



## FADING DREAMS

*Paintings and sculptures of Pekar*

## **ART AND CHARACTER**

**Pekar**

Art serves as a vanguard: as such it ought to have a forward-looking awareness, and not simply cater to mass aesthetics; otherwise it has no way to advance. Art must meet the challenge of spurring on the aesthetic sense of the masses and carrying it ever forward. It should embody a transcendent and sublime awareness. What one sees in my works, however, seems like the opposite of this. One moment it's as if we've returned to the conservative rigidities of medieval Europe, while the next we're lingering by the side of Rembrandt. Is this regression or is it just contrariness?

During my time at university I would sometimes go through periods of indulging myself in modernistic expressionism: Baudelaire's poetry, German expressionist writings: these seemed like the very breath of my soul. I painted a few pictures and wrote a good number of poems in that style. At the time, perhaps because I was concerned with individual liberation, they tran-

scended any sort of ethical tradition and this imparted to me a certain aloofness; a certain disdain for everything and a feeling of floating along a cloud. More and more of what I saw was of the dark nature of the human character: gloom, depression, isolation, terror, tumult... Always there was the bitterness of life that could never be fully expressed nor fully recounted. It seemed that I was attached to painfully and drank the sour wine of this bitter tragedy. And then, in the midst of my thirsting, I found Buddha; and the Buddha's mercy and tolerance changed my view of life. Tolerance brought me stability, and stability gave me peace for my soul; while mercy brought me selflessness, selflessness gave me life's happiness. I don't recall the name of the song, but there's one with a verse that goes: "over and over in sadness and darkness I sought/ and finally I learned that only in the ordinary one finds the calm and real." Only now, when I sing it, does it have any tangible meaning. The age of 29 was a big turning point in my life. Six years of worshipping and believing in Buddha transformed this naturally pampered and strong-willed girl... Nowadays, I am like the

child I was years ago, at my grandmother's side. Perhaps what I see is all a dream fading with the passage of time.

Coming back to my art, only when I look at it do I discover the distance between myself and the struggles of Schiller and the cries of Munch. My aesthetics hark back to the period around the Renaissance, to the Tibetan thangka and mural art of the 11th and 12th centuries, and to the simplicity of primitive art.

If we can state that art is the product of an artist's soul, I think that truth, goodness and beauty ought to be an artist's primary subjects. Moreover, the forms in which art is manifested ought to be based on a multiplicity of models. Only then can it draw forth a resonant harmony from different configurations, different cultures, and different spiritual domains. It also needs to take into account those people who have been left behind and forgotten by art. A large segment of people remain wholly unmoved by what is called art; they don't appreciate it. Do they really have no affinity for art? What, in their

view, really is art? Have they no art of their own kept within their own hearts? One can't deduce another's art on the basis of own individual feelings about colors, their partiality to various shapes, or familiarity with specific objects. Perhaps interaction with artists should be treated as something vital, like the universal need for food and nourishment. Everyone's tastes are different. Art ought to be a part of everyone's life: spiritual sustenance, a pleasure for the eyes, and the joy of the soul.

In choosing my materials and forms of expression I have mostly used the techniques of realism, which are in fact those of classicism. Most importantly, I have taken three major points into consideration:

- 1 The basic aesthetics of the entire Tibetan people tend towards the serious, elegant, and simple. This is quite close to the classicism of Western painting (the palace school).
- 2 From the standpoint of the historical development of Western painting, we can see that religious culture depended on the artistic

stream that flowed from Middle Ages through the Renaissance to carry and reproduce its forms and images. This is very similar to the connection between the development and growth of Tibetan art and the social environment surrounding the propagation and development of Buddhist culture. Moreover, the great craftsmen of the Renaissance, like da Vinci and Michelangelo, were also master artists; they were thoroughly skilled in mathematics, astronomy, medicine and science. Tibetan history has also produced many outstanding historical figures who have made great contributions to the development of Tibetan painting and sculpture. Historical records tell of Srong-btsan sgam-po using blood from his nose to draw an image of Dpal-Idan lha-mo. The 5th Dalai Lama was also creative and innovative.

- 3 In my painting and sculpting I have used the techniques of realism to represent the indomitable vitality of the Tibetan people. The directness and frankness of the Tibetan people, their way of understanding the universe and its creatures, and their search for

the underpinnings of life: all are revealed in their strong, solid forms, and in their penetrating and blazing eyes.

Someone once said that "The obliteration of the individuality of Tibetan artists, represented a stroke of wisdom. On a spiritual level, the ego was sacrificed for the sake of participation in the perfecting of mass norms of behavior among Tibetans as a people." I have lived among this great people. A great many of my sculptures and paintings were produced within this sort of spiritual environment. Of course, there is also a small portion that use modern methods and take a crude brush to a large canvas, so to speak. At the same time I still needed to fully attain individual creativity initiative and freedom in order for my works to be complete. This is surely what called the "individuality" of modern artists.

Aside from this, I should comment on the present exhibition. In late December, 1997, when I was more or less on my own, out on the streets, Tashi Tsering, the historian with the Amnye Machen Institute, called me over. With a heart



full of pity towards one who had encountered adversity he gave me encouragement and suggested that I mount a one-person exhibit. In addition, the Amnye Machen Institute took me in, provided me with rent money, living expensed, and the funds needed to mount an exhibit. But what is especially unforgettable to me is the fact that during the four years in which I studied Buddhism and engaged in Buddhist practice, fate and karma had pushed me into a psychiatric hospital. When I returned to Dharamsala I was rejected; a hopeless wreck, spurned and hounded by common society. It was the leaders of the Amnye Machen Institute and other friends there whose recognition and regard helped me, a "mad woman" to once more find the self-respect that is every human being's due. Today, this has given me this opportunity to take these first strong yet delicate steps as a well-meaning Tibetan woman shouldering her responsibilities towards herself, her people, her teachers, her parents, her friends, her homeland and all mankind. And also I would like to thank the Directors at the Amnye Machen Institute: Tashi Tsering, Jamyang Norbu, Lhasang



Tsering and Pema Bhum, as well as the institute's staff for extending the hand of friendship in support of this new Tibetan woman. I would also like to thank Jamyang Norbu for his guidance and help me concerning art, and to express my gratitude to my husband for his support, and for providing me with a warm home.

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Translated from the Chinese by Prof. Elliot Sperling