



## Artist weaves time into his work

**DEPARTURE:** Regular art is frozen in time and never changes. Yaacov Agam, a pioneer in 'kinetic art' and the creator of an installation in Kaohsiung, changed that

BY JENNY W. HSU  
STAFF REPORTER

At just about 1.52m tall, the 81 year-old, white-bearded Yaacov Agam may walk with a bit of a wobble, but he towers as a giant in the art world as he craftily manipulates colors to spread his message: Time can be defied, life is full of infinite possibilities and God is omniscient.

Best known as a forward-thinking pioneer in the optical and kinetic art field, the son of a rabbi has impressed many with his abstract sculptures that use the fourth dimension, or time, as his main element.

The creator of the Agamograph — graphic art that expands beyond the traditional still-life — Agam arranges his images in a constant changing form, with the result that images appear and disappear, with the viewer never seeing the whole picture at once.

"My endeavor," he once said, "has been to create a kind of visual graphic art, existing not only in space, but in time, one in which the form develops and evolves, thus procuring an unforeseeable infinity of plastic situations flowing out of one another."

The piece Agam created for the upcoming World Games in Kaohsiung, titled *Peaceful Communication with the World*, perfectly exemplifies his philosophy.

The breathtaking monument is Agam's first and only public art display in Taiwan. The piece consists of nine 10m high hexagon pillars positioned in diamond formation



People walk through Agam's art sculpture in front of the sport stadium in Kaohsiung last month.

PHOTO COURTESY OF RON SCHIMMEL

— or square, depending on where you are standing.

All 54 sides of the nine pillars are painted in different patterns and hues, totaling more than 180 shades. A closer look reveals that the one side of each pillar is also lined to segment the structure into sections.

The purpose of the segment, he said, is that as children grow, their perception of the pillar will change because they will see whole different pillars as their eyes hit at a different height.

Through this method, I defy time, he said.

Pointing to a watercolor painting on a wall in his hotel room, he said: "That painting will always look like that no matter when you look at it. But when people look at my art, they will always see something totally new at a different stage of life."

His art also "becomes alive," he said, when people move around throughout the pillars. A little more than 2cm to the right, a step to the left, 30cm higher, 1m lower, a girl dressed in yellow is holding hands with a man in black, a child with a blue

hat hugs his mom in a purple dress, everything is in constant motion, always changing.

"As the people wearing different color of clothing weave through the pillars, they become part of the art piece. They are an element that makes the piece non-static," he said.

Recalling the story of Noah's ark from the Bible, when God sent down a rainbow after the flood as a promise of hope that he would never send a flood again, Agam said the reason he used a rainbow in his piece was that as Taiwan will

be welcoming visitors from all over the world during the games, "the rainbow [represents] the unity of difference."

The symbolism of the number "nine" behind the piece comes from the Arabic number, which is shaped like a person, while the number eight resembles the symbol for infinity. Combined, the two numbers mean that "life is full of infinite possibility and time does not end," he said.

Agam's piece can be seen in the front quad of the sports coliseum that will be used during the World Games in July.

### PROFILE

## Non-native speakers do well in Mandarin tests

BY FLORA WANG  
STAFF REPORTER

A high percentage of participants in the Ministry of Education's beginner-level Mandarin proficiency tests for non-native speakers of Mandarin last year passed the examinations, a report said last week.

The Examination Report published by the Steering Committee

for the Test of Proficiency-Huayu held on Feb. 3 last year, said 83.5 percent, or 335 of the 401 participants in the beginner-level Mandarin proficiency tests in May and November, passed the test and obtained certificates.

The average scores in the two tests were 69.67 and 69.28 points on a scale of zero to 80, said the committee, an organization affiliated

with the ministry.

As for the basic-level examinations held in May and November, 45.9 percent of the 577 students obtained certificates, the report showed.

On a scale of zero to 120 in the two basic-level examinations, scores averaged 86.57 and 88.65 points, the report said.

Of the 770 participants in the

intermediate-level proficiency tests, 42.99 percent received certificates, the report showed.

The majority of students scored between 90 to 99 points on a scale of zero to 120, the report said.

Of the 385 examinees in the advanced-level proficiency tests, 58.96 percent, or 227, were awarded certificates.

Average scores at this level were 81.11 and 89.55 points on a scale of zero to 120, the report showed.

The majority of participants taking the tests were Asian, while the number of examinees from the Americas and Europe came in second and third, the report said, adding that 1,279 women took the tests, outnumbering men by 425.

## PIGEON POST

### Foreign labor overtaken by caregivers

#### LABOR

In yet more evidence of the economic downturn, the number of foreign laborers in the manufacturing sector in Kaohsiung fell below that of foreign caregivers last month for the first time, the city's Bureau of Labor Affairs said on Thursday.

At about 6,380, the number of foreign laborers made up 49 percent of the city's entire foreign working population, which stood at 12,900 last month, bureau statistics showed.

The bureau attributed the decline to premature termination of contracts by Taiwanese manufacturers starting in October amid decreasing demand in the industry.

Meanwhile, an increasing need for caregivers providing long-term assistance reflected growth in that sector.

With high domestic unemployment, city government officials said it remained to be determined whether hiring foreign workers would mean fewer jobs for Taiwanese. The labor bureau has nevertheless imposed stricter measures when examining foreign worker applications to ensure that jobs are only given to foreign nationals whose skills will complement those already found within specific sectors, bureau officials said.

The number of foreign workers in Kaohsiung City has averaged about 13,700 in recent years, government statistics showed.

### NIA makes it easier for foreign investors

#### INVESTMENT

In a bid to attract foreign investors to make long-term investments in Taiwan, the National Immigration Agency (NIA) on Friday announced that the government would relax the requirements for foreigners who wish to immigrate to Taiwan through investment.

