

BRUSH AND HAND

By ELEANOR CONSTEN

With photographs by HEDDA HAMMER

This illustrated article has nothing to do with politics or any other vital problem of today. It deals with ageless China. Our readers have already had occasion to enjoy the splendid collaboration of Mrs. Consten with Miss Hammer in the article "Landscape Painting—East and West" in the February 1942 issue of our magazine. Both live in Peking in the midst of China's great traditions, and both have penetrated deeply into the soul of China. In an original manner, Mrs. Consten uses, not her own words, but quotations from great Chinese painters of the past and present to explain the Chinese artist's ideas and technique. The article is like a round-table-talk to which Chinese artists of the last 1,500 years have contributed their wisdom.

Both Miss Hammer and the Editor wish to thank those Peking artists who kindly consented to pose for the photographs.—K.M.

"**C**ONSERVATIVE China" is one of the favorite expressions of Western writers, an expression which it is just as easy to prove as to disprove. These photographs and quotations may serve to supply another proof; for the Chinese technique of painting follows age-old rules. The style of painting has changed with the taste of the generations, but the underlying ideas and ideals have remained the same, as have the principles of technique. The power of the brush and the suggestive qualities of different shades of ink are the artist's cardinal means of expression, the subject of untiring efforts, practice, and study. The teacher shows his pupil, not what line to trace, but how to hold hand and brush correctly in order that the line may have life (Fig. 6). Color is of secondary importance, and so is the choice of silk or paper, according to the artist's individual preference. Brush and ink are the means by which the artist's hand conveys his inner vision, and to render them as versatile and expressive as possible is the artist's chief aim. This is the technique they have practiced and perfected ever since the fourth century. Advice given 1,500 years ago is still heeded today.

