

[ART JOURNAL]

EXHIBITION NOTES:

WHAT: Madden Reality: Post-Taipei Art Group (叛離異象: 後台北畫派)

WHERE: Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Gallery 3B, 181, Zhongshan N Rd Sec 3, Taipei City (台北市中山北路三段181號)

WHEN: Until April 5. Open daily from 9:30am to 5:30pm, closed on Mondays

TICKETS: NTS\$30

INFORMATION: www.tfam.gov.tw



Left: Kuo Wei-kuo's bizarre *Mr Desperado's Fancy Car of Leather Shoe* explores the absurdity and fickleness of love.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TFAM

Below: Lee Min-jong's *Four Seasons* interprets the multitude of colors and shapes found in Taiwan's natural environment.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TFAM



Celebrity Interview

Control

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She insists she wasn't deterred from doing *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* by the poor reviews and equally poor performances of Allen's recent cinematic adventures. She is shocked to hear that *Scoop*, the director's second outing with Johansson, never even got a UK release. "Really?" she says, her voice going up with a tinkle on the second syllable.

Cruz has kept parallel careers running in Hollywood and Spain, taking often uncertain roles in misfiring English-language films, which contrasted with huge European successes such as *Volver*. She found Allen most unlike the other American directors she has worked with. "He has a great lack of social veneer, and you see so little of that sometimes in places like LA. He speaks only when he has something to say and is really honest."

She will not hear a bad word about his films, and even says the excruciating *Match Point* is one of her favorites. She is horrified when I tell her it is the only film I have ever walked out of. Her affection may have something to do with the fact that *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* is the first English-language film in which she really shines.

To illustrate how uneasy Allen is, she offers the following anecdote: when it came to the day to shoot the kiss between Cruz and Johansson, rather than spend hours rehearsing the moment of passion and observing it from every angle, Allen announced that he was off to see his dermatologist instead. "He had a spot on his hand, and he was very worried. I was saying to Woody, 'How do you want us to do this? How do you want to shoot this?' But he said he had to go for two hours. He didn't want to wait until the end of the day to go to the doctor, which I thought was brilliant," says Cruz.

The spot turned out to be nothing, and Allen galloped through the scene with as little preparation and angst as the rest of the film: "We didn't rehearse at all, which gives you a lot of vertigo as an actor," says Cruz. "Often the scenes were done in two takes." She thinks it is all part of Allen's strategy to keep the actors — who, as a breed, are prone to "self-analysis and self-destruction," she says — on their toes.

She admits that she can be especially hard on herself at times. Allen has said that she doesn't appreciate how terrific she is: "She's slightly insecure and thinks she's not going to be able to do something well or that she needs extra takes to do it, which isn't true at all."

It may come as some comfort to the rest of the world's women to hear that she says she doesn't believe it when people tell her how gorgeous she is. Surely she doesn't wake up in the mornings, look in the mirror and think "ugh" like the rest of us? Apparently so. It is not soothing to be told that you are beautiful, she says. "Maybe all actors are insecure ... It doesn't mean you need more compliments, it just means your ego doesn't really get affected when you hear them, because you don't believe them."

I ask her if she ever wishes she were more plain-looking so she could get different parts, but she cuts me off. "I don't want to talk about that because you make a big deal by talking about it, you know?" Her fluent but accented English meanders a little as she tries to explain herself. "My attention is not there, on the advantages or disadvantages or anything like that. My attention is not there, so by talking about those things you make them a big monster."

The other thing she won't talk about is her relationship with Bardem — the pair got together on the set of *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* — but I am warned twice by her publicist not to ask him about her. It seems she has been burned by discussing her other famous exes; she famously went out with Tom Cruise for three years after his split with Nicole Kidman in 2001.

Cruz seems tired, and no wonder. When we speak in London on a Wednesday evening she is straight off a plane from Los Angeles, and is staying for only six hours before jetting off to Rome, Madrid, back to London and then LA again. She did the same trip 10 days previously, and was scheduled to repeat it before long. It is especially exhausting, says Cruz, because, despite her Madrid roots, she hates siestas. "I always wake up angry," she says, because as a kid she hated being made to sleep in the afternoon.

She is on this debilitating publicity drive in a fairly unashamed attempt at wooing all the right people ahead of the awards season.

State of ambivalence

TFAM's current group exhibit explores Taiwan's history, myths, folk culture and identity through the work of eight painters and sculptors

BY NOAH BUCHAN
STAFF REPORTER

Those depressed over the government's reality-defying rapprochement with China can take solace in Madden Reality: Post-Taipei Art Group (叛離異象: 後台北畫派), a recently opened exhibit on the third floor of the Taipei Fine Art Museum.

