Eastern spirit in western form

Ming-Ru Tsai

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Eastern Spirit In Western Form

MFA, Graduate Thesis
School of Photographic Arts and Sciences
Rochester Institute of Technology

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Eastern Spirit in Western Form

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CONTENTS. ......................................................... 1

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS. ................................. 2

CHAPTER

1. INTRODUCTION.................................................. 3

2. THE AESTHETICS OF CHINESE LANDSCAPE PAINTING........ 5
   Form and Spirit................................................. 5
   An Artist of Influence - Kuo Hsi & his art.......................... 7
   Tao, Yin and Yang............................................... 9

3. SURREALISM................................................... 12
   Dreams and Automatism........................................... 13
   An Artist of Influence - Max Ernst & his art..................... 16
   Sexual Symbolism of Surrealism.................................. 18

4. CREATING PROCESS OF MY ART AND IDEAS.............. 21

NOTES............................................................... 35

BIBLIOGRAPHY................................................... 39
# Illustrations (* mark as chart)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Kuo Hsi, partial image from Early Spring, 1072.</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. 太極圖 T’ai-Chi Figure</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. André Breton</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sigmund Freud</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* (Chart 2) Surrealism and Chinese landscape comparison chart</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Frida Kahlo</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Max Ernst, The Horde, 1927</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Max Ernst.</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Behemoth</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Pan.</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Nu Kua.</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Francis Bacon.</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Ming-Ru Tsai, Fish Land, 1998.</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Ming-Ru Tsai, Bird Land, 1998.</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Ming-Ru Tsai, Creating Order of Fish Land, 2003.</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Ming-Ru Tsai, Creating Order of Bird Land, 2003.</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Ming-Ru Tsai, Meteora Scene One, 1998.</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Ming-Ru Tsai, Meteora Scene Two, 1998.</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Ming-Ru Tsai, New Land, 1999.</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Ming-Ru Tsai, Mountain Land, 1999</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Ming-Ru Tsai, Sea Land, 1999</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Ming-Ru Tsai, Long Land, 2000.</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* (Chart 1) East and West Time Line.</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Kuo Hsi, Early Spring, 1072.</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Max Ernst, Child Horse, Flower, and Snake, 1927.</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Max Ernst, One Big Family, 1927.</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Max Ernst, Forest and Sun, 1927.</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Max Ernst, Monument to the Birds, 1927.</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

Can the idea of Chinese landscape painting coexist with Surrealism? Both Chinese landscape painting and Surrealism have different philosophical, aesthetic, and historical aspects.

The Chinese have for centuries valued painting as a unique and the highest form of art in civilization. The genre of Chinese painting that I wish to explore is Chinese landscape painting, which began fifteen hundred years ago. Chinese landscape painting is not about nature itself, but the pondering of nature by the philosophically minded spirit of the painter. Chinese landscape painters strive to master the qualities of simplicity, spontaneity, and asymmetry. The goal is to paint not what the eye sees but what the "heart-minded" knows. They are not interested in a static balance, but seek to create a dynamic equilibrium. Attention is paid even to the empty spaces, which are integral parts of the whole.

In contrast, Surrealism is a form in which imaginative imagery from the subconscious mind. Its form of expression is used with no intention of making the artwork rationally understandable. It does not attempt to represent the world around us but represent the clearly defined objects that beyond reality. Surrealism originally came from the ungoverned ideas of the Dadaist and French literary figures at the end of the First World War. The images found in surrealist works are as mysterious and startling as those of dreams. Surrealist works can have a realistic, though irrational style, precisely describing dreamlike fantasies.

The movement represented a reaction against what its members saw as the destruction wrought by the 'rationalism' that had guided European culture and politics in the past and had culminated in the horrors of World War I. Surrealism was a means of reuniting conscious and unconscious realms of
experience so completely that the world of dream and fantasy would be joined by the everyday rational world in an absolute reality, a surreality (Pioch)\(^1\)

Through using the elements to a maximal advantage, the Surrealists harnessed yet another element, that of the reunited conscious and unconscious into one blinding vision of pure emotion.

Throughout modern history, more Chinese artists have adopted a Western approach to art. As a native of Asia, I have also been influenced by Eastern and Western art. Although Chinese landscape painting and Surrealism are different in their expressive forms, I have attempted to combine Eastern and Western aspects of both art forms. While applying the principles of Chinese landscape painting, I have strived to create surrealistic landscapes. The idea of whether Chinese landscape painting can coincide with Surrealism has piqued my curiosity for a long time. In my thesis I wish to explore the following questions: First, how is the value of Chinese aesthetics in landscape painting determined? Moreover how are the set of aesthetic principles used to view Chinese landscape painting different from the concept of Surrealism? Finally, how has Surrealism influenced my work as an Asian artist?
Aesthetics of Chinese Landscape Painting

What are the aesthetics of Chinese painting? Two concepts related to aesthetics in Chinese painting include form and spirits, and yin and yang. In the final chapter of this paper, I will talk about my creating process of art related to these Chinese aesthetics. Of course there are some other essential Chinese aesthetics. However, I think these two notions are most directly related to my artwork.

Form and Spirit

According to Ku K’ai-chih (344-406 A.D.), one of the earliest painters and founding fathers of art theory in ancient China, “painting is an expression of spirit through form”. Moreover, “Painting is not the mere representation of external shape and forms, but rather the revelation of an inner character of the soul of an object” (Sakamishi, 1939, p.24). Chinese landscape painting, as one of earliest Chinese art forms, was influenced by this thought and had already established its own unique expressive art form by the 4th century in China. Chinese landscape painting further developed in the Song Dynasty (960-1279 A.D.) Chart 1. This era became the greatest period for Chinese landscape painting.

