

[ ART JOURNAL ]

# Nostalgia for lost times



## EXHIBITION NOTES:

**WHAT:** Arcadie  
**WHERE:** Taipei Fine Arts Museum (TFAM), galleries 1A and 1B, 181, Zhongshan N Rd Sec 3, Taipei City (台北市中山北路三段181號)  
**TELEPHONE:** (02) 2595-7656  
**WHEN:** Until July 12. Open Tuesdays to Sundays from 9:30am to 5:30pm, closes at 8:30pm on Saturdays  
**ADMISSION:** NT\$250  
**ON THE NET:** www.tfam.museum

Left: Max Ernst's *Le Jardin de la France*.  
Below: A projected image of *The Arcadian Shepherds* by Nicolas Poussin greets visitors as they enter Arcadie.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TFAM

*Centre Pompidou curator Didier Ottinger's Arcadie makes an interesting — if controversial — argument about the continuity of Western art*

BY **NOAH BUCHAN**  
STAFF REPORTER

A projection of *The Arcadian Shepherds* (Les Bergers d'Arcadie) by Renaissance painter Nicolas Poussin serves as the gateway to Arcadie, an exhibit of modern art that recently opened at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum.

Beginning a show of original works by the masters of 20th-century art with a Renaissance painter might seem heretical to some. But for Didier Ottinger, deputy director of the Centre Georges Pompidou and curator of the exhibit, that's the point.

"I think we've emphasized for too long that there is a big difference [between classical and modern art]. I'm not sure that there is that difference. You can use different vocabulary [to discuss the works] but in fact you are saying the same old story," he said.

TFAM organized the highly anticipated exhibition with France's Centre Georges Pompidou, known as the Pompidou Center in English. It features 83 objects by 42 masters of modernism including Henri Matisse, Georges Braques, Pablo Picasso, Paul Klee and Joan Miro. The paintings, installations, photography and film are located in galleries 1A and 1B of the museum.

But the exhibit is more than just a collection of cubist nudes and impressionist landscapes. Ottinger has employed *The Arcadian Shepherds* as a means of questioning

accepted assumptions about the relationship between two different traditions of Western art. It is an idea he hopes will help those unfamiliar with Western art gain a deeper understanding of its traditions and history.

The exhibit's main theme investigates Arcadia — a region in central Greece that has taken on mythological resonance as a utopian land of abundance. For Ottinger, the elements of utopia found in Poussin's painting are clearly evident in the modern works he has chosen to display.

The exhibit is broken down into 10 sub-themes: The Golden Age, Messengers, Arcadia, Arcadia Rediscovered, Abundance, Vanities, Sensual Delight, Harmony, Nights, and Breakfast on the Grass. Each of these sections addresses a detail of Poussin's painting and suggests aesthetic continuity between French classicism and European modernism as informed by an artistic tradition that dates back to antiquity.

"Most of the questions asked by the modern painters could be rooted in a very old tradition and this tradition is the French painting and the classicism of Poussin," Ottinger said.

It is a somewhat controversial argument because most art historians see a clear break between modern art and the traditions that came before it.

"We used to say that modern art starts with

a famous painting by Manet — *Luncheon on the Grass* (Le Dejeuner sur l'Herbe) ... Why can't we consider the other side that this particular painting introduced in modern times a kind of nostalgia for what we have lost in modern times: contact with the nature. This is the narrative that is told in the exhibition itself and you can see that it makes sense to understand that many of these artists have a kind of wish to reconsider their relation to the cosmos," he said.

The exhibit's 10 sub-themes investigate different aspects of Poussin's painting and reveal continuity in the preoccupation with nature — often with irony.

For example, in the section titled Abundance the curators placed Andreas Gursky's iconic photograph *99 Cents*, which depicts American-style consumerism, beside Georges Braque's *Canephore*, an oil-on-canvas diptych of two women holding fruit, which symbolizes fertility. Juxtaposing the two works enables the viewer to consider different ways of interpreting abundance.

The section titled Vanities takes the viewer in a different direction. A canvas by Giorgio de Chirico *The Melancholy of the Afternoon* (Melancolie d'un Apres-Midi) shows an industrial landscape rendered in stark tones of black, green and brown. The same section displays Braque's *Vanitas*, a still life with a



yellowed cross and human skull that is rich in symbolic meaning. Placing this section next to the one on abundance suggests that nature gives and man destroys.

