

[ART JOURNAL]



One foot in the East, one in the West

Chiang I-han's paintings are steeped in both the Western aesthetic tradition of modernism and the compositional principles of Chinese ink painting and calligraphy

BY NOAH BUCHAN
STAFF REPORTER

Many Taiwanese artists undergo a remarkable aesthetic shift after studying or traveling in the US or Europe. The principles of Chinese art in which they were originally trained, however, often prove to be implacable.

Painter Chu Teh-chun (朱德群) moved to France in the early 1950s where he was influenced by Nicolas de Stael's abstract geometric strips of impasto color. Chu combined Stael's style with calligraphy. Lee Tsai-chien (李再鈞) traveled to Europe in the 1970s to study Chinese sculpture, but returned to Taiwan with notes for a book on ancient Greek art (which he later published) and a mind full of the teachings of Plato, which inspired his monumental sculptures.

The Age of Writing Poems and Indulging in Wine — Calligraphy and Paintings by Chiang I-han (詩酒年華—姜一涵書畫展), currently on display at the National Museum of History, shows that Chiang I-han (姜一涵), 83, belongs in this artistic milieu. In his work, modernism meets Chinese calligraphy and landscape painting.

Chiang's early paintings closely adhere to the latter tradition, in which trees, mountains and enclosed compounds are rendered in great detail and serve as emblems of self-cultivation and nature's

perfection. But Chiang's interest in calligraphy and ink painting was as much academic as it was artistic.

Han researched Chinese art at Kansas State and Princeton universities in the early 1970s.

A retrospective of Piet Mondrian's work that Chiang saw at the Guggenheim Museum in 1973 was a turning point for the artist. Mondrian's paintings were an aesthetic revelation for Chiang. The bold primary colors and geometrical shapes contrasted with the detailed and literary Chinese ink paintings he had studied and created up to that point.

"I went [to the Guggenheim] to look at his paintings every day for two weeks," Chiang said in an interview with the *Taipei Times*. "I wanted to approach the paintings directly without the intermediary of essays or teachers."

He went on to study Western modernists for the decade that he lived and worked in the US.

Chiang said he viewed the work of impressionist masters such as Gauguin and Cezanne and later the surrealist forms of Joan Miro as a means of broadening the scope of his art, free of contextual interference.

Akin to Chu's landscapes, Chiang employs the thick, black brushstrokes that

characterize calligraphy. But whereas Chu broadened his palette (and canvas size), Chiang retained a degree of Mondrian-inspired simplicity, of form and color. It is a style that Chiang's friends have suggested resembles the work of children. Looking at the controlled brushstrokes of the pictures currently on display, however, reveals an artist in complete control of his medium.

Green on Green (豐翠) is an abstract landscape with broad, black brushstrokes that are tinged at the edges with beams of gray wash, interspersed here and there with dapples of vermilion, acid green and brown. The violence of the brushstrokes is startling and differs significantly from the meditative landscapes found in Chiang's earlier work.

Rhythms of Mountains and Sunset (夕陽山外山) is a serene expressionist study of nature. The orange-red sun in the top-right corner shines on charcoal-colored mountains, with the snow-capped peak of one reflecting the sunshine. Blotches of green-brown paint, presumably signifying leaves, are sprinkled across the lower part of the canvas, suggesting the presence of a light breeze. It is a landscape reduced to its most elementary colors and outlines.

It is a pity that the museum doesn't exhibit any of Chiang's earlier paintings — particularly the traditional Chinese

Top left: *Sunset Beyond the Mountains* by Chiang I-han.

Top center: *Green on Green* by Chiang I-han.

Top right: *White Hair and Red Flower* by Chiang I-han.

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landscape *Seclusion in the Mountain* (山居, 1970), the impressionist *Rhythm of Mountains* (山韻, 1989) and the expressionist *Red River* (紅河, 2006) — as doing so would have provided viewers with a clearer understanding of Chiang's development. The exhibit does, however, manage to broaden its scope with several books written by Chiang and a documentary of his life as an artist. Reviewing these sources does much to reveal an artist working across two traditions while transcending both.

EXHIBITION NOTES:

WHAT: *The Age of Writing Poems and Indulging in Wine — Calligraphy and Paintings by Chiang I-han* (詩酒年華—姜一涵書畫展)
WHERE: National Museum of History (國立歷史博物館), 49 Nanhai Rd, Taipei City (台北市南海路49號)
WHEN: Until April 5. Open daily from 10am to 6pm, closed Monday. Call (02) 2361-0270
ADMISSION: NT\$30
ON THE NET: www.nmh.gov.tw

Celebrity Interview



Young

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Yet he talks explicitly, often alarmingly, about his sexual preferences and how he has treated women. "I like strong women, not necessarily masculine women, say a woman who runs an organization, I like a woman with massive confidence and then I want to dominate her sexually. I like to watch her like a tiger watches their prey after they wound them. I want her to keep her distance for at least 20 to 30 minutes before I devour them and take them to the point of ecstasy. I love saying no when making love. What I want is extreme. Normally what they want is not as extreme as what I want. I want to ravish them. Completely ... I may have taken advantage of women before, but I never took advantage of her [Washington]."

