

静 观

Still Observation

—— 白晓军水墨艺术

—— Bai Xiaojun's Art of Ink-and-Wash

广西美术出版社

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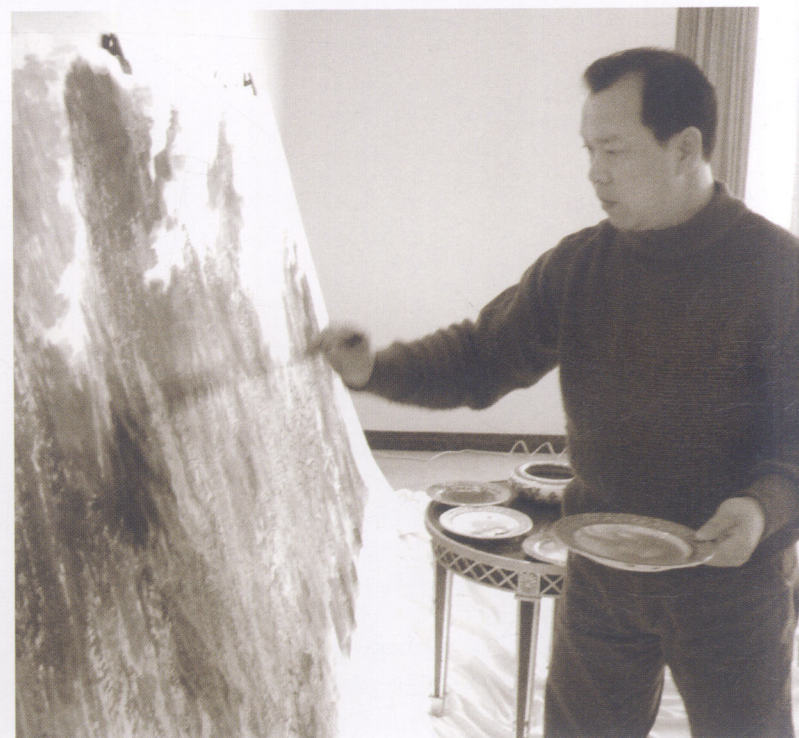
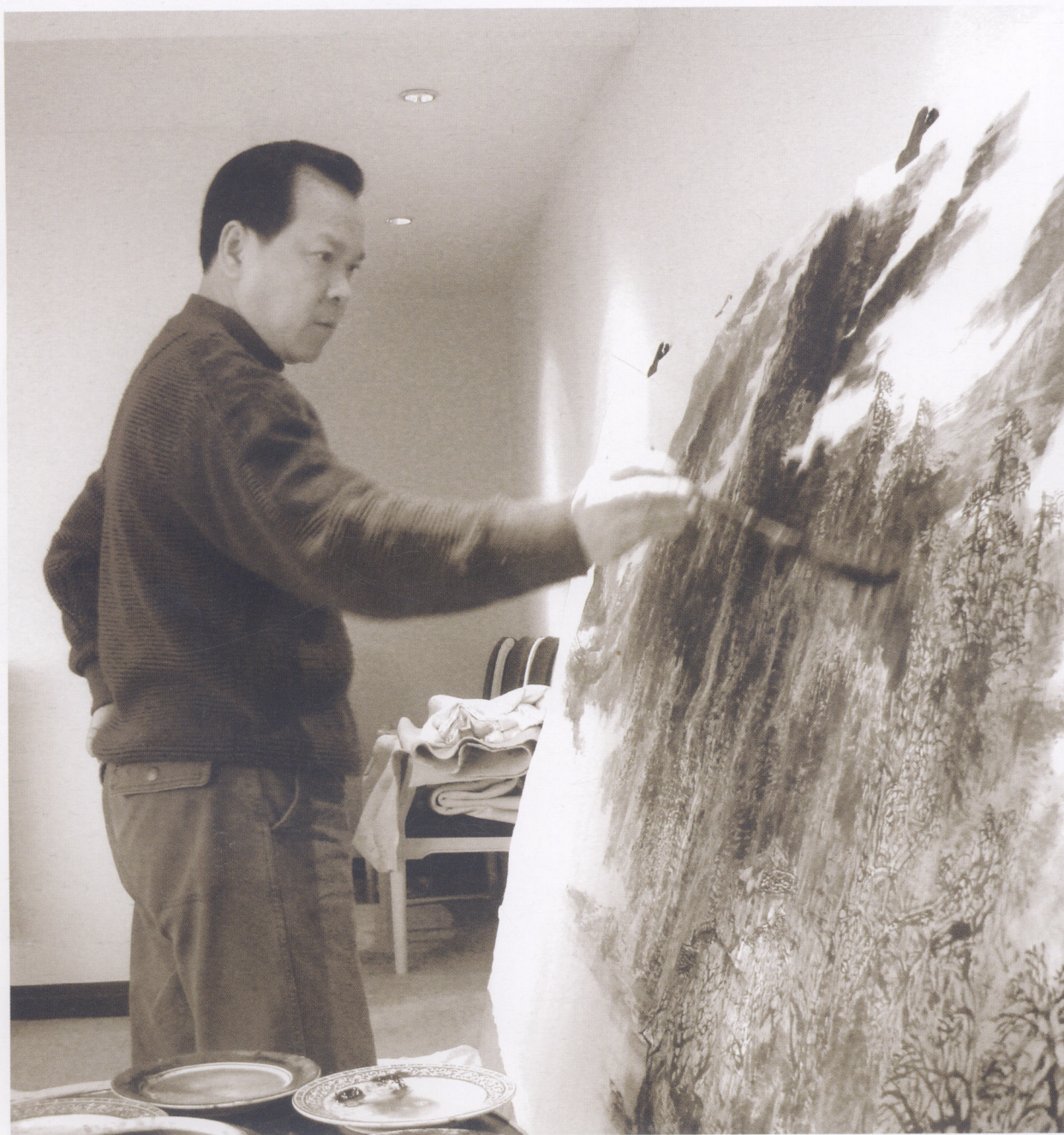
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胸怀传统，立足现代

——品读白晓军的绘画作品

黄伟林

乍一看白晓军的画，与我习惯了的中国画是有点差异的。

我的中国画审美感觉偏向空灵的一面，白晓军的画面却显得比较饱满。如果用桂林山水的风格做类比，我更习惯于杨堤到兴坪的烟雨漓江的感觉。在这种感觉里，水常常成了主角，山变作了点染。烟雨之中，一切都显得空灵澄静，万籁俱寂，超尘脱俗。白晓军的画则更接近兴安、灵川的自然山水风格。在这种风格里，山成了主角，水却是隐隐约约的，画面饱满、充实，甚至有苍劲、苍茫、浑厚、博大的感觉，画面里会很固执地出现民居、山路、石桥这些景物，仿佛是在提醒读者人间烟火的存在。

