



**Cultural Visions and Educations Compared: The
teaching of Western landscape painting and
Chinese Shan Shui painting in lower secondary
schools**

Aurora Vivenzio

Cultural Visions and Educations Compared:

The teaching of Western landscape painting and Chinese Shan Shui painting in lower secondary schools

By: Aurora Vivenzio

The following article aims to compare the teaching methods and approaches for representing the natural environment and phenomenal reality in the Art and Image subject for lower secondary schools (初中美术).¹

As is known, the representation of reality is influenced by the philosophical, political, anthropological, religious, and social frameworks of a given culture, which define its distinctive characteristics. It is evident that Chinese education is founded on the *Rujia* 儒家 school of Kongzi (Confucius), and the Daoist school of Zhuangzi (庄子), which also provides important theoretical principles, particularly the idea of direct experience and observation within nature. In Europe, philosophers such as Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates, based on their philosophical views, were among the world's first educators and thinkers to promote aesthetic education. However, it was through the work of Rousseau, Froebel, Pestalozzi, the Agazzi Sisters, Montessori, and other great pedagogues that education gradually shifted toward active, natural learning and direct engagement with the external environment.

The teaching of art in compulsory education in Europe began with early academic studies in the 14th century, thanks to figures such as Cennino Cennini and later Kandinsky. It was only through the work of individuals like Munari, Federico Moroni, and others that art education acquired its current pedagogical characteristics, while still reflecting the influence of the academic tradition that has persisted in the Italian context, as well as global reforms such as the Road Map for Arts Education. In China, thanks to Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培), who opened the doors to aesthetic education for all and promoted its social and educational value for the masses, and through the collaborative efforts of great figures such as Xu Beihong (徐悲鸿), Li Fengmian (李峰眠), and others, a series of reforms were initiated from the beginning of the 19th century until the early 2000s. These reforms led to the definition of basic art education curricula in compulsory schooling.

¹ In the Chinese education system, compulsory education lasts until the age of 14, and primary and secondary schools follow the division of 5+3 years. However, the high school is completed in 3 years. Compulsory education is divided as follows: the first cycle covers grades 1–3 of primary school, the second cycle covers grades 4–5 of primary school, and the third cycle spans grades 6–7 of middle school, followed by grades 8–9. High school is structured into three years, and the Chinese ministerial guidelines provide separate curricular directives without further specialization into different tracks. Tao Xuquan 陶旭泉, *Reform of Fine Arts courses in China: theoretical foundation*, Southwest China Normal University Press, 2021, p. 275:100

These pedagogical contexts, linked to well-known developments in the history of painting, continue to influence both the conceptual and practical approaches to representing the phenomenal world, the teaching methods, and the perspectives on natural phenomena and landscape representation. This is already evident from the terminology used in textbooks, which reveals significant distinctions.

These pedagogical contexts, intertwined with significant developments in the history of painting, continue to shape both the conceptual and practical approaches to representing the phenomenal world. They influence teaching methods and perspectives on natural phenomena and landscape representation, with notable differences emerging even in the terminology used in textbooks – differences that define their intrinsic characteristics and manifest in the delivery of instructional units. Specifically, the Italian curriculum focuses on "Landscape" (natural, urban, and maritime), while the Chinese curriculum centers on "*Shan Shui* Painting" (山水画), the painting of mountains and rivers.

Among the competencies both educational systems aim to develop is "reflective observation," a skill to be cultivated through informal and workshop-based learning activities in close contact with the natural environment within the school premises. However, in Italy, observational skills are typically developed through formal instruction that emphasizes analytical and critical thinking, specifically focusing on reading and interpreting iconic texts and visual language images.

This fundamental distinction reveals how these two great cultures perceive and engage with the tangible world. In China, learning is based on direct experience with the student's immediate social and natural environment, prioritizing subjective and experiential aspects. Only after a process of internalization, reflection, memorization, and re-elaboration can students arrive at a visual translation, simplifying forms into fundamental graphic patterns and stylistic conventions. This approach is guided by the principle of "grasping the idea while forgetting the words" (得意忘言), enabling students to fully understand and appreciate beauty while simultaneously nurturing and preserving a love for life – a cornerstone of Chinese artistic philosophy.