Form (形 = hsing) and spirit (神 = shen) are important to the aesthetics of a Chinese landscape painting. They are the fundamental concepts to depict not only the likeness but also the inner essence of the object. The Chinese character for form means outer appearance or shape. It represents the outer structure and characteristic of the object. In Hsieh Ho’s (5th century) six principles on Chinese painting, the third principle ‘應 物 象 形’ is close to the meaning of form. It means “conforming to the
objects in order to give them likeness” (Sakanishi, 1939). The Chinese character for spirit means inner soul or divinity. It symbolizes the synthesis of the artist’s inner thoughts toward his subject matter. This concept applies in Hsieh’s first principle ‘氣韻 生 動’, which means, “vitalizing spirit and life movement” (Sakanishi, 1939).

How is form associated with spirit? “When the eyes respond and the mind agrees with the objects, the divine spirit may be felt and truth may be attained in the painting” (Sakanishi, 1939). This idea of truth is not the same as realism in the Western art. This truth is what Wong described as “permanent validity, not what is fragmentarily and momentarily experienced with the eye” (Wong, 1991). Permanent validity is a painter’s integral thoughts from the objects of nature that he paints. It is from both inside the artist’s mind and heart and relates to the outside – the physical world outside the body. As the artist creates his work, he should be aware of both form and spirit. In the art creating process, it is fundamental for the landscape painter to focus on his environment, his existence, sensations, and thoughts.

According to Wong, “Outer appearance consists of everything seen directly by the human eye. Through this particular sense organ, we discover the natural environment, which is one component of objective reality” (Wong, 1991). In history, painters have attempted their best to depict nature. Yet, ancient Chinese painters had different attitudes towards depicting objects that have the appearance of being true or real. For example in his ancient philosophy book written in 246 B.C. Han Fei-Tzu (韓 非 子)⁴, describes an interesting dialogue between King Tsi and an artist. In response to the King’s question, “What is the most difficult subject to paint?” the artist replied, “Dogs and horses.” Then the King asked, “What is the easiest subject to
paint?“Demons and spiritual beings,” the artist replied (Sakanishi, 1939). To draw something invisible is easier than something visible. This concept is not merely a task of determining whether something is visible or invisible, easy or difficult. It explains how ancient Chinese painters emphasize combining imagination and artistic expression. Furthermore, Fan Kuan (990-1030 A.D.), one of the greatest landscape painters in the Song Dynasty said, “Learning from others is not as good as learning from Nature, and that learning from nature is not as good as learning from the heart” (Wong, 1991). In this statement, heart as in the Chinese character - 心 (hsin), refers to the center of the inner soul. In addition, Fan Kuan’s statement demonstrates how ancient Chinese painters thought that the inner soul, which related the true essence of the artist, was of greater importance than the outer appearance of a good painting. In other words, spirit was more important than form. Faithful attachment to the outer semblance develops closeness to realism, yet this may often forfeit a self-consciousness and connection with the inner soul.

Kuo Hsi and His Art

How is ‘form’ and ‘spirit’ represented in a Chinese landscape painting? One Chinese painting which reveals both form and spirit is entitled, ‘Early Spring.’ This painting was done by the famous painter Kuo Hsi (A.D. 1020-1090) in the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127 A.D.). His landscape painting is elaborate and heroic. How does Kuo amalgamate the idea of form and spirit? Kuo demands, “his
landscape painting shall supply the beholder with an imagined scene to take the place of a desired objective reality” (Sakamishi, 1935).

In the painting ‘Early Spring’, Kuo manages the mountains with the vertical high from bottom to top in the central axis, which suggests dominance and majesty. This extraordinary look enhances the viewer’s admiration and inner harmony toward nature. Kuo said in his criticism entitled Comments on Landscapes.

The mountains of spring are tranquil and captivating as if they smiled; the mountains of summer are fresh and green as if they dripped with dew; the mountains of autumn are clean and neat as if beautifully ornamented and arrayed; the mountains of winter are melancholy and subdued as if a sleep (Sakanishi, 1935).

“Early Spring” illustrates a scene in the transitional time between winter and spring, so the artist ‘portrays’ the mountains in “Early Spring” as they are awakening from sleep and starting to smile. The painter uses his eye to digest and transform what he sees in nature, and then he creates his painting as the nature he sees is filtered through his mind and heart.

He paints the scene with cloud-like rocks along sinuous terrain. The barren trees have started to grow new sprouts; snow has started to melt and flow into the stream. The mist and haze are hanging all over the mountain valley and the far mountains from behind seem to be floating. All these lively forms are revealed after the long, dark, gloomy winter. The earth has started the joy of new life. Through these lively forms, the viewers appreciate nature from the painter’s view. Viewers might raise the question, ‘Where is the place that inspired the painter?’ The answer to this question could be somewhere or nowhere. The painter may have visited the place, but the physical appearance may have changed base on the artists’ creative
interpretation. This interpretation thought is influenced by the artist’s travel experience and memories. Through the artist’s integrations of different landscapes, the reality of nature becomes multidimensional. Kuo believed that “an artist should concentrate his spirit upon the essential nature of his work” (Sakanishi, 1935). Consequently, the landscapes he created were enhanced by his imagination and spirit. He combined the essence of many landscapes to establish verisimilitude landscape. Kuo believed that a painting should be of the mind in order to be truly great.

**Tao, Yin and Yang**

Historically, the development of Chinese painting has long been influenced by Taoist philosophy. Chinese landscape painting has been especially affected by Taoist mindsets and thoughts. Moreover, “Yin and Yang” is part of the essence in Taoist thought. Therefore, I think it is important to talk about Taoism and the concept of Yin and Yang.