我反复地在白晓军的画面里留连，刚开始是有点刻意的。但久而久之，我必须承认，白晓军的画面对我而言，逐渐有了一种亲和的感觉。就好像我们遇到一个人，初一看，仿佛是陌生的。但经过一段时间的交往，你会被唤起一种亲切的感觉，一种沉睡了很久的感觉被缓慢地激活。白晓军的画就能唤起我的这种感觉。在反复品读之后，我感觉，白晓军的画其实是有根柢的。它承接着一个我久已疏远的传统。在我的意识层面，它仿佛已经不存在了。但浸润于白晓军的画面之中。就像白晓军那些以桂北山寨为题材的作品，画面上常常会有一条不深不浅的小河，似乎在暗示它会通向某个地方。我逐渐感觉到与这个传统相连的潜意识的复苏。

这个道理还是可以用桂林山水类比。对于桂林题材的山水画，我们更习惯的可能是阳朔标志的桂林山水。可是，如果我们深入桂林山水的腹地，会发现，桂林山水其实还有另外一面。如果说阳朔的桂林山水突出了烟雨的氛围而有羽化登仙的感觉，那么，桂北的桂林山水则厚重充实，饱蕴一种源远流长的精神。

为了理解白晓军的画，我专门深入到漓江上游的桂北山区。显然，与漓江下游开阔、空灵的峰林地貌完全不同，漓江上游山峦连绵、层林尽染，苍劲、苍茫、浑厚、博大，一如白晓军的画风。

显而易见，白晓军对漓江上游这片土地是“胸有成竹”的。1976年，刚刚高中毕业的他赶上了上山下乡的最后几班车。在灵川插队的一年多时间里，他与桂北的土地和人民有了一个零距离的结合。这个结合对白晓军的创作自然有着重大的意义。他不仅发现了漓江流域浑厚苍茫的一面，其绘画作品中山的连绵与树的茂密可以说正是对桂北自然风貌的精确表达；而且抵达了与这片土地休戚相关的原住民的内心，那栋民居、那条山路、那座石桥，表面看只是寂寞的存在，但设身处地去思想，却可以感觉到它们流露着桂北山民内心的呼唤与向往。我还注意到白晓军那些表现空阔江面的作品，应该说这是很典型的阳朔漓江的画面，但白晓军突出的仍然不是漓江空灵澄静的风格，他总是有意无意地突出了漓江上的风，那种将老树枝条刮得蜷曲的风。它有力地解构了我们习以为常的漓江山水画的宁静的感觉。我还注意到白晓军画作喜欢勾勒的泊在漓江中的船以及漫步在漓江边的牛的倒影，这都是绝大多数

艺术家忽略的景致。我更注意到白晓军画作中常常出现的色彩,那种极其深幽、极其僻静的山林中以及极其枯涩的笔墨中出现的彩色,而且经常是鲜艳的红色。这一切究竟意味着什么呢?在这里,我想表达的是,我们不能总是被烟雨漓江的空灵澄静、超凡脱俗所迷惑,以为这就是漓江的全部了,事实并非如此,我们也应该意识到漓江与它的人民也有其原初的欲望,有其质朴的幻想。

这其实只是诠释了白晓军画作与自然、与生活本身的内在联系。然而,对于一个有着深刻的审美追求的作者而言,这种阐释显然是远远不够的。

事实上,灵川的知青生活给予白晓军的不仅是质朴的桂北生活本身,而且还有艺术家的人格以及审美风格的影响。

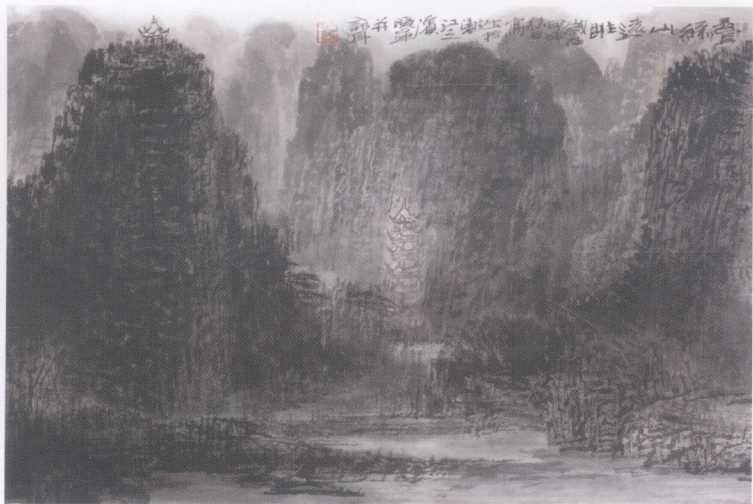
也许天意就是要让白晓军成为一个艺术家。他插队灵川的时候,正是艺术家李骆公被贬灵川的时候。插队期间的白晓军投师访友,正好遇到了这位“专直才雄,乃夺天工”的艺术大师。此外,还有一位执著的艺术大师此时也在灵川,他就是后来闻名一时的漓江画童阿西的父亲谭峥嵘。礼失求诸野,在一个文化革命的时代,白晓军幸运地进入了一片艺术的净土,艺术的世外桃源,获得了艺术家人格的真传。在很快来临的拨乱反正时代,1978年,他考上了广西艺术学院美术系。毕业工作两年之后的1984年,他又考上了广西艺术学院中国画研究生班,师从著名画家黄独峰教授。

被齐白石称为“写生妙手”的黄独峰曾师从高剑父学习国画,是岭南画派的第二代画师。陈传席在《画坛点将录》一书中专门谈到岭南画派与中原、江南画风的差异,认为岭南画派受“海岸海洋”地理形态的影响,有自己的独特风格。应该说这大体上是不错的。像我这样的绘画门外汉,也能感觉到白晓军画作与我们熟悉的绘画作品的差异,恰好说明白晓军确实得到了岭南画派的真传,走的是一条与我们这种绘画门外汉不熟悉的中国画传统的路径。因此,从绘画艺术甚至绘画形式层面上看,以我个人的想法,白晓军画作对桂北风景的选择,不仅来自他对滋生这种风景的土地的“胸有成竹”,更重要的,岭南画派的风格对他的绘画题材有着潜在的影响。因为,不同的地域环境造就不同的艺术气质。中原的雄浑、江南的灵秀与岭南的神秘深幽是不同的。岭南开发晚,地处热带亚热带地区,环境更多呈现原始自然状态,少人文痕迹,森林茂密,生物多样,造成了丰富、深幽、神秘的氛围。同样是南方,岭南南方的神秘幽深与江南南方的小桥流水是截然不同的。岭南画派的艺术家长期生活在这种神秘深幽的自然环境中,他们对这种自然环境的表现对中原与江南的艺术家而言自然具有一种陌生化的审美效果。表面上看是一种完全不同的艺术风格,本质上却来自忠实于自然的“写生”。不妨说,要理解岭南画派,就必须有对岭南山地风土民情的深刻体验。上百年的艺术积淀,造就了岭南画的艺术风格。由于我们长期受“正宗”的中原和江南的艺术传统的影响,对岭南的文化艺术传统缺乏深刻的领悟,对