The works on display — paintings and sculpture culled from a group of artists who seek to reveal something about the psyche of the country's people — can be seen as an antidote to the Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) administration's fixation with placating Beijing at the expense of Taiwan's identity and sovereignty.

The exhibit features 72 works by eight artists who formed an artist collective called the Hantoo Art Group (悍圖社), which literally means, "defending pictures." Begun in 1998 as a response to the art community's perceived obsession with conceptual art, Hantoo had splintered away from the Taipei Art Group (台北畫派) — itself a collective of artists known for their fervent social commentary in the wake of the lifting of martial law in 1987. Whereas the earlier incarnation was fueled by a desire to portray Taiwan's social gashes, warts and scars,

Hantoo takes an introspective approach, while remaining engaged in the exploration of the nation's history, myths, folk culture and identity — much of it with a dose of playfulness.

Caricature mixed with a sense of ambivalence toward their subjects characterise the works of Wu Tien-chang (吳天章) and Kuo Wei-guo (郭維國).

In Wu's digital print *Being in the Same Boat* (同舟共濟), four smiling clowns dressed in bright yellow costumes stand on striped stilts and attempt to row a dragon boat through a vague landscape rendered in metallic blue and purple. It is not clear where the clowns are going or why they are rowing the boat on land rather than water. And yet they appear happy in their quixotic efforts to reach an unknown goal. Sharing a similar burlesque aesthetic (and a tendency towards the monumental in canvas size), Kuo's bizarre *Mr Desperado's Fancy Car of Leather Shoe* (蘇絲不拉多先生的皮鞋花車) shows the artist driving an old leather shoe while embracing a stuffed rabbit. The lit fuse (reminiscent of the kind used with dynamite) in the boot's toe creates tension and hints that this scene will soon explode.

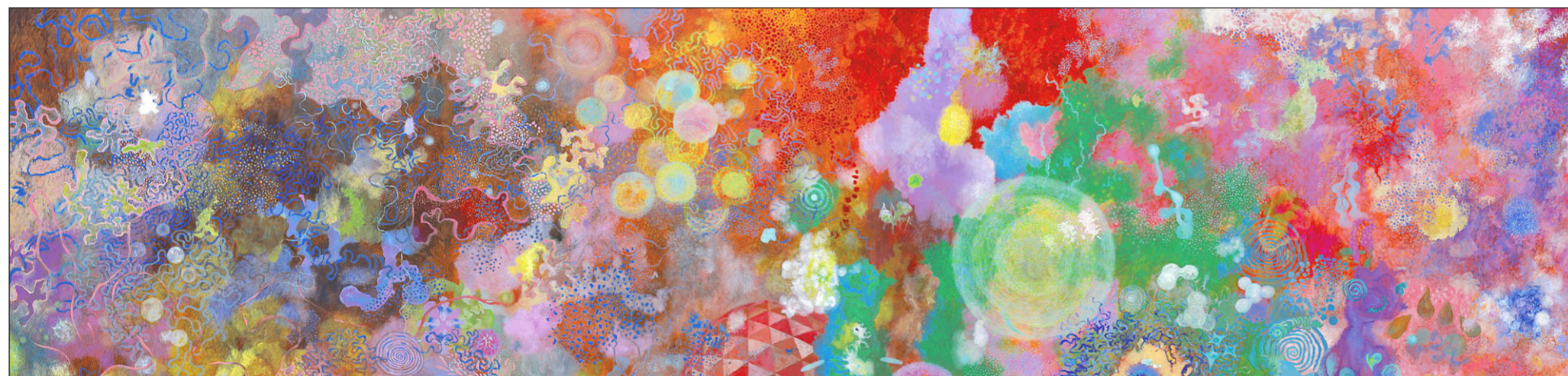
Artificial materials enclosing the natural world are recurring images found in Lien Chien-hsin's (連建興) imaginative canvases. Sharks, seals and tortoises share the same aquarium in *Secret Dance in Frivolous Mood 2* (隱舞情弄2). Concrete, glass and metal enclose the creatures and replace the natural environment. The work leaves the viewer with a feeling of confinement rather than the title's ironic suggestion of frivolous play.

Similar to Lien's animal captivity, Lu Hsien-ming (陸先銘) portrays what amounts to human internment in metropolitan centers — the effects of Taiwan's rapid industrialization over the past half century. No evidence is given of the island's natural beauty. Instead, the mixed media canvases rendered in darkened tones of blue and gray depict concrete urban centers with a sense of loneliness. This is made explicit in *Hesitation* (躊躇) in which an elderly man with his back facing the viewer stands alone in a doorway waiting for a bus with only the silhouette of deserted buildings in the background to keep him company.

