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THE FULFILLMENT OF  
A PART OF EARTH'S FURTHEST DREAM  
WHICH IS ASSIGNED TO ME

by  
Wen-Chi Kao

A Thesis Submitted to  
The Faculty of the Graduate School at  
The Woman's College of the University of North Carolina  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirement for the Degree  
Master of Fine Arts

Greensboro  
May 1963

6568  
Approved by

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252684

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For the introduction to modern painting, the advice of my work and assistance in this paper, my sincere gratitude is extended to Mr. Robert E. Partin

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## CHAPTER I

### THE SPIRIT DWELLS IN RHYTHMIC SILENCE

Painting is proverbially difficult to define and explain. The reason for this difficulty lies partly in the subject itself and partly in our attitude toward it. The production of a painting is a mysterious process; it is fulfilling a part of the Earth's furthest dream in a spiritual and unanticipated manner. The painter paints the dreams which wave before the half-shut eye, as the great singer sings our rhythmic silence. The one who has gone through the baptism of the sweat of agony and the tears of ecstasy, and is longing for an outlet of the spiritual pressure and a channel through which to relieve his overburdened mind, dips his brush into rare and rich colors and paints with the experiences of his life; then an artist is in existence. Experience as sculpturing dew softens the rock-like soul of man. Wisdom carves the mist into an image singing as an inspiration in an artist's heart. Then a work of art is born. As the years go by the artist will be forgotten but his work will live. Painting sings the song which lies in the artist's heart but does not explain it. The artist is never satisfied until he has found communication; just as the kid who learned a bad word, he will not be happy until he has chalked that word



on the wall. The artist lives in reality and stands for truth. When his soul dwells in nature, soft wind plays with his hair giving inspiration, waves run up and up on the sand and run back again, purifying the artist's mind as the tide washes the pink shells on the shore. He joins his dream with the dreams of Earth and Ocean. Blue waves, white clouds, green woods and gray rocks become his color and form, the mysteriousness of their smiles become his reality, and his work is a knot tied between himself and Nature.

A rain drop, a grain of sand is a source of endless interest to the imaginative person. How much sentiment is wrapped up in a mere brook to a person who lives close to nature and enjoys its exalted companionship. The heart of nature where the eternal serenity and the essence of Beauty lie is where the spirits of most artists dwell, and this is where my heart and soul are. Chinese art possesses a tender expression of deep Nature-feeling, for Nature plays an important role in the Chinese spiritual life. Meditation unites the nature within a man and the Nature without. The poetical presentation of the profound love of Nature and human passion in Chinese art are founded in the spiritual rhythmic silence of the artist.

From a grain of sand the artist sees the world, and through the light reflected from the sea-foam he recognizes the charms of animate Nature. Man weaves his deep and warm sympathy in his work whereon rests the hope of all mankind, and this is the way an artist does and I do.

## CHAPTER II

### PAINTING, POETRY AND I

Knowledge is like an infinite shore; man is always proud of the foot-prints he has left when he passes. But he does not know the high tide will erase them, and people shall see them no more. Man walks on the sharp stones of the shore, and cuts his feet; he bleeds and bleeds, till the mist of death is in his eyes, all his strength is gone, and he falls down grasping a hand full of sand in his hand, and he dies. But in his mind he is holding the whole shore. The shore is gradually changing, because the white bones of these brave and strong previous martyrs build up the silvery sand of the shore, and their tears and sweat join the ocean.

Poetry and painting are twins in the family of culture. The poet expresses his idea with words as the painter uses paints. I am a seeker of Beauty roaming on the shore of knowledge. Among all the treasures which can be found on the boundless shore, I picked up a brush for painting and a pen for poetry writing. I prayed in the silence of my soul: "Oh Lord, may my poetry and painting be the wings of my ideas, and carry my thoughts to those people who come to me." But God just gave me the painting brush and answered, "Hold this, and it will serve you in all purposes." A seed of poetic painting



image was sown in the field of my heart. That is the seed I must let grow and bloom on my canvases. It is a gift from Heaven that I have been able to work with my brush for years. Poetry is like my North Star guiding my way as I walk upon the shore of knowledge.

War-time bombing destroyed everything but built up my literature foundation in my early age. I love odes, for they represent the hopes and fears, joys and disappointments of the common people, who deal with such crises in their humble lives as participation in warfare. Many frontier songs are lyric, but the phenomena are well illustrated. The ode is valued not so much for what it says as for what it suggests, as it expresses the end and aim of the artist. A long poem does not appeal to the Chinese mind. The ideal length is either twelve lines, eight lines or even four lines. Each line contains five words or seven words. Within this measure, poets have to introduce, to develop, to embellish and to conclude their themes. Obviously it is an extremely difficult rule of composition. But the beauty of poetry lies not so much in what the poets have to say but how they say it. The creating of every poem is inspired by and gratifies some desires of the soul of the poet. The poets use poetry to escape from reality by the poetic imagination, and recreate an ideal world in accordance with their hopes and what is lacking in the divinely created world of reality, in order to give some shadow of satisfaction to the mind of man to relieve the bondage of dissatisfaction.

