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Submission date: 23-Nov-2017 11:24AM (UTC-0700)

Submission ID: 884521162

File name: M5 Lastname.docx (19.17K)

Word count: 1031

Character count: 5554

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Art 110

11/23/2017

ASIAN VS. EUROPEAN LANDSCAPES

One Hundred Horses vs. Landscape with Charon Crossing the Styx

One Hundred Horses drawn by Lang Shining is a Chinese landscape artwork of the 16th century that captures 100 horses in various postures. Some horses are kneeling, standing, running, while others are browsing on the grassland. On the other hand, Landscape with Charon Crossing the Styx is a European landscape artwork of the 15th century drawn by Joachim Patinier, a Flemish Northern Renaissance artist. It is a painting of Charon with another human passenger in a boat ² transporting the souls of the dead to the gates of Hades. The analysis of these two artworks reveal clear differences and close similarities between the Asian and the European landscape paintings in terms of both expressionism and aesthetic basis.

To begin with, the Chinese and European landscape paintings differ in terms of their ¹ aesthetic basis. The aesthetic basis of the Chinese landscape art is greatly influenced by the Chinese philosophy of Buddhism, Taoist and Confucian ideas (Shaw, 1988). In Chinese landscape paintings, painters did not only depict the exact appearance and fine details of the object, but also incorporated ¹ their personal feelings and emotions into the image. The result of this is that viewers can observe many ¹ white spaces and broad strokes on Chinese landscape paintings like the “One hundred Horses” and many others. To explain the relevance of the ² white spaces on Chinese

landscape paintings, Da-Wei (1990, p.72) observes that “Areas of the white paper ... are not unfinished, empty, or yet-to-be-filled-up spaces ... they are an integral part of a painting or calligraphy.”

On the contrary, European paintings are greatly influenced by the Christian faith where God is considered as the creator of the world and its beautiful nature. For this reason, the European painters always seek the trace of God’s presence in painting the details of the natural environment (MacGregor, 2000). It is by this Christian faith that the European painters are always out to bring out the real realistic natural scene in their landscape paintings. This is evident in the Landscape with Charon Crossing the Styx where the distance between viewers and painting is greatly shortened by the clarity of the objects represented in the painting.

The technique of expression is another aspect of painting that expresses the difference between the Asian and European landscape paintings. Looking at the composition, the Chinese landscape painters greatly rely on the use of stroke and line as the main expression methods to compose the general structure of an object (Cameron, 2012). Lines and strokes are vigorous and have a strong expressive force in Chinese paintings so that many Chinese artists use them to depict the particular scenes in their minds. This feature is widely evident in the “One hundred Horses” painting in which nearly every object is brought out by the use of stroke and line.

On the other hand, the European style of landscape painting has the principle of expression which aims at bringing out the realistic scene of the object being depicted in the paintings. Consequently, the European painters employ the objective use of color, appearance and the relationship between the light and the shadow so as to give viewers a realist feeling of actual atmosphere and environment surrounding them. In their book entitled, Practical Guide to Drawing, Ballestar and Vigue (2002, p.233) explain that western paintings emphasize details of the nature.

They consequently introduced the techniques of landscape paintings that are widely used by the European artists.

The use of color is another aspect of painting that brings out one of the biggest differences between the Asian and the European landscape paintings. Looking at majority of Chinese paintings, and as can be seen in the “One hundred Horses” painting, black and white are the main kinds of color that are used. The Chinese painters, instead of using different sorts of color to paint details, they ¹ always simplify the complex landscape nature and only show a general overview of landscape to viewers through the use of ink and brush. For this reason, most of the Chinese landscape paintings appear unclear and confusing especially to first-time observers.

Unlike the Chinese paintings, the Western landscape painters employ the use of a wide range of colors to help bring out the natural clarity of the beauty of nature depicted in their landscape paintings. This is why when you look at a European landscape painting like the “Landscape with Charon Crossing the Styx,” you get the feeling of a real-life experience seeing a natural person in a boat sailing in water. The use of different colors in the European landscape paintings helps the European painters to bring out the natural scenery of actual life in their paintings. Consequently, the ⁶ western landscape paintings have a stronger visual impact as compared to the Chinese landscape paintings.

However, though the Asian and the European landscape paintings have significant differences, they share common features that make them similar. For instance, both the “One hundred Horses” and the “Landscape with Charon Crossing the Styx” reflect ² a variety of life through the plane drawings and the use of lines, strokes and colors. In addition, both of them are visual art form that can depict the instantaneous moment of life. The two landscape paintings are

as well similar in the sense that ² they all focus on natural scenes such as mountains, lakes, clouds, grasslands and forests.

In conclusion, and as it can be seen from the above discussion, it is clear that the Asian and the European landscape paintings have as much significant differences as similarities between them. While the main differences between them oscillate around the aspects of expressionism and aesthetic basis, their similarities are tied to their form, purpose and physical representations.

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