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Leisurely (ink on silk) by Chen Chin.

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Looking into the past

TFAM's thought-provoking *Jewels of 25 Years Museum Collection* illustrates how the public exhibition system under the Japanese colonial and martial law-era KMT governments strongly influenced what art was produced and consumed

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Chen Cheng-po's (陳澄波) artistic career ended at the beginning of the White Terror period. Chen, who was born in Chiayi just before Japan's annexation of Taiwan in 1895, favored tranquil pastoral scenes in his impressionistic canvases. His painting *Street of Chiayi* (嘉義街外) was the first work by a Taiwanese artist to be exhibited at Japan's Empire Art Exhibition, in 1926, and back home he wielded considerable influence over Taiwan's burgeoning art scene. A few weeks after the 228 Incident, Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) troops seized and executed him in front of a train station.

The Taipei Fine Arts Museum's (TFAM) recently opened exhibit *Jewels of 25 Years Museum Collection* (25年典藏精粹) includes two of Chen's pre-World War II paintings, *Soochow* (蘇州) and *Street Scene on a Summer Day* (夏日街景). By placing both works immediately at the beginning of the exhibit, which spaces 31 paintings and three sculptures throughout seven rooms on its second floor, TFAM directs the viewer's attention to how art and politics interacted during Taiwan's colorful past. Organized for the most part chronologically, from the middle of the Japanese colonial period to the 1990s, the pieces on display were chosen from among the 4,000 works in the museum's possession because, according to the exhibit's literature, they "illustrate the development of Taiwan's art history."

This show does just that. But in the process it also reveals how two occupying powers, through a policy of acculturation, imposed their aesthetic views on Taiwanese artists, resulting in a repetition of styles and lack of innovation — especially when compared to the artistic movements flourishing in European painting that found their center in Paris during the 1920s and 1930s, in

American painting centered around New York after the 1950s and up to the 1970s, and in Taiwanese painting just before and after the lifting of martial law in 1987.

The early works on display were a product of or were influenced by the Taiwan Art Exhibition, or Taiten, a public exhibition that was held annually starting in 1927. The exhibition, which was later renamed the Taiwan Governor-General's Art Exhibition, or Futen, was aimed at promoting the cultural superiority of Japanese art, and Chinese calligraphy and ink painting were conspicuously absent because the colonial government wanted its Taiwanese subjects to follow the methods of Japanese painting, then a combination of traditional Japanese styles and Western realism known as *nihonga*.

These Japanese-derived methods are clearly discernable in Chen Chin's (陳進) *Leisurely* (悠閒) and Lin Chih-chu's (林之助) *Recess* (小憩). Adhering to the *bijinga* (美人畫, "painting of beautiful women") technique of representing women popular in Japan, Chen Chin's light brushstrokes and alluring colors show a woman reclining in a drawing room. The three waitresses in Lin's canvas are dressed in dark-toned navy uniforms and idle around a stove in a coffee shop, evoking the uncomplicated composition so loved by Japanese art critics of the time.

Although Taiwanese artists under imperial rule were expected to strictly conform to a Japanese aesthetic, their work is notable for its focus on Taiwan's scenery. Lin Yu-shan's (林玉山) detailed portrayal of a farmer with water buffalo in *On the Way Home* (歸途), Kuo Hsueh-hu's (郭雪湖) colorful depiction of Taipei's famous Dihua Street (迪化街) during the Lunar New Year in *Festival on South Street* (南街殷賑) and Huang Tu-shui's (黃土水) combination of traditional folk art with modern sculptural elements in *Sakya* all

employ the Japanese attention to detail and vibrant color while showing a concern for Taiwan's folk culture and landscapes. All trained in Japan or by Japanese artists, Lin, Kuo and Huang won top honors at the Taiten several times.

