

The difference between the art of the West and the East is rooted in the philosophy of life, in mental habit and in character. An opposition between man and Nature has been ingrained in Western thought. It is the achievements, the desires, the glory and the suffering of man that have held the central place in Western art. Only very slowly and unwillingly has the man of the West taken trouble to consider the non-human life around him. But in China and Japan, we find no barriers set up between the life of man and the rest of the elements. The continuity of the universe, the perpetual stream of change through its matter, are accepted as things of Nature, felt in the heart and not merely learned as the conclusions of science. These ways of thought are reflected in Eastern Art. Not the glory of the naked human form (to Western art the noblest and most expressive of symbols), not the proud and conscious assertion of human personality, but all thoughts that lead us out from ourselves into the universal life, hints of the infinite, whispers from secret sources--mountains, waters, mists, flowering trees, whatever tells of powers and presence mightier than ourselves--these are the themes dwelt upon, cherished and preferred.

The art of Asia, especially painting, is throughout its main traditions an art of line, with comparatively little emphasis on the use of color. Rhythm holds the paramount place in Oriental art, not the imitation of Nature, or fidelity to Nature, which the general Western races make the root-concern of art. In this theory every work of art is thought of as an incarnation of the genius of rhythm, manifesting the living spirit of things with a clearer beauty and intenser power than the gross impediments of complex matter allow to be transmitted to our senses in the visible world around us. A picture is conceived as a sort of apparition from a more real world of essential life.

Whereas the Western painters emulate the effects of sculpture in order to communicate the emotions which alone can be produced by pictures seen in roundness and relief, and emulate the effects of architecture in order to communicate the emotions that only ordered spaces and perspective can evoke, the Eastern artists limit themselves severely in the use of materials, leaving to sculpture and to architecture the effects proper to those arts, using line and rhythm in producing the illusion of perfect modelling. Whereas the West use perspective and cast shadows in her paintings, the painters of Asia disregard those two factors to a great extent, limiting themselves in the effort to make line intimately expressive of form, and with mere contour they succeed in producing the illusion of perfect modelling.

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The difference between the art of the West and the East is fundamental. In the West the outward semblance is considered the aim with which the artists wrestle, while the painters of the Asian tradition seek the inner and informing spirit as the object of art.