

Barbara Dunne / Hong Ling



Hong Ling, *Rainbow-like*, 2015, Private collection, © Hong Ling. Courtesy Soka Art.

Hong Ling: A Retrospective at the Chester Beatty Library.

My trip to the Dublin galleries had been carefully planned for several weeks. However, it was a serendipitous scroll through social media the night before that led me to make the eleventh hour decision to visit the Chester Beatty Library on the last Saturday of January – the beginning of Chinese New Year – to see the paintings of the Chinese artist Hong Ling. Although he may be relatively unknown in the West, his work, like so many Oriental artists, deserves our attention and respect.

Monumental landscapes in oils and ink confront the viewer. I was unprepared for the emotional impact of his work, particularly his snow scenes. The oils are thickly applied and built up in layers. Hong's works are a composite of bold, almost abstract marks. The effect is extraordinarily moving. The viewer is absorbed into the scene, emotionally, and in a way, physically, through the scale of painting and the densely vibrating colours. The intensity of colour and the scale of some of the works, particularly when seen all together, can be almost overwhelming.

Scenes of nature dominate the exhibition, In only one painting is there the hint of a person, in the shadows of *Rainbow Like* (2015), while in *Cold Snow* (1991) a couple of huts are dwarfed by the mountainous landscape.

One can see the influence of traditional Chinese art in the practice of meditating on a scene from nature for hours before returning home to paint from memory. This is also Hong's method. His works are a meditation on landscape, rooted in Taoist tradition, to which his inks on paper are a homage, and yet they remain fresh and bold as in *Diffuse Spring*. It is his paintings, however, that fuse traditional Eastern philosophy with modern Western painting techniques (Abstract Expressionism is an evident influence), that took my breath away.

But what moved me the most was not the fact that I was experiencing some far-off, Oriental landscape, but the sense of familiarity, that I could identify with those pine trees, those mountains, that snow and the passage of time.

Barbara Dunne is an artist and writer living in Connemara, Co. Galway.

Hong Ling: A Retrospective at the [Chester Beatty Library](#), 21 October 2016 – 29 January 2017.