岭南画的艺术规则和审美范式缺乏真正的理解,从而造成了欣赏和阐释岭南画的难度。

岭南画派的画风受晚清画家居巢、居廉的影响众所周知。“二居”青年时代曾在桂林生活十余年,“至山水之区,漫游诸名胜,潜研默会,为丹青之助。”(《广东现代画人传》附编,《居梅生传》,第2页。转引自林京海《居巢游寓广西事迹》,载《广西博物馆文集》。)由此可见桂林山水对“二居”的审美风格有过深刻的影响。据桂林文史专家林京海先生的推测,“二居”在桂林生活期间学习绘画曾受过当时桂林著名画家李秉绶的影响。由此可见,岭南画派的源头可以追溯到桂林的画家和桂林山水。岭南画派与桂林山水,与桂林的画家有着某种因时间原因几乎被人们遗忘的联系。意识到这一点,对于今天已经在中国产生较大影响的漓江画派,在古代桂林画家、岭南画家和漓江画派三者之间找到内在的联系,无疑具有重要的意义。

做这样一番追溯的目的是想表达这样一个意思,白晓军的绘画不仅有桂林山水自然的滋养,也有源远流长的岭南艺术传统的积淀。这就触到了白晓军绘画的根柢。白晓军在“写生”漓江流域的自然的时候,是带着他个人的艺术悟性和桂林山水数百年的艺术大师的艺术承传的,他不仅深深地楔入了自然,以他的天然悟性体验大自然的神奇造化;同时,他也深深地扎根于传统,以他的艺术自觉去融通传统的博大精深。从李秉绶到居巢、居廉,从居巢、居廉到“岭南三家”,从“岭南三家”到黄独峰,白晓军的绘画不可避免地积淀了这些大师的艺术营养。再加上李骆公、谭峥嵘这些艺术家的旁敲侧击,潜移默化。这造就了白晓军绘画规范的一面,他重功底、讲实力,因为他是在大师的直接培养中成长的,更因为他理解并认识到传统的力量,传统的深邃,传统的天网恢恢。所以他从不张狂、也不浮躁,更不轻率。记得有画家朋友称白晓军有胸怀,我想这所谓“有胸怀”不仅是针对他的社会身份而言的,更应该指他胸中蕴藏着对传统、对艺术的尊敬。如同张艺谋面对电影《刘三姐》所发出的心声“向传统致敬”,白晓军同样有着充分的对于传统的尊敬。回到本文开头所说的白晓军作品饱满的画面感觉,其实是彰显着丰富的传统蕴藉的。经历过文化大革命的大多数中国人要么轻薄传统,要么曲解传统,表现形式不一样,本质都是对传统的无知。所以,理解白晓军的画,需要对传统有一个深刻的体认。当然,对于白晓军而言,仅仅拥有对传统的尊敬也是不够的,他需要吐故纳新,需要穿越传统实现与现代的融合。事实上,他早已意识到这一点,在经历漫长的生活和艺术的磨砺后的今天,他终会站在一个新的制高点,高屋建瓴,用他的生命体验和审美领悟创造更优秀的作品,从而走出许多艺术家沉溺其中无法逾越的浮躁、轻率、无知无畏的时代局限。



叠彩山远眺/纸本/68cm×46cm/2004年



奇峰镇东山村/纸本/68cm×46cm/2004年

仁者乐山——白晓军印象

苏 旅

说白晓军是位仁者，肯定有很多人不服。这也难怪，在一般人的概念里，仁者是一种太高贵的尊称，那是得上了年纪著作等身的长者才能享受的，白晓军年不到半百，安能受之？“仁者”一词出自《论语·雍也》，子曰：“知者乐水，仁者乐山；知者动，仁者静；知者乐，仁者寿。”其实孔子云仁者乐山智者乐水，只不过是比喻心胸仁厚心地善良的人喜欢山，聪明活泼好动的人喜欢水而已。我查了一下，并无那位古人非要给仁者或者智者下年龄的定义。所以称晓军兄为仁者，并不为过。

白晓军从大处看算是我的同学。我是77级，他是78级，其实是同一年入的大学，又差不多同一年毕业。晓军兄后来考上了岭南派大师黄独峰的研究生，专攻中国山水画，毕业后到广西师范大学任教。无论是读书还是工作，晓军兄都成绩斐然。但他是一个非常低调的人，我们两地相隔，交往不多，但都彼此关注对方的成长。这从我们很久以前的一次难得的闲聊中就看得出：“苏兄最近写了不少好文章啊！拜读拜读。”“白兄的山水画有特色啊，印章也成了构图的主要元素，有想法啊！”这绝不是一般的互相应酬寒暄，他画的画，我大都了如指掌，同样，我写的文章，估计晓军兄也有所关注。从性格上，晓军兄属于仁者一类，我可能属于智者吧，一动一静，动静相克也动静相宜，我们也一直保持着“君子之交”，虽然“淡如水”，但淡得清雅，淡得有韵味。我向来佩服晓军兄的为人，是真君子也。他荣辱不惊，于朋友、同事、于熟悉的人或陌生的人都坦然处之，真诚相待。当然后来晓军官至桂林市政协副主席、广西师范大学副校长，还当选为十届全国人大代表，这是他自己的人品和能力已经被历史和社会认可使然。即使这样，晓军兄还是保持他那种“仁者”

的心态，不嚣张，不张扬，依然平平静静地画画、工作、生活。“仁者”也就是仁厚的人。仁厚的人安于义理，仁慈宽容而不易冲动，性情好静就像山一样稳重而不易移动，所以用山来进行比拟。晓军兄可当之乎？！

晓军画山水，既在笔墨上深得传统山水画真味，又能在布局意境中独出机杼。晓军有着一种如大山一般不轻易随波逐流的好性格，一旦认准了目标，绝不轻言放弃。画品如人品，明代四大家之一的文征明曾在画中题款云：人品不高，用墨无法。清代沈宗骞亦云：笔格之高下，亦如人品。又云：在学（画）者当先立卓识，操定力，不务外观，不由捷径，到功夫纯熟，自成为一种气象。所以晓军兄画如其人，虽从艺多年，但从不会花样翻新和追赶潮流，而是潜心修炼，处变不乱。如今终至墨呈秀润，笔有法度，自成一格，这自然是浸淫数千年中国传统文化之善果吧。

我仔细品读晓军兄的山水作品，发现晓军在画作中暗藏“野”、“寒”、“幽”、“深”四字诀。

先说“野”。晓军戏称自己的作品是“中国画中的野文化”。晓军追求山水画中的“野”味儿，并不是某些画家的那种没有文化的“野乱狂怪”，而是山野之野，田园之野、乡村之野，因此自有一种山林山村山野的自然之气。晓军的家乡是世界闻名的桂林山水，古往今来，画桂林漓江者如过江之鲫，但大都被漓江山水的秀丽妩媚所麻醉，鲜有能画出品格者。晓军知其弊，以“野气”入画，尽去媚俗，平添生机。在用笔用墨上，晓军也从“野”字诀出发，画中多用刚硬苍劲的线条和浑厚沉雄的彩墨，绝不纤弱秀丽，不浮夸媚俗。即使是一些画牛的小品，晓军也拒绝田园牧歌式的情调，而着重表现山野田间一种疾风劲草的意境。观晓军画，是觉野气快然，生机郁勃。晓军的朋友李向平君评论晓军的山水：平中求奇，雅中求野。当为的论。