In contrast, the Italian approach to observation follows a process of analysis, deconstruction, and objective reconstruction of nature, mediated through structured planning that spans compositional and geometric analysis, color balance, and the study

of light, volume, and perspective (both linear and aerial). This method appears to allow little room for personal reinterpretation of what is seen, yet it provides a precise, faithful, and scientific reproduction of human visual perception.

Consequently, the competencies to be acquired in Italy emphasize critical, analytical observation, requiring students to develop personal judgment, objective reflection on what they perceive, and the ability to create artworks based on objective criteria. Conversely, in China, students are expected to develop observation connected to personal consideration, driven by their own feelings and sensory perceptions rather than purely intellectual understanding. This aspect is complemented by the poetic and symbolic interpretation that *Shan Shui* painting assumes when the artist gives form to what has been perceived, mediated, and internalized. Although this might appear to be a completely free and personal operation, the study of this painting genre also requires extensive technical training and references to the study and imitation of great classics from the Five Dynasties (五代) and Song (宋代) periods.

This aspect defines a clear distinction in both approach and methodology between the two civilizations, which is already explicitly visible in the competency targets and educational objectives of their respective compulsory education systems.

In the Italian system, an experiential approach and direct observation of nature are not explicitly mentioned. The focus lies instead on understanding the rules and visual language underlying the representation of themes, and on comprehending their historical-artistic developments. While this may appear to be a highly schematic, rigid, objective, and coldly analytical method—confined within frameworks of projection, geometric composition, perspective, construction lines, color balance, and basic preparatory sketches—it paradoxically empowers students with operational mastery and autonomy. It enables them to undertake personal interpretations of themes and to deconstruct and critically rework what they have learned using the tools at their disposal, without being constrained by the need to copy and reproduce classical masterpieces.

Comparing the textbooks used in lower secondary schools - Italy's *Il Sogno di Artemisia* by Andrea Pacini, Vittorico Giudici and Giulia Coco (Part A: *Visual Grammar, Techniques and Multimedia Languages*) or *In Arte Volume A* by Stefano Zuffi, Margherita Romagnoli and Alessandro Baldanzi (Sansoni edition) with China's *Mei Shu* (美术) (2019 edition, Volume 2) published by Zhejiang People's Fine Arts Publishing House - reveals fundamental differences in pedagogical approach.

In the Italian curriculum, landscape is treated as an expressive theme addressed only after study-

ing *Vedutismo* in art history classes, positioning it within a clear historical-artistic framework.

The Chinese approach offers brief historical context but concentrates the entire unit on technical mastery - specifically the subtle peak (浅绛) and blue-green (青绿) techniques - while developing the core competency of “appreciation” (欣赏) through reflecting on classical works and reading literary quotations that perceive *Shan Shui* painting as materialized poetry.

The Chinese unit's title, *Poetic Feeling and Pictorial Meaning* (诗情画意), guides students to understand this technique not as faithful reproduction of phenomenal reality, but as personal, romantic, subjective perception of landscape. Students internalize the genre as the ultimate synthesis of human emotion and intellect, connecting it to poetic representation.

Structurally, the Italian unit introduces trees, flowers and sea before complete landscape composition, while the Chinese unit follows the reverse sequence: first studying trees (树), mountains and rocks (山石), and details (小品) - including rivers, houses and figures - before progressing to holistic landscape representation, reflecting different pedagogical priorities in building towards artistic mastery.

