

Sometimes art is just art

LECTURE NOTES:

WHAT: Taipei Salon (台北沙龍), Old Dreams, New Interpretations — An Artist's Perspective
WHERE: Zhongshan Hall (台北市中山堂), 98 Yenping S Rd, Taipei City (台北市延平南路98號)

WHEN: Saturday from 2pm to 4:30pm
DETAILS: Lectures are conducted in English with simultaneous interpretation in Mandarin; admission is free but those attending must preregister by calling (02) 3322-4907 or online at www.civictaipei.org

Jane McAdam Freud will discuss Sigmund Freud and the relationship between art and psychoanalysis in a lecture this Saturday

BY **NOAH BUCHAN**
 STAFF REPORTER

Jane McAdam Freud put the father of psychoanalysis on the couch for 20 months. Well, sort of.

In 2006, McAdam Freud, daughter of British painter Lucian Freud and great-granddaughter of Sigmund Freud, was granted an artists residency at the Freud Museum in London where she spent just under two years analyzing her iconic ancestor's life and his collection of more than 2,000 objects dating as far back as ancient Egypt. It also served as a means of exploring her own artistic self.

The result was an exhibit and book, *Relative Relations*, as well as a film, *Dead or Alive*, that documents the work she created during her residency. A screening of the film will open *Old Dreams, New Interpretations — An Artist's Perspective*, a talk by McAdam Freud this Saturday at 2pm.

The talk, co-organized by Taipei's German Cultural Center and the Lung Ying-tai Cultural Foundation (龍應台文化基金會), will be held at Zhongshan Hall as part of the MediaTek lecture series.

Taipei Times: In what ways has your father influenced your art and how does this complement/differ with your great-grandfather?

Jane McAdam Freud: My relationship to Sigmund and Lucian is something I cannot now deny or escape, so I have learnt to embrace it in my life. It has a continual impact on my life in many ways, genetically, psychodynamically and emotionally. The impact my relationship to my father and great-grandfather has on my opportunities in the art scene, I would say, is



Top: Jane McAdam Freud's *Sisyphus*. Above: Jane McAdam Freud says it is impossible to deny or escape the influence of Sigmund Freud, her great-grandfather, and Lucian Freud, her father.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF JANE MCADAM FREUD

more of a hindrance than a help.

The name Freud is a sort of "object." It is owned by many: the psychoanalysts, the artists and the relations. They are all possessive over the public object. He [Sigmund and Lucian] and his name are a sort of public object and each group wants to own him as theirs, psychodynamically speaking.

This makes it all the more important for me to maintain my own identity and not to

get lost in all of that.

(McAdam Freud trained at the Royal College of Art, London and was awarded the British Art Medal Scholarship in Rome. Her work is held in many international and national public collections including the British Museum and National Gallery Archive and is on permanent display at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Her depth of knowledge and extensive experience as a medalist has led to positions of engraver to the Royal Mint and chief sculptor at Australia's Perth Mint. The 51-year-old artist works in a variety of mediums including drawing and print, sculpture and medals and film and digital media.)

TT: In the book *Relative Relations*, you examine the similarities between your art and the antiquities collected by your great-grandfather. Why do you see this as important in your relationship with him and your art?

JMF: Well, you have to realize that I was unaware of Sigmund's collection before the year preceding my artist's residency at the Freud Museum. I found it extraordinary that I had made so many works that were so similar to those he had collected. I am a contemporary artist and Sigmund Freud collected ancient sculpture. However the nature of the objects he collected bore resemblances to things I had made over the past 25 years.

I was driven to continue with the medium but it was unexplainable to me and others. I continued with it like an addiction. Sigmund Freud said that he had two addictions, one

was nicotine and the other was his collection of antiquities. Freud also collected many portrait busts. Portraiture in sculpture was another area I felt compelled to master. Both these facts I found uncanny!

TT: Did [the residency] enable you to see your art in a new light?

JMF: Oddly it cured me of my addiction and as a result I was ... free to produce works in any/all dimensions and media. It was important for me to know that the precedent for my predilection came from my great-grandfather. His blood seemed to be singing in my veins at least as far as our desire for sculpture was concerned. He collected sculpture and I make sculpture ...

It enabled me to make art in a freer way — that is, without the unexplained restrictions. I feel that my art is less anal now and I prefer the relationship I have with my working processes.

TT: How did these objects help you connect to those artists of the past?