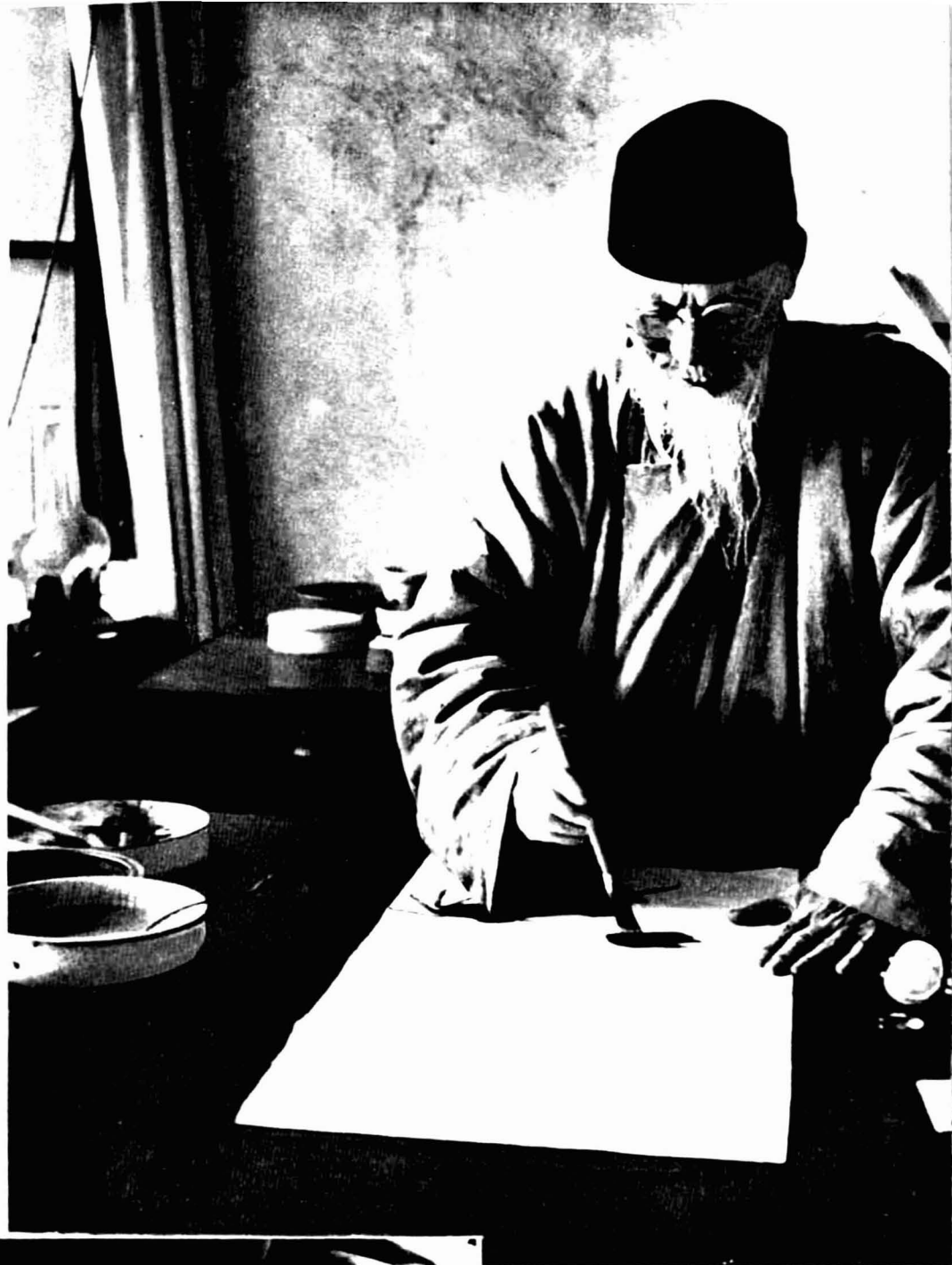
SPIRITUAL PREPARATION

"When an artist prepares the ink and dips his brush into it, his mind contains nothing but thoughts of diligence and reverence . . . He kindles the spark and goes over and over with his ink, continuing his work without rest." (Yao Tsui, 6th cent. A.D.—Fig. 1.)

"Let ideas precede strokes; the mental picture must first be formed before the strokes are put on the paper. Let the strokes be made with speed, and then each stroke will be full of force and harmony. They must by no means be retouched, careless, or defective, but natural and spontaneous . . . Good composition means abundance without superfluity, and restriction without sparseness." (Chou I-kuei, 18th cent.)

"Of all kinds of painting, figure painting is the most difficult; then comes landscape painting, and next dogs and horses. High towers and pavilions are definite things; they are difficult to execute but easy to handle, since they do not demand insight." (Ku K'ai-chih, 4th cent. A.D.—Fig. 4.)

"The representation of an object demands that its form be likened to the



1. Chi Huang, known to every collector of modern Chinese painting as Chi Pai Shi. He is famous for his crabs, chickens, and lotus, which he paints with a large brush heavily laden with ink. In the photograph on the left he is carefully placing his seal under his calligraphy on the finished painting. On ink-pictures, the red seal provides the only spot of color, and its position must therefore be chosen so as not to unbalance the composition.

BRUSH AND HAND



2. Painting a peacock on rocks. A second brush is kept in readiness for coarser strokes

PAINTING NATURE



3. Painting the bamboo, considered one of the most difficult subjects of painting



4. Miss Tso Ming-ch'e against one of her landscapes. Note the brush-washer and brushes of different sizes



5. Painting distant foliage with light and heavy dots

original. The form demands that its spirit be realized to the fullest extent. Both spirit and formal likeness originate in the directing idea and are given expression by means of the brushwork. Therefore, those who are skilled in painting are also masters in calligraphy." (Chang Yen-yüan, 9th cent.—Fig. 1.)

MATERIALS

"The paper is coarse in weave and porous." (Chiang Yee, contemporary.)

"The paper is raw, that is, not immersed in alum, and the water or ink spreads out when applied on it; and so all strokes must be made with rapidity, without hesitation or stops in midway." (Wang Fang-chuen, contemporary.—Figs. 5 and 8.)

"We always put a second sheet of paper beneath the one on which we are going to write (or paint), in order to prevent the ink from running through onto the table." (Chiang Yee.—Fig. 6.)

"Required: a good-sized ink-stone . . . bowl for washing the brush, flat porcelain dish for testing the shading of ink, and several dishes for preparing colors." (Wang Fang-chuen.—Fig. 3.)

"The Chinese ink-stone is a flat stone with a hollow scooped out in the middle, in which the ink is ground and mixed. One end is rather more deeply gouged than the other to enable the water to flow into it." (Chiang Yee.) "The best is to get an ink-stone with a lid which can prevent dust from getting in when the ink-stone is not in use." (Wang Fang-chuen.—Fig. 7.)

"The soot of burnt pinewood or of oil-smoke is collected and mixed with a kind of gum, warmed and left to solidify. It is then moulded into small flat or round sticks. [The stick] is ground upon the ink-stone with a little water When grinding . . . we hold the stick perpendicular to the surface of the stone and work it slowly but firmly, using the left hand, so that the right hand is free for writing (or painting). As we grind we meditate, making our mind as calm as possible." (Chiang Yee.—Fig. 7.)

"In painting there are three kinds of brushes—goat hair, wolf hair, and chicken hair [feathers]. Wolf hair and chicken hair are used in detailed paintings, but in freehand paintings only the goat-hair brushes of various [five] sizes serve the purpose excellently." (Wang Fang-chuen.—Fig. 4.) "The tips of the hairs form a very fine point, which is extremely sensitive and pliable in use." (Chiang Yee.—Fig. 3.)

