

OPEN ALOK PORTFOLIO HSU KWANG-HAN

AS SEEN IN
SEDONA
MONTHLY



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Alok Hsu Kwang-han, 70, lives in a sparsely furnished home in West Sedona, takes a deep breath before he speaks, and loves to serve guests a variety of teas, all the while making sure his cat, Honey, doesn't get in the way. It was Alok's sister who was the artist in the family, but, in the mid-1970s, Alok began experimenting with Chinese calligraphy. After being exiled from China 10 years ago, he developed his art into unique paintings he calls Zen calligraphic portraits, which he creates for individuals, couples and even corporations. Alok says he creates his paintings to help others come home to themselves; and though he's lived in Sedona since 2003, he's not attached to the red rocks. "To me, all forms are poetry and I celebrate the red rocks as poetry. But I am alert to not be attached to poetry and think it's ultimate. I'm not the kind of person who goes around the world looking for the best place to live. That's looking in the wrong place for contentedness. Our inner environment is the most important." This month, Goldenstein Gallery (390 N. SR 89A in Uptown Sedona; 928-204-1765), where Alok exclusively exhibits his paintings, hosts "Coming Home to Ourselves," on May 8 at 6 p.m. Alok will give a talk and display new works. To see more of his paintings, visit www.goldensteinart.com.





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"Portrait of a Swedish Shaman"; "Dao (The Way)."

ALOK: "My name is Alok Hsu Kwang-han. Hsu Kwang-han is my Chinese name and Alok is my spiritual name given to me by my spiritual master, Osho, in 1975. I use it as my artist's name – it means 'light.' When Osho gave me the name he said, 'Continue to be light.' As a Chinese person, when I talk about my life, I often refer first to my ancestors. My great-great-grandfather had 49 wives. What a manager, huh [laughs]? He was the highest-ranking scholarly official in the dynasties in China. My grandfather was a Baptist minister converted by the Southern Baptists. My father was a physics professor who got his Ph.D. in America. My mother belonged to the first wave of emancipated women in China. She not only went to school, she got her higher education and started three schools in China.

"So I come from a family that breaks the boundaries. We were refugees when I was born, during the Second World War. I was born in Hong Kong, then we lived in Kunming and we moved in America in the 1950s. Three months after we moved here, my father died. We were living in Hampton, Virginia. My mother, who was a very capable woman,



This page (Top to bottom):
"Portrait of an Energy Body Worker"; "The Great Ones Meet Only as the Light of the Full Moon!"

started teaching Chinese art and history at a small women's college in upstate New York. She encouraged me to go to the best schools, so I have degrees in mathematics, Christian theology, sociology and psychology. Sometimes I say I'm over-educated, but you can't be over-educated. You can always learn more. That's from the perspective that knowledge and information is not wisdom. It's not insight. So education for wisdom, insight and awakening really accelerated when I started to go to India. I've been to India 20 times.

"I first went to India at the end of 1975, after graduate school. At that time, I was teaching sociology of religion and psychology of transcendence. I taught only for a short time because there's such a restlessness in me to seek the truth about human suffering and the source of that suffering. In India, on the outside, I explored the connection between psychotherapy and spiritual disciplines and meditation, but on the inside I was trying to come to terms with who I really [was] and how I could come home to myself. What does it mean to be content?

"From my personal experience through all these different worlds and world-views, I have a strong sense that nobody has a corner on reality. That's why I kept on searching. It was such an adventure for me. You know, I'm an adventurer. I rode a motorcycle from China to Tibet by myself. Inner adventures, I've found, are much more dangerous and scary, because they get us right up against our deepest fears that for generations we've not been able to face.

"I had a team of six translators and we translated 40 books on meditation from English to Chinese. After trying for eight years, I got 20 titles published in 14 months. The books got really popular; we had 650,000 copies on the market in China mainland. After they became popular, the authorities closed [everything] down. A friend called me in India and told me if I returned to China, I'd be arrested. I was 60 years old. What am I going to



do? I couldn't go home, but what's home? This is a really big question in my life and in many lives. I've always felt alienated, so it was a question I'd thought about.

"In 1974, as I was a graduate student at UC Berkeley, I discovered I could see images above people's heads. I told this psychic friend of mine that this was happening. We were at a party, and she had me read everybody. She thought what I saw was very accurate. Then she went into a trance. When she came out, she said the reason I could do this was because in a past life I used a paintbrush and rice paper to paint people's psychic images. They weren't Chinese characters that I saw, but symbols related to the person. I don't do



that anymore – I don't look. I still could [see the images] if I looked, but I feel it's important to live an ordinary life and have the clarity in the ordinary.

"At the time the psychic told me about my past life, I was a Marxist – I didn't believe in past lives. But I bought this \$5 calligraphy set at a garage sale, and I would sit on Telegraph Avenue with my little cardboard box and calligraphy set with a sign that read, 'Psychic Images.' That was the beginning of my art career. I would do this off and on, infrequently. After I went to India, I stopped for 15 years because I thought I needed to look at myself rather than others.

