



Foreign artists find support, inspiration

SUBSIDY: Kuandu Museum's artist-in-residency program gives foreign artists a chance to pursue and realize their artistic dreams as well as explore the local art community

BY **SHELLEY SHAN**
STAFF REPORTER

While some people might find the sight of oily food detestable, for Maruyama Junko, oil collected from the campus cafeteria was a crucial ingredient in her artworks.

"Every week, I collect about 70 liters of oil from food served in the school cafeteria and mix it with water," said Maruyama, a Japanese artist in residence at Kuandu Museum of Fine Arts, located on the campus of Taipei National University of the Arts.

"To me, that's where energy comes from — the mixture of oil and water," she said. "And when I read something like the big bang theory, I try to recreate the vision using oil and water."

With the aid of these two ingredients, Maruyama turned an ordinary restroom in the museum into an art exhibition.

Using the oil she had collected, she made a soap mixture and plastered it on the pedestal supporting the toilet bowl, turning it into brown, tree-like stump. She also used the same mixture to shape tree branches hanging over the toilet bowl. On the floor is a shallow

pool where a mixture of oil and water creates mystifying patterns on the ground.

Aside from installation art, Maruyama has also opened a flower shop on campus. A closer look at these floral creations reveals flowers made from different plastic bags — ranging from the ordinary red-striped ones to those from 7-Eleven convenience stores or Watson's.

The artist-in-residency program sponsored by the museum allows Maruyama and artists from other countries to engage in creative projects without any distraction.

In Japan, Maruyama said she had to take several part-time jobs simultaneously to continue her artistic pursuits. "In Japan, life was so stressful. I got sort of crazy because of that stressful lifestyle," she said. "Here life is calm. I can go for a walk in the woods and feel completely refreshed."

To Seth Lower from the US, the residency program gave him an opportunity to live in a non-English speaking country for the

first time.

Lower was here for a project called "Looking for Lee Ming" (尋找李明), who sent him an e-mail from Taiwan last year and told him that he knew him from a dream he had many times in his life. Lee said Lower was the angel in the dream that fought the people who tried to hurt him and sacrificed his life eventually.

"And he [the angel] wrote with his blood on my hand as he died in my arms. Then I remembered, the name that guy wrote. It was your name," Lee said in his e-mail to Lower.

"Immediate shock" was his initial response, Lower said. "But pretty quickly the feeling went from being scared to wondering what might have happened if this was true."

He later pitched the idea of finding Lee Ming in Taiwan when he applied for the museum's residency program and got accepted.

Lower said that his past works dealt with coincidences, and he was interested in seeing how the multiplicity of coincidences generates different possibilities.

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— Maruyama Junko, artist

Lower soon acquired the help of two Taiwanese students, who were assigned by the program to work on the project with him. They posted the message on the university's bulletin board system and waited for a response. They took Lower to Longshan Temple in Taipei and sought guidance from fortune tellers. Lower also met several people called Lee Ming on Facebook in Taipei.

On a trip to Jiufen (九份), the team asked a passersby to pose as Lee Ming in the dream, while Lower, as the angel, pretended to die in Lee's arms.

FEATURE

Canadian on a mission to turn Kaohsiung green

GREENHEAD: Instead of complaining about the smog and the litter, Tim Higgs organized KHH Environs to teach people how to 'greenify' the city

BY **JENNY W. HSU**
STAFF REPORTER

For environmental activist Tim Higgs, being a contagious agent who spreads the "green bug" in Kaohsiung is exactly what he has in mind.

The 26-year-old Higgs, who hails from Ontario, Canada, got involved in the global environment protection movement because of his experience working with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as in the private sector, on energy and water efficiency in Canada.

"I loved my job because it was something that made you feel good about yourself when you went to work in the morning," he said, referring to his job in Canada.

"Moreover, I was constantly learning new things each day on the job," he said, adding that he missed that feeling when he moved to Germany.