Compared to the Chinese textbook, the Italian textbook also begins with an infographic supporting schematic and graphic-illustrated representations of tree species commonly found in landscape artworks: apple trees, maritime pines, palm trees, as well as pines, beeches, and maples. The difference with the Chinese lesson lies not only in the types of plants presented but also in the approach: Chinese students are encouraged to reflect on branch structures and their classical definitions (蟹爪枝 - crab-claw branches, 鹿角枝 - deer-antler branches, and 松树 - pine trees) to train their minds in processing not the internal structure but the external form—what the human eye perceives. This method focuses on capturing essential graphic traits to identify objects and guiding their depiction through specific directional strokes for outlining basic contours.

Likewise, the study of leaves follows different approaches. Rather than presenting a schematization based on circles and squares before redefining the external contours, the Chinese method exclusively modulates brushstrokes and traces according to leaf type—pointed leaves (夹叶) or dotted leaves (点叶)—thus distinguishing the different stages of the technique.

The depiction of rocks in the *Shan Shui* lesson, however, follows the same approach as the other elements presented above: first, a reference artwork is introduced and compared with a photograph of a famous mountain that has been frequently depict-



了解传统山水画的基本知识。体会中国山水画的意境。



中国人把描绘大自然的作品称为“山水画”，而非“风景画”，是有其独特含义的。山水画凝聚着人类丰富的智慧与情感，体现了东方艺术的崇高审美理想。画家借描写自然景物以表达自己的情感，在情景交融中创造诗情画意。

观察与思考

《万山红遍层林尽染》这幅山水画取材于毛泽东的诗词，找出它的出处并分析一下，它是否表现出原诗词的意境？为什么？

万山红遍层林尽染（中国画）
现代 李可染



春水归舟（中国画）现代 张大千

山水
诗的
歌是
峡图

中国山水画从东晋开始，历经唐、宋、元、明、清以及近现代的发展，涌现出了许多伟大的画家，创造了无比丰富与辉煌的艺术珍品。五代、宋、元是中国山水画发展的重要时期，对后世的影响极大。



潇湘图（中国画局部）五代 董源



寒江独钓图（中国画）宋代 马远

除水墨山水外，传统山水画主要有浅绛山水画法和青绿山水画法两种。浅绛山水以水墨为主，略施淡的赭石、花青色。青绿山水则是用水墨勾皴、淡墨打底，再层层设色，最后敷以石青、石绿等矿物质颜色。



仿赵伯驹笔意图（青绿山水）现代 吴时刚



巴船出峡图 (中国画) 现代 陆俨少

古人说：“诗是无形画，画是有形诗。”
画家所追求的就是“言有尽而意无穷”的
境界。苏东坡评价唐代王维的水墨画和诗
是“诗中有画，画中有诗”。这幅《巴船出
峡》是否把李白的诗意描绘出来了？

学习建议

- 说说你喜欢的山水画，谈谈你对山水画意境的理解。
- 写出一个山水画家的主要生平及作品，并谈谈你的认识。



山水册页 (浅绛山水)
清代 石涛



柳阴渡图 (水墨山水)
现代 黄宾虹

I TEMI ESPRESSIVI

Il paesaggio

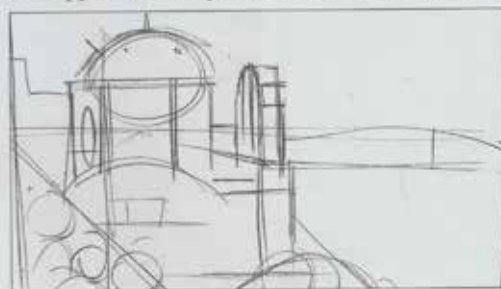
Il **paesaggio** è un genere in cui si rappresentano sia **ambienti naturali** sia **urbani**. È sempre utile disegnare l'orizzonte, anche quando non si vede. La conformazione di un paesaggio è sempre diversa, per cui non si può individuare una struttura generica.

Il paesaggio marittimo

Studiamo la rappresentazione di due paesaggi marittimi. Nella fase di studio del primo paesaggio, dopo aver analizzato le proporzioni e disegnato il rettangolo orizzontale dell'inquadratura, si traccia la linea dell'orizzonte. Si tracciano poi le linee oblique che delimitano la spiaggia e la collina in secondo piano. Successivamente si rappresenta la forma geometrica che delimita l'area costruita. Infine si procede con l'individuazione dei singoli volumi e con la rappresentazione del chiaroscuro.



