

BOOK REVIEWS

ZEN ART FOR MEDITATION. By Stewart Holmes and Chimyo Horioka. Charles Tuttle Co: Tokyo, Rutland, Vermont, 1973, 115 pp.

A sonata for unaccompanied cello by Bach, a simple drawing of a Dutch farmhouse by Rembrandt, and, yes, an ink painting like "Hui-neng tearing up a Sutra" by Liang K'ai have this in common: as by a stroke of magic they force us out of our habitual half-sleep into a mood of instant contemplation. Perhaps it is this powerful stimulation of our usually repressed contemplative receptivity that is the criterion of what is truly great in art. Yet we vary in our affinity with even the greatest, most universal artists. My own inner ear, for instance seems different from that of R.H. Blyth, who certainly was an exquisitely sensitive man. Like Blyth I hear Bach, Purcell, Mozart as being "full of Zen," but I also discern this quality in Vivaldi (think of his Gloria!) whereas Blyth judges him to be "masculine but empty."

It is one thing, however, to be aware of this "Zen-fullness" in a Rembrandt, a Goya and a Liang K'ai, it is quite a different thing to assemble an anthology of works by the masters, reproduce them poorly, combine them with "commentaries" and haiku and then to hope or even to claim presenting such an anthology as a "stimulus to expansions (*plural!*) of consciousness." The authors go even further and claim that the book "may function as a substitute (admittedly quite inadequate) for the guidance of a Zen master . . ."

The word "inadequate" unfortunately sums up my evaluation of this book, built around a random collection of "15 Zen Tenets," adorned by 31 illustrations of "great masterpieces by Zen-inspired artists and poets, used and preserved for centuries by followers of the Zen Way." I find in these "commentaries" little but un-inspiring sermonizing on the subject-matter rather than elucidation of the artistic-creative-contemplative characteristics of either the work of art or the artist; very often I find them almost comically flatfooted as in this commentary on a 15th century "Boat on a River":

"Here is a man flat out. Not flat out trying feverishly to make his mark by moving mountains but flat out enjoying the mountains just as they made

BOOK REVIEWS

themselves. His mind is as free of thoughts of making progress as the landscape he views, unmoving, is free of river and village and trees. . . . This is a world of horizontals. No seaside amusement park structures thrust their scaffolding up out of the sand. No summit hotels or television antennae pimple the peaks. This man and his forebears have been content to stay on the natural plane, content to contemplate rather than conquer . . .”

As far as the reproductions are concerned: the paintings are admirably selected by Chimyo Horioka, but they are so poorly reproduced and often on such a small scale, that the all-important structure of the masterpieces is completely lost. Forgetting all about the use of these works of high art for “meditation,” it is impossible to enter into any contact whatever with, for instance, plate 1 (Landscape with Flock of Birds, 12th c.): a muddy miniature that looks vaguely oriental, yet might easily be mistaken for a fragment of a Dutch 16th or 17th century engraving. As if to prove that adequate reproduction is attainable, I received simultaneously with this book Hideo Kudaira’s “Narrative Picture Scrolls” (Weatherhill). Here the quality of line and tone, the sensitive selection of detail is such that it stimulates the beholder to feel “in contact” with the original work of art. It is such excellence of reproduction that focuses rather than diminishes our perception of the creative process, the graphic dynamism of a work of art. Better no reproductions than poor ones, which reduce great paintings to the status of “pictures,” of things.

FREDERICK FRANCK

KŪKAI: MAJOR WORKS. Translated, with an account of his life and a study of his thought, by Yoshito S. Hakeda. Columbia University Press, New York and London, 1972, 303 pp.

Kūkai (774–835) (also known as Kōbō Daishi), who introduced Shingon Esoteric Buddhism into Japan, stands as one of the most influential figures in the history of Japanese culture. His philosophy provided the spiritual and theoretical basis for much of Japanese classical culture. In addition to his major contributions, Kūkai is remembered as the inventor of the *kana* syllabary, the founder of the monastic center of Mt. Kōya, a wandering saint and originator of the pilgrimage circuit of 88 temples on Shikoku, a builder of reservoirs and wells, and one of the