There are poems always lying in my heart, poems written  
 by the poets I love. They echo perfectly, and the waves of  
 the words are upon me when I paint with my deep thoughts.  
 On the shore of knowledge, I am a wanderer collecting sea-  
 shells which reflect the heaven light and direct my way.  
 Geniuses of all ages are like the oil for the lamp of culture;  
 Heaven fills them along the boundless shore of knowledge for  
 you and me who pass by night.

## CHAPTER III

### THE FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN THE SHOES THAT DANCED AND ME

Man is an actor on the stage of Life. He plays his first role in the bed of suffering and leaves the bed surrounded with sorrow. Sympathy and love are woven by angels as an unhemmed curtain of the stage of Life. The rainbow-colored silken threads which come out from this curtain are like the cobweb between two flowers linking heart to heart of all mankind. Beneath Heaven's majesty, there lies a dream which is the background of the stage of Life, while Wisdom and Effort control the foot lights. With life a mystery of mysteries, man moves through the stage of Life in Heaven's appointed way binding the present with the past and future. With the shoes that danced man dances God's will. Where the descending dew upon the new beauty blooms and part of God's will is revealed, the artist passes this message to all men.

The lights in the theatre grow dim, the musicians are ready, the audience sits quietly waiting. The great curtain of the stage slowly rises. With the melody like the murmuring brook, the dancers move with grace and precision weaving poetic patterns. Their movements sometimes are like the growing billows, sometimes like the gentle waves breaking on the shore. They are transforming the magic of the language of Nature into



the magic of the language of man, opening a new gate of the eternal world which is the world of thought. Dance needs deep responsiveness between body and mind. It is built of symbols of emotions and the abstracted movements of daily life. The dancers use their bodies as the main medium of the artistic expression. Instead of the brush of the painter, the dancer's feet become the essential contact with the life-charged earth and the realm of art. Hard is the rock, but harder is the delicate performing will. The dancer dances upon a chain of unknown desire, guided by dream alone. The Dream goes on forever, only the dreamer dies.

Once Degas was here in my mind. Discarding my dance shoes, instead of practising dance I sat at the corner of the dance studio with a piece of charcoal in my hand, I sketched. Under the blanket of ignorance I changed one dream to another. The more I drew the more I understood the similarity between dance and painting. Both the dancer and the painter must perfect their sensitivity so that they can complete a poetic creation. The complex inner world of the emotions of man suggests a new realm of inspiration and consideration for both the dancer and the painter. Like the dancer's jumping for joy and hopping mad, the painter expresses the turmoil of his internal subjective world with color and form. Music is essential to dance. Without music dance is just like seasons without Spring. The painter expresses rhythm with variations of colors and forms. Dance and painting are like two strings of a lyre. Although they are different and alone, they quiver

with the same music, which nurses the pain of the soul.

Art is like a jealous woman who needs every bit of the artist. She lives in a temple like a pearl which is built by the artist. The keystone of this pearly temple is founded on the soul of the artist. It is just like the oyster bearing a pearl, which has a grain of sand in the center and surrounded by years of pain. The artist influences the world by his sincerity, and he loves his work greatly; that is the secret of great art. The spirit of the artist can never sleep peacefully till the needs of Art are satisfied. Like seeds dreaming beneath the snow, the heart of the artist is always dreaming of a new world. The artist who loses the excitement of his work, breathes like one who has had a weary dream. Emptiness buries him in the blue shadow of the snow. Like the last of a wreck that still floats on the dark blue sea, like the single leaf still clinging to a cold windy tree, his soul roams over the pale dusts of loneliness. Life must pass dreary places, and it is always hoping though all hope has melted.

Even though I bade farewell to my ballet shoes, my painting did not answer my spirit needs. When the halo with which I had crowned Degas soared into the lemon sky and faded away, a key for my heart was softly turned; within my heart I found my ego. I felt my soul had met my path. Fate stood above me, whispering low, in his strange language. All I knew was I had touched the white garment of Truth.

When Beauty and Truth beckon to the world, the artist follows them with love and sincerity. He walks in cold and

dark, but with a great fire burning in his breast. God makes the artist the fuel of the sacred flame; the love of art keeps an everlasting warmth. In the Day of Judgment, when souls carry their cold wet bodies moving on and on over the frozen marble steps of heaven, the artist's holy torch burns as incense in front of God. That is the reward of an artist.