Tao philosophy is an ancient Chinese metaphysical thought, which developed around 600 B.C. Tao cannot be realized and mysterious. It is beyond all concepts, understanding and analysis. Then, what is the Taoist idea toward nature landscape? According to Eichman,

The Taoist concept of the natural landscape is sacred and reflects the inherently divine structure of both the cosmos and the inner human body (i.e., macrocosm and microcosm). The divine correspondence between the outer terrestrial and inner landscape of the human body is a fundamental aspect of Taoist techniques of visualization and inner Alchemy (Eichman, 2000).

Furthermore, he says, “the concept of the earth as a sacred body is often given visual expression in Chinese landscape paintings” (Eichman, 2000). In other words, Chinese
landscape painters not only conceived the natural landscape as a symbol of the cosmic process, but also as a symbol of the inner spirit. This inner spirit is what the Chinese art critic, Little, describes as “landscape of the human body” (Little, 2000). Using landscape as an implication for a physical being sounds surreal. This reminds me of an ancient Chinese myth entitled, 盘古开天闢地 (Pan Gu Makes the World) 11.

This story is about the birth of the world.

At the beginning, the sky and the earth were a blurred entity, like an egg. Pan Gu was born into it. He breaks the egg and separates the sky from earth...the Yang, which was light and pure, rose to become the sky, and the Yin, which was heavy and murky, sank to form the earth. Between them was Pan Gu... After Pan Gu dies, his breath became the wind and clouds, his voice became thunder, his left eye - the moon, his arms and legs - the four poles of the earth, and the five parts of his body became the five mountains. His blood formed the rivers.

From this myth, Pan Gu became recognized as the deity that created the world. In this world, earth is symbolized by yin (陰) and the sky is symbolized by yang (陽).

The Taoists adopted the yin and yang philosophy 12 which yin/yang symbol as an integral aspect of the physical world. They think yin and yang not only represent earth and sky, but also act as complementary forces of everything in nature. For example, yin and yang represent visible entities like shadow and light, moon and sun, female and male; moreover, yin and yang also represent invisible concepts like wet and dry, cold and hot, passiveness and activeness, and femininity and masculinity. These complementary forces are also known as ‘complementary opposites” (Kirkland). One force can be defined only by the other opposite force’s existence; they not only repel each other but also mutually balance together. Yin and
yang can be graphically represented together as -- 太極 (T’ai-chi) see figure on p. 10. In T’ai-chi there are two integrated parts, but the parts are identical and symmetrical. The black shape represents yin, while the white shape represents yang. The center of each shape also contains a small, opposed dot of the other.

In Chinese landscape painting, the term for landscape, as in the Chinese characters 山 水 (shan shui) literally means “mountain-water”. According to Taoist thought, the term for landscape, shan shui, or mountain-water, is in itself a metaphor for yin-yang. Mountains are believed to be associated with yang (male energy) while water is associated with yin (female energy). We can see these influences of the yin yang concept in Chinese landscape paintings. For instance, the dark side of a valley could represent yin, while the light side of a valley represents yang. Water is considered to be feminine, whereas rocks and mountains are considered more masculine. Trees are male, while the earth is female. Even though the characteristics of yin and yang are often recognizable, these concepts are sometimes inter-exchangeable. For instance, in Kuo Hsi ‘s painting, Early Spring, the dynamism of the trees appear to be dry and hard which suggest yang, compared to the dynamism of the cloud-like rocks and organic shape of the mountains, which appear to be misty and soft, which suggest yin. Moreover, Kuo depicts the activeness of spring water as yang, in contrast to the passiveness of the river valley as yin.
Surrealism

In contrast to Chinese landscape painters, who depict nature through their inner spirit, “Surrealist painters depict their inner subconscious world” (Basquin, 1992). What is Surrealism? According to André Breton’s (A.D. 1896-1966) Avant-Garde manifesto (A.D. 1924)⁴, “Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of association that have been overlooked, in the supreme power of the dream, and in the detached game played by thought” (Ford, 1995). Unlike the Chinese landscape painter who wanted to reflect internal harmony found in nature, Surrealist painters sought disruption consummated by the “rationalism” that had dominated European culture and politics. Surrealism was part of the earlier Dada movement and later on it develops its own different principles. Surrealism became an art form that achieved its peak in the Western world between World War I and World War II (A.D.1920s-1930s).

What are the principles and ideas of Surrealism? According to Breton, “Surrealism is outside of all aesthetic or moral preoccupations” (Danto, 2002). Due to the impact of the war, Dadaists⁵ upheld a skeptical attitude toward rationalism and the social political structure of bourgeois society. Surrealism shared some of the irrational qualities of the Dada movement. The use of dreams and automatism are two primary concepts of the surrealist movement.
Dreams and automatism

Influenced by the theory found in The Interpretation of Dreams written by the Austrian psychoanalyst, Sigmund Freud (A.D. 1856-1939), surrealist art is usually associated with the synthesis of dreams. It can be illogical, preposterous, and dysfunctional. Freud believed that the unconscious or subconscious had a powerful control on our daily behavior. Unconscious or subconscious is a part of the mind that collects repressed memories. These repressed memories can both externalize themselves in behavior and internalize themselves in dreams. As Freud said, “A dream that is not interpreted is like a letter that is not opened.” Surrealists used subconscious thoughts as their inspiration to create ideas. Without reasoning or interpretation, they allowed the flow of mental pictures to come into the realm of painting. They focused on conceptualizing the meaning of their art through feelings more than intellect.