Il punto di partenza per la rappresentazione del secondo paesaggio è lo stesso visto in precedenza: si studiano le proporzioni, si disegna il rettangolo dell'inquadratura e si traccia la linea dell'orizzonte. Si disegnano poi le linee oblique che separano la parte fiorita in primo piano, il mare e le colline sullo sfondo. Successivamente si traccia la figura geometrica semplificata che circonda la parte costruita. Infine si rappresentano i particolari e il chiaroscuro.



Le conoscenze
DI BASE



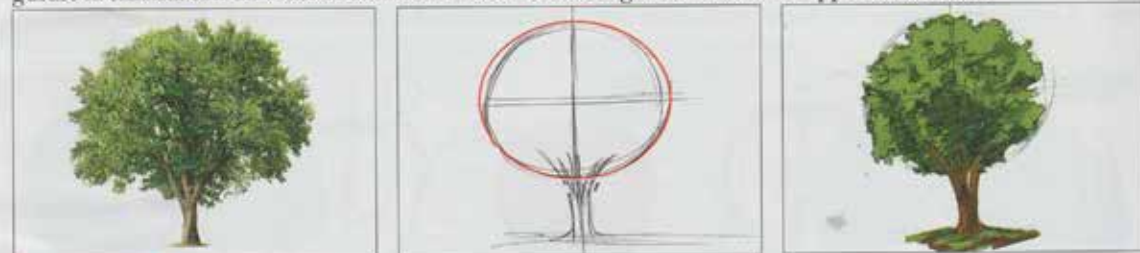
Gli alberi

La struttura di un **albero** è costituita da **tre parti**: una parte bassa, le **radici**; una parte intermedia, il **fusto**; una parte alta, la **chioma**, modellata attorno ai rami, che si sviluppano a partire dal fusto assumendo dimensioni progressivamente più sottili.



Il melo

Alcuni alberi, come il melo (sotto), hanno una forma simmetrica, con un asse verticale che attraversa il fusto. Se la chioma è molto fitta non si visualizzano i rami. In questo caso possiamo raffigurare la chioma con un ovale collocato su uno stretto rettangolo verticale che rappresenta il fusto.



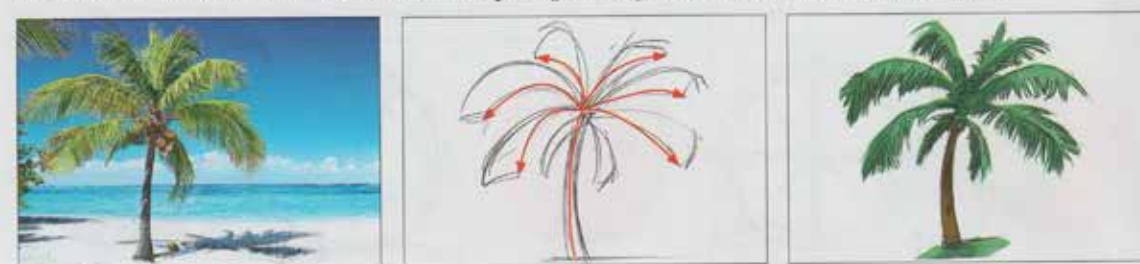
Il pino marittimo

Il pino marittimo mostra una chioma compatta e talvolta con inclinazione obliqua rispetto all'asse verticale del fusto, che in genere è molto slanciato verso l'alto e rettilineo.



La palma

La palma ha una chioma frazionata, con fronde (foglie lunghe e sottili) collegate a rami flessibili e curvilinei, che proseguono in modo sinuoso la direzione del fusto. Per rappresentarla disegniamo inizialmente la direzione dei rami e del fusto e seguiamo poi con la definizione della chioma.



