

A Theorem of Life and the Universe

—Images and Meanings in George Y. Ho's Artworks

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The origin of painting has always been linked closely with cultural elements that connect directly to a person's core, such as occultism, religion and spirituality. This quality is present in the art of both the East and the West.

George Y. Ho's paintings always possess a trans-temporal and trans-cultural character, shuttling between different religions and societies. It is a character that touches the human heart, or a frequency that resonates with one's emotions. When pondering about this character, one cannot help but think about the topic of the Universal Source brought up by the Greek philosophers in their discourse on aesthetics.

Before going further into ancient aesthetics, we need to review Ho's art creations through his career up to now. During his early period, particularly the 1990's, He often combined words and image in his composition. According to the artist himself, such presentation probably is related to his point of view at that time. In the article *About Me and My Hall of Records*, Ho explains that the combination of text and image has been one of his favorite formats. Such format can be traced back to the traditional Chinese landscape paintings or the medieval illuminated manuscripts. The difference between those and the way Ho combines text and images is that he aims to provide the viewer with more space for imagination, rather than delivering a simple one-way message. Using the works by the surrealist artist René Magritte as an example, Ho points out that he intends to present contents beyond the meanings of images and words in his works. It is a space for imagination that surpasses the confinement of cultures and directly reaches the inner depth of hearts where no language can describe.

This aesthetic concept directly resonates with that of the ancient Greeks. In 6th century B.C., those of the Pythagoreans School in Greek already paid particular attention to the question of the origin and substance of the universes. They generally considered that numbers (mathematics) are the origin of the physical world. While numbers are abstract ideas, it can be understood by one's spirit. In other words, the numbers govern the universes. From here we can understand that certain abstract spiritual entity exists prior to the creation of matter. With this concept applied to the

aesthetics, the theme of beauty is all about harmony, symmetry and proportion. This mathematically based aesthetic philosophy mentions that both music and art can serve to purify one's mind. Based on mathematics, all aesthetic questions can be answered at the cosmic, universal level.

The major attribute of beauty is "harmony" within the Pythagorean concepts. Harmony refers to the unification of muddled elements, or finding unanimity in different factors. There exists a quantitative balance as well as a coordinated consistency between the opposites. In other words, beauty is harmony created through quantitative relationships. Since this observation is made from the perspective of music theory, this aesthetic especially considers the universe as a harmonized system of fixed numbers. Any harmonious thing or phenomena could be considered as beauty.

Ho's distinctive qualities were already apparent in his work from the early 1990's. In the exhibition entitled *Paintings and Monotypes by George Y. Ho*, He infused images with flashes of spiritual inspiration or deeply pondered issues to produce tableaux resembling refined literature. These imageries are sometimes symbolic, sometimes showing religious sublimity and sacredness, but mostly they are poetic expressions of personal sentiments. Nevertheless, from his works of this period, one could detect subtly that, beyond the poetic imagery, Ho's intention to pursue an aesthetic concept that transcends the intellect and conventional training and allows him to find possibility to resonate with the cosmological order.

For his recent works, Ho takes on an occult approach and adopts a mandala-style circular form as the main format. This circular imagery not only matches the invisible operating procedure of the universe but also relates to the prototypic iconography in both Eastern and Western civilizations. In other words, Ho uses the circular form to represent all concepts and space. The kind of content a circle could contain depends on its ascertained order as well as the projection of the viewer's inner yearning.

For Ho, this circular format artwork is a type of "hyperspace" symbol. Namely, a common language can be shared among all through colors and symbols despite different languages and cultural backgrounds. Accordingly, the circular form indicates the formless universe as well as a space that is open to all possibilities.

Some seemingly very orderly arrangements in those artworks actually came about

by chance. Ho confessed that almost all of the colors in tableaux were picked coincidentally, and therefore the final outcome of each piece was not predictable. Surprisingly, these compositions of chance turned out to be ingeniously balanced, each showing individual character, and a gauge of the energies that created them. In other words, although the selection of colors is by chance, there is a hidden pre-destined order: art does imitate life.

This particular working process is closely tied to Ho's recent interest in the realm of energy. In the *Space of Wonder series*, all of the circular forms are based on a 360-degree circular template which is subdivided into 36 sections of ten degrees each. With this parameter, different circles are repeating, growing, overlapping and interlocking constantly, like unicellular growth or the blossoming of the "flower of life." Hanging the artworks higher than usual and placing them in a "space within a space" formation create a special installation that offers a new point of view other than the conventional one-way mode. Ho once mentioned that recently he has been particularly interested in spaces for ritual or worship. This interest is not specifically related to holding any particular faith but does demonstrate his focus on life, the balance of energies and occultism. Indeed, as Ho mentioned earlier, it is possible to express different types of cosmology through art, and such ideology for art matches perfectly with the concept of harmony of ancient Greek aesthetics.

Ho apparently has entered the next stage of his creative life, where art creation is not about looking for answers nor some means to an end. Art should be about "receiving the infinite possibilities." For him, making true choice comes only with total freedom, and art making is no exception.