"Because I like adventure and I like being present and not knowing what's going to happen, I decided to go around the world and paint. I never thought of going to Sweden, but I had my first exhibition in Sweden at the National Museum of Ethnography. My images were the same as they are now. After the first 15 years [of painting], I started calling them calligraphic portraits. The basic gift is the same, but how I understand it and use it in helping people to heal has become deeper. When they invited me for my first exhibition, I had very few paintings to exhibit. I had to hurry up and do some paintings. I don't know what I'm going to paint, but the intimacy of not knowing makes one available to existence, to the intelligence and creativity that includes us but is greater than the boundaries we draw around ourselves. This is why I don't sign or put my name on my paintings.

Opposite page (Top left): "*Morning Heart in the Middle East*"; (bottom left) "*Presencing*"; (top right) "*Marriage*."

This page: "*Birthday Card for Jyoti*."

"It's very important to know when to start and when to stop [painting]. I pay attention and act upon it. Many of my students also get a sense of when to stop but they don't [stop]. Their mind comes in and then they screw it up. I did a portrait in Cologne, Germany. It was the third anniversary of a couple who stood in front of me. When I was ready, I took one brush in each hand. I didn't know what I was going to do, but when it came to touching the brush to the paper, I made two strokes. This is such a simple, beautiful painting of two people who can see each other, who are really present with each other. To have to say that in another way is not as effective [as with the painting]."

"After Sweden, I met a beautiful woman who lived in Seattle. I came to Seattle and had an exhibition at the Seattle Asian Art Museum. I've had other exhibitions, but right now I'm represented by Goldenstein Gallery. When I was in Seattle I talked to my friend David Levine, who's a prominent realtor in Sedona. He told me to come to Sedona to visit. I came to Sedona and David took me to Exposures Gallery. They were impressed with my paintings so I had my first commercial exhibition in Sedona at the end of 2002. In 2003, friends took me to Mii amo Spa at Enchantment Resort. I started painting four holiday weekends a year at the spa. I've been doing it since 2003.

"I also do portraits at home. When I first did the portraits, I would see images over people's heads. At that time I called them Zen energy paintings. I would feel a person's energy in my heart and allow the energy to come through my arm to do the painting. I usually have people choose two seals in the beginning and I choose one. These are my leisure seals, not my official seals. But the seals say beautiful things. I carry 40 with me. I've designed them and they are made in China.

"But how do I describe a portrait session? First of all, I show up. I think that's very important. Most people don't show up – they are thinking about something else. I don't have an agenda. People become very relaxed and then they also become present. Often people start to cry. Most of us have so many tears inside. I always keep a lot of tissues [laughs]. I wait. I tell them I keep the session confidential. Occasionally, the energy is so strong I do a painting first. So, I paint what people need to see. I've done over 1,500 of these around the world. Oftentimes people are scared. They don't want to see anything bad about themselves, and that's been one of their major problems. They have not faced their illusions because they think they're real. When I work with people on their issues, it's not to point out how terrible they are, but to have them awaken so the illusions are no longer there and they are free. Oftentimes I paint people's essence. I paint their beauty. I paint their courage. [My paintings] are not always serious. They always show people what they need to see and bring healing into their lives and help them come home to themselves. I think of my work as helping people come home. My whole process, my whole





This page (Top to bottom):
 "Portrait of Chef Steve & Wife Angela Siciński";
 "Portrait of a Heartful Woman."

life, my whole search and spiritual journey brought me to a place where I have a sense of home. I am available to support people coming home to themselves so they can be themselves and be present to themselves.

"The paintings are done with Chinese calligraphy tools, but they have a very important non-traditional tradition of Western psycho-spiritual healing. The paintings are sent to Shanghai and mounted in a traditional Chinese way with colors and styles that aren't particularly Chinese. They are mounted on silk scrolls and sent back to me. It takes about two months. Recently, I made three of my paintings into giclees. They are framed in a Western style without the scrolls. It makes my work more available to those with contemporary décor.

"I carry 40 seals and I have about 15 brushes. All the brushes have an energy. The paper comes from China. It's called Xuan paper. In the West, you call it rice paper, but it doesn't have any rice in it. It takes the ink very well. On my paintings you see ink blots that spread. That's kind of a characteristic of my paintings. I make those using ink and water. The ink is a Chinese ink. It's very special. After it's dry, it's waterproof. The painting is very fast; it's the exploration system that takes much longer. The painting could be a minute; it could be two seconds. I do them at my home, but I travel a lot.

"I live in the flow. It just happened I've been in Sedona since 2002. My roots are in emptiness. I am here because it was cumbersome to have stashes all over the world. I'd also never lived in a house by myself, so I thought I'd like to experience that. I like it very much. I have Honey, my cat, who's a wonderful companion who came to adopt me.

"The best of Zen art comes from the artist's resting presence. Zen art carries the fragrance of the Buddha. That's why we're so attracted to it. It calls to our nature, which is also presence and emptiness. This attraction to Zen art can only happen in quiet, when we have a sense of yearning for the depth of who we are. I don't particularly want my art to be remembered as my art. If this art serves to help people to come home to themselves, then I'm happy. Whether you remember me or not doesn't matter. Impermanence is such a basic characteristic of life – not only impermanence of mental forms or emotional forms but [of] all forms. I'm happy to receive back into the emptiness just as I'm happy when my mind is quiet and just present." •