“寒”是晓军很喜欢表现的一种意境。我想这大约一，晓军久居桂林，喜欢秋冬时节桂林的斑斓色彩；其二也许因为晓军毕竟是个文人吧，无论如何为官为政，终究

还是免不了中国传统文人那种独立清高、不与俗流的喜好。《霜叶如丹映嫩寒》是晓军最喜欢画的主题之一，深秋的丹叶和初寒的清流构成了作品既丰富斑斓而又清寒扑面的意境。《寒月无声自有诗》、《临江寒树晓生烟》、《秋林霜重》、《高秋图》、《秋染瑶山》、《雪迷山村》……从题目上就可以看得出晓军对清寒意境的酷爱和迷恋。这种清寒意境就像一曲古琴的悠远琴声，来自博大精深的中国传统文人文化深处，或深或浅地穿行在晓军所有的作品中，去尘俗，存古意，淡泊而萧散，为晓军的作品标上了一个高雅的标杆。

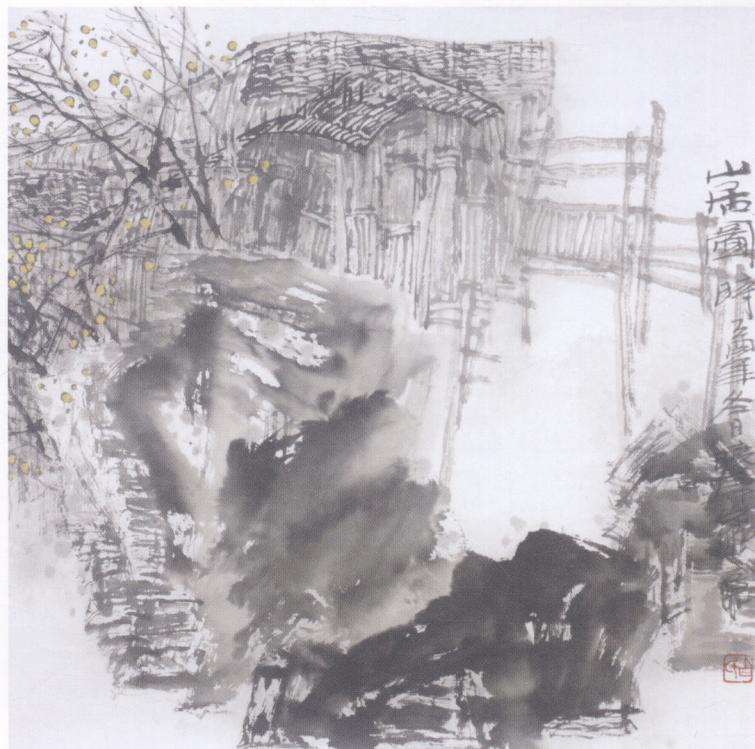
“幽”与“深”是传统中国山水画的一个美学标准，也是无数山水画家的至高追求。所谓“曲径通幽”是中国美学的一个境界。“幽”不止是幽深、幽凉、幽静，“幽”还代表着一种未知的世界，通往“幽”的道路是曲折而坎坷的，是谓“曲径通幽”。因此对“幽”、“深”可作形而上和形而下的两种诠释。依我看晓军深得此中真谛，无论作田园小品或山水村寨，皆现幽深之境。心有所思，手有所发，于是乎晓军的画如《幽居图》、《山深有意蕴》、《静泊》、《白云遮幽壑》、《清漓雾霭》、《清漓人家》、《南岭春深》、《苍茫山谷意幽深》、《曲径通幽》……等等，没有视平线，没有消失点，山、水、烟、云、树、草、木屋村寨在晓军纯熟老辣的笔墨下浑然一体，尽显山重水复，云雾苍茫，浑厚华滋，幽壑深远的山水画品格。

仁者乐山。晓军虽自甘寂寞，不事张扬，自乐于山水之间。也应是天道酬勤，这些年来晓军的画名日隆，求画者日多，国内外高档次的画展邀请其参加的越来越频繁，这应该是对晓军数十年在艺途上辛勤劳作的回报。但晓军的为人我知道，这些功名利禄于他不过是身外之物。清人王昱有云：学画所以养性情，且可涤烦襟，释躁心，迎静气。晓军自云：言画何分文野、何论雅俗。作画难得随心所欲、自由自在，能够尽遣心意、自然而然者已经足矣。画为心声，重要的是修身养性。

诚哉斯言！和晓军兄这样一位仁者作君子之交，余也幸甚。

丁亥年盛夏写于南宁半山草堂

苏旅 编审 广西美术出版社副总编
广西艺术学院客座教授



山居图/纸本/33cm×33cm/2005年



依山傍水图/纸本/33cm×33cm/2005年

Take a Firm Foothold in Modernity while Keep the Tradition in Mind

—My Understanding and Appreciation of Bai Xiaojun's Paintings

Huang Weilin

At the very first sight of Bai Xiaojun's paintings, I would think that they are somewhat different from that I am used to having a look at in terms of my own artistic taste.

I am in favour of a taste in the traditional Chinese paintings that tip the scale of aesthetics to the side of the free and natural style with no intention to present too complicated a design on the picture appearance. But the appearances of Bai Xiaojun's paintings seem to be in a substantial way well arranged in designs. If Guilin's landscape is likened to a beautiful Chinese ink painting, the water course of the Lijiang River from Yangdi to Xingping in the misty rain will provoke a sort of feeling that I am more familiar with. With such a picture of ink and wash coming into your sight, you will feel as if the whole picture appearance were enshrouded by the main component, the misty rain, in which peaks and mountain summits were vaguely visible, producing an effect of their being interspersed on the picture. In the misty rain, everything is in the state of natural stillness, no sound and no desire of the secular world. Bai Xiaojun's painting in the form of ink and wash represents another style, a style much closer to that of the landscape at Xing'an or Lingchuan, two Counties under the direct jurisdiction of Guilin Municipal Government. In this style of painting, the dominant component of the picture appearance has become mountains while waters are vaguely visible whereby the picture appearance will let you feel that it is so fully loaded with designs as to be forcefully wild, vigorously simple, vast and extensive. There may be such scenic spots as the civilian residences, mountain trails and stone bridges, which will obstinately display themselves in the picture, as if to show the existence of mundane affairs going on there.

I was deep into a repeated appreciation of Bai Xiaojun's paintings time and again. At first, this sort of appreciation was an act a bit purposeful. However, with days passing by, I must admit that I have gradually developed an affection for his artistic works the way I have done for a person, who is a stranger to me at first but after a certain while of daily intercourse with him, a close relationship has been established between us. This kind of metaphorical affection for Bai Xiaojun's paintings has been activated by my repeated study and appreciation of them. It is justified for me to say that a solid foundation can be discovered in Bai Xiaojun's works, which carries on an old tradition, a tradition that I haven't come into a close contact with for a long time. In my mind, it seems to have died out but it still saturates Bai Xiaojun's works. Take his pictures with mountain villages of the northern part of Guangxi as the subject matters for examples. The appearances of those pictures often display a river, neither so deep nor so shallow, which seems to drop a hint to the effect that it runs to somewhere. I've come to realize a subconsciousness connecting the old tradition has been revived.

