



# LANDSCAPE OF THE SOUL



*Nathalie Trouveroy*



*Notice these expressions in the text.  
Infer their meaning from the context.*

➤ **anecdote**

➤ **delicate realism**

➤ **figurative painting**

Anecdote: A shorty with  
message

Realism: based on facts

Figurative: Imaginative

➤ **illusionistic** likeness

➤ **conceptual** space

Illusion: belief that is not true

Conceptual: Based on idea or  
principle



Wu Daozi



Xuanzong

A WONDERFUL old tale is told about the painter **Wu Daozi**, who lived in the eighth century. His last painting was a landscape commissioned by the Tang Emperor **Xuanzong**, to decorate a palace wall. The master had hidden his work behind a screen, so only the Emperor would see it.

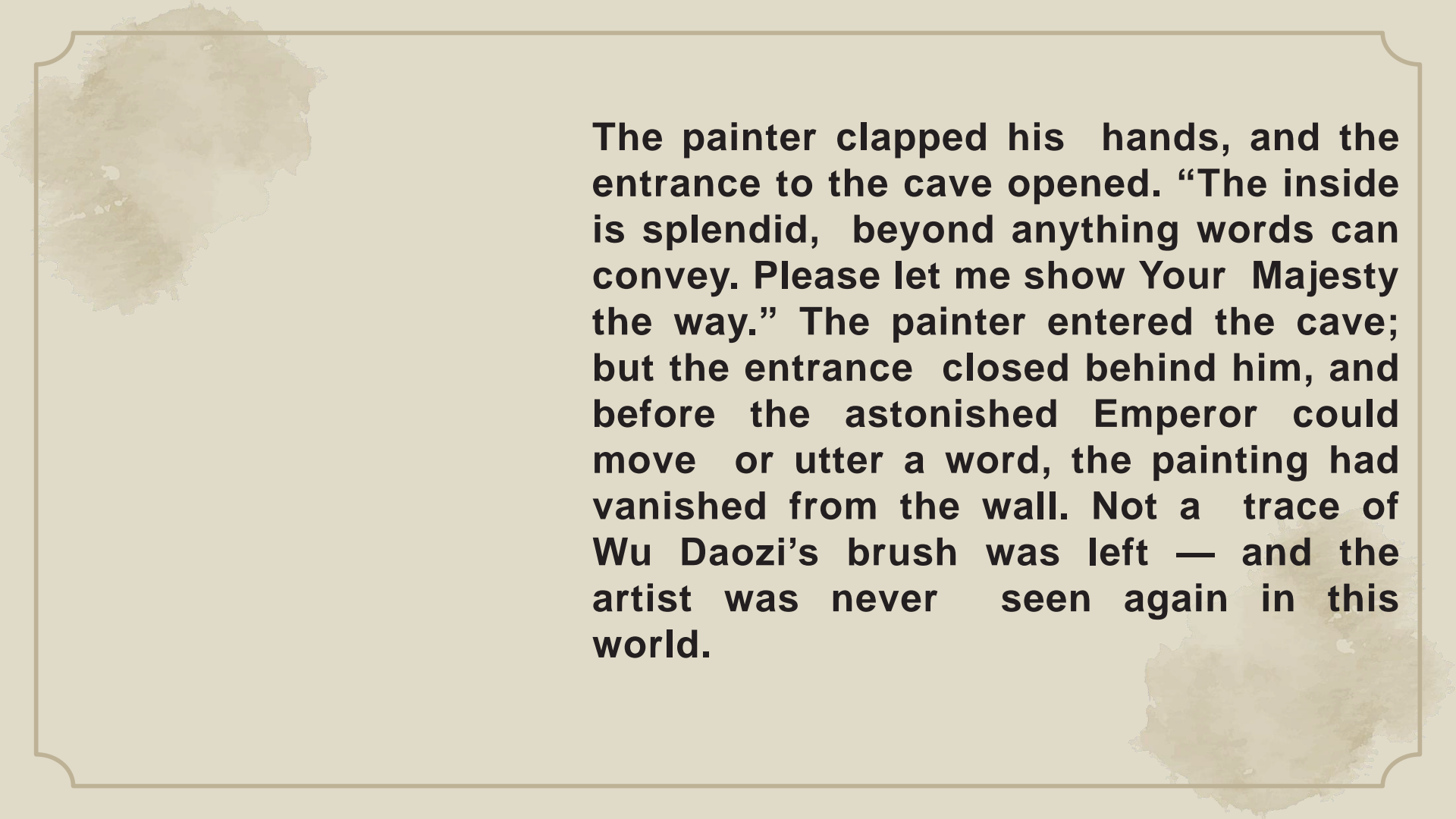


spirit

