



**INDIAN SCHOOL MUSCAT**  
**SENIOR SECTION**  
**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**  
**CLASS XI**  
***LANDSCAPE OF THE SOUL***  
Nathalie Trouveroy



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### **Summary**

Chapter 'Landscape of the Soul' by Nathalie Trouveroy is about art. The chapter consists of two parts. The first part has been taken from 'Landscape of the Soul: Ethics and Spirituality in Chinese Painting'; and the second part is from 'Getting Inside 'Outsider Art', an article written by Brinda Suri in Hindustan Times.

The first part deals with the art of painting. There is mention of two stories in it. The first story is about Wu Daozi, a famous Chinese painter, who lived in the eighth century. He was a master painter and had been commissioned by the Tang Emperor Xuanzong, to decorate a palace wall. He made a beautiful painting with high mountains, forests waterfalls, clouds floating in clear, big blue sky, men walking and working on hilly paths, birds in flight, and a cave situated at the foot of the mountain, where dwelt a spirit. As the painter was showing the painting to the emperor, he clapped hands; the entrance to the cave opened, the painter got in; the painting vanished and Wu Daozi never came out.

The disappearance of the painting from the wall signifies the knowledge of the spiritual inner world. Only the masters know the way within and can go beyond any material appearance.

In another famous story, a famous Chinese painter refused to draw the eye of a dragon he had painted for he feared it would fly out of the painting.

The third story in the first part is about Antwerp, a master blacksmith called Quinten Metsys fell in love with a painter's daughter. The father would not accept a son-in-law in such a profession. However, Antwerp had to accept Quinten Metsys as his son in law because he painted a fly on his panel with such delicate realism that it looked real one.

The author also talks about Chinese philosophy shanshui, which means 'mountain water'. The mountain represents 'Yang', the male principle; and water signifies Yin, the female principle.

In the second part the author writes about the concept of 'art brut', which means 'the art of those who have 'no right' to be artists as they have received no formal training, yet show talent and artistic insight. They are artists who think out of the box. Their works are totally different from those of their predecessors. In simple terminology this art can be called 'unorthodox art.' In this section the author talks about Nek Chand's creations. His creation of Rock Garden at Chandigarh is an expression of art brut.

### **TEXTUAL NOTES**

#### ➤ **TALE ABOUT CHINESE PAINTER**

- Wu Daozi lived in 8<sup>th</sup> century
- his last painting was a landscape, commissioned by the Emperor himself
- the European admired the wonderful scene showing forests, mountains, waterfalls, etc.
- the painter referred to a cave where, he said, lived a spirit - he clapped and the cave opened
- he entered the cave, the door of which closed behind him - the painter was seen no more
- the painting also disappeared from the wall, as the Emperor looked astonished

➤ **ROLE OF STORIES IN CHINESE CLASSICAL EDUCATION**

- stories like that of Wu Daozi reveal the spirit of art
- such stories abound in books of Confucius and Zhuangzi
- quite common in China's classical education
- another story of a painter – would not paint the eye of a dragon lest it should come out of the painting

➤ **REALISM IN EUROPEAN PAINTINGS**

- European art reveals delicate realism, while Chinese and Asian art reflects the essence of inner, spiritual life
- a story of a blacksmith, Quinten who fell in love with a painter's daughter
- not accepted by the painter because of his profession
- entered the studio secretly and painted a fly on the painter's latest panel
- the painter took the fly as real and tried to sway it away
- admitted the blacksmith as an apprentice in his studio
- Quinten married the painter's daughter
- became one of the most famous painters of his times

**CHINESE VERSUS EUROPEAN PAINTING**

➤ **CHINESE PAINTING**

- the focus is not on realism, but on inner reality
- one can view it from any angle - gives the viewer the freedom to enter and leave it
- the onlooker can view it with his own perspective - the artists shows the way
- Wu Daozi's painting is appreciated at the visual level by the Emperor, the painter unravels to him the mysticism, the inner reality, of his work by entering the cave and disappearing forever

➤ **WESTERN PAINTING**

- the focus is on realism, the visual level
- the western artist wants the viewer to see his work as he sees it, by borrowing his own eyes

➤ **CHINESE ART**

- broadens horizons – reveals itself like a horizontal scroll
- adds dimension of time – the action of slowly opening one sector and then the other
- gives liberty to the viewer to set his pace to travel through his landscape
- does not want the onlooker to borrow his eyes to see it
- provides spiritual and conceptual space

➤ **SHANSHUI – THE CONCEPT OF 'YANG' AND 'YIN'**

- Shanshui literally means 'mountain water' - mountain being Yang and water being Yin
- Yang reaches vertically towards heaven, is stable, warm and dry in the sun
- Yin remains horizontal, resting on earth, is fluid, moist and cool

➤ **DAOIST VIEW OF CREATION**

- Dao implies both the path and the method creation, according to a Daoist view of the universe, takes place through the interaction of Yin – receptive feminine aspect of universal energy and its counterpart Yang- the active masculine force
- the third element is ignored: the middle void where interaction takes place
- the void is like the suspension of breath in yogic 'pranayama' – breathe in, retain, breathe out