The other notion that had influence on Surrealists is automatism. Breton defined Surrealism as “pure psychic automatism” (Breton, 1969). Automatism occurs when “the body is a machine whose functions are accompanied but not controlled by consciousness” (The American Heritage). This unconsciousness, as a means of expression, liberates artists from taboos into an unknown, imaginary space. According to the editor, Jose Pierre, automatism can be divided into three methodologies. These methodologies include mechanical automatism, rhythmic automatism, and visionary automatism. Visionary automatism is most closely related to my art. Pierre described visionary automatism as follows.
Visionary automatism, as its name suggests, only transpires as a second phase, the hand of the artist faithfully transcribing images onto the canvas that, during the first phase, had formed in the mind. For artists working in this mode, it is not, as has too often been said, simply a matter of painting dreams. Rather, it is a matter of gradually transcribing a kind of hallucination that is sufficiently present and compelling to permit transcription (Weisberger, 1999).

The “hallucination” or mental image must be predetermined in the artist’s subconscious mind before it can be constructed onto the canvas. The process sounds pretty marvelous and fantastic. Surrealists are allowed to freely explore their minds, yet the focus of their art is based on the formation of an overpowering, almost haunting, image in their mind.

By amalgamating subconscious dreams and applying automatism, Surrealists reveal a new and higher reality than that of daily life. In the Surrealists’ psychological mind, the idea of landscape and nature are not the major theme. They focus on subconsciousness and the unknowing internal world of the mind. In this internal world, surrealist ideas often deviate from the order of nature. For example, these landscapes may contain irreverent floating and reversed objects. The content of surrealist art may include trees floating in the sky, eye-like leaves growing from a tree or even a mountain-sized apple with an ant-sized elephant. Unlike Chinese landscape painters who conceived landscape or nature itself as a major expressive form, Surrealists use landscape as a symbolic platform or a backdrop to enhance their work.

The chart below on the next page highlights the major differences and similarities between surrealist painting and Chinese landscape painting. It compares and contrasts some of the characteristics of these two art forms that have been discussed so far.
Surrealism and Chinese landscape comparison chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Surrealism</th>
<th>Chinese landscape painting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nature/Landscape</td>
<td>plays a symbolic role</td>
<td>plays the primary role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance</td>
<td>promotes imbalance and subversion</td>
<td>promotes harmony and order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>can be both spiritual and non-spiritual</td>
<td>is always spiritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political intentions</td>
<td>was originally a reaction to politics</td>
<td>has no political affiliation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The consciousness of</td>
<td>can be based on both subconsciousness and</td>
<td>can be subconscious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>creating art process</td>
<td>unconsciousness</td>
<td>it is also an integral thought from nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dream</td>
<td>is often inspired by dreams</td>
<td>is sometimes inspired by dreams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Object/Shape</td>
<td>contains amorphous, unrealistic shapes</td>
<td>contains clearly defined, realistic shapes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressive art form</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idea source</td>
<td>ideas are generated from inside to outside</td>
<td>ideas are generated from outside to inside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex Symbolism</td>
<td>ambiguous</td>
<td>Counter, coexist and balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realism</td>
<td>Super-realism</td>
<td>Divine likeness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art as abstraction form</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similar to Chinese landscape painting, surrealist painting is a form of expressive art. Surrealists express their creation through the use of dreams and automatism; however, Chinese landscape painters use nature as a source of inspiration.

In the Chinese landscape painting, expressions of the spirit more than were matters of composition or skill in realistic depiction. On the other hand, “Surrealism was a taxing and fully absorbing form of mental activity” (Danto, 2002). The forming imagery from Surrealists’ mental activity can be both destructive and sometimes
spiritual. The destructive ideas are generated from surrealists’ rebellious mind and their unexplored emotional aversion to society. The spiritual ideas are originated from the mystical tradition of the surrealists’ dream. Relatively, Chinese landscape painters express their art through harmony and spirituality. Outrageous ideas never appear in Chinese landscape painter’s minds; and the spirituality evolves from the integral thoughts in the painter’s mind and heart. Similar to Chinese landscape painters, some surrealists, who are not European, use memories and feelings as a major theme in their painting. For example, the Mexican artist, Frida Kahlo (A.D. 1907-1954), did not only express her art through dreams but also reflected her emotion and spirit from daily life in her art. Her phantasmal painting is like the journal of her life.

Max Ernst and His Art

Another Surrealist is the German born artist Max Ernst (A.D. 1891-1976). Ernst originally studied philosophy at the University of Bonn in 1909, and later became a self-taught artist. After he moved to Paris in 1922, Ernst became one of the pioneers from both the Dadaist group and the French Surrealist movements. During the period between the 30’s and 40’s, he relocated to America and became an important player in the American Surrealist movement.

As a result of his artistic innovations, “Ernst aimed to find a ‘New Mythology’” (The Economist, 1991). Ernst sought all experimental possibilities, which allowed him to explore the world beyond reality. Ernst’s style and techniques of art were creative and actually varied. Ernst was not only influenced by Freud's
theories of the subconsciousness, but also used Freud’s theories in conjunction with the textures of botanical, geological, and galactic images which he transcribed onto the canvas. I am especially fascinated with his art that was created around the year of 1927. This year was also known as the most productive year in his life. Most of the artwork in this period was oil on canvas, and created by combining some frottage, *grattage* techniques. As Martin said, “Ernst was inspired by the ways in which biologists, geologists, and astronomers probe the secrets of the natural world” (Martin, 2000). Through the use of Frottage technique, Ernst’s art reveal a metaphorical meaning of nature. His synthesis of science and art not only helped him define Surrealism, but also helped him to discover the unexplored visions in his mind.

