

for continuing students

the dance 
of the eye

and 
the hand

more fundamentals of Chinese brush painting by Bob Schmitt

lesson 1

- look at any Chinese landscape painting...
- Chinese painting theory: the 3 distances

Assumptions behind the dance of the eye and the hand

As a teacher I begin with several assumptions.
Any student coming to me has 3 sets of skills to be nurtured.

First, the student has the skills of the eye - when they look at things, what do they see?

Second, the student has the set of skills of the hand - how are they able to connect what they see to the brush, the ink and the paper?

Third, the student has the set of skills of their heart/mind - how are their actions connected to the source of their energy, their spirit, the Qi?

It is from these assumptions that I now offer the dance of the eye and the hand.

These instructional videos with printable models are based on the concept that to learn Chinese brush painting one must train not only one's hand but one's eye as well.

The understanding is that continued learning is a tension between what the eye can see and what the hand can do.

And that the dance of the eye and the hand will always be in play.

That tension is always there.

Mastery is a process.

Not a destination.

Bob Schmitt

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About brush painter Bob Schmitt



I am a life long student and teacher of the traditions of Chinese brush painting.

I began my study of brush painting in 1962 watching what was then educational tv. I would sit in front of the tv after school with my brush and ink and learn basic forms. I practiced most of my life unschooled.

In the late 90s I was fortunate to begin to study with Lok Tok, Yitong Lok of Toronto and

Hong Zhang in Minneapolis—three incredibly gifted Chinese brush painters and teachers.

Since 1998 I have been a weekly student of Hong Zhang, a native of Shanghai, schooled there and now living in Bloomington, Minnesota.

I have also had a long distance relationship with Chinese master Lok Tok (now deceased) and his son Yitong Lok.

In 2001, all three of these teachers endorsed my beginning to teach Chinese painting to students here in Minneapolis.

Currently I have 40 students who before the COVID 19 pandemic came to my house for weekly instruction in Chinese calligraphy and paintings.

I also have a weekly painting practice.
To see more of my work, visit:

www/laughingwatersstudio.com

Look at any
Chinese landscape
painting.

Where do you think
the painter began?

Most everything you might know about western painting, particularly western water color is turn on its head in approaching Chinese brush painting.

It begins with the line, the outline.
Then line shading.
Then washes.
Lastly color.

It begins in the foreground and works to the back.

It begins with the bottom and works to the top.

It begins with the darkest ink and works to the lightest.

Now in a tradition as deep and broad as Chinese painting there are exceptions to every rule.

This is general guidance. Helpful to allow you to decode the complexity of a painting and begin to decipher the code.

From single point perspective

Western painting works from single point perspective. I, the viewer, am the center of the world and everything radiates out from me.

To moving perspective

Traditional Chinese painting has moving point perspective. The artist (and the viewer) can be in one point at one place in the painting and move their point of perspective to another, and another point.

Thus in the Chinese system one can be standing in multiple places at once, or even in multiple points in time. There is not necessarily a single point of perspective.

In the painting on the previous page, where would you start?

One would begin with the foundational tree at the bottom center, in the front. This is a keystone and holds the weight of the entire rest of the piece. Thus it needs to be strong enough to carry that weight.

One would start with the building of the truck, then branches, then outline of leaves. Color would not come until the end of the process.

The structure of the painting in its entirety and in each of its components must be strong and integral to the painting.

The structure may be totally obliterated in the final but it needs to be there. Going too quickly to the final appearance without having an internal structure will create a weak painting.

The problem is that if you throw out western single point perspective, what do you use to structure your composition?

This brings us to Chinese painting theory.

In the following lessons we will explore several sets of Chinese painting theories:

The Three Distances

The Six Methods

The Eight Relationships

In these lessons we will study the calligraphy for each set of theories and review and paint models that demonstrate the concepts contained in each.

The Three Distances

in Chinese painting theory

The Three Distances gives us 3 ways of organizing perspective in a painting.

We have distance in height.

As the viewer I am down low and look up at the height of the mountain.

We have distance in depth.

As the viewer I can see distance of layer behind layer behind layer. Giving me a sense of depth.

These first two are often used together in landscape paintings to show not only height but distance.

The third is distance at the same level. This one is much less frequently used.

It shows all elements sitting at the same level.

Often at the bottom of a valley or river bottom looking across.

Creating the calligraphy

This composition has 6 characters for its content plus a 3 character title.

4 of these nine characters are the same: the character for distance.

In creating this calligraphy piece, we begin with the 3 pairs of characters, working from right column, top to bottom, moving leftward.

Once those are complete the title can be added and then the date and your name.

One must look very carefully at each of the 4 characters for distance. Though structurally identical, each one has variations to distinguish it from the others.

This requires using the skill of your eye.

Look carefully.

How do the dots differ from each other?

How do the wave strokes differ?

What strokes are thick?

Which ones are thin?

Take your time.

The Three Distances

in Chinese painting theory

平
遠

深
遠

高
遠

三
遠
法

píng
yuǎn

perspective
on same
level

shēn
yuǎn

perspective
in depth

gāo
yuǎn

perspective
in height

sān
yuǎn
fǎ

**three
distances
methods**

The Three Distances: Stroke Order/Direction

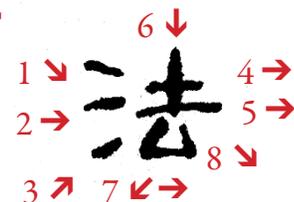
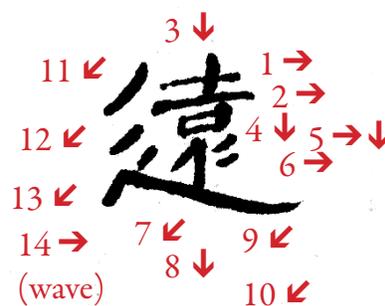
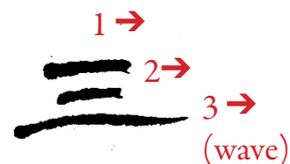
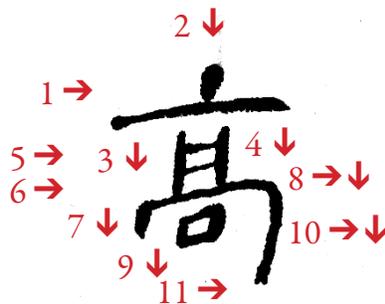
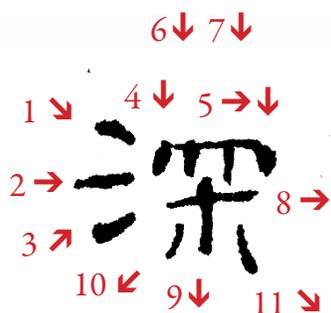
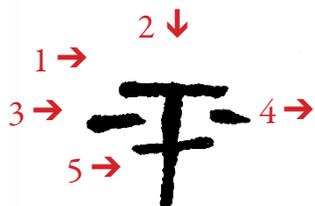
Start with:

column 1

then column 2

then column 3

then title



(repeat same order at right)

(repeat same order at right)

(repeat same at left)