

Composition and Space

Since the creative requirements of Chinese painting do not demand strict adherence to reality or to a particular angle of view or source of light, the painter has complete freedom in terms of artistic conception, structural composition and method of expression. To give prominence to the main subject, it is quite permissible to omit the background entirely and simply leave it blank. At the same time, since the sizes and shapes of the spaces in the painting are different, the very absence of content can itself create rhythm and variety. Sometimes the variety and balance created in this way is further enriched by

the addition of inscriptions in the empty space.



Chinese landscape painters' aim is to depict the familiar mountains and rivers of China from the perspective of nature as a whole and on the basis of their understanding of the laws of nature. In artistic conception and structural composition, most landscape paintings create the impression that the scene is viewed from high in the air, as if seen through the eyes of a bird.

With flower-and-bird paintings, sometimes a single flower hangs as if suspended in space, or the flowers and plants of different seasons appear together. Explained by one of the Ming painters, Wang Fu (1362-1416), as "likeness through unlikeness" and Qi Baishi (1863-1957) as "subtlety of a good painting lies in its being alike and yet unlike the subject" Chinese painters attach great importance to reality, science, space and time and yet manage to disregard them at the same time. The laws of these things must come second to the requirements of artistic creation and should not become shackles that bind artistic expression.