

Latter-day Lingnan painter

The strengths of the accomplished painting of Au Ho-nien are his fine drawing, and his delicate and evocative use of all shades of ink. The weakness lies in his inability, ~~or~~ or perhaps lack of acute desire, to ^{always} strike far ~~enough~~ ^{out} from the great classical tradition of Chinese painting. Some of the ~~best~~ works therefore have an old-fashioned air, well done but dated performances of rather dated thematic material.

At his best in some of the largest pictures in the exhibit (which are also the latest works shown) his strengths show clearly enough. The large (200 X 300cm) Cranes is but three years old and strikes brilliantly with its excitign drawing of ~~the~~ animated black and white birds in sharp focus against an evocative rendering of fleecy ~~trees~~ trees rendered ~~with~~ with consummate skill in the finest gradations of grey ink. Breathtaking skill!

The painting called Cowherd is actually a portrait of a water buffalo with ~~the~~ (incidentally) a boy on its back. The slothful dourness of the animal is enhanced by the dumb patience in its eye. And once more the manipulation of greys is wonderfully done.

The tiger, too, is more ferocious and convincing than any animal I can think of ~~in the~~ ~~the~~ painting of the Lingnan master Gao Qifeng.

Perhaps the most moving and effective work in t^(h) exhibition is another very large painting Seven Poets and Bamboos, painted ~~in~~ in 1986. Here on the ~~the~~ fringes of a soft copse of bamboo where the whole gamut of greys ~~is~~ ^{is} washed on, from black to palest shades, ~~the~~ the poets sit about on the grass, one playing a lute, two debating the merits of the view, ~~the~~ others talking. The moment is summed up in all its quietude and in a manner that is far from the same sort of work in t^(h) classical tradition. The Lingnan ~~ethos~~ ethos had much to offer to Chinese painting. The tentative inclusion of some Western elements in attitude, takes the best examples far from their Chinese ancestors.