

## Chinese Brush Painting: A Lesson

by Marianne Peel

“...To the mind that is still, the whole universe surrenders.”

-Lao Tzu

Serenity will be found in the presence of these graceful grasses,  
she tells us, mixing the ink and the water.

Short stick of hardened pine soot and glue, she wets this ink stick  
pressing into inkstone.

A flute can be made of bamboo, she tells us. The bamboo the vessel,  
with breath-song softly passing through.

She shows us how to apply ink to the brush: brush of white goat hair,  
black rabbit hair, brown weasel hair.

Bamboo. From the sound made in the forest, she tells us.  
From the sound of hollow canes knocking together in the wind.

She paints the stalk – no corrections, no touch ups. Just one confident  
continuous stroke to the segmented nodal rings.

She tells a story: A lonely bird rests in the forest after a long journey. She is tired.  
In her resting, she is struck by a bamboo pole, falling in the forest.

She pecks and pecks at the stalk. She promises vengeance.  
She pierces and punctures. The stalk cracks in her determined beak.

And when the hollow cane opens, exposed to wind and air,  
a man and a woman emerge from inside, she tells us.

The lonely bird reveals the first two humans. Hiding in the bamboo stalk.  
There, just waiting to unfold, she tells us.

Find the chi – the movement of the life force. Become one  
with the bamboo, she tells us.

Strive not for photographic likeness. This will always escape your brush.  
Strive for the essence. Express the essence of the bamboo. Honor the bamboo.

Bamboo, summer flower and shoot. Look to orchid in spring, chrysanthemum  
in autumn, the plum blossom in winter. Today we are bamboo.

Strive for simplicity. Find the life energy. Lift the brush off the paper  
with one, unbroken flow. Use your whole arm.