



SHANSHUI

**Between East and West – the Enso
Cats by Endre Penovac**

Thorsten Schirmer

Between East and West – the *Enso* Cats by Endre Penovac

By: Thorsten Schirmer

Ink is a fascinating medium with great expressiveness. While ink in the Western tradition is primarily used for drawing, in East Asia it is the most important medium for painting. According to the Chinese tradition, calligraphy is a mirror to the soul. Ink painting in East Asia, whose most important means of expression are paper, brush and ink, is shaped by the same principles. China has kept and maintained this tradition to the present day and thus creating a unique alternative to Western painting. The Serbian Endre Penovac is one of the few Western artists who have successfully approached this tradition. His depictions of animals use the techniques of western watercolors, but also show the influence of Chinese ink painting.

Born in Serbia in 1956, Endre Penovac studied at the Art Academy in Novi Sad. Already in his youth, through the books and poems of Hermann Hesse, he came into contact with Far Eastern philosophy, which had a lasting influence on him. The focus of his work is watercolor and ink painting, in which he particularly focuses on depicting cats. In doing so, he reduces the form to a few expressive lines and gradient effects. In this way he succeeds in a remarkable range of expression, the degree of abstraction of which ranges from precisely observed and effectively simplified movement studies to the almost complete dissolution of form. What characterizes Endre Penovac's work is its fine balance between Western watercolor painting and influences from the East Asian tradition. His careful observation and high tech-





nical perfection has earned him the recognition of a wide audience not only in the Western world but also in China, as his numerous international exhibitions, workshops and awards impressively confirm.

In East Asia, specializing in a subject that has to be practiced throughout life is a common challenge on the "Way of Painting" that Endre Penovac faces with his cat images. He expresses them with calligraphic brush strokes and ink washes or modulates them out of an ink circle, as the Chan monks uses to paint them as a symbol of the oneness of all being. This so called Enso (円相, jap. "circle") has its roots in the "Ten Ox-Herding Paintings" 《十牛圖》 of the Chinese Chan master Guoan Shiyuan, who around 1150 discribed and illustrated the way of enlightenment, showing an herd boy who has lost his ox, and starts to search for it. Finally, in picture eight there is no herd boy or ox left, just an empty circle symbolizing the highest

level of enlightenment. Penovac likes to transform this Enso into a sleeping cat, his beloved animal as the main subject. Corresponding to the image of the Enso with its open, converging ends, the poles of Occident and Orient come so close together in these works, resulting in a happy interplay of both traditions. So with his art work Endre Penovac joins the community of those people who stand for a dialogue of cultures As Goethe formulated it around 200 years ago:

He who knows himself and others
Here will also see,
That the East and West, like brothers,
Parted ne'er shall be.
Thoughtfully to float for ever
'Tween two worlds, be man's endeavour!
So between the East and West
To revolve, be my behest!

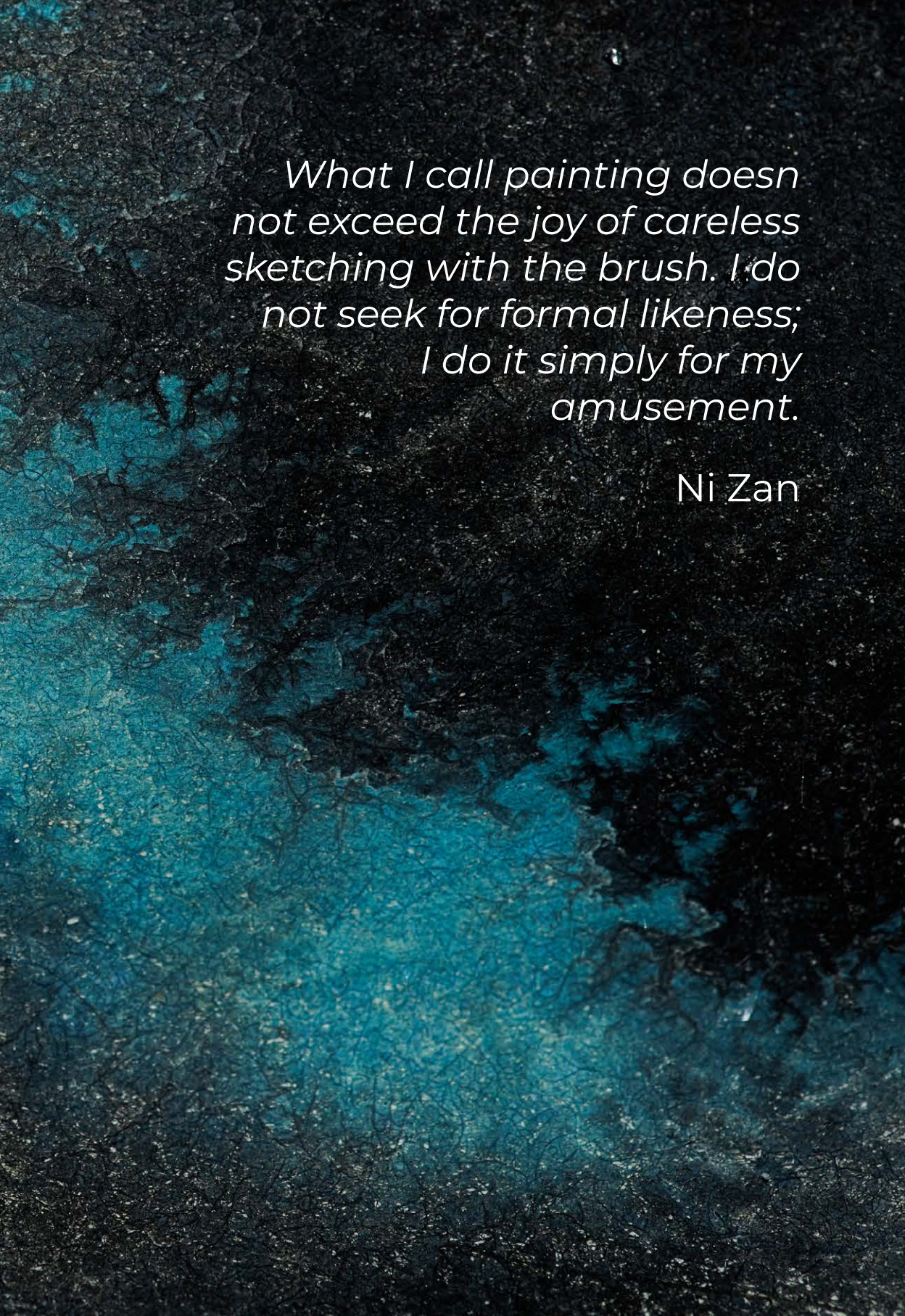
On the Divan, Johann-Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)

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*What I call painting doesn't
exceed the joy of careless
sketching with the brush. I do
not seek for formal likeness;
I do it simply for my
amusement.*

Ni Zan