

# Sociopolitical art: a happy marriage?

Whether revealing what's under her skirt or exploring the lives of women who entered brokered marriages, Lulu Hou's art combines photography, feminism and food for thought

BY BLAKE CARTER  
STAFF REPORTER



Tuyet Han's Mother (2009).

PHOTOS COURTESY OF LULU HOU

## EXHIBITION NOTES:

**WHAT:** Lulu Hou Shur-tzy Solo Exhibition: Look Toward the Other Side — Song of Asian Foreign Brides in Taiwan III (侯淑姿個展：望向彼方——亞洲新娘之歌III)  
**WHEN:** Until Sept. 20. Open Tuesdays to Sundays from 10am to 5pm  
**WHERE:** Kuandu Museum of Fine Arts (關渡美術館), 1 Xueyuan Rd, Beitou Dist, Taipei City (台北市北投區學園路一號)  
**ADMISSION:** Free



Tieu Thuy's Mother (2009).

PHOTOS COURTESY OF LULU HOU

In 1996, Lulu Hou (or Hou Shur-tzy, 侯淑姿) produced a well-known series of black-and-white photographs in which she coyly edged up her dress, giving surprised viewers a full view of what was underneath: a pair of skimpy panties stuffed with two lemons and a large banana dangling out.

The now 47-year-old's sassy, irreverent side showed in her slightly disheveled hair, a propensity for giggling, and the way she rolled her eyes when a brood of noisy *obasan* sat next to us during an interview at a crowded Dante coffeeshop early this month. Her manner transformed, however, when the conversation turned to some of the very serious issues addressed in her current exhibition.

Look Toward the Other Side — Song of Asian Foreign Brides in Taiwan III presents a heart-wrenching look at the lives of Vietnamese-born women who married Taiwanese men. The artist details her Asian Cultural Council-sponsored trip to southern Vietnam last summer in digital prints and videos. Hou spent three weeks talking with the

parents of immigrant brides through translators, recording their conversations and taking photographs.

Each of the 36 pairs of images at the Kuandu Museum of Fine Arts includes an enlarged photograph and a duotone duplicate with overlain Chinese text transcribed from Hou's interviews. While some of the pictures speak strongly enough — she honed her photography skills at the Rochester Institute of Technology in New York after majoring in philosophy at National Taiwan University — the juxtaposed



Japan-Eye-Love-You (2000).

PHOTO COURTESY OF LULU HOU

text elevates the works to something beyond a mere photojournalistic view of rural Vietnamese families.

The text in *Tieu Thuy's Mother* begins: "Our daughter Tieu Thuy married through a broker and moved to Taiwan in July 2006. When we saw our son-in-law, we thought he seemed like a good person, so we didn't worry about it. Only after she was married and in Taiwan did we learn he wasn't a good person."

Hou learned about Tieu Thuy's story from a friend who suggested she interview Tieu Thuy's family in Vietnam instead of her own. The girl was "sold" for NT\$4,000 and upon arrival in Taiwan, beaten and sexually abused by her husband, Hou says.

"Tieu Thuy wanted to stay in Taiwan a while to earn money to help us with our difficult lives here," her mother is quoted as saying. "I was very worried and told her: 'If you don't come home, I'll kill myself here in Vietnam,' and only then she returned."

According to her mother's account, Tieu Thuy fell ill a couple months after returning to the family's village.

They took her to Ho Chi Minh City to see a doctor and sold their house and fields to pay medical expenses. After three surgeries their daughter died of intestinal cancer.

Hou sighed when asked about legislation that came into effect earlier this month outlawing the types of match-making services that "sell" Vietnamese women to Taiwanese men. "They'll just go underground," she said. "But at least we won't see those awful signs advertising Vietnamese brides." Vietnam enacted similar legislation in 2002.



Peek A Boo — Banana (1996).

PHOTO COURTESY OF LULU HOU

The eight women Hou has come to know closely have been much more fortunate than Tieu Thuy. All the stories they or their parents tell are touching. Some are sad, others are uplifting. The best combine the two.

*Tuyet Han's Father* quotes him as saying matter-of-factly: "Our village has girls that have married Taiwanese and they all married pretty well, except for one: She doesn't send money back." Conceptually, Hou's new work isn't so different from the *Peek A Boo* works made 13 years ago. She has said the focus of that series was the "male gaze." Her newer work questions the same perspective but also includes criticism of the "Taiwanese gaze" and more broadly, in my opinion, an economic gaze that ranks people by their fiscal heritage.

Asked how the "Brides" series differs from documentary films or other direct forms of activism, she said: "Even other artists ask me about this: 'Is it pure [art]?'"

Hou says she's not bothered.

"I think if the audience feels it's very sociopolitical-oriented, that's a good thing."