Regime change after World War II witnessed a return to Chinese aesthetic mores in the cultural field. The KMT continued where the Japanese left off with a policy of controlling the creation and consumption of art through exhibitions and education. During the first three decades of KMT rule, local artists were forced to submit to Chinese aesthetic standards if they wanted to show their work at exhibitions, and artists trained in the orthodox literati traditions of ink painting and calligraphy gained recognition at these exhibitions. The Japanese-era use of Western realism with a focus on Taiwanese scenes was replaced by ink paintings of imaginary landscapes in China and calligraphy.

Apart from some interesting calligraphy-inspired modernist works by Chinese artists — Chen Ting-shi's (陳庭詩) *Lust of Life* (生之慾) is a notable work of abstraction that blends a Chinese aesthetic with modern visual elements — the appeal of most of the calligraphy and ink paintings on display is limited to the small cadre of experts who have been trained to appreciate them. Although most viewers will probably move through these rooms quickly, the martial law-era works provide a stark contrast to the paintings from the Japanese colonial period and direct the viewer's attention to the momentous changes that took place in Taiwan's cultural sphere.

If the earlier Japanese and Nationalist periods feature works copying foreign styles imposed from above, the works in the exhibit covering the post-martial law era are notable for their innovation and originality in representation. The

imaginary renderings of a lost land (China) by an earlier generation give way to a political and historical awakening among contemporary artists and a focus on the place they currently inhabit (Taiwan).

Yang Mao-ling's (楊茂林) ironic diptych *Zealandia Memorandum L9301* (熱蘭遮紀事 L9301) displays two impressionistic portraits of Taiwan's European and Asian colonial past, while Wu Tien-chang (吳天章) openly portrays the many phases of Chiang Ching-kuo's (蔣經國) rule in *Five Phases of President Chiang Ching-kuo* (蔣經國的五個時期). *Fire* (火) by Huang Chin-ho (黃進河) raises *taike* (台客) to high art. The blue flip-flops might be absent, but the flora of rural Taiwan, betel nut beauties and the paper houses constructed for burning in folk rituals are present and rendered in chromatic yellows, green and purple.

Hou Chun-ming's (侯俊明) wood-block print series combines the ancient tradition of placing Buddhist text beside religious folk images. In *God's Searching* (搜神), he retains the typology but replaces the religious iconography with sexually explicit (and often violent) images rendered in comic book simplicity. Chen Chieh-jen's (陳界仁) black-and-white video installation *Lingchi* — *Echoes of a Historical Photograph* (凌遲考: 一張歷史照片的迴音) recreates a photograph of a form of torture common at the end of the Qing Dynasty and acts as a commentary on colonization and the gaze of the oppressor.

Interestingly, the post-martial law art is displayed before the martial law-era art, creating a jarring contrast between the vibrancy and originality of the former and the second-hand feel of the latter. While the *Jewels of 25 Years Museum Collection* does not explicitly suggest that authoritarian regimes — at least in Taiwan's case — stifle innovation in art, it is difficult to imagine that it was not organized with this thought in mind.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Celebrity Interview

Job

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But when he talks with tender affection for his character, even quoting Chekhov at one point, I wonder if I'd half forgotten myself that Sutherland isn't a Pentagon official, or a politician, but an actor. He has nothing to do with writing *24*, and for a Hollywood star his patience in the face of charges he considers absurd is remarkable. He has an unusual quality of respectful humility, and perhaps his loyalty is understandable. For it is fair to say that Sutherland owes almost everything he has today to Jack Bauer.

When *24* first screened in 2001, Sutherland was a fading Brat Pack name, whose fame had been eroding since the 1980s on the familiar rocks of tabloid mayhem and terrible film choices. A marriage to Julia Roberts, his co-star in the unclaimed *Flatliners*, was called off at the last minute in 1991 when she eloped to Europe with his best friend. By 1994 Sutherland had accumulated a string of flops, a reputation for womanizing, a weakness for wild living, and 140 stitches in his head from barfights. He quit Hollywood, and went to live on a Californian ranch as a rodeo rider.