At times Tyson paints himself as a victim — of circumstance, of liggers, of women on the make — but in the end he says he has nobody to blame but himself. I say that the strength of the film is he doesn't absolve himself: "You say you didn't do the rape, but you did some bad things to women."

"I know. The fact is, I'm not trying to win no friends. I don't want you to think I'm doing this to try to get a clean-up job, or I want people to like me. I don't care." It's true, you don't feel he's trying to pull the wool over your eyes.

Tyson shakes his troubled head. "No ... sometimes my mind tells me, you think you've got these white people fooled, that they like you — you're a fucking fraud." Now he's talking with visceral intensity. "My mind is not my friend: 'You're a fraud, you're trying to fool these white people.' And I have to contain that. That's the addict talking. That's the guy who wants to get high. The guy who wants to drink the Hennessy, the guy who wants to gallivant in the street with a bunch of crude women, that's that guy talking right now. That's not you talking, Mike."

He pauses, the sweat dripping from his head. "When you go to a doctor or a psychiatrist, and they say, 'Do you hear voices?' of course we say no, because if you say, I hear voices, they go, 'Have that guy straitjacketed' and you go to hospital. But we do hear voices. Our mind does tell us things. So your mind is not your friend if you don't discipline it and control it." He tries hard now to filter his thoughts, but he worries that it's a form of lying. Thankfully, he says, he doesn't have the same intensity of feeling any more. Maybe the antidepressants have made things easier. In 2001, he told reporters, "I'm on the Zoloft to keep me from killing y'all."

When Tyson went into rehab in 2007, he admitted being addicted to cocaine and alcohol. "I'll never beat that. That's going to be a till-the-day-I-die job. That's an inside job. Nothing to do with anything else. That's just a disease I have received hereditarily."

"Simon, keep the questions to the movie," says a minder. "We don't want to talk about stuff."

"OK, I'm sorry," Tyson replies meekly, but then goes on to ignore him. "Listen, I'll talk about anything. I'm not ashamed of who I am. I understand I've got to be sold in a certain way, but I'm not ashamed of anything I've done in my life. After all, my journey, I know who I am. And I'm cool with who I am." For a second, he believes it.

But there are so many incidents in his life that he knows he can't begin to justify. On his release from prison in 1995, by now a Muslim with the name Malik Abdul Aziz and his body tattooed with images of Mao Zedong (毛澤東) and Che Guevara, he launched the following tirade on a reporter who suggested he should be in a straitjacket. "I'll put your mother in a straitjacket, you punk-ass white boy. Come here and tell me that, and I'll fuck you in your ass, you punk white boy, you faggot ... I'll eat your asshole alive, you bitch ... You scared, coward, you're not man enough to fuck with me, you can't last two minutes in my world, bitch. Look at you, scared now, you ho. Scared like a little white pussy, scared of the real man. I'll fuck you till you love me, faggot." It didn't help his protestations of innocence.

After being held butted by Evander Holyfield in 1997, he bit off part of the boxer's ear in the rematch seven months later and spat it out into the ring. Tyson was fined a maximum US\$3 million and had his license revoked. But boxing needed Tyson as much as he needed boxing, and a year later he was given a final opportunity. By now, though, he had lost the pace, accuracy and hunger. His sense of fair play had also gone for a burton. In 1999, he was accused of trying to break Frans Botha's arms in the ring. That same year he was sentenced to a year's imprisonment after assaulting two motorists following a traffic accident. On his release, he fought Orlin Norris and knocked him down after the bell rang. A win in 2000 over Andrzej Golota was overturned when Tyson tested positive for marijuana. His second wife, Monica Turner, the mother of two of his six children, divorced him in 2003. In his final fight, against the journeyman boxer Kevin McBride, he was a pitiful figure — slumped in a corner, legs splayed, unable or unwilling to stand himself up. Straight afterwards, Tyson announced his retirement. "I don't have the stomach for this kind of thing any more. I don't have that ferocity. I'm not an animal any more. I'm not going to disrespect the sport by losing to this caliber of fighter."

When he talks about biting Holyfield's ear or beating up boxing promoter Don King in public, for example, he simply says he was insane.

