

Title:

Chinese New Year Show Opens Window on Asian Subtlety

Word Count:

549

Summary:

The appreciation for what is implied rather than what is in plain sight sets Asian art apart from Western art. Traditional Chinese dance, for example, is less precise and strict in form than its Western counterpart, ballet. It is because it attempts to evoke a different sort of feeling.

Keywords:

Chinese new year, Chinese culture, ntdtv, dance, Asian, art, painting, spectacular

Article Body:

Asian-themed performances like NTDTV's Chinese New Year Spectacular offer an entirely new experience for many Westerners, partly because they are so different from the more typical, narrative-driven, performing art forms. They ask something different from the audience - a slight shift in expectations, a shift in sensibility.

The appreciation for what is implied rather than what is in plain sight sets Asian art apart from Western art. Traditional Chinese dance, for example, is less precise and strict in form than its Western counterpart, ballet. It is because it attempts to evoke a different sort of feeling. Like a glass of claret with its subtle undertones, this kind of dance leaves room for the imagination while leaving a lasting impression.

The following story may help shed some light on the mystery:

Once there was an art dealer who had a painting that depicted a young farm boy leading a horse across a bridge. The boy was facing the horse, his body leaning back, and he looked like he was exerting great effort. One day a buyer came in and had to have this painting. However, he didn't have enough money on him to buy this rather expensive artwork right away. So he asked the dealer to hold the painting for him while he went home to get the funds. As the seller took the painting down, he noticed it was missing the rope the boy should have been using to lead the horse. Without much thought, he picked up an ink brush and added a rope to fix this apparent flaw in the painting. When the buyer came back and saw the new rope, he was terribly upset. He told the dealer: "I was only willing to

spend so much on this painting because of the rope that wasn't seen but could still be felt!"

The more something is described in a concrete way, the smaller the range it covers. For example, the phrase "hot water" describes not only water but its temperature, so although "hot water" is more specific than "water," it precludes "warm water," "cold water," and other kinds of water and is therefore more limited. Perhaps this is why so much of Chinese art seems to speak in generalities. Ink landscape paintings with their broad brush strokes and wide swaths intentionally left blank are particularly hard for the Western eye to grasp. These paintings can often seem vague and unclear, but to the discerning viewer, each brush stroke speaks volumes.

The same holds for the Chinese language -- known for being extraordinarily concise and yet also rich and descriptive precisely because it is so succinct. Indeed, many Chinese words and proverbs contain concepts that could take paragraphs to explain in another language.

The NTDTV holiday shows seem to have struck a balance between the more refined traditional dance forms and the simple pleasures of rousing music, impressive large scale dances with dozens of dancers moving in synch, and, of course, gorgeous costumes and backdrops. The shows offer enough new flavors to be intriguing without being overly foreign. The more subtle elements may be lost on many in the audience, but their presence nonetheless enriches the entire performance for everyone. Ultimately, stories of grace and virtue told through song and dance will speak to us all forever.