## Monsters a hit — even during Morakot

Pixar: 20 Years of Animation charts the evolution of the studio's films and the links between old media and the latest technology

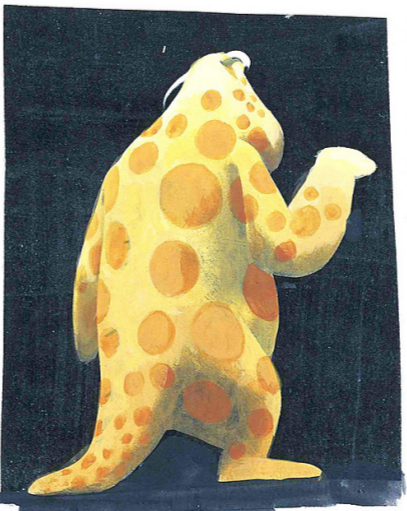
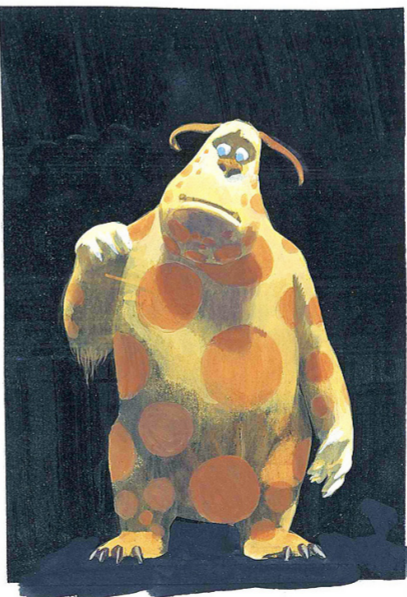
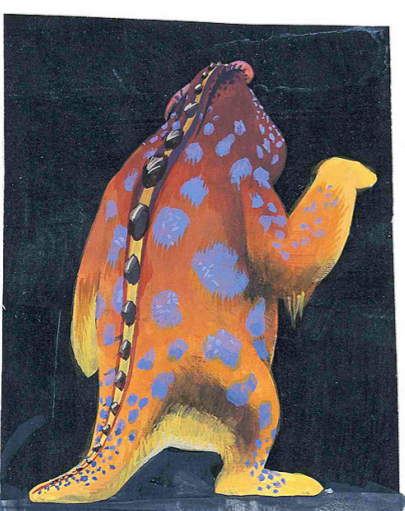
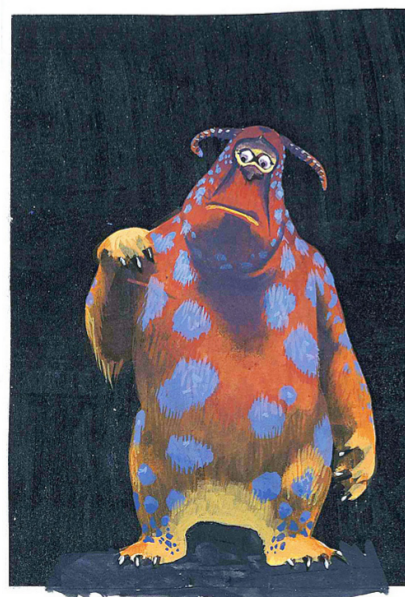
BY NOAH BUCHAN  
STAFF REPORTER

Torrential wind and rain weren't enough to keep museumgoers at home last weekend, with families and groups of students lining up outside the Taipei Fine Arts Museum (TFAM) in the pouring rain to catch a glimpse of Pixar: 20 Years of Animation.

As Typhoon Morakot ravaged southern Taiwan, approximately 8,500 people wandered through TFAM on the first day of Pixar's opening weekend — a number that dipped to 8,000 on Sunday. Thirty-two-hundred people paid to see the Pixar exhibit on Saturday with 5,200 on Sunday viewing the 650 paintings, drawings, sketches and sculptures on display. The rest were taking advantage of fee admission for other exhibits at the museum.

"Excluding the Pixar exhibit, we are waiving the museum entrance fee for the foreseeable future," said TFAM's Yang Shun-wen (楊舜雯). She added that the museum expects the large crowds to continue until the school year begins in September. The exhibit ends on Nov. 1.

For those wanting to avoid the multitudes of people viewing Pixar, there is still plenty to see in other parts of the museum. On the second floor, Jewels of 25 Years Museum Collection provides a succinct overview of Taiwan's art history through 34 works of painting, sculpture and video installation. It begins with the Japanese-influenced realist paintings that were the hallmarks of colonial art



and moves on to the explosion in artistic styles and media that characterizes Taiwan's post-Martial Law era.

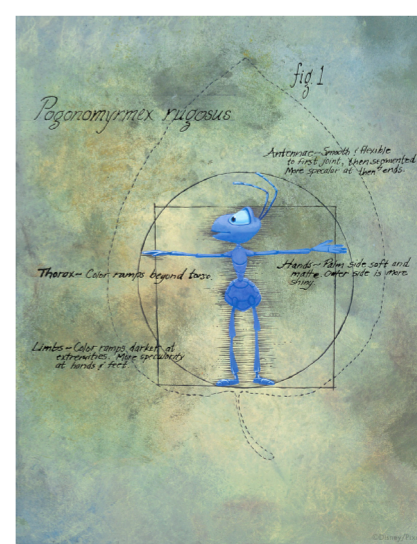
Two retrospective shows on the third floor offer insight into the many styles of Taiwan's modernist movement — particularly cubism and expressionism

— through the oil paintings and drawings of Lai Chuan-chien (賴傳鑑) and Chen Yin-huei (陳銀輝). In the basement, contemporary art takes center stage with an exhibit by Tang Ju-hung (蔣若洪), who explores the theme of "self" through vivid self-portraits.