- the void is essential – nothing can happen without it – like the white, unpainted space in Chinese landscape
  - man's role in art
    - ❖ man lies between heaven and earth
    - ❖ he is the medium of communication between the two poles - his presence is essential
    - ❖ as the admirer, 'the eye of the landscape', he gives new dimension to the landscape painting
- **'ART BRUT' OR 'OUTSIDER ART'**
- this concept given by a French painter Jean Dubuffet during 1940s
  - this type of art is the art of the untrained visionary who have had no formal training
  - such an art is in its 'raw state'
  - medium for work includes anything from a tin to a sink or even a broken down car
- **NEK CHAND – AN UNTUTORED GENIUS**
- created the famous Rock Garden at Chandigarh
  - emerged as India's great exponent of 'outside art' - received various awards and honours
  - his art is 'an outstanding testimony of the difference a simple man can make when he lives his dream'
  - his sculpture 'women by the waterfall' in the Rock Garden featured on the cover of the special issue (Spring 2005) of 'Raw Vision' a U.K based magazine
  - to be honoured by the Swiss Commission for UNESCO
  - a modest and humble person - seeks his reward in seeing people watching his works with admiration
- **EXPRESSIONS IN THE TEXT**
- **anecdote:** a short account of a particular incident or event, especially of an interesting or exciting nature
  - **delicate realism:** refers to the alluring quality of the art which makes it seem real. It is an interest in or concern for the actual or real as opposed to abstract
  - **illusionistic likeness:** refers to an adjective of the technique of using pictorial methods in order to deceive the eye. The reference is to an illusion created by the semblance of something.
  - **figurative painting:** refers to the metaphoric representation of a piece of art, through the eyes of the creator's imagination.
  - **conceptual space:** refers to relation with the abstract than the factual representation. This is the incalculable dimension of the understanding of concepts.

**Answer the following questions in 30-40 words:**

1. How did stories play an important role in Chinese classical education?

Stories play an important role in Chinese classical education. They were conveniently used to make the concepts clear to the pupils. Such stories were not only fanciful but also informative. The stories in the books of Confucius and Zhuangzi help the master (teacher) to guide his disciples in following the direction. They reveal the spirit in which art is considered.

2. Who was Wu Daozi? What did he ask the Emperor to do?

Wu Daozi was a famous painter of China who lived in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. He asked the emperor to look in a cave of his painting at the foot of the mountain where a spirit lived.

3. What happened which astonished the Emperor?

The painter clapped his hands and the door of the cave opened. The painter entered the cave but the door closed after him.

4. What do the stories in the books of Confucius and Zhuangzi do?

The stories in the books of Confucius and Zhuangzi help the master to guide his disciple in following the right direction. They reveal the spirit in which art is considered.

5. What is the difference between the approach of the European painter and the Chinese painter?

The European painter wants an onlooker to be guided by him. He wants to borrow his (the painter's) eye's and look at the painting from a particular angle. But the Chinese painter wants the onlooker to look at the painting from different angles. The onlooker is free in his opinion and perception.

6. What is the significance of the horizontal scroll?

The horizontal scroll is significant in understanding the artistic view point where you open up one section of painting, rolling it up to move to the other. It requires an active participation of the viewer who is at liberty to move in time and space.

7. What do you understand by the terms 'outsider art' and 'art brut' or 'raw art'?

The term 'art brut' was given by the French painter Jean Dubuffet during the 1940s. 'Outsider art' refers to those art who have no right to be artists as they have received no formal training yet show talent and artistic insight. 'Art brut' or 'raw art' art the works of art in their raw state as regards cultural and artistic influences.

8. Which element is often overlooked? How is it essential?

The element which is often overlooked is the third element, the Middle Void. It is essential because the interaction takes place here. It can be compared to yogic practice Pranayama, breathe in, retain and breathe out – the suspension breath is the Void where meditation occurs. Nothing can happen without it. Hence, it is important in Chinese art.

**Answer the following questions in 100-120 words:**

1. The landscape is an inner one, a spiritual and conceptual space. Discuss.

Nathalie explains to the readers that a classical Chinese landscape is not meant to reproduce an actual view as would a Western figurative painting.

The Chinese painter gives full freedom to the viewer to look at his painting from any angle. On the other hand, the Western painter wants the viewer to use his eyes to look at his landscape. To the Chinese painter, the outer landscape does not matter much. The real landscape is the inner one, covering a spiritual and conceptual space. In it one can enter from any point and travel in it up and down and then back again in a leisurely manner. It implies that the viewer of a Chinese landscape has to seek the beauty within. He ought to involve himself both physically and mentally in appreciating a real piece of art. The story of Wu Daozi, the Chinese painter in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, who vanished after entering the cave of his own painting, only reveals that the artist wants the viewer to enter his mind, for the landscape is not the outer reality, as the Western artist believes but a spiritual and abstract reality.