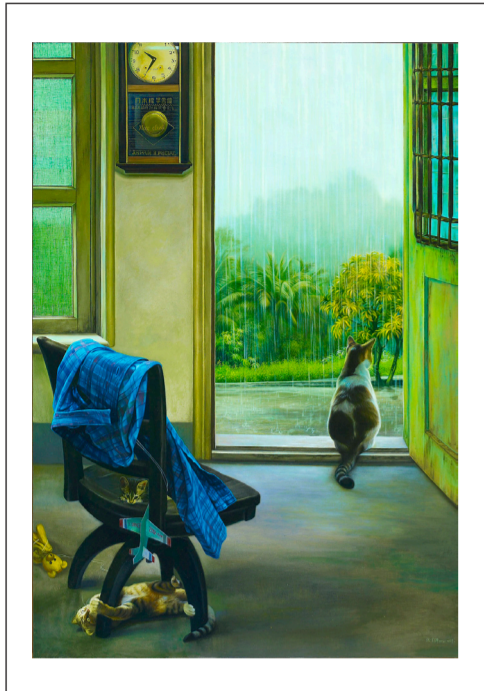


[ART JOURNAL]

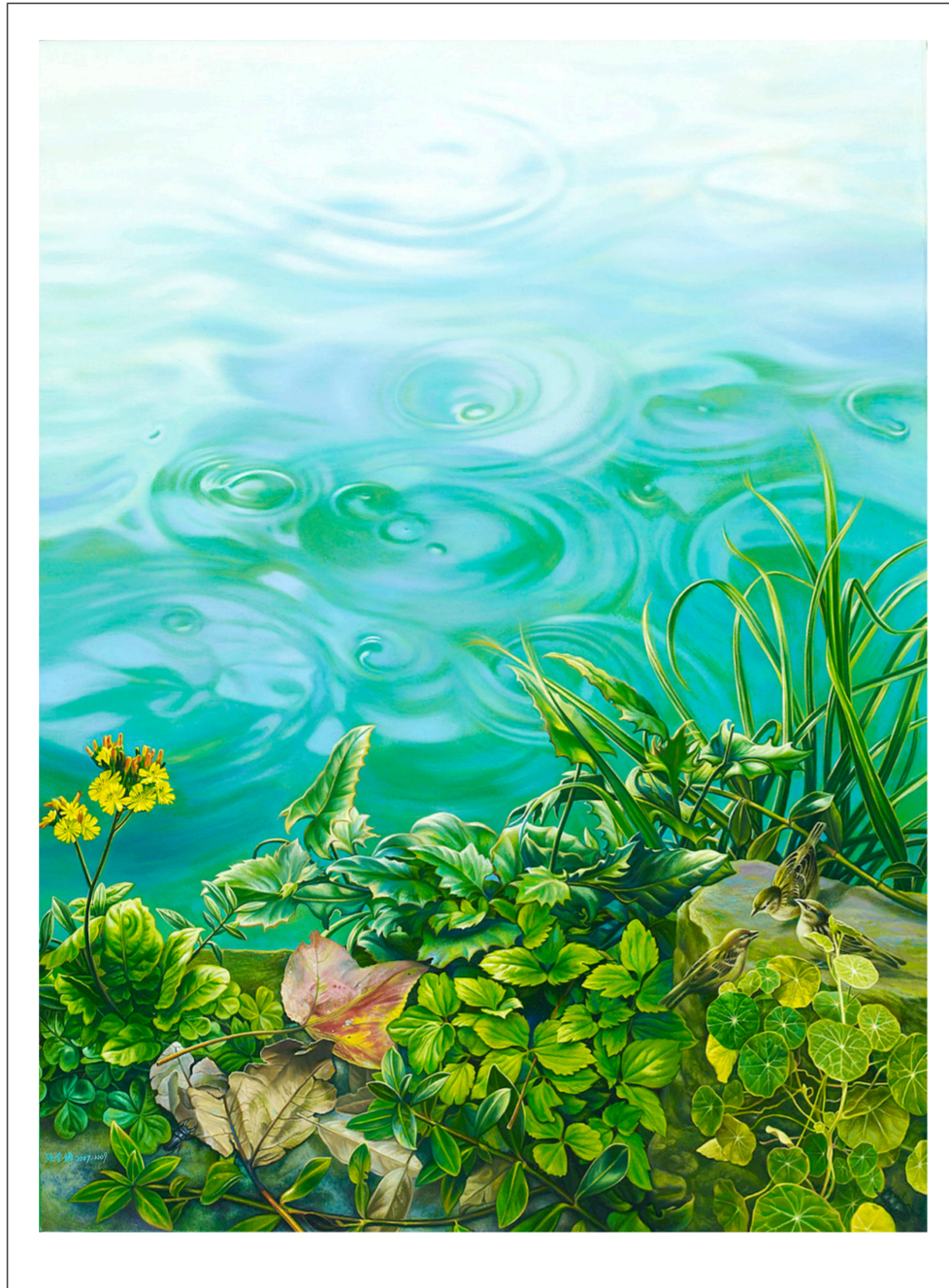
Shining waves, dancing shadows

Jang Tarn-kuh realist paintings show Taiwan's natural beauty in all its bounteous diversity

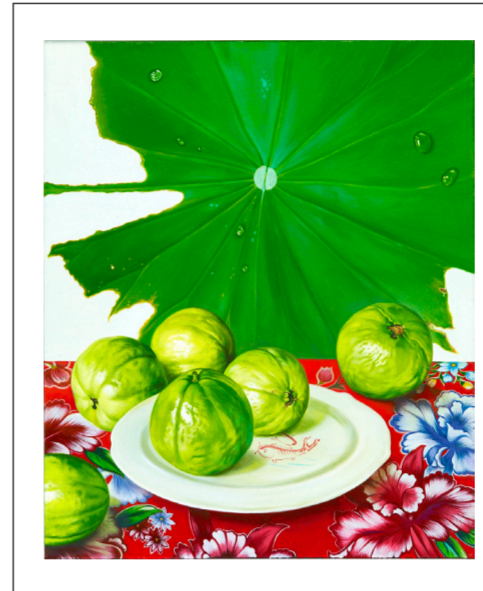
BY NOAH BUCHAN
STAFF REPORTER



Listen to the Rain. PHOTO COURTESY OF METAPHYSICAL GALLERY



Drizzle at the Pond. PHOTO COURTESY OF METAPHYSICAL GALLERY



Guavas. PHOTO COURTESY OF METAPHYSICAL GALLERY

Wandering out of the Metaphysical Gallery last weekend, I was trying to think of a Taiwanese artist who, over the past few decades, has depicted Taiwan's natural landscape in a realistic style. Aside from a few sculptors, I couldn't come up with a single one. This because, perhaps, of recent trends in contemporary art, with its craze for digital media. Or perhaps local artists prefer to represent humans or cityscapes. Regardless, it seems strange that, few, if any, of Taiwan's artists of late have represented the country's natural beauty on canvas.

The work of Jang Tarn-kuh (張堂庫) prompted these musings because his 22 pieces currently on display at the gallery do just that. The oil-on-canvas landscape paintings — flowing rivers, verdant foliage and mountain scenes — and still-life paintings of flowers and fruit depict the diversity of lush plants and wide-open perspectives found around Yangmingshan (陽明山), where the 41-year-old artist lives and works.

Jang's process of creation is similar to that of one of the early impressionists. Prior to applying paint to canvas, he sketches outdoors, scrupulously rendering the movement of a body of water, for example, or the dew on a cabbage leaf. He then returns to his cottage studio and, using the drawings and his memory, proceeds to create his works. He often returns to the forest or field to gain a deeper sense of a branch's texture or a flower's color. What results are realistic paintings of exceptional detail that often take two or three years to complete.

Pop of Plantain Trees (芭蕉樹的普普風) is fairly representative of Jang's mountain landscapes. A cluster of plantains, its vibrant leaves rendered in emerald and malachite take up most of the canvas. A field of yellowish-green grass in the mid-ground stretches into a background of misted mountains — a kind of Garden of Eden idyll of bountiful greenery.