For the clarity of what stated above, we may also turn to Guilin's landscape for an analogy. We are quite familiar with Guilin landscape paintings depicting the mountains and waters that

shut Yangshuo in, a small county within easy reach of the city-proper of Guilin, for the landscape within Yangshuo is the marker of Guilin's landscape. And yet, if we arrive at the interior of Guilin's landscape, we will find the other side of it. If Yangshuo's scenery gives Guilin's landscape a prominence of the mood created by misty rain in which you would feel as if you were an immortal living in a fairyland, then the scenery of northern Guangxi will represent another taste in Guilin's landscape, imposing, magnificent and imbued with a spirit originating from a distant source.

In order to make a better understanding of Bai Xiaojun's landscape paintings, I toured the mountainous region on the upper reach of the Lijiang River, which is geologically situated in the northern part of Guangxi. Different from the land forms of a forest of peaks on the spacious lower reach of the Lijiang River, the district on the upper reach of the Lijiang River presents an imposing view of rolling mountains covered by woods of various trees that will be deep-dyed in late autumn, which looks like a landscape painting composed in the same style as that of Bai Xiaojun's painting, and the appearance of such a Nature-created landscape painting is also as forcefully wild, vigorously simple, vast and extensive as that of Bai Xiaojun's artistic works.

It is obvious that Bai Xiaojun has a clear idea about how to depict the landscape on the upper reach of the Lijiang River. In 1976, upon his graduation from senior middle school, he joined the last group of high school graduates dispatched to countryside and settled down there. Over one year's farm work in Lingchuan Country as an educated young man settling down in rural area, a chance for him to come into a "zero-distance" contact with the land and people of northern Guangxi occurred and this kind of contact proved to be of great significance to his career of art creation. He has not only discovered the side of the naturally imposing, extensively wild and vast view that the upper reach of the Lijiang River has presented—his discovery is shown by his paintings in which the rolling mountains and dense woods can be regarded as his accurate expression of the natural scenery of the mountainous area in northern Guangxi, but has also arrived in the inner world of the aborigines whose destiny inclusive of happiness, prosperity and troubles in life are all indispensable with the mountainous area—all these are expressed in Bai Xiaojun's paintings by the civilian residences, the mountain trails and the stone bridges. They seem to be a sort of existence in tranquility but it can be felt that they imply and emit a sort of cry and yearning from the hearts of the aborigines. I've also directed my attention to those works of Bai Xiaojun, which depict the spaciousness over the Lijiang River. It's reasonable to say that the appearances of those pictures stand for the typical scenery that the reach of the Lijiang River within the boundary of Yangshuo County presents. But at the point of Bai Xiaojun's painting brush, the still spaciousness has given way to the wind rising over the Lijiang River, and the strong wind which can bend the branches of old trees at that. Bai Xiaojun has put this mood in his paintings, either intentionally or unintentionally. So, it has made a forceful deconstruction of the tranquil mood in Guilin landscape paintings, which we would habitually intend to feel when we taste any painting that belongs to this category. I've noticed that Bai Xiaojun loves to sketch with simple strokes or lines the moored boat and reflections in the water of the buffaloes leisurely strolling along the banks of the Lijiang River and the views of this kind are often neglected by the majority of the landscape painters. Furthermore, my special attention is paid to the colours that often occur in Bai Xiaojun's landscape

paintings. The appearances of his pictures are often tinged with colours, bright red in particular, which come out from the view of the most tranquil woods deep in the mountains or from the most rough strokes and lines. What do all these really mean? To my own understanding, they could mean that we should not always be bewildered by the atmosphere of tranquility and the mood of transcending the secular taste, which a view of the Lijiang River in the misty rain has conveyed to us, simple because in truth, it is not the whole of fact. We should be aware that the Lijiang River and her people have also had their original desires and simple dreams.

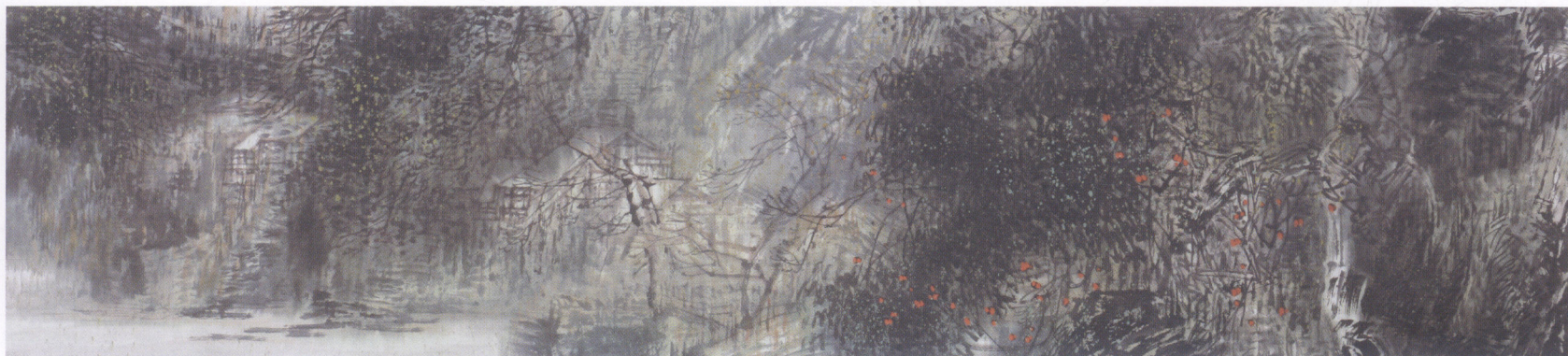
What I've said above is a mere interpretation of the internal logic of Bai Xiaojun's artistic works, nature and life itself. But I know well that such an interpretation is far from being enough if it is intended for the works of an artist who has incisive views on his or her aesthetic pursuits.

As a matter of fact, the rural life in Lingchuan Bai Xiaojun underwent as an educated young man settling down in the countryside has made him a man endowed not only with the experience of the simple life itself in the northern part of Guangxi but also with the character of an artist and the impact of an artist's aesthetic orientation.

It may be the arrangement of predestination to let Bai Xiaojun become an artist. During the period of time when he was living a farmer's life in Lingchuan, Li Luogong, a renowned artist, was transferred to do manual labour as a demoted cadre by sheer coincidence in Lingchuan, too. At that time, Bai Xiaojun, in search for the teachers and friends who could help him to make progress in his painting skills, happened to meet Master Li Luogong, whose artist's reputation is described as "a gifted man of complete integrity with supernatural accomplishment in the field of art". Besides, another painter, who is famous for his inflexible will or tenacity in the artistic pursuit, was also in Lingchuan. His name is Tan Zhengrong and he is the father of A Xi, a talented child-painter well-known to the public at that time. So lucky was Bai Xiaojun that he found the right road leading to his future career, entered the pure realm of art and acquired the essence of a real artist's character under the tutelage of those masters he met in the chaos of "the cultural revolution". Shortly after "the cultural revolution" was brought to an end, social order was established out of chaos. In 1978, Bai Xiaojun passed the national college entrance examination and was enrolled to study at Guangxi Academy of Arts and became a student of its

Art Department. In 1984, two years after his graduation from the college, he got a chance to continue his education and became a graduate student of the postgraduate program run by Guangxi Academy of Arts, majoring in the traditional Chinese painting under the guidance of his supervisor, Professor Huang Dufeng, a very famous painter.