JMF: Just being with his ancient objects helped me familiarize myself with them. Greek, Roman, Egyptian and Chinese ancient sculpture surrounded me for 20 months. This itself was an education. It is rare to see such objects outside of a museum setting. It is even rarer that one gets the opportunity to handle such objects. I did this with many of the objects for long periods of time, scrutinizing and drawing them. I understand ancient sculpture in a way I could only have dreamt of before.

To place my sculpture in my own past, in my ancestral home alongside their

precedents was a rooting experience for me and for my art.

TT: Which of your great-grandfather's theories has played an important role in your work?

JMF: Sublimation is interesting as it is Freud's theory of art as a defense mechanism. Sublimation is one way of dealing with conflicting feelings, which can in some cases lead to neurosis. Sublimation is a type of defense mechanism to prevent mental conflict becoming too acute. It is a channeling of the sex drive into achievements like making art, writing poetry, science etc — a socially acceptable way of dealing with these drives where displacement serves a higher cultural purpose, one that is socially acceptable.

TT: You mention that the processes of psychoanalysis and of art make use of the unconscious. Please expand on what you mean by the unconscious and discuss its relationship to the process of creating your art.

JMF: There are two terms used by Freud. One is the "subconscious," and this refers to information that can be recalled albeit with difficulty. The other is "unconscious," referring to repressed information that is, for all intents and purposes, forgotten. By unconscious I mean unknown, once known, hidden knowledge, repressed knowledge. I think artists use this knowledge and the viewer taps into it in his/her engagement with art.

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[CD REVIEWS: TAIWAN]

As one of Taiwan's early "alt-rock stars," Faith Yang (楊乃文) injected a dose of sorely needed attitude into the Mando-pop world in the late 1990s. The part-time model drew in mainstream listeners with her pristine voice, and distinguished herself from other cut-and-paste pop stars with her jade singing style and rock sensibility.

Yang's latest, *Self-Selected* (我自選 選自我), is an album of covers by Western rock artists and her first release since 2005.

The song choices jibe with the non-mainstream leanings associated with the start of Yang's singing career. She takes on art-rock classics like Lou Reed's *Perfect Day*, interpreting the song with a dark romantic feel in a duet with Canto-pop star Eason Chen (陳奕迅).

British alt-rock bands appear to be a favorite of Yang's, as she covers songs by Blur, Coldplay, Radiohead and The Verve.

Her renditions offer a few novel twists, such as the electronica intro to Blur's *Song 2* and ethereal female vocal choruses in Coldplay's *The Scientist*.

But the album's opening track, Radiohead's *Fake Plastic Trees*, never takes off, despite admirable vocals by Yang. The backing band arrangement remains true to the spirit of the original but lacks imagination in the instrumentation, relying on stale synthesizer and guitar sounds for atmospheric mood.

Her rendition of Velvet Underground's *After Hours* is also a miss. The backing band overshoots by sounding too slick, and Yang's phrasing overlooks the deceptively innocent charm of the song.

Yang is at her best when she's not rushed or overwhelmed by the song itself. On Maximilian Hecker's *Miss Underwater* and The Verve's *The Drugs Don't Work*, her delivery is sublime. She sounds both consoled by the song and consoling when she sings; you forget she's singing a cover.

Judging from the album title, Yang wants to assure listeners that she remains



Faith Yang (楊乃文)
Self-Selected (我自選 選自我)
 Sony Music Taiwan

very much the independent-minded artist. Sure enough, the songs of *Self-Selected* have indie-street cred and plenty of studio polish, but the overall vibe of the album comes across as self-indulgent.

Devoted fans will likely appreciate Yang sharing a glimpse of her musical favorites, but general rock audiences or those unfamiliar with her music might find this work unremarkable as a whole.

— DAVID CHEN

Power Station is back after a four-year hiatus as full of their usual power chords and life-affirming lyrics as ever. The pseudo-emo duo have lost what little hard-rocking credibility they ever had, something their distressed jeans and leather jackets can do nothing to disguise.

The opening track, *Undying Heart* (不死心還在), is a perfectly adequate power ballad, but its combination of strained earnestness and derivative orchestration doesn't really give the listener many surprises. The duo are certainly in good voice, but the rousing chorus about the "undying heart



Moving On (繼續轉動)
Power Station (動力火車)
 HIM Inc

overturning the dictates of fate," would be more at home in a self-help CD.

