotion of Chinese Art

Speaker: Ms. Christine To
University of Hong Kong
Date: 21 September (Saturday)
Time: 2:00 to 3:00 pm
Venue: Members Lounge, Friends of TMAG
Enquiries/Bookings: **Mrs. Nancy Wong**
0418914007
chinese.art.soc@gmail.com

c) WORKSHOPS

Prof. Wong will be offering free workshops exclusively to the Friends of TMAG at the Members Lounge, Friends of TMAG.

Workshop for Beginners in Chinese Painting

Date: 25 October (Friday) (tentative)
Time: 2:00 to 3:30 pm
Class Size: 8 - 12 people

Workshop for Beginners in Chinese Calligraphy

Date: 26 October (Saturday) (tentative)
Time: 2:00 to 3:30 pm
Class Size: 8 - 12 people
Enquiries: **Mr. David Coleman**
dpcolent@gmail.com

{ NOVEMBER }

GROUP DISCUSSION

Topic: Experiences in Learning Chinese Painting

Date: 23 November (Saturday)
Time: 2:00 to 3:30 pm
Venue: Written On Tea Function Centre,
135 Bathurst Street, Hobart

Participants: Prof. Wong Shiu Hon
Ms. Julie Walters
Ms. Robyn Devlin
Ms. Yvonne Hine
Ms. Jan Watt

Enquiries/Bookings: **Mrs. Nancy Wong**
0418914007
chinese.art.soc@gmail.com

{ OCTOBER }

a) DINNER GATHERING

Chinese National Day Celebration Dinner (Joint Function with Australia China