

On the day before Double Ten Day earlier this month, German artist Amely Spoetzl placed dispensers filled with fresh flowers in front of Taipei 101, Taipei Train Station and Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall. The reactions of passersby to the flowers were videotaped and photographed by German photographer Bernd Zoellner from a distance as part of the artist duo's ongoing public art project *Just a Moment, Please*, which the artists previously took to Berlin and Los Angeles.

"It is interesting for us to see how the reactions we got [in Taipei] are completely different from what we expected. People are really shy here," Spoetzl said.

Just a Moment, Please is presented in conjunction with *Open Your Mind — New German Art*, a collaboration between Taipei's Aki Gallery (也趣) and E105 Gallery in Bonn, Germany. For the first show at Aki Gallery last year, Josef Bernhard, curator, artist and founder of E105, introduced young German painters of the Expressionist, neo-Expressionist and New Leipzig Schools.

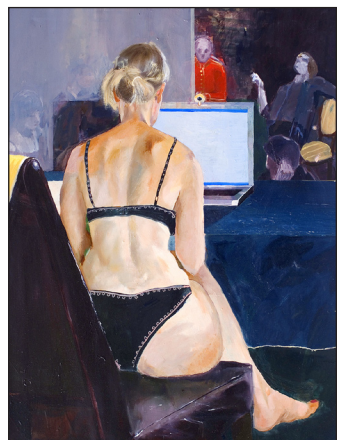
This year's show, however, is a departure from the previous edition's more traditional approach. At *Open Your Mind*, the art escapes the confining white walls of modern museums and galleries.

Apart from Spoetzl's project, which takes art to the street, the selected works are either made from commonplace objects or inspired by everyday situations in an attempt to show that art is inseparable from life and encourage people to appreciate the ordinary and the mundane in new ways.

"For the past 40 years in Germany, art has been more and more confined to the white cube. But art is everywhere. You just have to look for it," Bernhard explained.

After viewing Germany-based Japanese artist Akihiro Higuchi's watercolor-painted moths, visitors may see nature in a new light. By painting the moths' wings to make the insects look as if they are dressed in attractive costumes, the artist transforms the often overlooked nocturnal creatures into something fit for the display cabinet of a dilettante's showroom, and at the same time makes fun of our anthropocentric view of the world.

Combining her life-long hobby of plant collecting and



An audience with Mr and Mrs John Q Public

Open Your Mind is a group exhibition that celebrates the ordinary

BY HO YI
STAFF REPORTER



Above: Akihiro Higuchi, *Watercolor on Moth*.
Top left: Matthias Galvez, *Die Spielerin*.
Top center: Amely Spoetzl, *Dandelions in Plastic Capsules*.
Top right: Josef Bernhard, *Peter*.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF AKI GALLERY

Taiwanese tapestry

Lee Ming-tse's canvases present a pastiche of Taiwan's history, culture and identity

BY NOAH BUCHAN
STAFF REPORTER

Introduced to Taiwan during the Japanese colonial period, comics were suppressed for much of the Martial Law era because they were thought to corrupt the nation's youth. And yet, there remained an underground fanbase of avid readers. Comics took on new life after the lifting of Martial Law — exemplified by the ubiquity of 24-hour chain stores that opened in the early 1990s.

The medium gained respectability in 2000 when the National Museum of History (國立歷史博物館) mounted an exhibit titled *A Celebration of Taiwan Comics* (漫畫史特輯), at which then-president Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) was heard to say, "I love Taiwan, but I love comics even more."

Born 52 years ago in Kaohsiung County, Lee Ming-tse (李明則) grew up reading martial arts comics (武俠), which heavily influenced his visual language. A selection of Lee's work completed over the past two years is currently on display at Main Trend Gallery (大趨勢畫廊).

Working in a similar vein to other Taiwanese artists of his generation such as Yang Mao-lin (楊茂林) and Hou Chun-ming (侯俊明), Lee's paintings offer a glimpse of contemporary society through the use of traditional folk and religious imagery rendered in a comic book style. But whereas Hou's wood-block prints explore desire and Yang's sculptures of fairy tales examine consumerism, Lee's canvases offer a pastiche of Taiwan's history, culture and identity.

The triptych *New Zuoying Landscape* (新左營山水) is representative of how Lee uses different modes of representation to illustrate the hybridity of Taiwan's culture. He said that the painting was inspired by the discovery of an archaeological site found during the construction of the High Speed Rail's Zuoying Station (高鐵左營車站).

Dozens of androgynous figures are pictured in all manner of dress and undress, some wearing clothing characteristic of the martial arts comics that Lee devalued as a child, while others appear in skimpy shorts and bras as though taken from the pages of *Next Magazine* (壹週刊). Mountains and trees resembling those found in Chinese landscape painting (山水畫) punctuate the canvas along with Japanese architecture, temples, modern furniture and designer bags.

The Japanese architecture, Chinese landscape painting, comic book figures and Western consumer items, unsystematically arranged on a canvas that includes an archeological find, underscore Lee's point



Lee Ming-tse, *New Zuoying Landscape*.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MAIN TREND GALLERY

that a conglomeration of influences shaped Taiwan's cultural identity, and each influence can only be understood in the context of the others.