Does he think the boxing led to that type of instability? "Boxing is nothing to do with madness, it's all about control and discipline. Madness has nothing to do with it. It's what you do with the discipline, it can drive you mad, but it depends on the individual, whether they allow it to drive them mad."

Today, Tyson lives by himself in a modest house in Las Vegas. His great hope for the future is that he catches up with his children, and becomes the kind of father he should have been years ago. "They never had a chance to hang out with me, like all these freeloaders did."

Looking back, he says, perhaps the biggest problem was achieving so much so young. "If you want to see a tragedy, just take a kid who's 19, 20 years old — some kid from the hood who's got some talent — and give them US\$50 million. I didn't know what to do. By society's standards, you reach that level and people bow down to you. I never understood that."

He seems exhausted. By the afternoon, by his life, by his mind, by everything. He says he thinks it is unlikely he will ever have anything to do with boxing again. I ask why he hasn't considered television commentary. He thinks some time before answering. "I am ashamed of so many of the things I have done." In boxing or in his private life? "In the ring, too."

It's not so long ago that he told me there was nothing he was ashamed of. He smiles, and points to his head, suggesting that the last thing you should ever expect from Mike Tyson is consistency. "There's a committee going on up there." And he laughs, a little desperately. "A committee! A committee going on up there! Oh God help me!"

Going gouache

Chen Shir-juh's warm and radiant gouache paintings depict Taiwan's flora and winged creatures

BY NOAH BUCHAN
STAFF REPORTER

Gouache painting has a long and storied history in Taiwan. The genre was first popularized during the Japanese colonial period when it fell under the influence of the *toyoga*, or "Eastern painting" style. It suffered a serious decline for almost three decades because of the Chinese Nationalist Party's (KMT) re-Sinification policies. Artist and academic Lin Chih-chu (林之助) revived the art form, today known as "Eastern gouache," during the 1970s and since then it has enjoyed growing popularity.

The Eastern Gouache Exhibition of Chen Shir-juh (陳石柱膠彩畫展), currently displayed on the second floor of the National Museum of History, shows roughly 80 works by Chen Shir-juh (陳石柱), who was Lin's student. The paintings, completed between the late 1940s and 2006, provide viewers with a clear picture of the Chen's visual style and are complemented by a display case that shows some of the materials he used.

Chen's warm and radiant works are primarily concerned with the observation and depiction of Taiwan's luminous flora and winged creatures. *Lotus Pond Scenery* (蓮池農景) is fairly representative of his subject matter, palette and style. A pair of mandarin ducks, the drake with fiery orange and wine-red plumage, the female washed in speckled earthy browns, swim in a pond rendered in turquoise and abounding with deep green lotus flowers in bloom. *Blooming Orchid* (洋蘭盛開) depicts two charcoal-colored swallowtail butterflies flitting around an orchid's snow white and crimson flowers.

The exhibit shows Chen's process of creation through a display of materials he worked with. He would begin a painting by sketching a draft outline in the field with charcoal or pencil and then transcribe the drawing onto rice paper. His sketchbooks show the different colors he planned to add to a flower here or bird there. The colors were prepared by mixing the

powdery pigment with melted gelatin. He finally applied the colorful mixture on respective sections layer by layer.

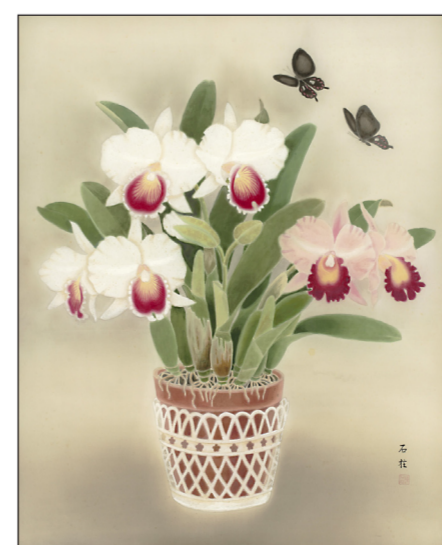
Although the museum provides clear explanations of the medium of gouache painting, it fails to delineate any theme. The composition and color of the fire-red blooms found in the 1949 painting *Kopok Flower* (木棉花), for example, resemble those found in the 1992, 2001 and 2002 paintings of the same name. Placing the four in the same exhibit leaves the viewer with the impression that Chen underwent very little development as an artist.

An exhibit at Taichung's National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts on Chan Chien-yu (詹前裕) — another artist who worked in the Eastern gouache tradition — deftly illustrates, through images and explanations, the artist's different periods. That the National History Museum didn't do the same results in a show that is somewhat repetitious and starved of meaning.



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Top: *Lotus Pond Scenery* by Chen Shir-juh. Above: *Blooming Orchid* by Chen Shir-juh.

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