

Her World of Peonies

Cai Zhuomin's work captures the beauty of the peony in various ways, through colors, delicacy, quietude, rhythm, forcefulness, permanence, Daoism and transcendence. Her works are suggestive of life that she expresses in her art. And that suggestiveness allows each of us to enter into her images to bring something out of us that refreshes our own lives. She has painted a delightful arrangement of moods that we can respond to. Her work is the interplay between quietness and passion, which reflects the forcefulness coming from life experiences.

The Peony Symphony is captivating. Cai Zhuomin does on a smaller scale what Cezanne does on a larger scale. In Cezanne's painting, we find a justification for creating still lives with much structure to the landscapes; his apples and the folds of his tablecloth are extended motifs of the landscapes. Likewise, Cai Zhuomin has fused her flowers with mountain features and waterfalls, as, for example, a red peony is integrated with Huangshan in China and a peony bud is infused with Mount St. Helens, in Washington State. Her merging of these two realms run in the same way like Cezanne, with the connections of still life to the concept of nature and landscape. As an overall scheme, the four movements of The Peony Symphony give the emphasis of heaven, earth, I and the Dao that are amazing ways of experiences to divide the flower.

Red Horizon is a period that draws in a remarkable range of personalities. *Dye* gives penetrating but controlled red hue and the compositional emphasis of the in and out and then upward movements. The work is organic and suggestive of all sorts of possible moods. *Inebriated* gives the movement of expressiveness, while *Adorn* gives centrality, and both point to feminine temperaments. Yet *Broadminded* presents a world of difference with its sharp and masculine redness. It shocks but nonetheless imparts a provocative mood. *Soul Mate* has the white that comes in charmingly as cloud formation through the mountain. The purplish dark petals, the richness of the dark, move all the way through the frame, again effective in alluding to the permanent force.

In the period of the Blue Landscape, *Blue Rays* is conceived in an abstract form to unfold a mystical world and yet with life forces that help us awaken to latent life signs around us. *The Way*, again, is abstract, especially in the richness and intensity of colors that she has created to accentuate the depth of human feelings. The period of Blue Variation is different from Red Horizon. There are much more landscapes, aerial landscapes, with the nuance of heightened color tones that uncovers the amazing earth.

Whiteness is a period of rhythm, quietude, but vibrancy. In *Lighthearted*, the tonality of the white and off white is distinctive and the ways the petals wrap around create rhythmic tension and a focal design. In the medal series, the inner stamen does have resemblance with medals. In *Her Highness*, there is unexpected richness, with the interplay between light and shadow, the open and hidden, the gold and bright pistil wrapped in petals infused with Chinese ink. Cai Zhuomin's work is slightly reminiscent of O'Keeffe, sometimes only, and mostly not at all. She has freed herself of O'Keeffe and has created her own ways.

In the last movement, Color of Nothingness is a totally different period that focuses on simplification and some degree of minimalism in her peonies. *Vague* is integrative and offers an organic connection with what envelopes the flower. *Open* is stunningly fresh and free as she knows when to stop. In *Wisdom*, the stamen seems to have a growing quality and yet is nuanced delicately. It is incredible to see the variety of expressions and moods that Cai Zhuomin can evoke in her world of peonies.

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