But even there, he was inspired by the German government's commitment to green energy and the people's love for the Earth, he said.

When he moved to Kaohsiung last year, he said he was greeted not only by the area's famous southern hospitality, but also by the heavy smog that enveloped the city.

"You don't need a big reason to want to do something for the environment here in Kaohsiung. Just look around you or breathe in the air in the city," said the English teacher, recalling the time when he lived in an apartment downtown, where he could not even open the windows without smelling exhaust fumes from heavy traffic.

"Within in a day, there would be a layer of dirty black grime so thick that you couldn't dust off. The pollution was in your face all the time and you just couldn't escape from it," he said.

Instead of moaning and groaning about the constant battle with the smog-filled air and the litter, Higgs decided to roll up his sleeves and go to work by organizing the KHH Environs, a community-based group to educate the public about ways to "greenify" the city.

Higgs used a technique called "community-based social marketing," which involves engaging

“You don't need a big reason to want to do something for the environment here in Kaohsiung.”

— Tim Higgs, environmental activist

the community from a market perspective.

"What you do is first find out everything you can about the problem you are seeking to solve. Once you have done that, you find out about the barriers that are stopping people from doing a behavior that you want them to do," he said.

Take littering for example, he said, a big barrier to people disposing their garbage properly is the low number of public garbage cans.

Taiwan's trash pick-up system presents another problem to making people more environmentally conscious, he said.

The next step to shaping public behavior is to get them to change the way they view themselves — from ordinary citizens that are detached from the movement to "green people" who are committed to cleaning up the city in a sustainable manner.

Higgs and his group of volunteers do this by passing out stickers that say "Greenhead."

"This might sound simple but it is an effective method. Having the sticker on your scooter, you are telling the world that you are an 'environmental person,' which means whenever someone asks you about it, you either have to strengthen the identity inside yourself or discard it. We find that most people do the former," he said.

In addition to organizing projects such as beach clean-ups, the group offers various "green tips" on its monthly newsletters to raise public awareness that protecting the environment is often easier than many would think.

Higgs said one of the goals of KHH Environs is to be able to partner up with the city government on different city beautification projects.

Like many NGOs in the country, KHH Environs faces the twin problems of cash and staffing shortage. For more information on the group and volunteer opportunities, check out www.khhenvirons.webs.com/home.

FEATURE



A TASTE OF CULTURE

An ice cream vendor hands a cone to a customer at the 2009 World Games Fair featuring international cultures. The fair was held along the Love River in Kaohsiung last Wednesday.

PHOTO: CHA

France, Taiwan laud closer ties

STAFF WRITER, WITH CNA

The French Institute in Taipei held a Bastille Day reception last Tuesday in celebration of France's 220th national day, with the top French representative to Taiwan praising the close relations between Taipei and Paris.

"Many developments have been seen in bilateral relations despite the dire global economic situation, and the most impressive developments have been in the cultural area," Patrick Bonneville, director of the French Institute in Taipei, said at the function, which was attended by members of the diplomatic corps.

Bonneville was referring to the "unprecedented success" of the exhibition "Millet and His Time: Masterpieces from the Musee d'Orsay," which attracted 800,000 visitors last year, as well as a recently concluded exhibition of art collections from the Pompidou Center that drew 200,000 visitors.

Bonneville also announced that

the institute would hold a function in September to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the French-Taiwan Grand Prize, which represents the long-term close scientific cooperation between the two countries.

Bastille Day commemorates the Fete de la Federation, held in 1790 on the first anniversary of the July 14, 1789, storming of the Bastille prison that marked the beginning of the French Revolution.

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs David Lin (林永樂) said that France has a long and glorious history well-known for its refined culture and rich traditions, and Taiwanese have a deep affection for French art and culture, as well as its achievements in science and technology, architecture, literature and fashion.

"Over the past few years, Taiwan and France have enjoyed frequent and wide-ranging exchanges and cooperation in many areas, and such deep relations have continued to grow stably," Lin said.

