

" IMAGEining the Lotus "

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PSA Conference 2018 at Salt Lake City, USA 5/10/2018 10:30 am

The challenge of creating photographic images which remain true to traditional Chinese philosophical roots, but yet can readily resonate with the contemporary 21st century world.

I would like to talk about my journey of exploration and application of Chinese Philosophy, the fundamental of Chinese art and culture to Photography, the modern art form of the Western origin. This talk will include and expand on what I have established in my previous work, "Lotus Rendezvous", and apply it to daily contemporary living.

LOTUS RENDEZVOUS - Fusion of the Art of Subtraction and Addition, Chinese Philosophy to Western Art Form

Traditionally, photography is a means of recording the outside world using different perspectives under the lens and the camera. It is a selection of momentary actions, a decisive moment. This is very different from paintings, which reconstitute and reorganize symbols into an empty canvas. As summarized by British critic John Berger in "Way of Seeing", "The photographer's way of seeing is reflected in his choice of subject. The painter's way of seeing is reconstituted by the marks he makes on canvas or papers". There are also sayings that "Photography is an art of selection or Subtraction" while "Painting is an art of Addition".

Since the invention of camera some 170 years ago, this media as an artistic expression has been rapidly developing.

As Hong Kong Chinese born in the era of Colonial British rule, I naturally adopted photography, a modern media of western origin, as my way of expression. After the handover of Hong Kong from the United Kingdom to China, I gradually discovered the root native to my bloodline, and

treasures in Chinese culture, traditional Chinese literati painting and calligraphy, and its relation to Chinese philosophy. Under the philosophical umbrella of Lao Tzu's Taoism, the "freehand style – 「寫意」" in traditional Chinese literati painting does not emphasize narrative accurate replication of reality. Instead, it stresses the hidden meaning and emotion, an abstract reinterpretation of the visual realism in the paintings. The development of "poetic world - 「意境」" beyond the visual reality as represented in the paintings is not to reproduce the appearance of nature exactly (realism), but rather to grasp an emotion or atmosphere, and capture the "rhythm" and "harmony" of nature. It is a form of expressionistic art that captures the unseen – 「景外之景」、 「立象盡意」.

The integration of the ideals of Taoism into this Western media of photography, the combination of the essences of photography "capturing of decisive moment and choosing of perspective", with the thinking behind Chinese art, painting and calligraphy is my goal. This, I wish to accomplish by infusion of this Chinese philosophy into my photographic compositions. This, I wish to create the fusion of

photograph and Chinese brush painting and calligraphy style, but using photographic techniques.

This had been attempted in the last century by Mr. Jingshan LANG, generally considered as the father of photography in China, who used dark room techniques such as superimposition of negatives films, to put calligraphic Chinese characters onto the photographs, creating photographic images that resembled traditional Chinese paintings. This is an art of fusion of Subtraction and Addition. In the 1980s, Mr. Rili CHEN, another protagonist of this fusion art form, demonstrated another form of fusion of Subtraction and Addition by inviting contemporary accomplished artists to paint and write on his photographs.

I have chosen Lotus as the subject matter. "Lotus" is a favorite and much adored subject in Chinese culture. It is considered a symbol of noble character. Multiple art forms including poetry, painting are the media used to express the "Love of the Lotus". I approached my goal of artistic presentation using the subject matter "Lotus" by three photographic expressions: "Colour", "Light", "Shade", to feature a gradual transition

from a dazzling lotus pond in a more direct and concrete realism, to a more abstract and conceptual manners figuring a monochromic and yet infinite representations.

In the "Colour" section, I intended to present the sensible beauty and elicit the traditional Chinese esteem for lotus ponds. The works are taken by a conventional approach, with visual images enriched through the application of both eastern and western scenic compositions, and the combination of traditional and modern

multiple exposure photographic techniques, recreating the visual aesthetic of "freehand style" painting, depicting the "poetic world".



[Color - Whispering](#)

This is the art of conventional photography, mere "Subtraction".