树石画



树、石是山水画中的要素，学习法，是学画山水画的基本功。古人把向下弯曲的树枝称为“鹿角枝”，把向下弯曲的树枝称为“鹿角枝”，把向下弯曲的树枝称为“鹿角枝”。在一幅山水中哪些是鹿角枝，哪些是蟹爪枝，想一想，古人为什么把这些树枝冠以



蟹爪枝

● 树的画法

画树应先观察树的整体特征，再对树或冬天的落叶树作为观察的对象，掌握其生长规律与基本结构。



了解传统山水画中树、石的基本画法并试着画一画树和石。



树石图（中国画）现代·潘韵

树、石的基本画
向上生长的树枝称
“蟹爪枝”。这
爪枝？对比一下照
这些名称？



蟹爪枝

观察树枝。以枯
容易了解各种树



树木课徒稿（中国画）现代·顾坤伯

画树的步骤



1. 先画主干。

2. 添加枝节。

3. 再画枝。

4. 用浓淡不同的墨色画出不同的树叶。

树木课徒稿（中国画）现代·陆俨少

观察与思考

画树叶有点叶画法和夹叶画法之分。用来表现不同的树种。下面这些树叶画法最适合表现哪些树？

夹叶



点叶



学习建议（一）

- 临摹不同的树干和树叶。
- 用毛笔画一棵树，注意树枝和叶子的画法。

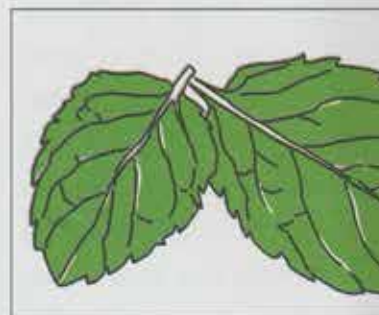
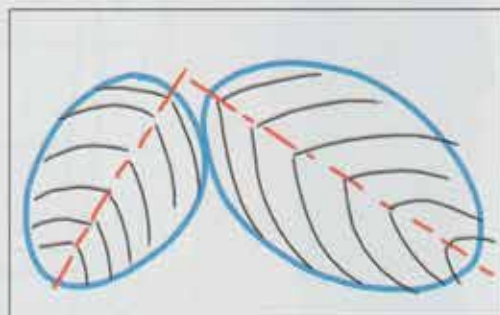
松树的画法

Le foglie

Le **foglie** sono spesso rappresentate come **elemento ornamentale** sia nella pittura, sia nella scultura. Come spesso accade per gli elementi della natura, le foglie hanno una **forma generalmente simmetrica**. Il loro asse di simmetria coincide con la nervatura principale, dalla quale si diramano nervature secondarie con dimensioni che progressivamente si riducono. La forma della foglia è strettamente connessa al percorso di questa ramificazione.

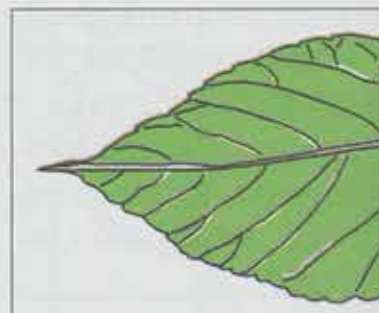
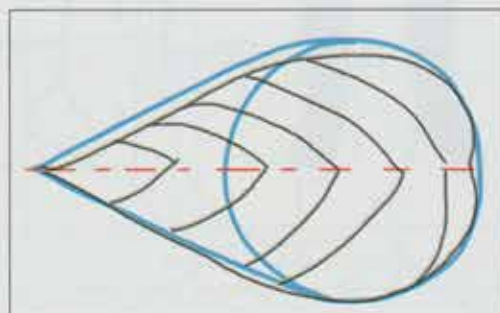
Le foglie di menta

Le foglie della menta hanno una struttura ovale. La loro nervatura è abbastanza regolare e si protrae fino ai margini della superficie, che generalmente è seghettata.