Huang Dufeng, highly praised by Qi Baishi as "a master in drawing from nature", once studied the traditional painting under Gao Jianfu and became a second-generation successor to Lingnan art school(岭南画派). In his book *List of renowned Names in the Circle of Painting Art*, Chen Chuanxi has devoted a certain space to dealing with what are the aspects in which Lingnan art school differs from Zhongyuan art school(中原画派) and Jiangnan art school(江南画派).①According to Chen Chuanxi, if Lingnan art school has its unique style, that's because it is under the influence of land configuration characterized by "sea and coastline". Generally speaking, his opinion is right. A layman in art as I am, I can see the difference of Bai Xiaojun's paintings from the works of art that we're familiar with. But it is the difference that attests the fact that Bai Xiaojun has acquired the essence of Lingnan art school and the road he has taken is the one the laymen like me are not familiar with, quite traditional though it is. If we appreciate his pictures from the perspective of artistic effect and form, I'd like to say, on the basis of my own understanding, that Bai Xiaojun has chosen to depict the scenic spots in northern Guangxi in his landscape painting and the reason for his choice can be interpreted as follows: He is so familiar with the mountainous area with so many nature-born scenic spots that he has made a well-thought-out plan for an expression of the beauty of this area in his pictures, and what is more important, the style of Lingnan art school has a potential impact on his choice of subject matters in creation. Different geological environment is conducive to the formation of different artistic disposition. The magnificence of Zhongyuan, the fine delicate features of Jiangnan and the mystic and tranquil recesses of Lingnan — each has its own distinction. Lingnan—the regions south of the Five Ridges—is developed rather late in terms of our history and is situated in the subtropical zone. To a large extent, its ecological environment is still in a primitive state with less traces or signs of humanist activities. So, in such ecological environment, dense forests and a variety of animal and plant species have given rise to the mood of abundance, tranquil recesses and mystery. Geologically termed as "south", the southern part of Lingnan differs from the southern part of Jiangnan in that the



云山无尽(局部) / 纸本 / 2007年

former's tranquil recesses are not on a par with the latter's small bridges and streams. The artists of Lingnan art school have lived in the natural environment of Lingnan's tranquil recesses for long. Small wonder that their expression of the natural environment they live in is quite different from that of the artists of Zhongyuan art school and Jiangnan art school and naturally, their works will produce an aesthetic effect which is strange to the artists of the other two schools. Seemingly, the artistic style of Lingnan art school is unique. But in essence, the unique style originates from that "to paint from nature" definitely faithful to nature as it is. It is reasonable to say we must have heart-felt experience of the local conditions and customs of the mountainous area in Lingnan regions if we intend to understand Lingnan art school. Over one hundred years' artistic accumulations have resulted in the formation of the style of Lingnan landscape paintings. Owing to the fact that we are under the influence of the "authentic" tradition of Zhongyuan and Jiangnan arts for a long time, lack of both an insight knowledge of the tradition of Lingnan's culture and arts, and of a real comprehension of Lingnan's artistic rules and aesthetic paradigms, we are confronted with difficulties in appreciation and interpretation of the Lingnan style paintings.

It is well-known that Ju Chao and Ju Lian, two famous artists who were brothers in the late Qing Dynasty, exerted their influence over the style of Lingnan art school. They lived in Guilin for over a decade when they were young. They "had been to where they could place themselves amid mountains and waters. They toured all the historic sites and scenic spots in Guilin in a leisure way. They made a deep understanding of what came into their sight and conveyed through their paintings what they realized from the natural landscape" (see, *Life Story of Ju Meisheng*: Page2, a supplementary book of *Life Stories of Guangdong Modern Artists*; recited from, Li Jinghai: *Ju Chao: His Temporary Life in Guangxi*, an article carried by *Guangxi Museum Collected Essays*).^② From what mentioned above, we can see that Guilin's landscape produced a strong effect on the two brothers' aesthetic orientation. Based on the inference by Mr. Lin Jinghai, who is a specialist in Guilin literature and history, during their stay in Guilin, the two brothers learned the art of painting from Li Binshou, a very famous artist at that time, who might have exerted some influence on their painting style. Hence, we may arrive at a conclusion that, if we trace Lingnan art school to its source, we will find that its source is Guilin's artists and landscape. Between Lingnan art school and Guilin's artists and landscape as a whole there exists a linkage which has almost gone out of people's mind, for time could erase some memories. To be aware of this, beyond any doubt, is of great importance to Lijiang art school and to the internal connections that we try to find among the three: the Guilin artists in old times, the Lingnan artists in old times and Lijiang art school.

I've made such retrospect with an intention to express that Bai Xiaojun, as an accomplished artist, has not only been nourished by the natural mountains and waters of Guilin but also been rewarded with his accumulation of the traditional techniques of Lingnan art school— all these can be found in his paintings. If we make an analysis of Bai Xiaojun's paintings this way, we will touch where their foundation is. When Bai Xiaojun sketches from nature along the reaches of the Lijiang River, he will do it with his artistic power of knowing the nature and with what he has inherited from the preceding masters who have depicted Guilin's landscape in the past hundreds of years. He has placed himself deep into the natural landscape, using his gifted power