With so much forethought going into the exhibit, it is disappointing that the curators and museum have yet to provide introductory essays for any of the 10 sections. Whether the cubism of Picasso or the expressionism of Miro, modern art is notoriously difficult to decipher. Without a clear context, the uninitiated viewer will probably fail to appreciate the deeper significance of the works on display, let alone understand the primary theme of utopia as a perennial artistic preoccupation.

It might even have the opposite effect and reinforce the commonly held assumption that art — especially the modern kind — can only be appreciated by a small circle of the initiated. A few paragraphs for each of the 10 sections would have sufficed to show how modern art fits into the larger tradition of Western art.

# Zin and the art of media manipulation

*Nearly a decade after the fact, South Korea's Kijong Zin and Taiwan's Kuo I-chen take on the spin surrounding the Sept. 11 attacks*

BY **BLAKE CARTER**  
STAFF REPORTER

"I woke up and couldn't feel my two legs," South Korean artist Kijong Zin says quietly, weighing each English word before he speaks. "My back was broken."

If it weren't for that contingency, Zin would have continued his tour of duty in an elite special forces unit and might still be serving in the South Korean navy.

Instead, he returned to art school and is now showing in Two-Person Exhibition by Kuo I-chen and Kijong Zin (郭奕臣陳起鍾雙人展) at Taipei's Galerie Grand Siecle (新苑藝術). The shy 28-year-old shares his Taiwan debut with Kuo, the Ciaotou (橋頭), Kaohsiung County-born artist who in 2005 became the youngest Taiwanese ever to represent his country at the Venice Biennale, when he was 26. The joint exhibition presents Kuo's first works since finishing his military service last November.

Zin's injury came just a year after he dropped out of a painting program at Kyungwon University to volunteer for the navy — rare in a country that, like Taiwan, requires males to serve in the military. When Zin returned to school, he switched to sculpture and eventually began experimenting with "new media art" using video and low-tech machines.

His works in the current show explore the relationship between truth and television. In *CNN* (2007), what at a casual glance appears to be a recorded news broadcast turns out to be a live video feed from a small mechanical set around the corner. The airplane seen in the "broadcast" is really a plastic model and the crawl — that text often seen

moving along the bottom of news programs — is just a piece of printed tape looped between two spoons.

Zin's videos aren't meant to fool anyone for long. On closer examination the viewer notices *CNN*'s faux images of the World Trade Center attacks are accompanied by text from what appears to be a poorly written tourism brochure from Scotland: "The gorges and lochs, greenmeadows overlooked the Cullin Hills. Clouds dropping down over the mountain tops greeting the viewers ..."

## BROTHERS IN ART

The gallery's pairing of Zin and Kuo is no coincidence. The two met in 2005 when Zin first visited Taiwan to help his art teacher with an installation in Taipei. Zin's teacher is friends with one of Taiwan's best-known new media artists, Yuan Goang-ming (袁廣鳴), who was Kuo's teacher at the time.

Later Kuo and Zin ran into each other at new media exhibitions in South Korea and Germany and discovered how much they have in common. They share an interest in geeky machinery, video and computers and were raised in small towns, though both now live in their countries' capitals.

"We are brothers ... country boys," Kuo said as the two sipped Coca-Colas during a break from installing their show at Galerie Grand Siecle, which represents Kuo.

Like Zin's *CNN*, Kuo's latest pieces address the mass media's presentation of the Sept. 11 attacks. Sculptures and paintings with inlaid

video screens combine comic-book superheroes with images of the attacks or Muslim elements that have been mistakenly associated with terrorism and the Taliban, such as traditional clothing and Arabic script. *Superheroes: Mask* (2008-2009) fuses Batman's hood and a burka headscarf in glimmering stainless steel that weighs more than 60kg.

Kuo stresses the concept in his work, downplaying the actual making of the art object. His paintings were mostly done by an assistant and his sculptures were cast at a foundry in Taipei based on toys and computer images he designed while serving in the military.

Judging from our interview, Zin would prefer to let his works speak for themselves. He wasn't enthusiastic to talk about them or anything else, despite the fact he speaks passable English. To be nice, we'll attribute this to shyness. In the past, he's compared his interest in television to a child's fascination with whether people on black-and-white programs were actually black-and-white in person.

Pressed to describe the accident that ended his naval career, Zin said he was helicoptered to a hospital where he had emergency surgery and stayed for two months before being released in a tortoise-shell brace. More than five years later, he's fully recovered.

The obvious question seemed to surprise him: How'd it happen?

By this time I was somewhat prepared for his answer: "Training was very hard ... I don't know," he said.