In the "Light" section, I further applied this technique, and with the integration of different angles, focuses and apertures into one single picture, the vivacity of lotus pond under different weather, season and

lighting conditions are consolidated into one image. Through these



Cubism-like creations, I endeavor to translate the perpetuity and infinitude of lotus pond into comprehensible

Light – Bathing Beauty

images. Thus the final images are not the

narrative realism of the nature as in “traditional photography” but a reinterpretation of the virtual truth, an imaginary world of mine at the time and space when the images are taken. They are yet another interpretation of “decisive moment” of mine, while capturing the very moment of thoughts and emotions when the photos are taken. This is the art of fusion of Subtraction and Addition.

The “Shade” section shows a collection of works with non-conventional photographic techniques applied extensively. The multiple exposure technique helps capture my emotion at the moment. This cannot be achieved through post-shooting development. In this way, the subject matter, an element of the nature, the “lotus stems” are transformed into forceful and exceptional lines that complement and supplement each other. Crossing over or running in parallel, the lotus stems created some

discrete and artistic composition that is impossible to crystalize in reality.

The resulting picture is the outcome of new angles and new perceptions that comes not from what we see with our eyes, but from what lotus pond transmitted to our mind. This mirrors the thoughts and rationale of calligraphy, which emphasizes



forceful lines, structures, space, rhythm,

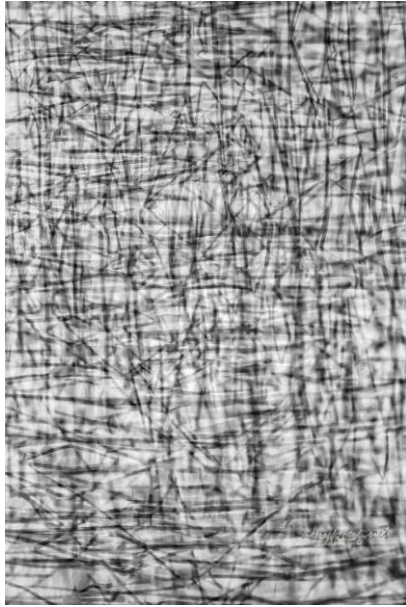
[Shade – Shade #1](#)

harmony and infinite soul as far as one can imagine. In this way, I try to infuse the traditional valued beliefs into these images. The reality of the original lotus stems is limited, but through composition, it is infinite.

Lao Tzu said: "It is like the eternal void: filled with infinite possibilities."

"Empty yet inexhaustible, it gives birth to infinite worlds."

These compositions attempt to actualize and reinterpret these abstract concepts into a photographic image, not by area of void and emptiness, but by infinite and inexhaustible structures and spaces created by mere



withered lotus ponds and ponds alone. It is another approach to the art of fusion of Subtraction and Addition.

[Shade – Shade #9](#)

APPLICATIONS TO 21ST CENTURY CONTEMPORARY WORLD

Moving forwards, I have tried to apply the new vision and perspective that I developed in the "Lotus Rendezvous" to contemporary 21st century daily living.

Instead of "Lotus", I used other "subject matters" that I encountered in my daily life, crossing over with other disciplines of photography, be it street photography, travel photography etc.

Thus, the traditional concept of photography, "decisive moment of capturing the reality of the world", is changed to "capturing the decisive moment of my profound feelings and emotions" at the time and space of execution, as a reaction to contemporary daily living.

All the works collected in the talk resulted from my efforts to capture and magnify the unique feelings and features I experienced during my encounters with the subject matters.

I instituted the concepts, did the shooting, post-shooting refinement, and photo development on my own, trying to apply new concepts and elements to portray my profound feelings, and furnish readers with new ideas, new visions, and new experience.

ROUNDING UP, in this study, I attempt to

1. Reinvent photography from the “art of Subtraction”, to the “fusion of Subtraction and Addition”;
2. Reinterpret the concepts of “decisive moment” from reality to emotional captures, from realism to abstraction;
3. Revisit the fundamentals of traditional Chinese philosophical values and beliefs using “lotus” as the subject matter. Then infuse the concepts developed into the capturing of the 21st century contemporary world; using Photography, the modern art form of Western origin.

It is a great privilege to be able to share my thoughts with you in this conference.

I sincerely hope that you will enjoy going through the works.

More about me could be reached at www.amypang.net.