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ENTERTAINMENT ARTS HEALTH LIFESTYLE

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Chinese Character





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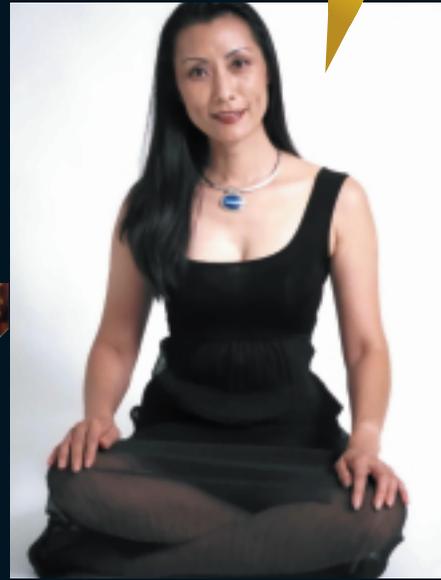
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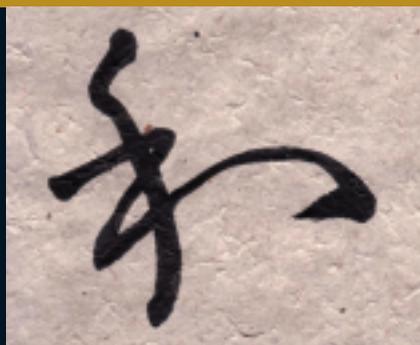
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*Harmony -
Asian Brush Calligraphy*



Cecilia Ling: Chinese Character



Truth -
Asian Brush Calligraphy



*Tao, Path, The Way -
Asian Brush Calligraphy*

China has a rich literary history of over seven thousand years, yet during that span of time, one art form has ranked even higher than painting... the art of calligraphy. "You can see an artist's personality in their calligraphy-- their knowledge, literary level, and culture. Not all young people can do it," according to Cecilia Ling, and she should know. She started her study of calligraphy when she was six years old in Beijing, where she grew up. "Calligraphy is a discipline, and you have to train yourself with patience. In China, you hesitate to call yourself a calligrapher."

Cecilia's parents are both writers, and she says she has a poet's heart, but her poetry is found in her calligraphy, her photography, and in the intricate simplicity of the tea ceremony. For a day job, she owns a firm dealing with matters of international business, she has degrees from the Harvard School of Business and UT Austin. Oh yeah, and she cooks...and teaches Chinese cooking classes. Not a bad portfolio for someone who could barely speak English when she came to this country to stay in the late 1980's, just before Tianamen Square.



*Winter Leaves - Wood Block Impression
Guadalupe Mt., Tx 2002*

Chinese characters are graphic in nature, simple forms that represent deep meanings-- pictures that are not only worth a thousand words, they are words. The meaning of a character can also have intricate shades of nuance... the term for "crisis", for instance, is represented by two Chinese characters: "crisis" and "opportunity". Calligraphy, then, is a form of meditation, "one of the best forms of stress relief" as Cecilia puts it. "The brush is something that's soft and flexible, but it's said that it can weigh a thousand pounds, because when you pick it up, it requires you to be focused and in harmony. Some of China's best calligraphers are monks, not because they have nothing to do, but because they understand harmony between the self and the mastery of an art form."

There's a standard form of calligraphy that's used for print that's to be read, and forms that are considered artwork. "It can take twenty or thirty years to write the freehand or 'swift' style," Cecilia explains, "but there are still rules that you have to follow. Styles are named after masters, and once you're very famous, you can do what you want. One master might have as many as five different styles."

The term "freehand" is misleading, though. Before she does a piece of calligraphy, she thinks about it for several months, studies masterpieces in her "library" of calligraphy, and might practice it from fifty to a hundred (or even two hundred) times, on recycled paper. "Once you put down the

CECILIA LING HAS REGULAR SHOWINGS OF HER WORK IN GALLERIES AND BUSINESSES THROUGHOUT AUSTIN. SHE IS CURRENTLY ONE OF A HUNDRED LOCAL ARTISTS WHOSE WORK WAS CHOSEN TO APPEAR IN THE PEOPLE'S GALLERY AT CITY HALL, A SELECTION OF PHOTOS, PAINTINGS, SCULPTURE, AND INSTALLMENT ART THAT OPENED IN FEBRUARY. THE EXHIBIT WILL RUN FOR A YEAR, AND BALLOTING BY THOSE WHO'VE VISITED WILL DETERMINE WHICH SINGLE PIECE WILL BE PURCHASED BY THE CITY FOR PERMANENT DISPLAY. VISIT WWW.ART.COM/MEMBERARTIST/CECI_LING TO SEE HER ARTWORK AND CLASS SCHEDULE, OR EMAIL CECI_LING@HOTMAIL.COM.

brush" she says. "it's done. It's not like oil painting, where you can paint over things. You have to think before you write." This explains why someone who asked her to do a character for a tattoo was surprised by the price, because it takes days of work to produce a single character. (Interestingly, a recent article in the New York Times Magazine pointed out that there's a new market for the removal or alteration of tattoos of Chinese characters that, turns out, don't really say what they were supposed to say.)

You won't have that problem with a character by Cecilia Ling, who also teaches calligraphy classes. She takes the first five minutes of each class to calm down, followed by exercises and massage for the elbow, wrist, hands, and fingers. Fifteen minutes is spent talking about culture, history, and masters, and each class ends with a tea break, where students taste different teas. "Tea and calligraphy are similar," she says, "because of their simplicity, and because you add water to both the ink and the tea to bring them alive."

Cecilia brings the principles and integrity of calligraphy to her photography, framing each shot carefully with the same sense of balance and placement she uses for a character. By Chinese standards, photography is a relatively new art form, only a little over a hundred years old, and so many people have digital cameras now that they don't understand the art form. "Don't change the image," she says. "A photograph is not a painting, so you don't have the right to change it." Her photos make people say, "I want to go there," or "I went there, but I didn't get that picture."

"That's why some photographs sell for \$35, and Ansel Adams' sell for \$47,000," she says. Cecilia has worked with people in 64 different countries, and her photos might be of Macchu Picchu, Big Bend, or the Forbidden City in Beijing-- a place that's usually jammed with people, but which she found at a precise moment in time when it was virtually deserted. Each one them is framed in its four corners like a piece of calligraphy, and each one represents something important to Cecilia. "A feeling of quiet," she says, "and harmony-- things I had to learn to incorporate into my own life. I can make the truth look like a dream, or something I saw in a dream become truth... but I don't twist the image."



Window Quartet - China, 2002