

Sumi-e



"If we study Japanese Art, we see a man who is undoubtedly wise, philosophic and intelligent, who spends his time doing what? In studying the distance between the earth and moon? No. In studying Bismark's policy? No. He studies a single blade of grass."

Vincent Van Gogh

The EmptyHands School was founded exactly one year ago and, its objective was to foster the true essence of KaraTe in simplest form. Our aim has always been to illustrate the depiction of KaraTe in various ways so it can be understood fully. When we found this work of art, it exemplified KaraTe without any words or description. The brush stroke is powerful but yet elegant; it is almost empty but yet in form. Sumi-e is an excellent way to describe the impressions of the mind. Happy Anniversary & Sumi-e day to EmptyHands KaraTe School!



What is Sumi-e?



Sumi-e simply means Black Ink Painting. Normally black ink on white paper which signifies the simple elegance and serenity of this art. Simplicity is the most outstanding

characteristic of Sumi-e. An economy of brush strokes used to communicate the essence of the subject.

This art has no conventional method or rule; it is a way of freely expressing feelings obtained from nature. Sumi-e is about the spirit of the brush strokes rather than techniques or professional painting standards. This form of monochrome art was recognised and practised as far back as 1066 in China by scholars and painters.

Sumi-e is completely unconcerned with producing a literal representation, its emphasis is completely upon the spirit. There are various schools of Sumi, essentially they are all concerned with a representation of the state of mind. Therefore the most prized masterpieces are those which are thought to display a noble soul rather than an exact reproduction. The artist is not concerned with imitations of photography or copying natural elements particularly perceptions such as colour or shape defined by our eyes.



This art is encompassed within the artist before the brush touches the ink; it is the impression rather than the expression which Sumi is concerned with. The only expressive aspect of the painting should be the ideals and longings of the artist. Ultimately, the artist must take the essence of the view and translate his impression of it onto paper. The artist is merely the means through which this essence appears in the painting.



The spiritual aspect of Sumi-e is embedded within the philosophy of Zen which appears simple to understand but difficult to explain. The Zen mind is no mind hence its relationship with non-conforming art such as Sumi. The Zen mind is typically enlightened and disciplined, it is able to rise above the mere technical ability and embrace the core soul.

In western art black is used for its own colour value, however, in Sumi colours can be expressed through shades of black. The interplay of the

white areas of the paper helps develop this idea by assuming the role of the ever-present nonessential detail of the background.

The ultimate goal of any Sumi artist is to bring life to the Sumi colour through the brush. The artist must be able to pass on to the one who views his picture this feeling of a living quality.

How is Sumi-e related to KaraTe?

Some of the most well known Martial Artist of our time were great brush painters; Miyamoto Musashi (*war lord, feudal Japan*) often brush painted nature to aid his meditation. The founder of Modern KaraTe; Gichin Funakoshi Hanshi admired Japanese art and was particularly drawn to the nature of pine trees and bamboo. However, his real passion was poetry.



Essentially every Martial Artist should have an avenue to evoke their creative mind or no mind. We often find this through our weekly or daily training via various activities including Mokuso (*focused meditation*).

Japanese brush painting is often done alongside focused meditation; the artist will attempt to find the impression of the moment in order to illustrate something creative. Serious practitioners of Sumi meditate for hours, days, weeks before they attempt to paint. Eventually, the end result may not be always perfect or what is expected and this is the very essence of Sumi.

KaraTe & Sumi are synonymous in many ways as they are both trying to constantly achieve a natural moment where the spirit and mind are at peace.

Example of Sumi-e Art:

There are many artists who influenced by Sumi, much of their work can be found via the internet or specialist book shops. Here are some paintings by Nikolai Jelneronov: Sumi artist who has an internet gallery called “The Art of One Hand Clapping”:

Sumi-e - Version 0.1 (22nd March 07) – Author: Azeem Mushtaq



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¹ Source: The above information has been extrapolated and collated from various books & sources including the internet as well as years of experience by the author.