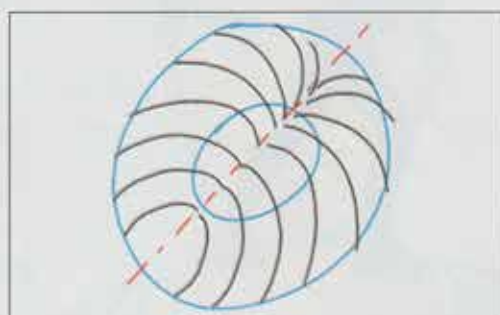
Le foglie di ibiscus

Le foglie di ibiscus si sviluppano attorno a un asse di simmetria costituito dalla nervatura centrale. La loro forma è riconducibile alla sovrapposizione di un triangolo e di un cerchio.



Le foglie di monstera deliciosa

La monstera deliciosa è una pianta la cui foglia ha una forma simmetrica, riconducibile a un ovale. La sua particolarità consiste nella serie di apparenti «tagli» o «fori» sulla superficie attorno alle linee curve della nervatura.



ed throughout history. The process begins by defining the basic contours, carefully balancing solid and empty spaces while avoiding a complete and sharply defined form. Through various stages and different brushstroke techniques, volume and substance are gradually built up: outlining (勾), creating texture (皴), rubbing (擦), washing (染), and finally dotting (点).

In contrast, the Italian lesson incorporates the theme of rocks within the broader study of mountains, which are often not addressed through dedicated technical exercises. Instead, rock formations are typically used to demonstrate specific artistic concepts, such as aerial perspective, the representation of distance and proximity, color balance, or the gradation differences between warm and cool colors.

The study of single-point, frontal, and accidental perspective, among others, is addressed in textbooks of both cultures before proceeding to landscape explanation, within the unit dedicated to spatial representation. However, Chinese textbooks also include a brief study of various compositional forms that landscape scrolls may adopt during their conceptual phase: serpentine composition, curved composition, and two planes interspersed with clouds and concentrated at a single point, extending to large areas of emptiness with only a central figure. These examples also demonstrate different types of perspectives that sharply contrast with Western perspectives, which assume a binocular, planar viewpoint.

In summary, we can observe how the Italian approach to landscape study progresses from the particular to the general, with object composition always following geometric schemes based on rigid chromatic and compositional rules. In contrast, the Chinese approach moves from the general to the particular, follows the natural forms of objects to create a sense of vitality, and seeks to represent the inherent life force within objects through fluid and rapid brushstrokes, demonstrating the indeterminacy and elusive nature of the overall natural vision.

What fundamentally distinguishes these approaches is the underlying conception that guides the creative process: one based on scientific objectivity, and the other on emotional sensibility.

画山石一般先勾再皴、擦、而后染、最后点苔。

墨、色相结合的山石画法



Bibliography

MIUR (Ministry of Education, University and Research). (2012), *National Indications for the Curriculum of Kindergarten and the First Cycle of Education*, Retrieved from https://www.mim.gov.it/documents/20182/51310/DM+254_2012.pdf

Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. (2022), *Standard Curriculum for Art Education in Chinese Compulsory Education*.

Pacini, A., Giudici, V., & Coco, G. (n.d.), *Il sogno di Artemisia: Parte A, grammatica visiva, tecniche e linguaggi multimediali*. Dea Scuola, Petrini.

Tao, X. (陶旭泉). (2021), *Reform of Fine Arts courses in China: theoretical foundations*. Chongqing: South-west China Normal University Press.

Zuffi, S., Romagnoli, M., & Baldanzi, A. (2019), *In Arte, volume A*. Milano: Sansoni per la Scuola.

Yi Wu Jiao Yu. (2019), *Mei Shu [美术]*, Volume 2. Hangzhou: Zhejiang People's Fine Arts Publishing House.