If many of the artists portray their imaginative worlds in a realistic fashion, Lee Ming-jong (李

民中) and Yang Jen-ming (楊仁明) take their work in a different direction by employing more abstract techniques to reveal the musings of the subconscious. Less pessimistic about the destruction of Taiwan's once Arcadian vistas, Lee's expressionist *Four Seasons* (四季) interprets the multitude of colors and shapes found in Taiwan's natural environment. Yang's four-panel *Unstable Ties-Happening* (不安定的聯結—發生中) is an abstract rendering of the explosion of light — here in yellows, reds and whites — after the creation of the world.

It has been said that these artists are following in the footsteps of other, Western, artists who employ irony and satire to reveal uncertainty. Perhaps. And yet it seems natural for these interpreters of Taiwan — where it is not uncommon for people to identify more with China, Japan or the US than they do with their own country — to infuse their work with images that bennuse as much as they equivocate. The exhibit for the most part astounds in its diversity of styles and control over materials used and moves beyond status quo expectations of recent (and generally banal) trends in contemporary art.



Most men in suits don't look like sex symbols. Gary Cooper did, at least in Edward Steichen's come-hither 1930 photograph of the actor for *Vogue*.

In those days, a fashion magazine was the go-to place for seduction by portraiture, publishing the most provocative photographers, writers and designers of the moment.

Today, a style magazine is literally a museum piece at New York's International Center of Photography. Proclaiming 2009 as its Year of Fashion, the center is presenting four separate but unequal exhibitions that propose fashion photography as a crucible for new ideas in art.

To accomplish this, the center, which prides itself on classic photojournalism, has taken a radical step. Its lead show, *Weird Beauty: Fashion Photography Now*, pretty much dispenses with photographic prints. Those it does show are nearly lost within a blizzard of magazine layouts, and not even original ones at that. All are reproductions, most published within the past two years.

Fashion trades on fantasy and *Weird Beauty* includes some startling images. Several center on the mouth, exemplified by Miles Aldridge's bright color close-up of a woman's blinding white teeth clenching a yellow gemstone between her fiery red lips.

This picture is surrounded by Aldridge images from recent magazines, some featuring languid young men sleeping under bushes. Their clothing is secondary to their presentation as objects of desire themselves.

That is what is most striking about the images in this show: Clothes are not the center of attention. The artifice of the image itself is what takes center stage — the dramatic lighting, framing, styling and posing that combine to brand the style of each of the show's 40 photographers rather than any designer of fashion.

From Nick Knight we get an overhead, black-and-white shot of a model in a laced-string camisole laid out on an examination



Spot the Fake by Miles Aldridge.

PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

Garbo meets models in show pitching fashion photos as art

At the International Center of Photography's four exhibitions on fashion imagery, the artifice of the image itself is what takes center stage

BY LINDA YABLONSKY
BLOOMBERG

table as if begging to be ravished. Paolo Roversi's *Blue Mask* surrounds the model's face behind the blow-up of another Roversi photograph of her tinted blue face, with a fake pink mouth attached.

Removed from their commercial context, it might be easier to consider these images as ingenious works of art. But we see them here only in the service of commerce, to sell a label or a concept, not to create any larger understanding of the human condition.

Steichen, who mined the Romantic tradition of the sublime before becoming a hard-core modernist, was one of the stars of the Conde Nast firmament in the salad days of *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair*, from 1923 to 1937.

His work for those magazines is the subject of a retrospective at the center, with 175 photographs of socialites and celebrities who ruled the gossip columns of the day.

Two smaller shows force a closer consideration of the artistry behind a fashion photograph. Munkacsi's *Lost Archive* presents a small selection of new prints from a cache of glass negatives by the Hungarian photographer.

Before he died in 1963, Martin Munkacsi was a top talent at *Harper's Bazaar* whose art took place as much in his darkroom as on a set. The show reveals his process, juxtaposing original shots that include an assistant's hands or feet in the frame with the tight focus of a cropped, finished print.

More absorbing — and curious — is *This Is Not a Fashion Photograph*, a group of unrelated photographs from the center's collections that curator Vince Aletti cites as having as much calculated style as documentary truth.

It would be difficult to find a more fashionable image than George Strock's 1941 photograph of the very stylish baseball great Satchel Paige, who lights a cigarette at a Harlem pool hall.

On the Net: www.icp.org.