

Xu Longsen landscape paintings: a modern image of Chinese traditional art as well as an ode to the beauty of nature

In each of his ink paintings - landscapes on paper scrolls - Xu Longsen carries us to classical China. No human presence in his work, except the application of ink on paper and calligraphy. Without any obvious borders, the abstract forms of Xu Longsen paintings ascend to the peaks of the mountains. There, clouds, shadows, reveal a spiritual force. Xu Longsen is known for his Shanshui practice (the art of landscape), very important in Chinese culture. This art form was developed by the masters of Song and Yuan dynasties (10th-14th centuries).

Xu Longsen was born in 1956 in Shanghai, where he studied sculpture, calligraphy and painting. He was initially a collector of Chinese classical art and antiquities, through which he gained a good understanding of Chinese tradition and history. Xu Longsen has also absorbed the values of classical "literati tradition". In the traditional culture, people create gardens and rocks to represent nature, the legacy of this practice is the "literati culture of the garden". The artist thus built his own literati garden through his brushes. Xu Longsen became an artist and a thinker during the Cultural Revolution, and later found his true source of inspiration in the writings of Confucius ; since 2001 he has carried out a true revolution by painting mainly abstract landscapes.

Xu Longsen's landscape painting challenges contemporary Chinese culture. In the context of devastating policies for environment, Xu Longsen's work is a reminder of the beauty of nature and a judgment on an economic civilization that can wreak havoc and destruction as a consequence of transformational economic policies and development, explained Janet McKenzie (Studiointernational) in June 2011. She pursued: "Xu Longsen expresses his rejection of the attitudes of artists such as Ai Weiwei who destroy classical artifacts to illustrate political views, and to the vast number of artists in the burgeoning industry in China who are determined to replace old forms for new as a matter of course".

The landscapes of Xu Longsen sometimes confront with the monumentality of modern architecture with their imposing presences as in 2011 at the Museum of Roman Civilization in Italy and the Palace of Justice in Belgium. His installation "On Top of Two Empires", in Rome, juxtaposed the very fine works on paper, the massive scrolls of the artist, and the power of sculpture and the Roman architecture, represented by the Museum. In 2009, the artist exhibited 10 long suspended rolls of 12 meters in the lobby of the Palace of Justice in Brussels. "With Xu Longsen, we climb to the top of a thousand mountains and his paintings, also called Shanshui, evoke the strength of nature, vitality and exuberance. Xu Longsen is the one by whom traditional Chinese art has turned into a modern image", reported La Libre Belgique in November 2009. "The work is in black and white" but as the artist explains, "Chinese ink gives color". If the artist has more and more large paintings, "it is the society of consumption that requires it". With its latest exhibition "Wind on the Mountain" at the Hanart TZ Gallery in Hong Kong, at the end of 2016, Xu Longsen brought Chinese landscapes to new heights. His ink paintings of mountains and water, pay tribute to the past while offering new, abstract elements.

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