How has Max Ernst inspired me? Most of Ernst’s work, which has inspired me, was painted around 1927. For example his works entitled, *Child Horse, Flower, and Snake, One Big Family, The Horde, Forest and Sun, and Monument to the Birds,* see figure 2, 3, 4, 5 on p. 34 & 35 contain transfigured and nearly abstract objects that inspired my own work. Ernst’s objects look somewhat human-like and somewhat bird-like. What fascinated me the most is that Ernst bestows these earth toned imaginary objects with some sort of natural human qualities. Some of the objects are monumentally set
on the ground. Some are suspended in the air, and most of them structurally interlock together as one entity. Because of their earth tone colors, they look like they grew out from the ground. This technique makes them a part of the landscape. According to Hopps, an author and editor, these structurally transfigured objects seem like “anthropomorphic beings” (William, 1993).

Ernst uses the method of free-association on painting, which allows him unexpected, often random, combinations. He did not consider the rational aspect of or relationship between the different elements. Free association enables him to express the workings of the unconscious mind and ascribe human characteristics to that which is not human such as natural landscape. Once again Ernst’s technique reminds me of the inner spirit found in Chinese art, known as the “landscape of the human body” (Little, 2000). However, Ernst’s motivation for his artistic expression is different from Chinese landscape painters. Nevertheless, I think that both types of art have reached the same degree of excellence, though in different ways.

**Sexual Symbolism of Surrealism**

“Central to Surrealist thought was sexuality, the voice of the inner self and a key to understanding human nature” (Panero, 2002). The Western world, in particular, has repressed sexuality. Sexuality has been largely condemned by major religions. Parts of surrealist ideas were originally driven from the rebelling force aimed against these social norms. Surrealists applied Freud's studies of hysteria and repression to painting
as a way of exploring sexual taboos. They sought to liberate these aspects of human life. Surrealism is also the first major artistic movement to openly address the theme related to desire and various aspects of sexuality.

Freud's belief that desire - repressed or otherwise - was the main driving force in our mental lives was gleefully seized upon by the surrealists, who saw in the liberated sexual instinct a force powerful enough to break the stranglehold of the rationalist mindset (Denny.2001).

Ernst played a significant role because of the knowledge of Freudian theory that he brought to the surrealist group early in its development. By liberating the unconscious processes of the mind, Ernst opened his desire to create the bizarre and fantastic in art from. These art forms draw the viewers away from recognizable representation and toward abstract and organic forms. According to the author, Mann and Lyle, "Sexuality is seen as an animalistic and base instinct (Mann and Lyle, 1995)." The semi-human figures from Ernst's painting possess an animistic nature. These objects tend to blend together to become a mixture of beings. These mixture of beings look like the nightmare that came from the unknown world in the creator's mind. Ernst's anthropomorphic figures recall the symbolism of behemoth 14, see figure (a) on left, the mythical demon-like creature; and the Greek myth of Pan 15, see figure (b) on left, the god of pastures and natural landscapes who also liked to seduce females. There is a similar Chinese mythical character with anthropomorphic traits named Nu Kua (Gua) 16, see figure (c) on left, the
goddess of creation who made the first human beings from yellow clay.

“In Surrealist thought, male and female are often transcriptions of each other” (Danto, 2002). Ernst fused male and female imagery into cohesive hybrids; the symbolism of these figures piques the viewer’s curiosity. The identities become blurred and ambiguous. There is no line between gender, age, and race. Ernst’s work also reminds me of the transfigured forms created by the British painter, Francis Bacon (1909-1992). Bacon’s artistic life came after the Surrealist movement. His theme of the transfigured human tends to be aesthetically seductive, but disturbingly violent. Ernst, on the other hand, gives his transfigured hybrids a more mysterious sense and fanciful quality. As the author, Denny said, “because of surrealists' preoccupation with sex, the most fundamentally ‘magical’ of human activities, it comes as no surprise that so much of their art is erotic in nature” (Denny, 2001).
The Creative Process of my Art and Ideas

Can the idea of Chinese landscape painting be rendered utilizing the Western method of Surrealism? Of course, this question does not suggest that these two, unique, art forms should be physically or visually combined together. This idea stems from the inspiration I have gained from both art forms. While creating my artwork, I found various perspectives of both Chinese landscape painting and Surrealism to be stimulating. Chinese landscape painting is a unique and eastern ancient art form. Surrealism, on the other hand, is a wild, new emerging western art form. As an artist from the East, and as an individual living in the West, I found myself linked to both artistic venues and I wanted to consider the artistic possibilities between them.

What kind of art have I created? Before I discuss my artwork, I would like to address the two perspectives from which I view my art. These points of view include the content perspective and technical perspective. The content perspective is related to the setting or landscape. The setting can be a composition within an object or created by the juxtaposition of random objects. Because the objects I have created are organic forms, I relied upon my photographs of natural substances such as plants, rocks, and animal bodies. I utilized their form and texture to recreate a new form of meaning. As for the technical perspective, I used photographic images as my main source of materials. In order to get high quality images, most of my images were photographed using color positive film (i.e. slide135mm and 120 formats). Instead of manually creating a collage from these images, I scanned the positive film and turned the images into a digital form. This allowed me to manipulate the images on the computer.
The creative process is a journey for me. It is adventurous. I never know what I am going to get until I reach my final destination. In the image collecting process, there are always amazing discoveries. For example, by exploring the texture of objects, the internal bio-structure of objects, or the natural form and color of objects, I am invited to enter into a new world of possibilities and discoveries. Similar to the inspiration that Ernst received from biologists and geologists, I am inspired by the organic and natural substances that surround my environment. No matter if the organic substance is small, like a leaf, or big, like a mountain. For me, these substances fulfill the same degree of mystery waiting to be unleashed. Through a closer observation of the photographic images of these objects, I am astonished by their beauty and oddness.

