

Being and Time

Andreas Walther's photographic works immediately give one a feeling of 'outer-worldliness', of what may be generally described as an atmosphere of 'stillness [silence]' or 'solitude'. All of his subjects are landscapes: small blossoms that flourish and wither in the shade; a pathless forest with dead leaves; a quiet, long river where time flows as the wind ripples the water; traces of moss and grass that seem to have been there since time immemorial; near-pitch-black nights in which things are only dimly visible in the feeble light.... His works let us experience natural surroundings where traces of 'human beings' and their 'culture' seem to vanish. What is left is pure nature, 'the earth' and its elements; the passage of time is evoked unintentionally in the here and now.

Here the element of 'outer-worldliness' functions primarily to exclude cultural and literary description. What is most intriguing is that this 'outer-worldliness' is expressed through a viewing 'person'. From this we can be certain that the ability of this person to restore consciousness is very far-reaching. It has long been the highest achievement of Eastern art to retrieve the state of non-self and non-knowledge, which is also the subject of numerous aesthetic texts, of Zen meditation, and philosophical treatises.

One of the most concrete examples of restoring consciousness to its natural state, and initiating the exchange and interaction of the human and the natural, is the various discourses and expressions of traditional Chinese literati painting. As the Collection of Lofty Ambitions in Forests and Streams by the Song Dynasty painter Guo Xi explained, the traditional Chinese literati created art with a yearning for lofty and refined seclusion. The idea of refined seclusion is the origin of shanshui (mountain-water) painting. A life in seclusion as a reaction against political reality points to the two main characteristics of Chinese politics and society: 1, The efforts and frustration of the literati who entered the world with moral and political ideals; 2, The high regard the society held for the recluse who lived in seclusion. The literati whose ideals were thwarted by officialdom by demotion or banishment, or who retired early to avoid trouble and protect themselves, sought seclusion in mountains and forests. They turned from mundane concerns to the embrace of nature, until it had changed their lives and reconnected them with reality. Their aesthetic utterances are studded with expressions such as 'natural blandness', 'what appears to be common is the most extraordinary', 'if you want to create blandness, you should derive it from the flowery, as flowers fade, the state of blandness can be created'. The Japanese concept of wabi-sabi, an aesthetic attitude to the dying life, is probably a variation of this concept. The only difference is that wabi-sabi gives more weight to solitude and grief than literati painting.

Walther is a European deeply immersed in Eastern aesthetics. He does not come from a culture of aesthetic seclusion, but his restoring of consciousness to its natural state nearly turns landscapes into pure natural objects. Comparing his works to the literati paintings, one finds that the literati did not paint completely desolate places. Even if you see no one on the mountain you may have the impression of hearing somebody's voice, which suggests the literati's deep concern for the human condition. Ni Zan's paintings always contain a kind of 'Rongxi Studio', and Mi Fu's landscapes of pines and snow always have a grass hut in which people can gather. The relationship between humans and nature is either dialectic, as implied by 'I find the mountain most enchanting, and imagine it smiles at me in the same way,' or paradoxical, as indicated by 'Desolation is the master of form, lonely silence is the master of sound'.

Since this artistic work of restoring comes close to pure things, it enters 'being and time.' The most appealing aspect of Walther's works is his depiction of time. We have no idea when time begins and when time ends. Past, present, and future all appear in the present moment.

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