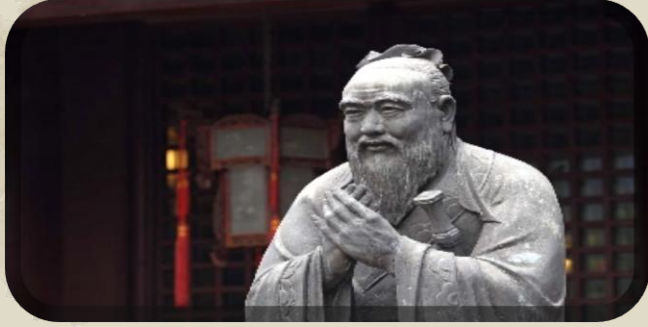


Cave at the foot of a hill

For a long while, the Emperor admired the wonderful scene, discovering forests, high mountains, waterfalls, clouds floating in an immense sky, men on hilly paths, birds in flight. “Look, Sire”, said the painter, “in this **cave**, at the foot of the mountain, dwells a **spirit**.”



**The painter clapped his hands, and the entrance to the cave opened. “The inside is splendid, beyond anything words can convey. Please let me show Your Majesty the way.” The painter entered the cave; but the entrance closed behind him, and before the astonished Emperor could move or utter a word, the painting had vanished from the wall. Not a trace of Wu Daozi’s brush was left — and the artist was never seen again in this world.**