"With regards to the dips that I've taken, I think the one time that saved my life was when I went and did the rodeo. I realized that if I did something else that wasn't going to be good — and I wasn't getting offered things I liked — well, if I was to do another one of those ..." He lets the sentence fall away.

Sutherland likes to say he has lived his life backwards, and there is some truth in that, for his youth had been precociously responsible. He was born in 1966 in London, the son of Canadian actors Donald Sutherland and Shirley Douglas, but his parents divorced when he was 4 and he grew up in Toronto with his mother. At 15 he left home to star in *Bay Boy*, which won him a nomination for Canada's equivalent of an Oscar, and he had made *Stand By Me*, *The Lost Boys* and *Young Guns* by the age of 21. By then he was already married, with a daughter, Sarah Jude, named after his friend Sarah Jessica Parker.

The marriage didn't last, though, and nor did his second in 1996 to a Canadian former model. In 2000 he returned to Hollywood from his ranch to shoot a pilot for a new show he doubted anyone would buy. "I loved *24*, but I didn't think anyone else would. I had absolutely no idea."

Restored by *24* to the Hollywood stratosphere, I wonder whether the pleasure today of uber-movie star treatment is enhanced or inhibited by his experience in the industry's wilderness. "I would have to say," he grins, "it enhances it. I'm not sure I even know what uber-star treatment really is, but I certainly know the difference between being able to get a film with a certain director and not being able to get a film with a certain director 10 years ago." The memory of unanswered calls doesn't rattle? He smiles gently, shaking his head. "No, there's no resentment. Just absolute relief, and thank you for the opportunity, absolutely."

Sutherland has made more than a dozen films since beginning *24*, although it must be said that his choice of scripts hasn't improved much, for only one — *Phone Booth* — has detained the critics' attention. He lives alone in Los Angeles with a collection of vintage guitars, working 14-hour days on *24* for 10 months of the year, and has kept out of trouble since a drink-driving conviction saw him spend the Christmas before last in prison. He was already on probation for an earlier drink-driving offence, and doesn't want to talk about the 48 days he spent in jail. But when I ask him whether he thinks acting tends to attract self-destructive hedonists, or create them, he doesn't hesitate to answer.

"I've certainly always been of the view that it attracts those people. The heroes for me were Richard Burton, Peter O'Toole, Richard Harris — extraordinary actors, and extraordinary characters. And they were pushing the barriers of their own lives too, for whatever reasons they wanted. They were just great, I loved their stories, I loved all of that about them. But then, I also think there's a balance. Jimmy Stewart is one of my favorite actors, Tom Hanks is one of my favorite actors." He pauses for a second. Then he adds, not with the coy timing of a faux apologetic naughty boy, but with disarming honesty, "But I think Colin Farrell's funny, you know?"

If Sutherland's life is quieter these days, Bauer's is also changing. Although Sutherland resents the controversy surrounding his character, he seems pleased — possibly even relieved — to see the latest series address it.

"Jack Bauer is in a place right now of terrible questioning of all of the stuff that he's done, and that is obviously informed by a lot of things surrounding the show that had nothing to do with us. And the debate which occurs through all *24* episodes, until Jack Bauer finds some resolution for himself, is: 'I'm the guy who will do whatever it takes to save those 45 people on the bus from terrorists. And in the back of my mind I also know that upholding the laws of this land has to be more important than the 45 people on the bus. But I just can't do it. So maybe I'm not the guy to be doing this.' He's in a terrible moral dilemma about the things that he's done. And I found it heartbreaking."

Does he ever, I ask, think the things Bauer has done are all right? Sutherland stares at me, a cartoon of astonishment.

"Absolutely not!" he exclaims. "Are you kidding me? No! Absolutely not, God no. Be really clear about that." He laughs. "Oh. My. God. NO."



Above: *Fire* (oil on canvas) by Huang Chin-ho.
Right: *Festival on South Street* (gauche on silk) by Kuo Hsueh-hu.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF TFAM