Because I do not want to lose my sense of adventure while I am engaged in the creating process, I never do the sketch work. When I start to combine images, I view
my images as wooden blocks. Each block is positioned next to another block. One by one and step by step, the blocks take a unique form. Each time, by adding one more block, my work takes on another new meaning. Not until I arrive at my final destination, does the process of forming new meaning cease. How do I decide when my artwork is finished? Similar to the Chinese aesthetic philosophy of divine likeness, my artistic stamina exists as long as it takes for me to capture the spirit of work. When my artwork reaches the point of divine likeness, and I can sense the spirit within it, then I know I have reached my destination.

Different from Ernst’s approach, my approach involves creating digitally formed collages. I call it, “photo-paint”. Ironically, one of the major intentions of the Dadaist/Surrealist movement was to create ‘anti-art’. Anti-art was unconventional artwork not intended to be artistic. However the term “photo-paint” suggests an artistic intention. Nevertheless, owing to the Surrealists’ distinctive style in history,
Surrealism has already become its own artistic trend. The term "photo-paint" is self-explanatory. It means to paint photographically. Unlike the old photo collages that were created during the Surrealist movement, "photo-paint" requires actual painting skills. These skills are required to digitally paint and compose the photo images on the computer. My first image was developed through this process. I call it "Fish Land" see p. 22. The name is based on the subject matter of the composition. Similar to "Fish Land," the work entitled, "Bird Land," see p. 23, was constructed through the method of free-association. By combining images freely, I created this exotic and strange vision. While I am creating, I always develop the first major form or character. Then I develop the second character to react to the first character. Later I develop the third character to react to the first two characters, and then the rest of the composition gradually falls into place. I have included two graphic examples to indicate the order of my developmental process see graphic above. Both "Fish Land" and "Bird Land" were my first attempt at creating art in the studio, as opposed to creating art based on my travel experiences. The rest of the pieces, on the other hand, were actually affected by my journeys to other places.
Similar to the way Chinese landscape painters are inspired, I am also inspired greatly by travel. Travel and memory is essential to my creative process. In the summer 1998, I traveled to the Greece and visited the ancient Greek ruins. I was amazed by the beauty and magnificence of the scenic landscapes in this Mediterranean country. One amazing haven is Meteora. Its name mean ‘suspended in air’. It is one of the oldest monasteries in the world, and well known for the rocky precipice upon which it is located.

During the four days when I visited this place, I enjoyed walking, climbing, and exploring the rock formations on these mountains. The play of light and shadows on the mountain especially enhanced my imagination and seemed to breathe life into the rock formations. My thoughts paralleled the concept of the complementary force of yin and yang. For example, I was intrigued by how the dark complemented the light, as well as how these degrees of light shaped the form of the rocks and crevices. As I took the pictures, I noticed the views of the mountains changed dramatically based on the moving angles of the sunrays, as well as each moving angle of my position. These positions allowed me to observe the changing rock forms as they underwent this metamorphosis. Moreover, due to the river running through the mountain and the earthquakes that transformed the mountain millions of year ago, these peaks and valleys looked animated. Walking among these
organic forms, I felt like I was a part of them. When I observed them more closely, I also felt like they were a part of me. Once again, I was reminded of the Chinese myth of “Pan Gu”. Pan Gu was a deity whose body parts became mountains and Nu Kua, another Chinese mythological deity, created the first human beings from yellow clay.

After the trip, I brought these photographic images home and turned them into digital data. Similar to the Chinese landscape painter, I tried to depict scenes on to the computer instead of on paper, based on abstract thoughts and memories in my mind. I brought my own travel experience and memories home to recreate the landscape in my mind. Similar to Kuo Hsi’s multidimensional landscape, I combined the essence of many landscapes to establish verisimilitude landscapes. These verisimilitude landscapes became imaginative and mythological. Like the process of visionary
I reconfigured the abstract thought from the trip into a mental image and created my artwork. My work entitled “New Land” contains various sized objects, such as rocky mountains, potatoes and fishes. Through the magical digital world, I easily manipulated many objects including small potatoes and fishes. Then I integrated these images with the anatomical features of animals, including fish scales and lamb eyes. I used the rocky mountain photographs as my backdrop so that the combination of these images became a behemothic mountain.

During my trip, I was standing on a mountain overlooking a valley. From my position I could view the mountain on the other side of the valley. At that time, I felt as if I was the last person on earth. The only other existing entity was a graceful cloud floating in the sky. The whirling summer wind blew through the valley like breath
entering my lungs. The mountains seemed to talk spiritually to me. I observed them as a microcosm in my mind see p. 9. The contrast between light and shadow enhanced my imagination. The verdure of the trees extended through most of the ground along the hillside. In contrast, the stone-gray mountains with their sharp crevices stabbed the deep blue sky. Some of the natural formed rocks looked like dragons from heaven; others looked as though they had been touched by Nu Kua’s hand 16. I felt the existence of a supernatural power beyond reality, through my mind, through my inner sight, and through my memory. I manipulated some of my artwork symmetrically. For me, symmetric form is a perfection in balance, like the two identical shapes of yin and yang,– 太極 (T’ai-chi) p. 10. The symmetrical shape of T’ai-chi’s not only symbolizes the beauty of balance, but also the perfection of complementary opposites. The next image -- “Sea Land”, see image above ‘Sea Land’ was created through this inspired
thought. The entity of white rock was made of two identical sides. Due to the influence of sea waves, the rock form already looks ambiguous like an organic being. By fusing these two identical forms, it looks like a morphing goddess sitting beside the sea.