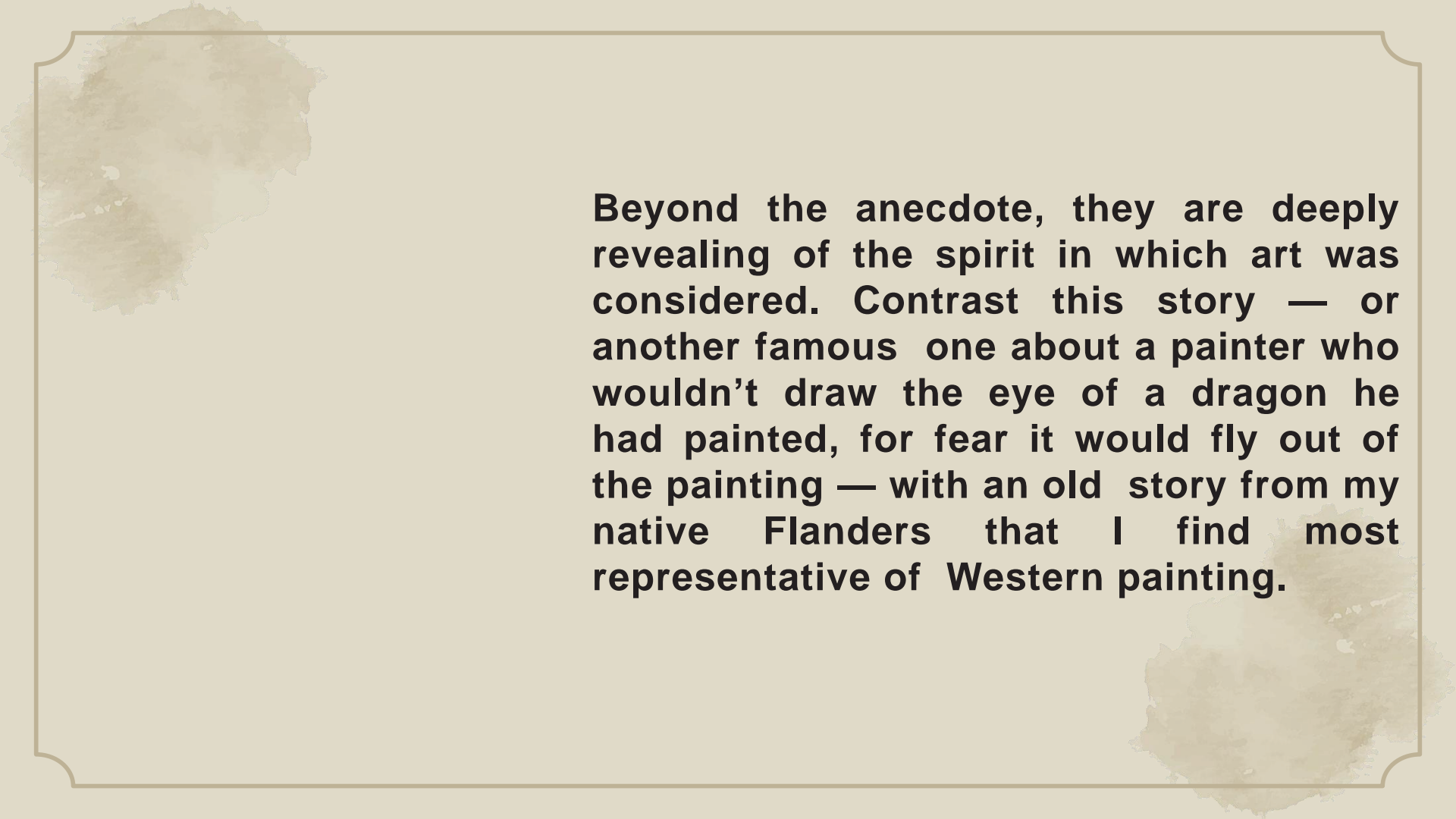


**Confucius**



**Zhuangzi**


Such stories played an important part in China's classical education. The books of **Confucius** and **Zhuangzi** are full of them; they helped the master to guide his disciple in the right direction.



**Beyond the anecdote, they are deeply revealing of the spirit in which art was considered. Contrast this story — or another famous one about a painter who wouldn't draw the eye of a dragon he had painted, for fear it would fly out of the painting — with an old story from my native Flanders that I find most representative of Western painting.**

In fifteenth century Antwerp, a master blacksmith called Quinten Metsys fell in love with a painter's daughter. The father would not accept a son-in-law in such a profession. So Quinten sneaked into the painter's studio and painted a fly on his latest panel, with such delicate realism that the master tried to **swat** it away before he realised what had happened.


**Swat: To hit with flat object like hand**



Quinten was immediately admitted as an apprentice into his studio. He married his beloved and went on to become one of the most famous painters of his age. These two stories illustrate what each form of art is trying to achieve: a perfect, **illusionistic** likeness in Europe, the essence of inner life and spirit in Asia.



**Illusionistic: not real**



In the Chinese story, the Emperor commissions a painting and appreciates its outer appearance. But the artist reveals to him the true meaning of his work. The Emperor may rule over the territory he has **conquered**, but only the artist knows the way within. “Let me show the Way”, the ‘Dao’, a word that means both the path or the method, and the mysterious works of the Universe. The painting is gone, but the artist has reached his goal — beyond any material appearance.