Above: Kijong Zin, *CNN* (2007), video still.  
Left: Kijong Zin, *CNN* (2007), detail of set, mixed media.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF GALLERIE GRAND SIECLE

## EXHIBITION NOTES:

**WHAT:** Two-Person Exhibition by Kuo I-chen and Kijong Zin (郭奕臣陳起鍾雙人展)  
**WHEN:** Through May 17, Tuesdays to Sundays from 1pm to 6pm  
**WHERE:** Galerie Grand Siecle (新苑藝術), 17, Alley 51, Ln 12, Bade Rd Sec 3, Taipei City (台北市八德路三段12巷51弄17號)  
**ADMISSION:** Free

## Celebrity Interview



PHOTO COURTESY OF COLIN DAVEY

## Art

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### TT: What of art in a more general sense?

**JMF:** Freud's recognition of the unconscious was very important for the comprehension, growth and development of contemporary art in general. As a result my art can exist and develop. I can make conceptual art. It is socially and culturally acceptable. In fact I feel that Freud, with his theory of the unconscious, opened the doors to conceptual art practice and this is very important for me as conceptual art is the movement I align myself to.

### TT: Who are your artistic influences?

**JMF:** I love Duchamp and the American conceptual artists like Bruce Nauman and Joseph Kosuth. When I met Joseph Kosuth he told me that he was inspired by Sigmund Freud. What I admire about them is their use of language and visual symbols in art. In my own work I have always used symbols and language. I think that is what attracted me to the medium of the medal, which I worked with a lot initially.

### TT: You've participated in Art in Action [where artists demonstrate and discuss their techniques with the public]. What is it and why did you participate?

**JMF:** Art in Action is about doing the thing I like best, making art, and doing it with people around. It is often very lonely being an artist ... But I hate being alone. It is a contradictory state and the way I deal with it is to have people around me once a week. I open my studio to students for one day where I carry on my own project while they also do their own work.

### TT: What do you get out of Art in Action as an artist?

**JMF:** It is important to connect with people. We all need people. At Art in Action it is another opportunity to balance out the usual day-to-day isolation. It is exhausting performing for two full days and being asked questions. But at the same time, when it works and people get it, it feels exhilarating and addictive.

### TT: What do you think the public walks away with?

**JMF:** I think people feel the same thing I do when I make a piece. They look at something and it speaks to them on a visceral level and they understand something they did not understand before in a language not spoken. Neurologically speaking, the information goes straight to the heart, the gut or some other place where the unconscious may reside. The public I hope may walk away with something new.

### TT: What is your process of creation?

**JMF:** I have the thought, the idea and then I seek out a way of expressing it but more often than not the process seeks me out. For example, sometimes I feel really restless and just get up and make or draw and that is a response to concepts I am mulling over. Other times I sit with an idea for a project and see how important it is by seeing if the ideas and desire to make something of them stays with me for a period.

### TT: You recently re-titled yourself as an artist: 2D, 3D and 4D. What is this transformation, and why did you undergo it?

**JMF:** I don't like to be pigeon-holed and notice that as soon as I am labeled I want to escape. In 1993 I embarked on a MA project at the Royal College of Art. I entered into the broadest program that I could manage which involved fine art, sculpture, bronze casting, silversmithing and ceramics. I wanted to learn many skills.

At that time the idea of multi-disciplinary did not exist. The college however proved to be an open and "multi-disciplinary" experience for me.

When I started making video it seemed that the work had become multi-dimensional too. The strange thing with the title you refer to which I use on my Web site "Artist 2D, 3D, 4D" is that it leaves out the most important dimension to me which is 2.5D. By 2.5D I mean two-and-a-half dimensional works. They are not works in the round but instead they operate in relief format. They employ the use of two sides, a distinct back and a front. Front and back implies the existence of the side and I like to play with these ideas. The psychological overtones of the interplay interests me.

### TT: What projects are you currently working on and in what way does this continue your past work and, perhaps, move beyond it?

**JMF:** I am preparing for an exhibition with "interfaith" overtones. It is called *Otherside*. This title refers to the process I favor which is making objects with 2.5 dimensions. That is, objects with two distinct sides. *Otherside* embraces all the connotations of the phrase, with its poetic and political resonances. It relates to the other side in a Freudian dualistic sense. "One side infers the other." There is always another side to everything, another option, and another way forward. My works for this show displays traditional sculpture but through symbolic placement of the pieces and distortions of the form evoke some poetic/provocative questions.

*This interview has been condensed and edited.*