HOW TO HOLD THE BRUSH

"The brush is held vertically between the thumb, the third and little fingers on one side, and the index and middle fingers on the other. Only thus can it be firmly held." (Wang Fang-chuen.—Fig. 10.) "The work is distributed, the fingers never tire." (Chiang Yee.—Fig. 4.)

"The painter can make free movements by the co-ordination of the fingers, the hand remaining stationary, while the brush can be made to travel in any direction." (Wang Fang-chuen.—Fig. 10.) "The normal position, called level wrist." (Chiang Yee.—Fig. 9.)

"In painting large pictures the hand and the whole arm have to act, hand and arm must not rest upon the desk, which checks free movement. The artist must do the work while standing, so as to get the free movement of the hand, the arm, and the whole body in co-ordination." (Wang Fang-chuen.—Fig. 1.)

STROKES OF THE BRUSH

"Strokes of the brush must be firm The brush should be handled with ease." (From Liu Tao-chun's *Six Necessities of Painting*, Sung dynasty.)

"A weak wrist results in a stupid brush." (From Kuo Jo-hsu's *Three Faults in Painting*, Sung dynasty.)

"Breadth or slenderness of stroke depend upon the pressure of the hair of the brush upon the paper. Too great pressure not only renders impossible the execution of the intended stroke, but damages the delicate Chinese paper." (Chiang Yee.)

"In putting down the brush do not make the strokes too heavy; then the painting looks muddled and not clear. Nor make them too light; if they are too light, then the painting looks arid and not rich." (Li Ch'eng, 10th cent.—Fig. 10.)

"Use the brush to lay down the bones [structural basis]." (The second of Hsieh Ho's famous *Six Principles of Painting*, about 500 A.D.—Fig. 8.)

"Make dots for the leaves and vary their shapes according to the species of the plant (Fig. 5). In painting a bird or fowl a certain order must be followed: beak, eye, head, back and wings, breast, stomach, tail, legs, and claws (Fig. 2). To paint the bamboo the four types of calligraphy are applied The stems are first, written from top to bottom, the joints are written next from left to right, the twigs are the third to be written, and last of all the leaves are written." (Wang Fang-chuen.—Fig. 3.)

SHADES OF INK

"Though the brush follows the rules and regulations of painting, its movements are unimpeded . . . it is as if in flight The ink can heighten or lower the tone according to one's wish. It is now thick and now thin. It shows the depth or shallowness of an object." (Ching Hao, 10th cent.—Fig. 12.)

"Rough outlines are drawn in light ink . . . darker shades are added step by step, until they produce a tone glistening and lustrous (Fig. 2). The connecting parts of objects and other essential portions are rendered in light shades; over it details are added in a dash of

darker shade (Fig. 10). Ink applied meaninglessly to silk in a monotonous manner is called dead ink; that appearing distinctly in proper shading is called living ink. The natural aspect of an object can be beautifully conveyed by ink-color only, if one knows how to produce the required shades. Ink should be regarded as a true color in painting. Ink complements, color only supplements the work of the brush." (Ch'en Chieh-chou, Ch'ing dynasty.—Fig. 5.)

COLORS

"On the upper part of the picture ink should be blue-black, while on the lower part it should be reddish-brown For burning heat use scarlet, for cold emerald green. For warmth paint the sun, but for coolness paint the stars." (Hsiao I, 6th cent. A.D.—Fig. 11.)

"Colors should be applied according to the varied forms." (The fourth of Hsieh Ho's famous *Six Principles of Painting*, about 500 A.D.)

"Colors should be harmonious." (From Liu Tao-chun's *Six Necessities of Painting*, Sung Dynasty.)

"The colors . . . sold in little cakes packed in boxes . . . are prepared by dissolving in water." (Wang Fang-chuen.—Fig. 11.)

"The mountain has many faces and its back many shadows (Fig. 12) I would use deep blue for the color of heaven and water, thus making the top of the picture reflect the bottom On the remaining parts of the picture I would slacken my brush and quietly bring my composition to its close." (Ku K'ai-chi, 4th cent. A.D.—Fig. 4.)



I write in order to express my heart,
I paint in order to satisfy my mind.

Chu Hsiang-hsien



6. Mrs. Wang Hsien, who teaches painting in Peking, and her daughter

BRUSH AND INK

7. Grinding ink. This ink-stone dates from the K'ang-hsi period (about 1700) and has a lacquer cover with a poetic inscription. (Ink-stone by courtesy of Mr. P. C. Huang)



8. Painting a gnarled tree with alternating swift and halting strokes



9. Lucas Chen, a Peking painter who is famous for his Christian art in Chinese style



10. Light and dark ink give shape to a tree trunk



11. Grinding colors on a separate stone and mixing them in porcelain dishes



12. Mrs. Lo Chang, who comes of a family of scholars and artists and is considered one of Peking's finest contemporary painters