

EXPERIENCED, PERCEPTIVE, DARING AND INDIVIDUALISTIC

Sesin Jong's Paintings

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I first met Dr. Sesin Jong through Mr. Dong Xinbin. In 1992 Mr. Dong attended the World Art Exchange Symposium held in the United States. When he returned, he told me about a Chinese American called Sesin Jong. Not long afterwards, Mr. Dong received a telephone call in Nanjing informing him that Sesin was to arrive in the city at 2:00 P.M. Mr. Dong mistook the time for 2:00 A.M., so he dragged me along late in the night to welcome Sesin Jong. Obviously we waited all night at the hotel, and all of the following morning too, to no avail. Eventually we had to return home. Mr. Dong received another telephone call from Sesin Jong informing him that he had just checked in at the hotel.

In matters of art, Mr. Dong was a hard man to please. Yet he took a particular liking to Sesin, something that puzzled me. In the autumn of 1997, Mr. Dong recommended Sesin Jong's paintings for exhibition at the Nanjing Museum. As I was working at the museum at that time, I had the opportunity to witness the entire exhibition process. Indeed Sesin's paintings were extraordinary. It was obvious that he had had no formal training. However, that was no blemish as far as his paintings were concerned. Instead, it was as if he had free reign on the paper, and that, as a result, he had created a new perspective. So colorful and individualistic were his paintings that Mr. Dong had said, astonishingly, that seeing them was a learning experience. Indeed, in the final years of Mr. Dong's life, there were perceptible changes in his paintings.

Dr. Jong's paintings are the culmination of his vast experience, talent and daring nature.

First of all, his ancestors left China's Guangdong province for South East Asia, the result of which was that he was born in Indonesia. He then studied in Japan, and finally worked in the United States. A renowned gynecologist, he became a senior consultant to a hospital in Shanghai after his retirement from practice. He loves traveling, and has been to five continents, frequently traveling to China, the United States, Hong Kong and Taiwan. He has organized numerous cultural exchange activities. Wherever he goes, he loves to visit scenic spots and museums and to make acquaintances with collectors, painters and calligraphers. He counts the works of Wang Duo and Zhi Baishi in his private collection, which numbers in the hundreds.

He has friends all over the world, most of whom are elite members of the arts community. C.C. Wang, Leon Chang and a host of others regularly attend his parties and are often pampered with good food and excellent tea. His experience in social functions has allowed him to be as good a gourmet as any, consuming delicacies in generous portions. He is equally comfortable in playing the 'erhu' and the piano. These are the signs of a person who knows how to live, and indeed lives his life at the highest level. His vast knowledge is reflected in his paintings, giving them a larger-than-life character.

<<Copy of Dong Shibai, by Sesin Jong, 51.5 cm x 115 cm>>

Dr. Jong employs a wide array of styles and themes in his paintings. The splash ink colors are complemented by razor-thin lines and dry ink web texture strokes. Landscape paintings are not entirely about the landscape. There are people, flowers and birds. He draws easily from a wide arsenal of styles, using landscape scenery from all parts of the world. As he has not had strict or formal training in the arts, some of his brush strokes appear clumsy and immature. On the other hand, he manages to present his visual image in a breathtaking manner. Even his works of imitation of ancient masters are transformed and take on his personal character.

It is clear that Dr. Jong's understanding of Chinese painting has not been from mechanically copying the past master's respective strokes and ink techniques, but from a clear insight into the humanistic quality of the paintings. Among the several volumes of his published works, there are inscriptions from the painter, as if telling the viewer that the paintings were his leisurely pursuits and that the viewer should not take them too seriously. Thus is his philosophy: enjoy life to the fullest. Apart from that, he has an in-depth understanding of past masters. He has especially taken to heart the works of Wen Zhengming, Shi Tao, Badai Shan-ren, Chang Dai-chien and Liu Haisu. He is also very discerning. So discerning is he, that when he met Mr. Dong Xingbin, who had been misunderstood for much of his life, in large part due to his straight-talking ways, he saw at once the immense artistry in Mr. Dong's works. He therefore asked Mr. Dong for a painting. The painting that Mr. Dong presented to Sesin was of a single bamboo. Mr. Dong's mastery for the arts was in the picture's elegant simplicity, appearing at once traditional and modern. Few would realize this. Not so Dr. Jong, who once likened Mr. Dong to Bada and Shi Tao. Such a view was surely contrary to the general consensus, and only Dr. Jong, who has a high moral standing, would dare to speak his mind. Through this episode, I got to understand the deep friendship between the two great painters.

<<Upper picture: Scholar under a Pine, by Sesin Jong, 26.5 cm x 34.5 cm>>

<<Lower picture: Blue Tango, by Sesin Jong, 22 cm x 15.5 cm>>

Mr. Dong Xingbin is a painter-cum-doctor, while Dr. Jong is a doctor-cum-painter. The former is a grandmaster of professional painters, and the latter is a rare talent among amateur painters. It is not difficult to see why they understood each other so perfectly, given their common background.

<<Secret Passage, by Sesin Jong, 41 cm x 61 cm>>

Dr. Jong's daring lies in his use of colors. Some of his pictures that left me with the greatest impression include: "Red Cloud" and "The Great River" much of which are washed in red. On the other hand, "Get Lost" contains an incredible amount of blue. Another is splash-painted in green. Yet another sees a mix of large patches of ink and red, with a touch of golden color on the horizon. Most of his color supplies are from the United States, the United Kingdom and Japan, and they create dazzling effects when applied. The colors' generous proportions do not render the paintings monotonous, surely a feat that is difficult to emulate. Long, dense lines form strong contrasts with thick and broad ink patches, albeit in harmonious fashion. This technique is used especially to depict night, dawn, or evening glow. Such effect has much to do with his application of Western painting color materials. Interestingly, even that did not in any way impede the Chinese character and style of the pictures. It could only be explained by the fact that he was still using the Chinese brush, coupled with a deep understanding of the Chinese tradition. He might have been a globetrotter, but he is quintessentially a Chinese man who is loyal to his roots.

<<Red Morning, by Sesin Jong, 50 cm x 66 cm>>

<<Overcoming the Elements, by Sesin Jong, 63 cm x 98 cm>>