of understanding to comprehend the natural wonders; and meanwhile, he has been deep rooted in tradition, combining his artistic consciousness with the extensive and profound tradition. Bai Xiaojun's artistic works have inevitably shown the signs of absorbing enough artistic nourishments from the paintings of those masters, such as Li Binshou, Ju Chao, Ju Lian, "Three Masters of Lingnan" (i.e. Gao Jianfu, Gao Qifeng and Chen Shuren) and Huang Dufeng. In addition, he has benefited a lot from the instructions and influence of Li Luogong and Tan Zhengrong, directly or indirectly. That's why Bai Xiaojun has attached importance to a solid foundation in drawing and we can see that his paintings have demonstrated the side of his adherence to rules. As an artist who has undergone a certain process of growing into mature under the tutelage of those masters and who knows the power of tradition, profound and unavoidable, he remains modest, cool-minded and steady. I still remember some of my friends in the art circle have said that Bai Xiaojun is a broad-minded person. I think that "broadmindedness" refers not merely to his social status but to his respect for tradition and arts as well. One point should be stressed, that is, by "broadmindedness" more is meant than the phrase is usually understood for Bai Xiaojun has in mind the sufficient respect for tradition. Once Zhang Yimou uttered what from the bottom of his heart in face of the film entitled *Liu San Jie*, "Pay respect for tradition!" Bai Xiaojun takes the same attitude toward tradition as Zhang Yimou. As is mentioned at the start of this article, the appearances of Bai Xiaojun's paintings are fully arranged in terms of designs. This fact has proved that his works are imbued with tradition in his own way. Most of the Chinese people who suffered from "the cultural revolution" would depreciate or distort tradition. No matter in what a different way they depreciate or distort tradition, they will express nothing but their total ignorance of tradition. Therefore, to understand Bai Xiaojun's works requires a deep cognition and personal experience of tradition. It is a matter of course that only to have some respect for tradition is not enough in case of Bai Xiaojun. He is in need of taking in something new and removing the dross from tradition in order to further develop his techniques. And for the sake of this, he is also in need of combining the traditional essence with modernity. In fact, he was aware of this issue as early as it could be. Today, having been tried by life and art for a long time, he will stand high with a distant view into the future of the traditional Chinese painting and make a fresh start to create by far the best artistic works with his personal life experience and power of aesthetic comprehension. He will transcend the restrictions of present times and shake off the yoke of the restrictions in the form of the social diseases of times, such as anxieties, impulses, flippancy and dare-to-do out of ignorance, which many artists have contracted without any consciousness of the urgent need to do away with.

Notes:

① Here in this article, Chinese pinyin is used to denote "岭南"、"中原" and "江南". Lingnan(岭南) refers to the regions south of the Five Ridges in Southern Part of China; Zhongyuan(中原) refers to the regions of Central China and Jiangnan(江南) refers to the regions of the Yangtze River Delta.

② Ju Chao and Ju Meisheng are the full names of the same person. Meisheng is Ju Chao's courtesy name. Ju Chao is the elder brother of Ju Lian.

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**"The Virtuous Find Pleasure in Hills" :
My Impression on Bai Xiaojun**

Su Lü

Some people may disagree with me without hesitation if I define Bai Xiaojun as a man of virtue(仁者). This is not surprising because, in common sense, a man of virtue who enjoys public respect is too high an honorable title that only those who are both biologically aged and prolific authors can deserve. How can Bai Xiaojun, a man who is less than 50 years old, enjoy such a title? The term "the man of virtue"(仁者) originates from **Yong Ye of the Confucian Analects**. Confucius said, "The wise find pleasure in water; the virtuous find pleasure in hills. The wise are active; the virtuous are tranquil. The wise are joyful; the virtuous are long-lived." As it is, the utterance of Confucius is merely a figure of speech: The open-minded and benevolent-hearted are in love with hills while the clever and active are in love with waters. Having checked up the history, I am certain that no one throughout ages has designated how old a man of virtue or a man of wisdom should be. Therefore, I haven't gone too far if I call Bai Xiaojun a man of virtue.

Bai Xiaojun and I were schoolmates and we entered the same academy of arts in the same year. But I was a student of 1977 class and he was a student of 1978 class. Roughly speaking, we graduated from the same institute in the same year. Later on, he continued his education as a graduate student, majoring in the traditional Chinese landscape painting under the guidance of his supervisor Huang Dufeng, a master of Lingnan (岭南: regions south of the Five Ridges) art school. Ever since he completed his school work of the postgraduate program, he has been working with Guangxi Normal University as a teacher of art. Xiaojun has scored remarkable achievements both as a student and as a teacher. Outstanding as he is, he has a preference to keep himself unnoticed. We live and work apart from each other in two cities without the possibility of seeing each other often, but we put our mind to each other's development in every aspect. Many years ago, I fell into a conversation with him—such a chance for us to have a face-to-face talk is rare. The dialogue went like what as follows and it is an expression of our reciprocal concern for each other. "Mr. Su, you've written quite a few wonderful articles recently. It's a great honour for me to read them!" he said. "Mr. Bai, your landscape paintings are distinctive from that of others. Even seals have become the components of your picture. What an unconventional idea you've got!" I said. This dialogue between us is not a common exchange of greetings at all, for, to a certain extent, I know what he has drawn and he keeps an eye on what I have written. In terms of character, Bai Xiaojun can be bracketed with the men of virtue and I, be bracketed with the men of wisdom. To be quiet that he loves and to be active that I prefer are two elements at once destructive and productive to each other in a philosophical sense. We have always kept between us the friendship between gentlemen, which is as pure as water but is quite elegant and in high taste. I have long admired Bai Xiaojun's personality for he is a gentleman of principles. He is the type of person undisturbed either by favor or by disgrace and he is in all sincerity toward his friends, colleagues, familiar and unfamiliar people. His personality and ability have been recognized by the public and society in such a personal history-making way that he has been promoted to Vice-Chairman of Guilin People's Political Consultative Conference and Vice-President of Guangxi Normal University and in addition, he has been elected a deputy to the 10th National People's Congress. Ranking high as he is in his social standing, he keeps his state of mind in that of a virtuous man, remaining modest, avoiding publicity and going on with his painting, daily job and life in a tranquil way. A man of virtue is a man of benevolence. A benevolent-hearted man is content with everything reasonable, benign and tolerant,

uneasy to be impulsive, born with love for tranquility, and well composed like an immovable mountain. Hence, a benevolent-hearted man can be compared to a mountain and Bai Xiaojun fully deserves this analogy in terms of his personality.

In his landscape paintings, Bai Xiaojun has not merely understood the real art of ink and wash embodied in dots, strokes and lines but has shown his originality in the organization of a whole picture as well. As a man of principles, immovable as a mountain facing any impact of the tide of fashion, he will never give up once his goal is set. As the Chinese saying popular in the artistic circle goes: Like the character of painter, like the style of his works. Wen Zhengming, one of the four art masters in the Ming Dynasty left an inscription on his painting, which reads as follows: "If a painter's moral standing is not high, he will make a muddle of the rules of how to use ink with his painting brush." Shen Zongqian, a master of art in the Qing Dynasty, also pointed out, "The quality of strokes depends on the moral standing of the painter." He also said, "What a painting learner should do first is to exert every effort to make himself a man of deep insight while keeping his mind undisturbed, taking no interest in what is overt and following no short-cut. When he has cultivated himself into a painter with consummate techniques, his pictures will for sure be quite different from that of others in the unique style." Bai Xiaojun's works represent what a man he is. He has never followed suit in any temporary and overwhelming fashion and has never changed his track so far ever since he started his artistic career so many years ago. Different from other artists, he has put his heart to self-cultivation, remaining undisturbed before changes. We can see that in his ink and wash, his strokes are elegant and his wielding of brush is not out of the artistic norms. But he has formed a style of his own. Naturally, Bai Xiaojun's attainment can be regarded as a good reward from his personal cultivation saturated within the traditional Chinese culture which has a history of several thousand years.

I have made a careful study and assessment of Bai Xiaojun's landscape paintings and found that there are four special aspects: wildness(野), coldness(寒), tranquility(幽) and deepness (深) that are embodied in his works.