Austrian brings Italian fare to Hsinchu

BY **CHEN WEI-JEN**
STAFF REPORTER

Susi, an Austrian who is a certified tourist guide and chef, said she fell in love with Taiwan after coming here with her husband.

Encouraged by her spouse, a technician, she decided to bring the Austrian and Italian cooking that had been passed down to her through the generations to Hsinchu.

Susi, who used to work as a hotel manager, said that during the five years she has spent in Taiwan she has been attracted and moved by the passion and civility of Taiwanese.

Attracted to Hsinchu's living environment, Susi said she decided to abandon the metropolitan lifestyle in Taipei for a new life in Hsinchu.

Now living with her husband in Paoshan Township (寶山), Susi comes from a family that runs a hotel and restaurant in Austria.

After finishing her studies in tourism, she managed the family business and also worked in Germany and Italy before taking up Italian cooking professionally.

"At the beginning, not too many artists knew about the program so that we had very few applications," she said, adding that the information later spread through word-of-mouth and now they have about 20 applicants per year.

Artists who want to participate in the program must first pitch their ideas, which are reviewed by a committee of specialists who select two to three artists. Each artist can stay between two weeks and two months, depending on the time needed to finish their project.

Besides working on the projects, the museum arranges for the resident artists to teach university students in workshops, talk to visitors in a question-and-answer session and explore the art community in Taiwan, Ho said.

Ho said the subsidy only pays for boarding at the university's dormitory and the expenses needed to complete the projects. Artists must pay for their flights to Taiwan and their own living expenses.

"The money may not be much, but our staff try their best to help the artists put their creativity to life," she said.

Since 2007, the program has subsidized five artists, mainly from Japan and the US. For details, visit <http://kdmofa.tnua.edu.tw>.

Taiwan eases visa application rules for select countries

BUSINESS VISITORS: An official said the measures were aimed at promoting trade and economic ties with the Middle East and developing countries

STAFF WRITER, WITH CNA

Taiwan has eased restrictions on visa applications for business visitors from Iran, Iraq and Bangladesh, a Ministry of Foreign Affairs official said on Sunday.

In 2003, Taiwan imposed strict visa restrictions on applicants from 19 countries, including Pakistan, Myanmar, Nigeria, Iraq, Iran and Bangladesh, because the ratios of citizens from those countries who had overstayed their visas or committed crimes during their stay in Taiwan were relatively high.

Under the stringent regulations, applicants must first obtain a guarantee by a Taiwanese company and are required to file their applications at select Taiwanese embassies or representative offices.

"After review, we have decided to ease the restrictions on business applicants from Iran, Iraq and Bangladesh," said Lo Yu-chung (羅由中), director-general of the ministry's Bureau of Consular Affairs.

The relaxation of the rules is partly aimed at facilitating Taiwan's efforts to promote trade and economic exchanges with the Middle East and developing countries, Lo said.

Under the new regulations, prospective business visitors will no longer need to obtain a guarantee from a Taiwanese company and will be permitted to file their visa applications with any of Taiwan's representative offices.

Separately, Lo said that the ministry had issued second passports to three Taiwanese this year.

These include a business executive and an academic because their first passports were stamped with visas issued by the Israeli government. As they had to travel to several Arab countries for business and academic meetings, they were both issued a second passport, because Arab countries tend to deny visas to anyone who has visited Israel, Lo said.

In the third case, Lo said, it was because the businessman had to apply for visas for urgent business travel and his first passport had been sent abroad with an application for a visa to visit Ukraine.

Several countries, including Ukraine and some Central Asian countries, require Taiwanese applicants to send their passports abroad when applying for visas, with the procedure taking more than a month to complete, Lo said.



Susi smiles while cooking in Hsinchu County on June 19. PHOTO: CHEN WEI-JEN, TAIPEI TIMES



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