

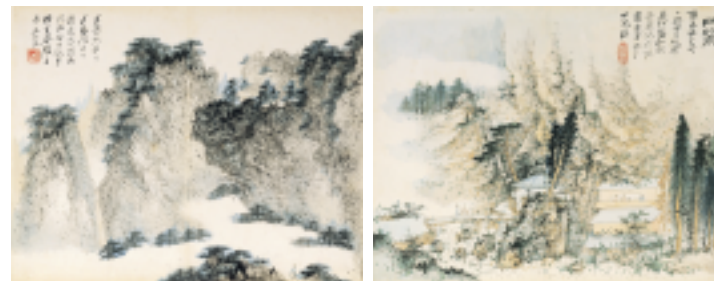
FEATURES

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SATURDAY, MAY 23, 2009



Above: *Dawn Mist* is from Chang Dai-chien's later period and features techniques drawn from expressionism, action painting and traditional Chinese ink painting.
Top right: Chang Dai-chien's *Record of a Visit to Huangshan*.



When Chang Dai-chien (張大千) met Pablo Picasso in 1956, art critics hailed the confab as a summit between the world's greatest living artists. Although Picasso and Chang worked in different genres, they were united by their artistic genius and the profound influence they exerted on their respective cultures. A photograph of the two artists forms part of a retrospective of Chang's work that is currently on display at the National Museum of History.

Entitled *Chang Dai-chien: Memorial Painting and Calligraphy Exhibition* (張大千110 — 書畫紀念特展), the exhibit features 96 of Chang's works as a means of illustrating his entire oeuvre — from his early calligraphy and ink paintings to the Buddhist fresco-inspired works of his middle period and the expressionist paintings of his late period.

Documentaries of the artist's life and work, photos of Chang pictured with famous personalities and brief introductions — in English and Chinese — provide added depth.

Chang is unquestionably an artistic legend. Art historians generally agree that his faculty for emulating the styles and techniques found in the Chinese artistic tradition of ink painting and calligraphy dating as far back as the Tang Dynasty is unsurpassed. As such, the exhibit is as much a survey of the tradition of Chinese pictorial art over the past 1,000 years as it is an exhibition of one artist's work.

The museum, to its credit, doesn't skirt around Chang's career as a copier and forger. Nor does it linger on those concerns — copying the great masters is presented as a necessary stage in Chang's artistic development.

The 1929 *Painting in the Style of Shih T'ao's "Grass Hut by the Path in Autumn"* (仿石濤秋徑草堂圖) illustrates Chang's mastery of previous styles.

The lower half of the canvas, rendered in shades of dark green, blobs of black and pale brown, depicts an intellectual sitting outside a thatched hut that is partially obscured by thick foliage. Chang, following in a tradition developed by Shih T'ao, uses negative space as a means of showing perspective.

In 1939, Chang traveled to Dunhuang (敦煌), an ancient city along the Silk Road in the northwest of China, to study the Buddhist frescoes located in the Mogao Caves (莫高窟). The almost three years he spent there left an indelible mark on his painting technique.

Deity Descending to Earth (降聖圖) reveals the direction Chang was taking. The vibrant oranges, yellows, greens, blues and reds of this painting replicate the ornamental beauty of the Buddhist frescoes and contrasts the ink painting tradition that emphasizes line over color.

The influence of these Buddhist frescoes can be seen in the paintings of the following decade when vivid coloring appears in Chang's pictures that depict more traditional subject matter. *Seeking Inspiration* (覓句圖) is an ink painting of an intellectual sitting at a desk under a tree and contemplating nature. The vibrant blue cap he wears on his head and the red flower on his table, as well as the green leaves growing on the tree, reveal that ornamental coloring had become an important part of Chang's style.

There is another reason why this painting is important: the vase holding the flower is rendered in expressionist swaths of green, blue and red — a technique of painting and use of color that would come to characterize much of Chang's later work.

Chang fled China after the civil war and made his home in the West for the next 25 years, mostly in the US and Brazil. During that time, he traveled extensively across Europe studying the modernist styles popular at that time.

Dawn Mist (煙雲曉靄) reflects the influence of expressionism. Swaths of burnt sienna, green and blue are washed across the canvas in a manner reminiscent of the coloring and splash-ink technique popularized during the Tang Dynasty. But it also combines expressionist and action painting styles that Chang picked up while living in the West.