了解山水画小品创作知识，临摹或创作一幅山水小品。



山水范图（中国画）现代 顾坤伯



草



水



人



云

山水画小品是山水画创作中的一种体裁，常以生活中熟悉的小景为题材，通过笔墨的运用，达到借景抒情的目的，它是进一步学习山水画的重要途径之一。山水画小品创作一般包括构思立意、章法布局、起笔落墨三个基本过程。

观察与思考

在一幅完整的山水画中，除了树、石，一般还包括什么景物呢？



辅助的景物在一幅作品中往往起关键作用。如上图中亭子画在不同的位置，山势给人的感觉就不相同。在山水画创作中还可以借助留白的形式表现水、云等，反而显得意境深远。



青绿山水图（中国画）现代 潘天寿

不同的构图形式

章法布局就是指构图，山水画作品创作应根据立意选择合适的构图形式。



S形构图



C形构图



二段式构图



居中取势的构图



以少取势的构图



张家界



学习建议

- 临摹一幅山水画小品。
- 根据左边的风景照片，创作一幅山水画小品。
- 选一首自己喜欢的诗，结合诗的意境创作一幅山水画。

IL PAESAGGIO NATURALE

+ contenuti multipli

UN ELEMENTO MUTEVOLE

Il paesaggio è l'**aspetto** che un **territorio** assume a seconda delle sue caratteristiche: quando gli elementi naturali predominano su quelli antropici (riguardanti, cioè, la presenza dell'uomo), esso si può definire **paesaggio naturale**.

Il paesaggio è un elemento dinamico e mutevole che cambia ciclicamente con il susseguirsi delle stagioni e per effetto degli agenti naturali, come il vento, la pioggia, i terremoti e le eruzioni vulcaniche.

IL PAESAGGIO NELL'ARTE

La grande stagione del paesaggio inizia a partire dal **XVI secolo**, quando gli artisti riservano un'attenzione sempre crescente alla sua descrizione: esso diviene allora un **genere pittorico**, che dà vita a tanti tipi di paesaggio quante sono le interpretazioni degli artisti. Così, ad esempio, il francese **Poussin** descri-

ve la natura secondo un ideale di classica perfezione, mentre con l'avvento del Romanticismo (XVIII-XIX secolo), il paesaggio sembra sovrastare la figura umana ed esprime la forza della natura, come nelle opere di **Turner**, **Constable** o **Friedrich**. Nel XIX secolo, con gli **impressionisti**, esso diventa soggetto di opere dipinte *en plein air*, cioè all'aperto, in modo da studiarne l'aspetto nelle diverse ore del giorno.

RAPPRESENTARE UN PAESAGGIO

Per poter rappresentare un paesaggio è necessario individuare gli elementi che lo compongono: la **linea dell'orizzonte** che divide il cielo e la terra, posta a un'altezza che dipende dal punto di osservazione, gli **andamenti lineari**, le linee curve o spezzate che caratterizzano il paesaggio, gli **indici di profondità** e i **colori**.

Andamenti lineari curvi, tipici del paesaggio collinare.

Indici di profondità: gli elementi più vicini a noi appaiono più grandi di quelli posti in lontananza.

Linea dell'orizzonte



Claude Monet, *I papaveri*, 1873, Parigi, Museo d'Orsay.

A destra: Caspar David Friedrich, *Viandante sul mare di nebbia*, 1817, Amburgo, Kunsthalle.