A branch emerging from the top left-hand side of the canvas and leaves shooting up from a riverbank at the lower right are the only hints of perspective in *Shining Wave Dancing Shadow* (波光舞影). The river reflects opaline



Shining Wave Dancing Shadow. PHOTO COURTESY OF METAPHYSICAL GALLERY

EXHIBITION NOTES:

WHAT: The Day I Saw Past and Future Sceneries Playing (那天我看見昨天和明天風景在遊戲)

WHERE: Metaphysical Art Gallery (形而上畫廊), 7F, 219, Dunhua S Rd Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市敦化南路一段219號7樓)

WHEN: Until April 8. Open Tuesdays to Sundays from 11am to 6:30pm

ON THE NET: www.artmap.com.tw

shimmers of light from the sky, while a single leaf creates a ripple in the water's surface, making the branches appear as though dancing. *Drizzle at the Pond* (湖畔細雨) captures the circling undulations made by gently falling rain on a luminous azure surface tinged with purple and green.

The still-life paintings, though done with domesticated objects such as plates and tablecloths, retain the emblem of plenitude. The five luminous persimmons of *Golden Year* (錦金歲月) are placed inside a bowl sitting on a crimson tablecloth with flower patterns.

Less impressive for this reviewer were Jang's series of domesticated cats frolicking in nature. A feline plays in the luminous undergrowth in *Hide and Seek* (捉迷藏), while *Afternoon Talk* (午話) features a cat lounging in a tree as another looks on. Although these canvases retain his impressive palette and attention to detail, they come off more as greeting card images than fine art.

It is frustrating and disappointing that the English-language version of the artist's introduction — as well as the Chinese-language version on which it was based — offers practically no insight into Jang's thinking as an artist. Instead it relies on statements such as, "Every present stands on its past track to expect the next splendid instant," or, "Every today is the tomorrow of yesterday," as a means of explicating on the artist's work. How these words are meant to convey to visitors a deeper understanding of an artist who deserves recognition is totally beyond me.

Celebrity Interview



PHOTO COURTESY OF FILMKO PICTURES

Destiny

CONTINUED FROM P14

TT: Why did you choose Giddens as your blog name?

JB: It was because Marx and Habermas were already used (laughing). I found *The Third Way* [by Anthony Giddens] boring, but I wanted a cool name ... Lots of the reasons behind what I do aren't really that cool.

TT: Have you ever experienced writer's block?

JB: Hardly. I constantly look for ideas and inspirations, collect news, and take them down. One idea is enough to keep me writing for days. When there is no newspaper and magazines on the table when I eat, I think of ideas, plots and stories.

TT: What's the most bizarre news story you have recently collected?

JB: I read somewhere that there is this girl found living on a toilet for two years. I don't know when I will or if I will ever use it in my stories. There are all sorts of things saved in my computer.

TT: What is more important to a writer, talent or practice?

JB: I won't talk crap about how a person who can't sing can become a singer if [he or she] practices. Everybody has a talent for something. It takes practice, of course, if you want to be really, really good at your calling.

TT: In your eyes, what makes a high-quality movie or novel?

JB: To me, a good work makes people unable to stop reading it. There are excellent books that people can put down and read several days later. But I like them strong and intense. You feel the sense of time disappearing when totally immersed in reading.

TT: What would you do if one day you woke up to find you couldn't write anymore?

JB: Couldn't write anymore? It could only be an accident in which I lost both my hands.

TT: I mean if your muse does a midnight flit

JB: Then I would just be less of a great writer. Even if no one pays attention to me and my works, I can still keep doing what I like to do.

TT: Name one of the books you have been reading recently.

JB: *Running With Scissors* [by American best-selling author Augusten Burroughs]. But the rest of the stuff I read is manga. Reading manga makes me happy.

Hunter X Hunter [by Yoshihiro Togashi] is super good! I read it every day. I put *Slam Dunk* [by Inoue Takehiko], *One Piece* [by Eiichiro Oda] and *Hunter X Hunter* outside my bathroom, so that every time I take a leak, I can grab one book and read.

I would say that my ideas for storyboarding come from manga rather than films.

TT: Have you thought of adapting your novels to the big screen?

JB: Yes, it's already in the works. I will start with a simple love story, though all my fans think that what I do best are hot-blooded action, thriller and *wuxia* novels.

Truth be told, there are plenty of romance writers already, and by joining them I would be unlikely to make a difference. I can probably make a difference, though, in the world of *wuxia* and thriller. But then again, I am not that great in the world of filmmaking. I need practice and to figure out how it works.

TT: What's your plan for the near future?

JB: I am going to take a hot air balloon ride in Kenya in August and watch animals roaring on the savanna.