My final creation is called “Long land”. It was composed by connecting eight different rocks from different locations in the same area. Each rock has its own unique style and form. It looks dramatic because of the angle of the setting sunlight that strikes the surface of the textured rocks. This dramatic scene reminded me the 18th century European landscape painting. The dramatic light looks unnatural in a way, like the lighting in a theater. Creating my work is just like directing a play. Similar to a director’s position, I direct and arrange the characters (rocks) on the stage (ground, earth). In order to make these characters seamlessly connect together, I carefully juxtaposed them based on the range of each rocks height, the angle of sunlight on each rock and the formation of each rock. “Long Land” see image on p. 30 is the only piece that I had decided not to add any additional elements, other than the rocks. Due to nature’s transformation over millions of year, these rocks already look anthropomorphic.
<table>
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<th>Dates</th>
<th>Dynasty</th>
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<tr>
<td>ca. 2000-1500 B.C.</td>
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<td>1700-1027 B.C.</td>
<td>Shang</td>
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<tr>
<td>1027-771 B.C.</td>
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<td>770-221 B.C.</td>
<td>Eastern Zhou</td>
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<td>221-207 B.C.</td>
<td>Qin</td>
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<td>206 B.C.-A.D. 9</td>
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<td>A.D. 9-24</td>
<td>Xin</td>
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<td>A.D. 265-420</td>
<td>Jin</td>
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<td>A.D. 420-588</td>
<td>Southern and Northern Dynasties</td>
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<td>Sui &amp; Tang</td>
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<td>A.D. 617-907 (Tang)</td>
<td>Five Dynasties &amp; Ten Kingdoms</td>
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<tr>
<td>A.D. 907-979</td>
<td>Song</td>
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<tr>
<td>A.D. 960-1127 (N. Song)</td>
<td>Liao &amp; Western Xia</td>
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<td>A.D. 1115-1234</td>
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<td>A.D. 1127-1279 (S. Song)</td>
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<td>A.D. 1279-1368</td>
<td>Ming</td>
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<td>A.D. 1368-1644</td>
<td>Qing</td>
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<td>A.D. 1644-1911</td>
<td>Republic of China</td>
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<td>A.D. 1911-1949 (China)</td>
<td>People's Republic of China</td>
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<td>A.D. 1949- (Taiwan)</td>
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- **Western**
- **CHINA**

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- Bronze Ages cultures ca. 2500-800 B.C.
- Roman Rule Ca. 50 B.C.- A.D. 393
- Byzantine A.D. 300 - 1400s.
- Western Roman Empire A.D. 393-A.D.500
- Romanesque (Western Europe) A.D. 800-1100s
- Gothic art (Italy) A.D. 1150-1400
- Rococo Western Europe A.D.1700 -1780.
- Impressionism Post-Impressionism A.D.1875
- Dada A.D.1900 Surrealism
- The Renaissance (A.D.1450 - 1600)
- **Chart 1**
- **Impressionism**
- **Post-Impressionism**
- **A.D.1875**
- **Dada A.D.1900**
- **Surrealism**
- **A.D.1949- (China)**
- **A.D. 1949- (Taiwan)**
- **A.D. 1911-1949 (China)**
- **A.D. 1911-1949 (China)**
- **A.D. 1949- (China)**
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- **A.D. 1949- (China)**
- **A.D. 1949- (China)**
- **A.D. 1949- (China)**
- **A.D. 1949- (China)**
Early Spring, 1072 A.D. by Kuo Hsi (fl. 11th c.), Song Dynasty,
Hanging scroll, ink and light colors on silk, 158.3 x 108.1 cm
Notes

(1), http://www.huntfor.com/arhistory/earlyC20th/surrealism.htm
This article was written by Nicolas Pioch and publish on the web site – HuntFor.com

(2), **Chinese Painting Four Forms:** It is significant to the note that already in the 4th century, painting was divided into four major groups according to the subject-matter, i.e. **PORTRAITS, LANDSCAPES, BIRDS AND ANIMALS,** and **ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS.** (Sakanishi, 1939, p.24)

(3), The founding father of Chinese painting principles was Hsieh Ho of The Six Dynasties. After the warring "Three Kingdoms" came brief stable period of West Zin and East Zin. Art flourished, and so was the principle of painting.

**The Six Principles of Painting of Hsieh Ho:**

1, The vitalizing spirit and life movement.
   氣韻生動
2, The structural use of the brush.
   骨法用筆
3, Conforming to the objects in order to give them likeness.
   應物象形
4, The coloring should be applied according to their characteristics.
   隨類傳彩
5, By planning, the composition should be arranged.
   經營位置
6, By copying, the ancient models are to be transmitted.
   傳移模寫

(3), **Han Fei Tzu** wrote a book called by his own name, Han Fei Tzu. It gives us our most complete and mature picture of the Legalist philosophy.

* reinterpretation of history in terms of evil human nature; criticized Confucian scholars for praising antiquity and wasting time in useless discussion. He argued that the larger the number of citizens that study, the less there will be to raise food, to make the state strong and the ruler rich.
* scholars ought to be punished and made to give up their harmful vocation and put to useful work.
* Humans are inherently evil. Education cannot make them better. Only punishment and reward will.
* The following three things are important for the ruler to employ in order to govern the world properly.
   o shih (power and position): Even the sage emperors were unable to make the
people to obey them until they occupied the throne. On the other hand, even the most unworthy of rulers had secured obedience. Thus, virtue and wisdom are of no account as compared with power and position.

o shu (methods): The conduct of government requires administrative techniques. Virtue is not enough.

o fa (law): It is necessary to use codes of law to run the government. (Confucian scholars insisted on putting the administration of justice into the hands of good and wise men rather than on limiting administration by codes of law.)

