



MR. KAO AND MISS CHANG

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In January, 1943, the Metropolitan Museum had its first intentional exhibition of modern Chinese painting, consisting of the works of some sixteen painters well known in China. Among the paintings shown were one by Kao Wêng (Kao Ch'i-fêng) and one by his adopted daughter Chang K'un-i. This year we are presenting the paintings of these two artists, together with a single picture by Miss Chang's mother, Mme Chang Yü Shu-hua, the latter for reasons of sentiment.

Kao Wêng was a very great painter indeed. I think you will feel his integrity and his urgency when you look at his pictures, for there is life and power in them. He was also a teacher, and there is sincerity and vitality in his writing, even when he is using a strange language. The historians of these things will take note of him a hundred years from now—no doubt of it. It was Kao Wêng's fortune to be born to live and die in a period of woe and error. The great painters of the past that we

most admire appeared in times when and places where painting was loved and nurtured and, being loved and cared for, grew and flowered. Not in these days! Not either in the Orient or in the Occident. We in this period prize ancient things (rightly so—they have been proved by time), and we suspiciously play ducks and drakes with "modern" art. Art (a nasty word) is a plaything in our day, not a recognized necessity. The necessity exists, all right, even with the most primitive of peoples, and the time will come again when we who call ourselves civilized will as a matter of course live in rooms of pleasant proportions, eat from agreeable dishes, and wear reasonable clothes. When we become as civilized as that, painting and the other arts will once more flourish naturally.

Such painters as Kao Wêng are born out of their time. They burn with genius, but they burn alone and mostly unwanted. Our own Shakespeare came out of an age of brilliant

literature—the stage was set for him. The great Sung painters that we know today came out of an age when any schoolboy could flicker his brush across a paper and make a bamboo or a landscape. That day is gone, but this Kao Wêng paints with the same mastery and the same intensity that illuminated his famous predecessors. He is well worth looking at. Somewhere I have read literary stories about our masters of prose who wrote when death was close upon them. Kao Wêng, dying, roused himself and dashed off a tiger. This man wanted to paint.

Miss Chang, his adopted daughter, wants to paint too, and paint very well she does already, painting better as time goes on. Miss Chang's publicity value is enormous and scares anybody who is as shy as I am. Miss Chang attached herself to Mr. Kao as pupil and adopted daughter. She is far more than talented and is

gradually growing into a style of her own based on Mr. Kao's teachings, and I have no idea how far that will take her. In the meantime she is doing an inestimable service, as she has come to us with a mass of Mr. Kao's paintings snatched from the jaws of the Japanese in a series of hair-raising escapes. She has not yet learned to put down on paper the way a tree grows as well as Mr. Kao did, but she rather makes up for it in allegorical content and meaning. There is, for example, her lordly crane with head tossed high, inscribed: "Loudly singing, looks toward the moon; proudly dancing, but not to meet people," which, Miss Chang tells me, is a kind of self-portrait; and there is an ancient plum tree bursting into bloom—a favorite subject with the Chinese and a most appealing one. Miss Chang has gone tradition one better and painted this picture with her own tears and her own blood, cut



OPPOSITE: *Tiger by Kao Wêng.* ABOVE: *Crab by Chang K'un-i*

handily from her arm. One of her most recent paintings is of an enchanting and lively little bear cub. This is a very good young woman, and there is no telling what she may do. These are woeful and dreadful times we live in, and they will be more so. But there are comforts.

Out of the midst of carnage and horror comes Miss Chang, leaving everything behind her to save Mr. Kao's paintings, and in a completely strange land, among strange people, she is able to make us stop and look with pleasure at his paintings and hers.



Owl by Kao Wéng and Bear by Chang K'un-i