PHOTO: PAN HSIAO-THANG, TAIPEI TIMES

Dialogue

CONTINUED FROM P13

TT: Why did you open JAMEI CHEN•Dialogue?

JC: We wanted to encourage people to talk about art. A lot of developments in European culture sprang out of the discussions artists and thinkers of the time had in salons. They were able to create new philosophies as a result of those conversations. We hope that this space is also inspirational. Atmosphere is very important and it's quiet and peaceful in here. Dialogue is hopefully a space with many different possibilities, and not just place for casual conversations.

TT: Does the name Dialogue also mean the dialogue between fashion and fine art?

JC: Yes, it means all kinds of discussion.

TT: What kind of relationship do you think exists between fine art and fashion?

JC: It depends on how you look at things. I think everyday life is, in and of itself, a kind of art. I was just saying to the students from Shida who were in here that no matter what you are doing, as long as you take a close look at it, you can see it as a form of art or turn it into art. It doesn't matter what it is. Art can permeate all the different layers of your life. For example, in your home you have a space that you can arrange and decorate with things that are not only useful, but that also appeal to you aesthetically and move you.

TT: Do you think the economy has affected people's ability or willingness to incorporate art into everyday life?

JC: I don't think you need a lot of money or the backing of a strong economy to do that. Actually, I feel that when the economy is weak or when there is a recession, people start to consider objects and their value differently. I feel that when they chose things to buy, they look for items that are longer lasting, not just things that are cheap and offer a quick fix. Ultimately, I feel that is a good thing. People start to look at what they buy differently and consider how much they will actually enjoy it.

TT: Do you think the poor economic climate has had an impact on the shopping habits of your customers?

JC: I feel that it's had a positive impact, in the sense that people focus on higher quality, longer lasting goods. When designing our clothing, we also think about how our current seasons works with previous seasons and so on, because we want to encourage people to keep our clothing and continue wearing it, as opposed to tossing it out for new items. We also focus on creating our own style that doesn't rely too much on what is fashionable at the moment, because following trends ends up making something disposable. I like to think that we create things that are timeless.

TT: When did you become interested in designing clothing?

JC: I think everyone discovers the one thing

that really captures their interest when they are still very young. In my case, I was always very clear about what I enjoy doing. Of course, I wasn't so directed when I was little, but when I think of my childhood, a lot of my memories focus on things like my mom working the pedal of a sewing machine and the way watching her made me feel. There are a lot of things you might forget, like what you read in books, but there is that one thing that stands out in your memories. So looking back, I think that designing clothing was something that I was always meant to do.

TT: Who are your favorite fashion designers?

JC: I have quite a few. One of them is Martin Margiela. He's very confident and he's really created his own unmistakable aesthetic. I feel that every designer has to have a very specific point of view and the ability to translate that into clothing. I try to make sure that is the strong point of my brand, too. We've never placed our logo on the outside of our products, because I feel that the clothing should be able to speak for itself. Clothing should allow people to express their own sense of style; it shouldn't be something that allows brands to use their customers as a marketing tool. I feel very strongly about this.

I think as a designer you should have a very distinct style, but of course in every collection we still try to seek out and present a new point of view, because keeping that in mind allows us to remain exciting.

TT: What kind of impression do you hope Jamei Chen designs make on people?

JC: In terms of my upcoming collection, [Quo] and I hope it captures the carefree feeling of summer. Generally speaking, I think good design has to do with understanding the environment your customer lives in and how it influences them, and keeping that in mind as you plan the silhouettes and choose fabrics. For example, when I was younger I took a trip to Milan and I kept thinking to myself, "Why do all the women here have such great style and present themselves so beautifully?" And my hypothesis was that the architecture in Milan is so wonderful, it really inspires the residents to dress up every day. So I think that in every environment, there are different things that subtly influence people's decisions about what they put on every day, which are important to keep in mind as a designer.

I also hope people think of Jamei Chen designs as timeless. I think that when people talk about my brand, they think of something that is simple but not boring. To be honest, the more simple a design is, the more difficult it is to pull off successfully. One of my seamstresses told me she enjoys making our clothing for that reason, because she can really focus on the process itself and when she's done she has a feeling of accomplishment. I hope wearing our clothing feels the same way, in that it gives people a sense of confidence.