(source: http://www.cohums.ohio-state.edu/deall/jin.3/c231/handouts/h7.htm)


(source: The Encyclopedia of World History. 2001.)

(5), Dada or Dadaism [French, from dada, child's word for a horse] Nihilistic movement in the arts that flourished chiefly in France, Switzerland, and Germany from about 1916 to about 1920 [and later -ed.] and that was based on the principles of deliberate irrationality, anarchy, and cynicism and the rejection of laws of beauty and social organization.

(source: http://www.peak.org/~dadaist/English/Graphics/)

(6), The Interpretation of Dreams, in 1899 this book revolutionised our way of looking at dreams. Instead of attributing them to prophetic inspiration or a bad dinner, Freud introduced the idea of the Unconscious. He believed that our dreams are a window into our hidden emotional lives. That they express unfulfilled wishes and desires, often via coded symbols. (source: http://archives.theconnection.org/archive/1999/11/1117b.shtml)

(7), Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939) was born on May 6, 1856 at Freiberg, Moravia, now Pribor in the Czech Republic. Freud developed the techniques of "Psycho-Analysis" for the treatment of psychological and emotional disorders.

(source: http://www.lucidcafe.com/library/96may/freud.html)

(8), http://www.bway.net/~monique/history.htm

(9), There are three types of automatism: mechanical automatism, rhythmic automatism and visionary automatism

**Mechanical automatism:** limited magnitude of the mechanical gestures involved when producing frottages (rubblings), decalcomanias (transfers), fumages (smokings), grattages (scrapings), and coulages (pourings). The gestures require neither a particular state of intellectual concentration nor psychological tension of any kind, nor do they demand that the slightest attention be paid to the results obtained.
Rhythmic automatism: involves mobilization of the painter’s mind and body. Thus, it depend on the particular case and time, this type has been called, “action painting” and “gesture painting”. This, however, does not make rhythmic automatism into a boxing match. In rhythmic automatism, the body is completely at the service of the mind. (Weisberger, 1999, p. 44)

(10), 1925, frottage he rubbed black chalk on paper held against various materials such as leaves, wood, and fabrics to achieve bizarre effects. (source: http://www.encyclopedia.com)

In the winter of 1926 to 1927, Ernst adapted it to painting in a technique he called grattage, which involves scraping pigment over canvas placed on a heavily textured surface. (http://www.geocities.com/Paris/2651/ernst.html)

(11), "A Chinese Legend Of How Pangu Separates The Sky From The Earth"
The sky and the earth were at first one blurred entity, like an egg. Pangu was born into it. The separation of the sky and the earth took eighteen thousand years; the Yang which was light and pure rose to become the sky, and the Yin which was heavy and murky sank to form the earth. Between them was Pangu, who went through nine changes every day, his wisdom greater than that of the sky and his ability greater than that of the earth. Every day the sky rose ten feet higher, the earth became ten feet thicker, and Pangu grew ten feet taller. Another eighteen thousand years passed, and there was an extremely high sky, an extremely thick earth and an extremely tall Pangu. Then came the three Emperors. So these numbers came into existence and evolved like this: The numbers begin with one, become established as three, are completed at five, prosper at seven and end in nine. So the sky is ninety thousand li from the earth.

"Pangu Turns Into Myriads Of Things"
Pangu, who was born before anything else, underwent great bodily changes when he was dying. His breath became the winds and clouds, his voice thunder, his left eye the moon, his arms and legs the four poles of the earth, and the five parts of his body, the five mountains. His blood formed the rivers and his veins the roads. His flesh and skin became the soil of the fields and his hair and moustache the stars. The fine hair on his skin turned into grasses and trees, his teeth and bones became metals and rocks. His marrow changed to pearls and jade and his sweat fell as rain that nourished all things. The insects on his body, caressed by the winds, took the shape of men and women. (http://beifan.com/026topic/26legends.html)

(13), Free association
A psychoanalytic technique in which a patient's articulation of free associations is encouraged in order to reveal unconscious thoughts and emotions, such as traumatic experiences that have been repressed. (The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language: 4th Edition. 2000.)
(14), **Behemoth**, a spirit of the desert, possibly derives from the Egyptian for "water buffalo" or from the Egyptian deity, Taueret, about whom the Greek historian, Herodotus wrote. The term "Behemoth" in the Hebrew is the plural form of the very common "behemah" referring to a beast of use to humans or a dumb animal. It is being used here, however, as a single entity.

(source: www.deliriumsrealm.com/delirium/mythology/behemoth.asp)

(15), **Pan** was also the Lord of nature, woods, pastures, and other landscapes. He was depicted as half man and half goat. Pan was the Greek god of the woods who looked after shepherds and their flocks. His mother a nymph. Father is Zeus, (or Hermes) he lived in Arcadia. dwelt in grottos, wandered on the mountains and in valleys, and amused himself with the chase or in leading the dances of the nymphs.

(16), **Nu Kua** is an old Chinese Goddess, the ancestress of humankind. Pan Ku and Nu Kua, were considered the Adam and Eve of China, the all-knowing gods of the Middle Kingdom. Nu Kua is said to have repaired the sky and the earth after a great battle or what the rebel God Kung Kung had destroyed in a fit of anger. To accomplish her task, Nü Kua used the feet of a tortoise and melted-down stones that turned into a five-coloured mixture. Nü Kua is also said to have built a lovely palace that became a prototype for the later walled cities of China. The material of which it was made was prepared overnight by mountain spirits. By slipping a miraculous rope through the nose of the King of Oxen, she put a stop to the terror this monster visited on his enemies by means of his enormous horns and ears.

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