Tang's dark and psychologically rich images that deconstruct his own personality may just be the kind of art that the Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) administration needs to check out as it reflects upon its delayed response to the tragedy in the south.

## EXHIBITION NOTES:

**WHAT:** Pixar: 20 Years of Animation  
**WHEN:** Until Nov. 1. Open daily from 9:30am to 5:30pm, closes at 8:30pm on Saturdays  
**WHERE:** Taipei Fine Arts Museum (TFAM), 181, Zhongshan N Rd Sec 3, Taipei City (台北市中山北路三段181號). Tel: (02) 2595-7656  
**ADMISSION:** NT\$200  
**ON THE NET:** online.tfam.museum/pixar



PHOTOS COURTESY OF TFAM

## EXHIBITIONS

**Open call for exhibition proposals:** AIR Taipei, which represents Taipei Artists Village and Grass Mountain Artist Village, invites artists or curators to submit original exhibition proposals for the upcoming year in three categories: individual/team artists, creative industry and business-art collaboration. The exhibitions can be solo, two-person or group and are open to all visual arts media. For details and an application form go to [www.artistvillage.org](http://www.artistvillage.org). The deadline for applications is tomorrow.

Japanese artist Ozawa Sakae recreates the fantastical world of fairy tales in her solo exhibit **Broken Fantasy**. The realist oil-on-cotton paintings depict lush and colorful landscapes that feature nostalgic symbols of youth such as children frolicking with animals. Gallery J. Chen, 3F, 40, Ln 161, Dunhua 5 Rd Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市敦化南路一段161巷40號3F). Open Tuesdays through Sundays from noon to 9pm. Tel: (02) 2781-0959. Until Sept. 6.

**Eternal Music — Eternal Art** is a tribute to pop idol Michael Jackson. The show includes several paintings in a variety of artistic styles by Taiwanese artists that portray the recently deceased star. Star Crystal, 16, Alley 52, Ln 12, Bade Rd Sec 3, Taipei City (台北市八德路三段12巷52弄16號). Open daily from 11am to 7:30pm, closed Mondays. Tel: (02) 2577-0636. Until Oct. 11.

Taiwanese contemporary artist **Wu A-sun (吳炫三)** continues his investigations of the primitive in his solo exhibition (吳炫三個展) at the Xue Xue Institute. Wu, who gained considerable media exposure in 2004 for burning more than 20 of his own works, employs animal and tribal motifs in his Picassoesque sculptures and paintings. Xue Xue Institute (學學文創展坊), 3F, 207, Tiding Blvd Sec 2, Taipei City (台北市堤頂大道二段207號3樓). Open daily from 10:30am to 8:30pm. Tel: (02) 8751-6898 X180. Until Sept. 13.

**2009 Keywords: Everydayness, Sculpture, Non-Place (2009關鍵字：日常、雕塑、無處)** showcases the work of eight contemporary Taiwanese sculptors. The purpose of the collaborative exhibit is to examine the ecological issues confronting contemporary society through various sculptural media. Juming Museum (朱學文美術館), 2 Sheshihu, Jinsan Township, Taipei County (台北縣金山鄉西勢湖2號). Open Tuesdays through Sundays from 10am to 6pm, closes at 9:30pm on Saturdays. Tel: (02) 2498-9940. Until Oct. 25.

## HIGHLIGHT

**Art Taipei 2009** kicks off on Aug. 29 with the theme "Art and Environment" — appropriate, perhaps, in light of the recent havoc wrought by typhoon Morakot. Art Taipei Spokeswoman Joanne Chen (陳章晴) says that part of this year's ticket sales will be donated to the ongoing relief efforts to help victims of the catastrophe. Now in its 16th year, the art fair is one of Asia's largest and provides a unique platform to view the latest in contemporary art from throughout the world, with an emphasis on Southeast Asia. Seventy-eight exhibitors from Europe, North America and Asia will display paintings, sculptures, video, photography and installations throughout areas A and D of the Taipei World Trade Center. The fair is complemented by a series of lectures by some of the world's most renowned art experts as well as special exhibitions such as Made in Taiwan, which presents the works of younger artists and is an ideal venue for the first-time art investor. Taipei World Trade Center (台北世貿中心), Area A and Area D. Opening hours are 11am to 7pm from Aug. 28 to Aug. 31 and 11am to 6pm on Sept. 1. General admission is NT\$200. Comprehensive details of the event in English and Chinese can be found at [www.art-taipei.com](http://www.art-taipei.com).



Addicted by Indonesian artist Suraji. PHOTO COURTESY OF PILOT INTEGRATED MARKETING