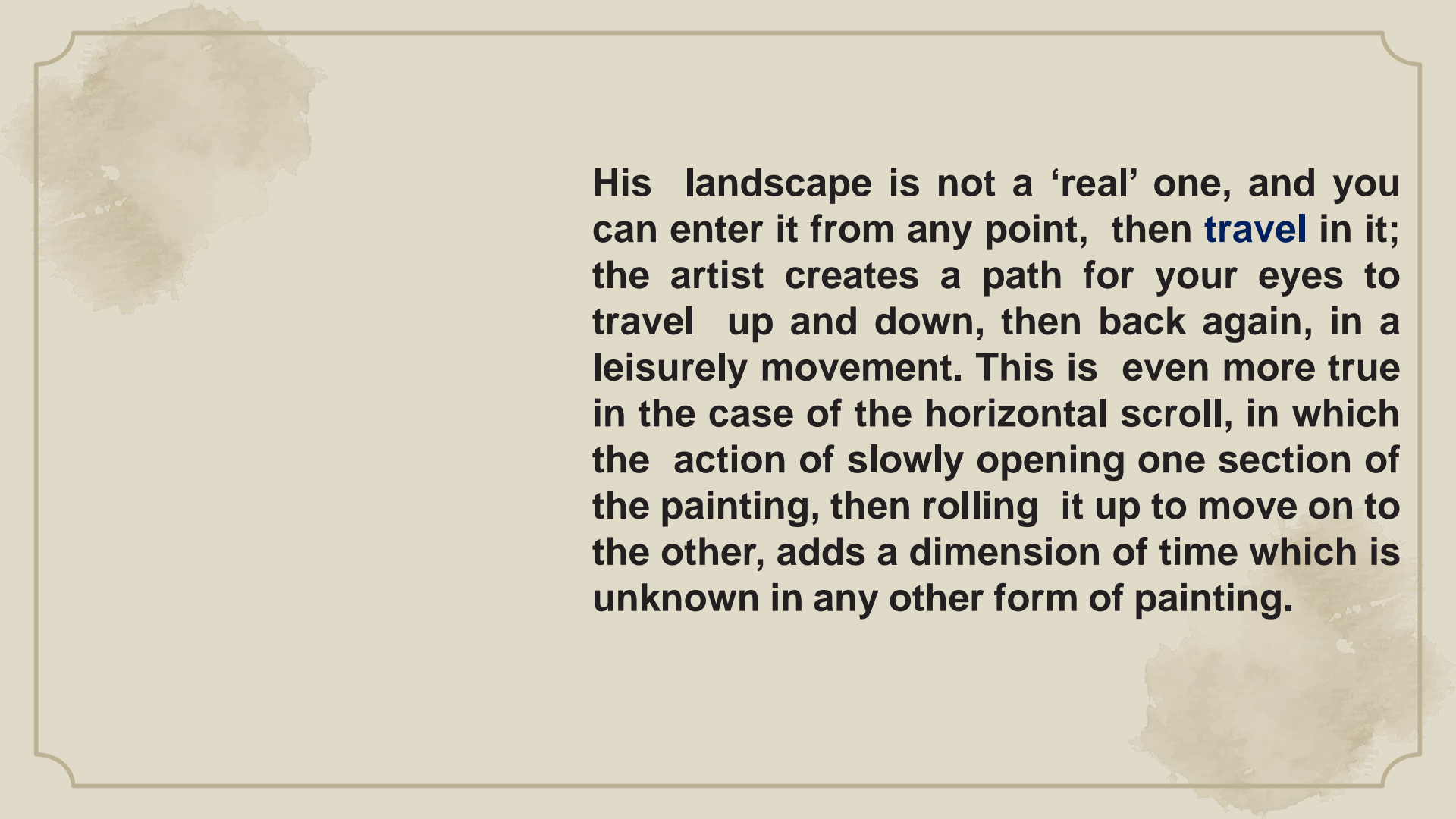


**Conquer: To take control**



**Figurative Painting**

A classical Chinese landscape is not meant to reproduce an actual view, as would a Western **figurative painting**. Whereas the European painter wants you to borrow his eyes and look at a particular landscape exactly as he saw it, from a specific angle, the Chinese painter does not choose a single viewpoint.



His landscape is not a 'real' one, and you can enter it from any point, then **travel** in it; the artist creates a path for your eyes to travel up and down, then back again, in a leisurely movement. This is even more true in the case of the horizontal scroll, in which the action of slowly opening one section of the painting, then rolling it up to move on to the other, adds a dimension of time which is unknown in any other form of painting.



**Spiritual Painting**

It also requires the active participation of the viewer, who decides at what pace he will travel through the painting — a participation which is physical as well as mental. The Chinese painter does not want you to borrow his eyes; he wants you to enter his mind. The landscape is an inner one a **spiritual** and **conceptual** space.

**Conceptual : Based on idea or principle**



**Shanshui (Yang + Ying)**

This concept is expressed as **shanshui**, literally 'mountain- water' which used together represent the word 'landscape'. More than two elements of an image, these represent two complementary poles, reflecting the Daoist view of the universe.