Let's come to the wildness first. Xiaojun jokingly said that his works represent a wild culture in the traditional Chinese paintings. However, what he pursues is the "wild taste" in the landscape painting rather than the cultureless wildness and absurdity that some other painters are quite interested in. In his works, the wildness is closely in relevance to that of mountains, rural scenery and mountain villages. Therefore, his pictures have emitted the appealing breath and taste of Nature by the representation of forests, villages and fields in the mountainous area. Guilin, a world famous city for her beautiful landscape, is Bai Xiaojun's native place. Through ages, there are innumerable artists who have produced Guilin landscape paintings but they were simply enthralled by the beautiful scenery along the banks of the Lijiang River and few of them could depict the essence of the landscape and establish their own style. Bai Xiaojun is deeply aware of the weakness of the predecessors so that he puts wildness into his paintings. He has ridged his pictures of any intention to cater the poor taste of the audience and injected into them vivacity. Starting from the point of showing the signs of wildness, he has drawn hard and forceful lines and dipped his brush in thick ink or color so as to make strong dots or strokes. There are no tender and pompous designs to please the audience with poor taste in his pictures.

Even in case that he makes a sketch of cattle, he will reject the expression of the pastoral tone and instead, he will lay emphasis on how to impart the aesthetic contextual connotation of "the wild and recalcitrant grass braving the strong wind". An observation of Bai Xiaojun's paintings will let you feel that they are imbued with wild atmosphere and vitality. Mr. Li Xiangping, one of Bai Xiaojun's close friends, has made such comments on Bai's landscape paintings as follows: To pursue the extraordinary in commonplace and to search for wildness in elegance; and his opinion is the one unanimously accepted.

Coldness is the literary mood that Bai Xiaojun loves a great deal to translate into his works. There may be two reasons, I think, for his preference. One is that, having lived in the city of Guilin for quite a long time, he loves the riot colors of the landscape in autumn and winter. The other could be that, in any way, Xiaojun is an intellectual and a traditional type at that, no matter what a post he holds in the officialdom, he will remain independent-minded, pure-hearted and keep himself away from the secular taste as a traditional Chinese intellectual will do. "**Frost-Reddened Leaves Sparking in the Mildly Cold Air**" is one of his most favorite subject matters for his creation of painting. The red leaves and the limpid stream in the late autumn have constructed a piece of work with the artistic mood that will not only present a colorful scene to please your eyes but also make you feel as if a breath of refreshing cold air were caressing your face. "**A Cold Moon Silent in the Poetic Sense**", "**Smoke from the Trees on the River Bank in a Cold Morning**", "**The Woods in Heavy Autumn Frost**", "**Autumn at Its Best**", "**The Yao Mountain Tinged with Riot Autumn Colors**" and "**A Mountain Village Enshrouded in Misty Snow**", etc., — All these titles indicate that Bai Xiaojun is fascinated by and deep in love with the artistic mood in tranquility and coldness, a mood like a piece of melodious music produced by heptachord (an ancient instrument), which comes from the remote past and originates from the bottom of the heart of such a traditional Chinese intellectual as Bai Xiaojun who has been deeply steeped in the extensive and profound traditional Chinese culture, and which permeates each of his works in one way or another. To transcend the mundane affairs and taste, to retain the primitive implication of simplicity and to pursue the quality elegant designs without using too many intensive lines and strokes— all these combined into one have marked what are Bai Xiaojun's paintings.

Tranquility and deepness are the aesthetic standards of the traditional Chinese landscape painting. They are also the ultimate realm that the Chinese artists of this area exert themselves to reach. The Chinese set-phrase "Winding path leading to seclusion"(曲径通幽) stands for a state of the traditional Chinese aesthetics. Tranquility means much more than tranquil deepness, coolness and absolute quietness and in addition, it represents an unknown world. So, the road leading to the tranquility(幽) in the above-interpreted sense is as winding and bumpy as it can be. That is why "winding path leading to seclusion" in Chinese is so couched. As for "tranquility" and "deepness", we may paraphrase them from two perspectives: one is the abstract or metaphysical, another is the concrete or practical. In my opinion, Bai Xiaojun has got a deep understanding of their true meaning for his works, whatever they may be, either a sketch of pastoral scenery or a picture of village with a stream in the front and hills behind, will represent the artistic mood of tranquility and deepness. What conceived in an artist's mind will be exhibited at the point of his or her painting brush. Bai Xiaojun's works, such as "**Living a**

Life in Seclusion", *"Remote Mountains Have Their Special Implications"*, *"Boat Moored in Quietness"*, *"White Clouds Cast Shadows over Mountain Gullies"*, *"A Heavy Pall of Mist over the Limpid Lijiang River"*, *"A Village Hidden in Woods beside the Limpid Lijiang River"*, *"The South Ridges in the Height of Spring"*, *"The Valley in Its Desolate, Vast Expanse Gives Birth to the Mood of Tranquility and Deepness"* and *"A Winding Path Leading to Seclusion"*, ect., are all the works that bring you a feeling of no ending on the general appearance of the picture in terms of the field of vision. At the point of Bai Xiaojun's painting brush, mountains and waters, fogs and clouds, trees and grasses, wood houses and villages—all in all are a adroitly unified entity so as to express down to the last detail the character of landscape painting distinctive from that of other painting styles in picture appearance: a place surrounded by mountains upon mountains and girdled by a winding river; or the vast sea of misty clouds; or the mountain gullies imbued with the mood of tranquility and deepness; all are represented by the traditional Chinese ink and wash in its style of using ink and wielding the painting brush.

The virtuous find pleasure in hills and that is what Bai Xiaojun is. He finds pleasure in hills, remaining modestly reticent and unnoticed but his remarkable diligence is rewarded in that, in recent years, he has gained an ever-increasing reputation for his outstanding paintings and the number of people who ask for his works has also been on increase. Besides, many high-graded painting shows, both home and abroad, have sent him invitations to the effect that his works should be displayed on show. In short, all these have demonstrated that his diligence of over one or two decades in his career has been repaid and recognized. However, to my understanding of his personality, Bai Xiaojun will regard all his accomplishment either in gain or in fame as nothing but what detached from his body and soul. Wang Yu, a scholar in the Qing Dynasty, once pointed out, "To learn how to paint can be conducive to self cultivation, to removal of one's worries and anxiety and to ushering in the tranquil state of mind." Bai Xiaojun's own viewpoint is that there is no need to distinguish refinedness from crudeness, highbrows from lowbrows in the art of painting. An artist will feel it to his or her heart's content if he or she can put what on his or her mind into his or her picture and accomplish it in a natural way because as an artist, one is unable to shake off the yoke of rules and draw a picture at one's will in the job of painting. An artistic work is the voice of the artist's mind. What is important is how to cultivate oneself into a person of noble character.

The art of painting is what has been exactly expressed by Bai Xiaojun! I feel it a great honor and pleasure to make true friends with him, a man of virtue!

P.S.: The article has come to a finish in my own Banshan(半山:Mid-Hill) Thatched Cottage, Nanning, in the height of summer, 2007.

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傍水依山(局部)/纸本/2006年

云山无尽/纸本/180cm×98cm/2007
Clouds-Covered Rolling Mountains