The title track, the second on the album, was written to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Chinese Professional Baseball League (CPBL) and makes a perfectly adequate stab at combining some watered-down rap with the duo's signature guitar-driven melodies. It is a very professional effort of creating a musical tie-in, and shows that Power Station, who have created numerous theme tunes for television and film, not least for *Cape No. 7* (海角七號), know what they are about in producing music to order.

The first two tracks, for all their inadequacies, at least have a certain oomph that stops the listener from actually falling asleep, but other tracks dip into the dangerous waters of soft rock and have many of the facile melodic features and empty lyrics that are often associated, by this reviewer at least, with the band Air Supply. The two tracks that the duo produced for the hit soap *The Hospital* (白色巨塔), with their combination of Broadway musical, soft rock and the meaningless incorporation of English lyrics into a Chinese song, were particularly annoying, and should be beneath the talents of a group that when



The Unruly Ones
 The Dana Wylie Band
www.danawylie.net

it first formed made a real stab at creating a kind of rock 'n' roll ethos within the saccharine world of Mando-pop.

— IAN BARTHOLOMEW

There are hints of Ani DeFranco, Indigo Girls, Michelle Shocked, Joni Mitchell and even Tom Waits in this second album by The Dana Wylie Band, but though connections with musicians such as these keep floating by as you listen to the album, it is clear that Dana Wylie has a voice that is absolutely her own.

The Unruly Ones is by no means perfect, and Wylie sometimes struggles to fit all her thoughts and emotions into compositions that creak and strain under the burden. Always, when her train of ideas gets out of control, teetering on the brink of the facile or the ridiculous, she, with the aid of multi-instrumentalist Jeremy Hellard, guitarist Matthew Ord and double-bassist Nye Parson, manage to pull things back together, through self-assurance as much as through technical skill. Most of the tracks deal with relationships, but there is a curiosity about people, an introspection and a poetic sensibility that turns out many memorable lines and creates a sense of expectation.



Ling Nieh (聶琳)
Sparkling Smiles (微笑星球)
 Wind Music (風潮音樂)

The Seer sets off with the line "There is so little keeping you from greatness/Just the difference between tears and sweat ...," which opens up a story filled with the tension between speculating about the past and hope for the future. For all its self-conscious wordplay, it remains thoughtful and immensely appealing even on replay.

Hinting at deeper stories is one of Wylie's strengths, and this is no more evident than on the country-tinged *The Ballad of Jones and Dougie*, which, despite a Nashville twang, remains very contemporary and urban.

Musically, Wylie and her band show an easy familiarity with numerous forms, switching effortlessly from piano lounge to jazz to country, sometimes in a single song, a quality announced in the opening track, *Talent Crush*.

The Unruly Ones shows a solid talent and unique voice, and while a little rough at the edges, this roughness is more often than not part of its appeal. There's not too much keeping this ensemble from greatness.

— IAN BARTHOLOMEW

The listening is easy all the way through flautist Ling Nieh's (聶琳) debut album, *Sparkling*

Smiles (微笑星球). But the cheerful disposition of her music sounds genuine and nuanced and has a cinematic feel that appeals to a childlike innocence.

Nieh, a trained flautist and graduate of the Berklee College of Music, composed and produced the album's 10 tracks, which draw from a broad emotional palette.

The album begins with a sense of discovery in *Songs of Whales* (鯨魚在唱歌), which is not as straightforward and pedestrian as it sounds on first listen. Nieh uses sound effects such as guitar with heavy reverb and piano to create a sense of space, but she doesn't hammer them into her listeners. Instead the emotional impact comes from a joyous melody performed on the flute and saxophone.

For Mr Dale (戴爾先生) is a bittersweet tune, delivered bossa nova style by Nieh's impressive team of studio musicians. A *pipa* (琵琶), a lute common in traditional Chinese music, serves as one of the main voices of the song, and its fluid, plucked sound enhances the flute's soaring melodies.

The tango mood of *Ariadna* (天使熱愛的生活) is played out in the intertwining harmonies of the flute, cello, piano and double bass. The energy is intense and passionate, yet the song remains light and playful, thanks to the lilting rhythms conceived by Nieh.

Renowned acoustic guitarist Dong Yun-chang (董運昌) makes an appearance on the album's title track, a wistful, bossa nova-tinged number.

It's no surprise to read in the liner notes that Nieh composes for film and television, as many of the songs in this collection indeed play like soundtrack music.

This album won't resonate with listeners who prefer darkness in music, but there is a sophistication and emotional depth to Nieh's songs that make this worth a listen.

— DAVID CHEN