**Shanshui : A Chinese style of painting**



**Yan = Heaven, Stable, Warm, Dry**




**Yin = Earth, Fluid, Moist and cool**

The mountain is **Yang** — reaching vertically towards **Heaven**, **stable**, **warm**, and dry in the sun, while the water is **Yin** — **horizontal** and resting on the **earth**, **fluid**, **moist** and cool. The interaction of Yin, the receptive, feminine aspect of universal energy, and its counterpart Yang, active and masculine, is of course a fundamental notion of Daoism.



**Middle Void**

What is often overlooked is an essential third element, the **Middle Void** where their interaction takes place. This can be compared with the yogic practice of pranayama; breathe in, retain, breathe out — the suspension of breath is the Void where meditation occurs. The Middle Void is essential — nothing can happen without it; hence the importance of the white, unpainted space in Chinese landscape.

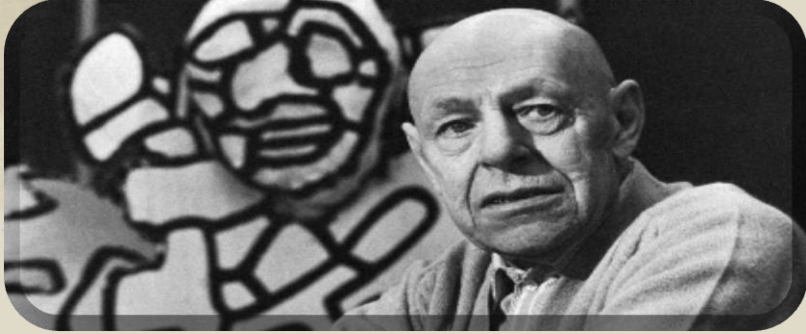


**This is also where Man finds a fundamental role. In that space between Heaven and Earth, he becomes the conduit of communication between both poles of the Universe. His presence is essential, even if it's only suggested; far from being lost or oppressed by the lofty peaks, he is, in Francois Cheng's wonderful expression, "the eye of the landscape".**

**[excerpt from 'Landscape of the Soul: Ethics and Spirituality in Chinese Painting', slightly edited]**



## Getting Inside 'Outsider Art'



Jean Dubuffet



Art Brut

When French painter **Jean Dubuffet** mooted the concept of 'art brut' in the 1940s, the art of the untrained visionary was of minority interest. From its almost veiled beginnings, 'outsider art' has gradually become the fastest growing area of interest in contemporary art internationally.

This **genre** is described as the art of those who have 'no right' to be artists as they have received no formal training, yet show talent and artistic insight. Their works are a **stimulating** contrast to a lot of **mainstream** offerings.

**Genre: An style in art**

**Stimulate: to encourage**

**Mainstream: A general way of life**



Rock Garden


Around the time Dubuffet was **propounding** his concept, in India “an untutored genius was creating paradise”. Years ago the little patch of jungle that he began clearing to make himself a garden **sculpted** with stone and A Rock Garden sculpture made of broken bangles by Nek Chand recycled material is known to the world today as the **Rock Garden**, at Chandigarh.

**Propound: suggest to people**

**Sculpt: Create by carving, casting or shaping**

Its 80 – year - old creator– director, Nek Chand, is now **hailed** as India's biggest contributor to outsider art. The fiftieth issue (Spring 2005) of Raw Vision, a UK-based magazine pioneer in outsider art publications, features Nek Chand, and his Rock Garden sculpture 'Women by the Waterfall' on its anniversary issue's cover.

**Hail: to praise**



The **notion** of '**art brut**' or 'raw art', was of works that were in their raw state as regards cultural and artistic influences. Anything and everything from a tin to a sink to a broken down car could be material for a work of art, something Nek Chand has taken to **dizzying** heights.

**Notion: a belief or idea**

**Brut: not taking formal training**

**Dizzy: Feel your head turning round and round**






Woman by the waterfall



UNESCO

Recognising his art as “an outstanding **testimony** of the difference a single man can make when he lives his dream”, the Swiss Commission for UNESCO will be honouring him by way of a European exposition of his works. The five-month interactive show, ‘Realm of Nek Chand’, beginning October will be held at leading museums in Switzerland, Belgium, France and Italy.

**Testimony: Evidence**



**“The biggest reward is walking through the garden and seeing people enjoy my creation,” Nek Chand says.**

**BRINDA SURI**  
**Hindustan Times, 28 August**  
**2005**