## CHAPTER IV

### VOLCANO

The old volcano stands on earth like a wistful philosopher facing the reciting sea. Torrents of rain wash its surface. Year in and year out a silence as of death reigns over the chaos. The flame has been extinguished, and the incandescent lava cools off. A limpid lake fills the hollow, and nothing could be calmer, nothing more smiling than its window of soul reflecting the eternal blue. When the heavenly wind blows, white clouds pass by, like a flock of sheep moving on a grass-land. The skylark sounds like the sheep-bells giving forth a gentle tinkling. This peaceful old well is the crater of what was once an active volcano. What once was a cauldron of molten lava, now is where the blue water placidly stretches smiling in the sun. Where the subterranean fire once roared and thundered, now is nothing but a mass of slag, volcanic ashes and vitrified rocks. From the gray shadow of the black and reddish rocks, man learns the dignity and pride of the Earth, the mother of numberless children, the sister of the stars.

Some artists are like volcanoes, and some are just like the little hot springs. The artists bury their emotions in their breasts. Like the frequent earthquakes which shake

the mountains, the artists struggle to be free of their spiritual burdens. The hot spring is heated by the earth's inner fire. Even thousands of years after the eruption of the volcano, the heat is still being contributed to the rocks beneath the surface of Mother Earth. The hot spring becomes colder and colder after it has left the bosom of the Earth. Like an exile of the world, it passes through ridges and plains and disappears in its hours of loneliness. The great master of art is like an active volcano. It takes a giant volcano centuries and centuries to bank its fires and cease its smoke. It seems impossible to block up its chimney and cut off the communication between the great central furnace and the outer world. After the resplendent period the gloomy chaos sighs years after years for the bitterness of joy and the sweetness of pain in the heart of the Mother Earth. The great master reveals his faith and love to his follower. His burning will as a torch guides the path of truth. Like an ashy dormant volcano, when emptiness enfolds him in his old age, his knowledge is passed to men like the heat of the volcano contributes to the hot springs. Like the birth of a new volcano, the artist is not built in one day. The artist has to disclose his heart to his heart, and learns to listen to silence. After a peal of thunder the volcano reveals its innerself to the world. When the smoke has dispersed and vanished the burning flame will be clear. The artist understands himself deeper after he has devoted himself to his work. Like a dim spark laid in ashes the artist learns the joy of

loneliness. Only at the hours of being alone, man clothes himself in the garment of sensitiveness.

In an artist's heart dwells a philosopher's spirit and a poet's soul; his lips speak his faith and love. His work proves his theory of Life. He reveals the worth of his followers and directs their courses. A great teacher is built on him. Like a volcano, the master has his eyes opened toward the sky observing the ultimate knowledge on high. His followers are like the hot springs surrounding him and hem the edge of his gray garment with silver. Following the brook of the spring, one can find the heart of the Master.

The volcano stands on Earth, the vast cradle and graveyard of life as firm as if it were a bronze image of a great master of all men. The moon has journeyed round it, as it has journeyed round the sun. It learns the secrets of light and the mysteries of darkness. In its great shadow chants the cosmic rhythm. Deep in the under-darkness the volcano mutely and patiently keeps its pride. Even where the earth is baked to stone, Death means to take all. However, Misfortune, the sister of Hope still speaks joyful courage to the master's might, Faith. These sisters are alone in the universe; Death casually permits them to remain.



## CHAPTER V

### MY PAINTING

My painting walks with me along life's merry way and weary path. It laughs out loud and free when I feel bright and gay. The brave joyful words it says cheer my dim way and brush the gray from my sky. The pleasure of seeing my painting, the pleasure of hearing its talking, and the drama of watching its movement make my hopes of clearer light and my faith a surer sight.

My painting is like the sort of friend who will be with me till my life's journey ends. When I depart from this world of men, I can still feel the familiar pressure of their friendly hands. I shall smile in peace as my eyelids close. No promise will be needed to satisfy my soul, but I will pray my friends will speak my faith, and forever keep my thoughts in their hearts.

How many noble spirits and precious thoughts have passed away without a single heart's understanding. It makes tear drops start, and aching in the region of the heart, just because of lack of sympathy and understanding. May my painting be an intimate of mine and a true friend of others. May it draw the people a little nearer to understand God's will more clearly.

My painting is my dear friend who tells the tale of my life. It shares my triumph and pain and leads me through the uneven land. My paintings are the memories of my heart, and each one of them is an individually complete statement. They speak to people in their own particular language.

In the year 1961, a spark of abstract thought lighted love between me and the stranger, modern painting. Gradually I learned its language and it caught my Chinese accents. Painting and I plan our patterns of life, to live or to die; we shall struggle together to fulfill the part of the Earth's furthest dream which is assigned to me.

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