The exhibit can be seen in the context of earlier shows put on by the National Museum of History in which work by artists who combine both Western and Eastern techniques to create art of profound originality were shown. This exhibit is worth visiting not only because it shows Chang's mastery of many styles and his evolution as an artist, but also because the museum presents his oeuvre in easily digestible sections that can be used as a starting point to approach each period in depth.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF HISTORY



Deity Descending to Earth is from Chang's middle period when he spent almost three years studying and copying the ornamental Buddhist frescoes at the Mogao Caves.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF HISTORY

Remembering a master

The Chang Dai-chien retrospective at the National Museum of History is a must-see for anyone interested in one of Asia's greatest artists and the tradition of Chinese painting

BY NOAH BUCHAN
STAFF REPORTER

EXHIBITION NOTES:

WHAT: Chang Dai-chien: Memorial Painting and Calligraphy Exhibition (張大千110 — 書畫紀念特展)
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 June 14. Open daily from 10am to 6pm, closed on Mondays. Tel: (02) 2361-0270
ADMISSION: NT\$30
ON THE NET: www.nmh.gov.tw

Asian cinema gains traction as Hollywood takes a tumble

Amid the economic gloom, Asian flicks are lighting up the Cannes Film Festival and sweeping through the world's movie industry

BY ANDREW MCCATHIE
DPA, CANNES, FRANCE

AS any good entrepreneur will tell you, there is always an opportunity in any business downturn.

This is how the Asian motion picture business appears to be sizing up its prospects, a result of the economic storm that has swept through the world film industry over the last 18 months, hitting Hollywood particularly hard.

With signs of a strong domestic movie market driven by a homegrown product, the Asian movie business continues to grow in international stature spurred on by the digital revolution and Hollywood remakes of Asian film hits.

"Now we have the confidence to compete with Hollywood," said Jennifer Jao (饒紫娟), director of the Taipei Film Commission.

"The popularity of US movies has declined," said Kenta Fudesaka from

Japan's film industry group Unijapan. "Maybe we are waiting for a new star like Julia Roberts or Tom Cruise to emerge."

The big batch of films from Asian directors that have been included in Cannes' main lineup, including Taiwan-born Ang Lee's (李安) homage to the 1969 US music festival Woodstock and Taiwan-based art house moviemaker Tsai Ming-liang's (蔡明亮) film about making a movie about Salome, helped to underpin that confidence.

Also in the 20-movie race for the festival's prestigious Palme d'Or award are Chinese director Lou Ye's (婁燁) tale of desire in *Spring Fever* (春風沉醉的夜晚) and Filipino director Brillante Mendoza's gangland story in *Kinatay*. In addition there is legendary Hong Kong director Johnnie To's (杜琪峰) revenge thriller *Vengeance* (復仇), that also helped to mark 100 years of Hong Kong cinema.

Buoyant national film markets and international film festival recognition means that large parts of the Asian movie business have managed to escape the fall-out from the current economic downturn, unlike Hollywood, which emerged from a major industrial showdown with scriptwriters only to be engulfed by the global financial crisis.

"It is a good chance for us," Jao said, as Taiwan's movie business slowly gains ground and the nation's film companies have so far avoided making big job cuts.



In 2005, Taiwan-made films accounted for less than 2 percent of the national box office. But by last year their hold on the market had grown to more than 12 percent.

The same is true of Japan. Despite the global recession having sent the Japanese economy spiraling downward, the nation's movie business still appears in relatively good shape.

A strong domestic box office, film festival success and a big move by Japanese television companies into movie production helped to underpin the Japanese movie industry.

"They want to make commercial films," Fudesaka said.

One exception to the upbeat mood in the Asian cinema industry appears to be the Korean film sector, which is still battling to emerge from a crisis, which came in the wake of too many films being produced, ballooning movie budgets, piracy and illegal downloads

combined with concerns about the falling quality of the nation's movies.

In the meantime, the percentage of Korean movies in the Korean market slipped to 42.1 percent last year.

"It is still not in good shape," said Han Sang-hee from the Korean Film Council (KOFIC).

But progress is being made. About 113 movies were made last year compared to 124 in 2007.

Nevertheless, underscoring Korea's emergence in recent years as a major new Asian movie powerhouse, the nation has a raft of films screening in this year's Cannes.

The lineup includes veteran Korean director Park Chan-Wook, whose tale about a priest-turned-vampire, *Breath*, is in the race for the festival's top honor, the Palme d'Or.

At the same time, the crisis has meant that low-budget independent moviemaking appears to have come to

Left: Director Lou Ye, second from left, poses with the cast members of his movie *Spring Fever* at the 62nd Cannes Film Festival on May 14.

Right: Ang Lee attends a news conference for his film *Taking Woodstock* held at the 62nd Cannes Film Festival on May 16.

Below: South Korean actor Song Kang-ho performs as Sang-Hyun in the film *Thirst*.

PHOTOS: AP AND REUTERS



life in Korea with a documentary about an aging farmer's relationship with his ox becoming a surprise hit.

To be sure, it can take just one film hit to give the national box office a big push. In Taiwan it was the success of Ang's *Lust, Caution* (色·戒), which is set in 1930s Shanghai.

"*Lust, Caution* brought film back to Taiwan," Jao said. This success was followed up by *Cape Number 7* (海角七號) last year. A sentimental movie, *Cape Number 7* scored a box-office record.

Taiwan is also keen to ensure that the potential of the vast Chinese-language film market encompassing China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore is fully realized.

"Co-productions could be another way to make people come back to the movies," said Jao, as Taiwan plans to increase the number of co-productions with China to 10 a year.

In the meantime, a special Chinese-backed US\$150 million fund to promote Chinese movies was announced in Cannes on Monday.