The agency said expected amendments to the Regulations Governing Visiting, Residence and Permanent Residence of Aliens (外國人停留居留及永久居留辦法) would cut required capital investment from NT\$30 million (US\$860,000) to NT\$15 million.

With the amendment, foreigners who invest NT\$15 million and employ at least five local individuals for a period of three years would be able to apply for permanent residency after being in Taiwan legally for five years, the agency said.

STAFF WRITER, WITH CNA

## Exhibition opens window on Czech 'gems'



Czech Economic and Cultural Office Representative Jaroslav Dolecek, right, and Council of Cultural Affairs Chairwoman Huang Pi-twan, center, view a tribute to PET bottles at the "Czech Gems" exhibition at the National Taiwan Museum last Tuesday.

PHOTO: CNA

**SOMETHING FOR ALL:** From technology and fine art to architecture, the exhibition provides a chance to learn more about this central European country's rich history

STAFF WRITER, WITH CNA

The National Taiwan Museum and the Czech Economic and Cultural Office (CECO) on Tuesday opened the "Czech Gems" exhibition and invited art lovers to explore modern art and Baroque architecture from the Czech Republic.

The exhibition, which runs until April 5, features technology, music, design, modern art, sports and scenery of the Czech

Republic, from ancient to modern times.

Located in central Europe, the Czech Republic's long history and rich culture have given birth to fine literature, art, craft and architecture that are admired all over the world, Council of Cultural Affairs Minister Huang Pi-twan (黃碧端) said.

CECO Representative Jaroslav Dolecek said the word "gem" does

not just mean a precious stone that has been cut and polished, as it also denotes something that is prized, especially for its great beauty or perfection, or someone who is in some way outstanding and unique.

"One can find such gems in every country, including Taiwan," Dolecek said. "The Czech Gems exhibition will take you on a remarkable journey through the history of the Czech Republic up to the present day and will provide a window on a place that for some [is] a distant and little-known country somewhere in Europe."

Dolecek said the exhibition offers a great opportunity to get

**Q: I have been wanting to write to your column for a while, but when the Super Bowl aired a while ago on Videoland Sports it broke the camel's back. Let me explain.**

I have lived in Kaohsiung for almost 20 years and have seen this wonderful city grow and improve. With the World Games around the corner and the pride of the country at stake, it's time Taiwan took one more step toward becoming international with second audio programming (SAP). For years I have been shocked to see professional sports from abroad broadcast in Mandarin when the English broadcast is also available. This also occurs on educational programs aired on Discovery and National Geographic and NHK.

While Videoland Sports is the main culprit, ESPN and Star Sports are also guilty.

Still, when one criticizes, one should also offer solutions, so here's mine.

With the World Games approaching, the government should require that the above-mentioned channels include English commentary and narration for all programs when available: Sumo wrestling on NHK; many nature shows on Animal Planet, Discovery Channel and National Geographic; and all international sports on ESPN, Star Sports and Videoland Sports. It is silly to watch a program dubbed in Mandarin with the original English audio also audible, as was the case with the Super Bowl.

The world's eyes will be on Kaohsiung and Taiwan in July, and the expected influx of foreigners should be impetus enough for the government to use existing technology to provide wider — and often superior — coverage. But which department or government body is responsible for making sure this policy is carried out?

Thanks for your attention and I look forward to your response.

**Todd Breier**

**A-hok says:**

The director of the National Communications Commission's (NCC) communications content department, Jason Ho (何吉森), told me there is no law at the moment that would compel any commercial TV station to offer SAP. TV stations are entitled to decide what service they should provide after considering the cost factor, he said.

The commission, he said, only regulates media content and determines whether it violates regulations.

At present, only some programs on TV, including Public Television Service (PTS) and China Television (CTV), have SAP. PTS is partially funded by the government to serve the interests of different communities, particularly those of the Aborigines and physically challenged individuals.

*If you have something you'd like to ask, please write to community@taipeitimes.com.*

**“The ... exhibition will take you on a remarkable journey through the history of the Czech Republic up to the present day.”**

— Jaroslav Dolecek, Czech Economic and Cultural Office representative

acquainted with the achievements, famous personalities, world-renowned inventions, breathtakingly beautiful architecture and refreshing modern art of the Czech Republic.

"I am confident there is something for everyone in the exhibition, something that you will find interesting, surprising or admirable, and which will bring you joy, expand your knowledge, and leave you with a positive impression of my country and its people," Dolecek said.

According to the museum, the "Czech Gems" exhibition will also be presented at the National Tainan Living Art Center from April 8 to June 14, the Cultural Affairs Bureau of the Kaohsiung

County Government from June 27 to July 26, the Taichung County Seaport Art Center from Aug. 8 to Sept. 6, and the National Taitung Living Art Center from Sept. 19 to Oct. 30.

The museum said that in recent years the CCA had cooperated with the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic to promote an international cultural exchange program.

"In 2005, the museum launched a special exhibition titled 'A Thousand Faces of Formosa: The Nature and Tradition of Taiwan' at the Czech Republic's National Museum," she said.

This was achieved on the basis of an exchange agreement between the CCA and the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic, she said.

In 2007, the museum invited the Czech Republic's National Museum to bring the "Traditional Czech Puppets" exhibition to Taiwan, which gave the public a chance to learn more about one of the Czech Republic's most important traditional art forms, Huang said.

"After several years of interaction and exchange, cooperation between Taiwan and the Czech Republic on exhibitions and cultural heritage preservation has strengthened the cultural ties between the two countries," she said.

**IF YOU HAVE SUGGESTIONS FOR EVENTS, INTERVIEWS OR TOPICS YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE COVERED ON THIS PAGE PLEASE SEND YOUR IDEAS TO: community@taipeitimes.com**