

ART SCENE

PAINTING THE WAY THROUGH ESSENCE ART

by David Monson

Hundreds of half squeezed paint tubes, an artist's easel, palette and a canvas covered in blue. They're probably common fare in any artist's studio, but this isn't any artist's studio. It's up a mountain, in an old stone farm house, were medieval music ripples around the eaves, with a view of vegetable gardens, sulphur springs, a temple and the tangle of Peitou. It is the studio of the best known American artist in Taiwan, Kathryn Jaliman, who has come a long way – literally and figuratively speaking – from a childhood on the family golf course north of Chicago to the mountains just north of Taipei.

"As a child my life was deeply touched by nature – the open sky, spaces, woodlands, water and wild animals. I would often spend my early morning hours sitting by a spring and watching the sunrise."

Now she enjoys nature from the porch of her Yangmingshan refuge or



**Espirito Do Carnaval
(Saudades de meu Brasil)**



Symphony of Tao

during solitary walks in the national park – experience that is translated into the rapture and harmonies of eye dazzling color that articulately capture the inner worlds of the artist. All these impressions are subtly, sensitively blended in a new school of painting known as "essence art."

Kathryn Jaliman is quite untouched by her artistic accomplishments as she pursues this passion of a lifetime. "After all," she muses, "it helps to live life with humor and compassion and to cultivate a joyful spirit." And that is what her art is about – paintings that uplift, refresh, inspire, and a mission to share with the viewer an appreciation for all things "bright and beautiful."

Not surprisingly then, some of her works like the powerful series the *Symphony of Tao*, which with its deep red background and interplay of surface color, are reminiscent of a skillful combination of Sung dynasty painting and directions pointed to by the French Surrealists.

In her writings about art theory, Kathryn Jaliman has championed the ideals of the father of abstract painting, Wassily Kandinsky and the spiritual aesthetic of Chinese art. Her *Manifesto of Essence Art* become a classic of its kind.

But for all the theory there is the sheer delight of visual intoxication through merely allowing the eye to loiter at will and as freely as the artist's brush, across the surface of the work. There is color, form, energy and meaning — paintings that are evocative of childhood, youth and life in foreign places.

And the warmth, the spontaneity one feels in the paintings are just as much a reflection of the artist's own formative years as a member of a large and devoted family. Her student years were spent at the University of Wisconsin, and later in Cambridge, Massachusetts where she studied Art History at the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard University and earned a Masters degree in Fine Arts from Lesley College.

Disarmingly modest, even self effacing, for more than a decade Kathryn Jaliman cloistered herself to focus on her painting. It is only recently that she has been persuaded to "go public" and exhibit works that have been praised by Ward Jackson of the Guggenheim Museum in New York City, not to mention the renowned American painter Sam Francis.



Whispers of Eternity



Cathedral II

Over the past couple of years she has held a number of solo exhibitions at Taiwan galleries, where she has been one of the few foreigners to break into the cultural life of the island. A major exhibition of Kathryn Jaliman's work will be held next year at the Taiwan Museum of Art. In addition, her art has also caught the eye of collectors and art critics in Taiwan and there has been frequent mention of Kathryn, or Lee Tang as she is called, in the Chinese press.

Kathryn Jaliman's art speaks to the mind soul and imagination of the viewer. It is always unpretentious, abounding in, on the one hand, all the joy and rhapsody of life, but on the other beckoning us to pause, contemplate and enrich lives that are, for the most part hurried and too preoccupied to appreciate the world around us.

There are few who clap their eyes on Kathryn Jaliman's art and feel quite the same again. "Wouldn't it be wonderful," she comments, "if through essence art this message of unity, of our common human destiny, went out from Taiwan to touch the hearts of kindred spirits everywhere. Through my life and work as an artist I would like to feel that I am making, however small, some contribution to this universal goal."

There are many who would argue convincingly that she is. ■