● 石的画法

山石的质地不同，所表现出来的形态、纹理也不相同。古人把用笔墨线条来表现山石的不同纹理的画法称为皴法。



黄山（中国画）现代 董寿平



观察与思考

张家界的山石给人什么样的感受？想一想用什么皴法表现最合适？



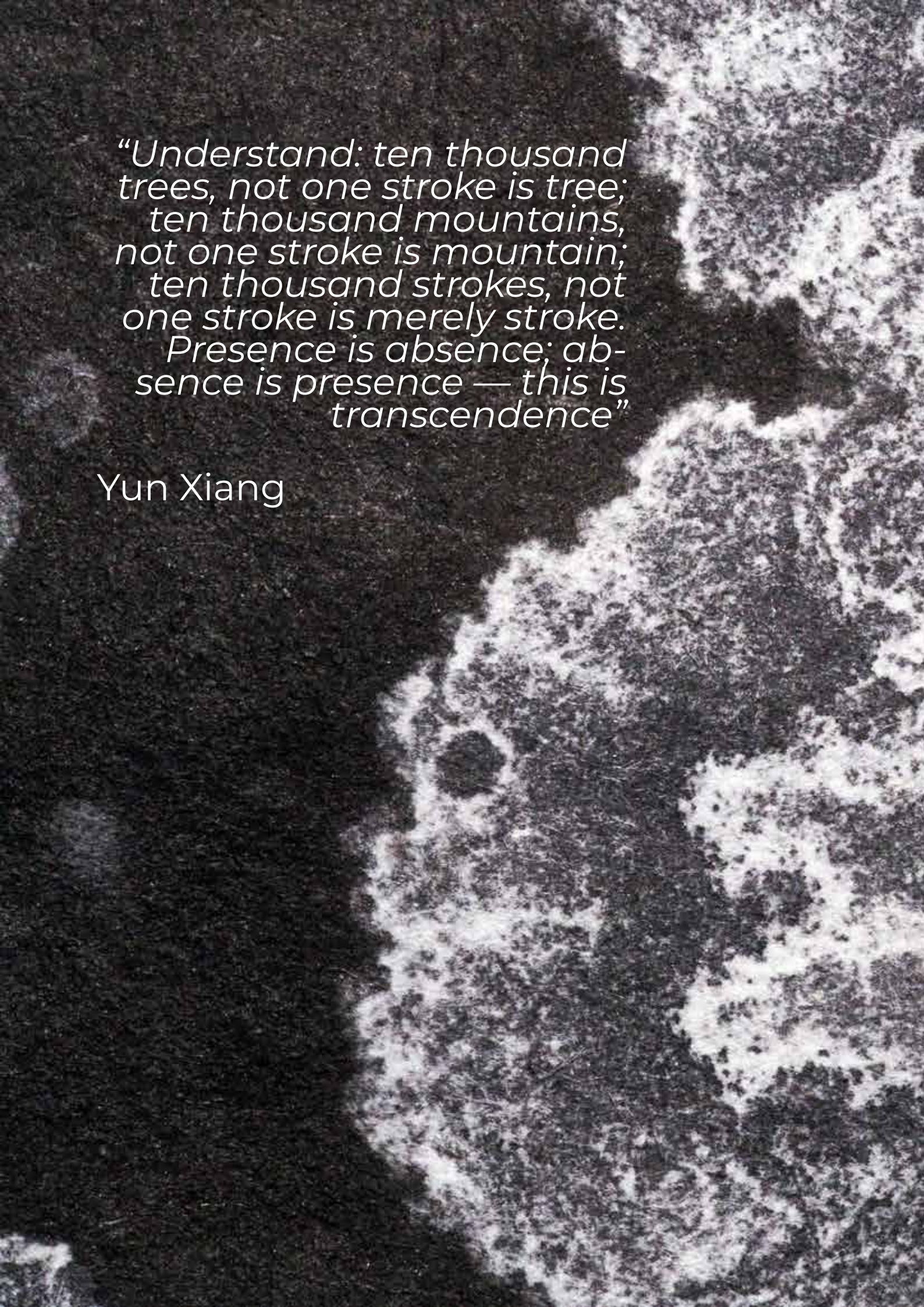
披麻皴，用来表现纹理细致的山体。



斧劈皴，常用来表现峭壁、山崖。



大斧劈皴（中国画）现代 贺天健



*“Understand: ten thousand
trees, not one stroke is tree;
ten thousand mountains,
not one stroke is mountain;
ten thousand strokes, not
one stroke is merely stroke.
Presence is absence; ab-
sence is presence — this is
transcendence”*

Yun Xiang