Lee's use of diverse styles also reflects his democratic approach to art. In the monumental seven-panel *I Love Taiwan and Love Southern Taiwan Even More* (我愛台灣更愛南台灣), he takes two genres — highbrow Chinese landscape painting as his background, which is populated by lowbrow martial arts comic book figures — and links them with wildly expressive calligraphic brush strokes. The figures are rendered in black with white outlines suggestive of shadow puppetry and *gezai* opera (歌仔戲) — both of which remain popular forms of entertainment.

Although Taiwanese art has been influenced by many cultures — whether Chinese literati painting, American consumer culture or comics — these

EXHIBITION NOTES:

WHAT: Lee Ming-tse's 2009 Solo Exhibition (李明則2009年個展)
WHERE: Main Trend Gallery (大趨勢畫廊), 209-1, Chengde Rd Sec 3, Taipei City (台北市承德路三段209-1號). Tel: (02) 2587-3412
WHEN: Until Nov. 7. Open Tuesdays to Saturdays from 11am to 7pm
ON THE NET: www.maintrendgallery.com.tw

disparate elements have been assimilated. The way in which Lee combines these different styles in his paintings gives equal weight to the influences that made Taiwan's culture Taiwanese.

EXHIBITIONS

Open Flexibility: Innovative Contemporary Ink Art (開顯與時變—創新水墨藝術展)

is a group exhibition that brings together 15 artists from Taiwan and 12 artists from China. Curated by Liu Yung-jen (劉永仁), the show charts developments in the genre over the past half century by displaying contemporary ink paintings alongside modern Taiwanese ink paintings from the 1960s and Chinese experimental ink paintings from the 1980s.

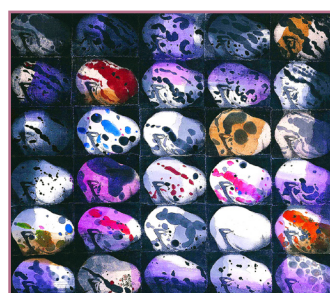
■ Taipei Fine Arts Museum (TFAM), 181, Zhongshan N Rd Sec 3, Taipei City (台北市中山北路三段181號). Open daily from 9:30am to 5:30pm, closes at 8:30pm on Saturdays. Tel: (02) 2595-7656. Admission is free
■ Until Jan. 17

The Ceramic Road of Southeast Asia: Pottery Villages, Ancient and Contemporary Ceramics (海上絲路·看見東南亞—古陶瓷·陶器村·現代陶瓷)

takes a comprehensive look at Asian pottery and ceramicists. The displays, consisting of artifacts from Japan, Thailand and Taiwan, among other countries, track the different styles, from ranging from prehistory to modern times, that emerged in the region.
■ Yingge Ceramics Museum (鶯歌陶瓷博物館), 200 Wenhua Rd, Yingge Township, Taipei County (北縣鶯歌鎮文化路200號). Open Tuesdays to Fridays from 9:30am to 5pm and Saturdays and Sundays from 9:30am to 6pm. Tel: (02) 8677-2727
■ Until Feb. 28

Inner Heart Memories (心象追憶)

is a solo exhibition by Taiwanese contemporary artist Chang Pei-chun (張培均). Chang's abstract paintings explore the tension between the real and the imaginary and the rational and the sensual.
■ Dynasty Art Gallery (朝代藝



Lost by ink painter Yuan Chin-ta is on display at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum as part of Open Flexibility: Innovative Contemporary Ink Art.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF TFAM

術), 41 Leli Rd, Taipei City (台北市樂利路41號). For a viewing call 0933-804-092
■ Until Nov. 17

Mind Topology — The Phases of 2009 Korea

is a group exhibition of contemporary art by Korean artists jointly sponsored by the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Art and South Korea's Gwangju Museum of Art. Through installation, painting, video and animation, the show examines the cultural and spiritual similarities between Taiwan and South Korea.

■ National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts in Taichung (國立台灣美術館), 2, Wucyuan W Rd Sec 1, Taichung City (台中市五權西路一段2號). Open Tuesdays to Sundays from 9am to 5pm. Tel: (04) 2372-3552
■ Until Jan. 10

Multi-talented Taiwanese contemporary artist Earthstone Chu (周子樸) returns with a solo exhibit of oil paintings entitled *Understood Entanglements* (了牽了扯).

■ Jia Art Gallery (家畫廊), 1F-1, 30, Zhongshan N Rd Sec 3, Taipei City (台北市中山北路三段30號1樓之1). Open Tuesdays to Sundays from 10am to 6pm. Tel: (02) 2591-4302
■ Begins Friday

academic training in sculpture, Spoetzl uses dried flowers and plants to create a delicate collection of objects that playfully contemplate the beauty of nature. The most memorable pieces include boysenberry bushes and rose thorns arranged as delicate sculptures and weightless dandelions encased in plastic capsules.

Zoellner's photographs of people reacting to the fresh flowers presented in receptacles in Berlin, Los Angeles and Taipei are displayed next to Spoetzl's work.

Local visitors may be surprised to find that while the dispensers were quickly emptied by passersby elsewhere, Taipei's restrained denizens are seen either curiously studying the unusual additions to the urban landscape, bypassing them, or taking photos of themselves flashing the victory sign next to the receptacles.

Bernhard's oil paintings depict ordinary people and everyday existence. By placing questions such as, "Where are you going?" and, "When did you stop dreaming?" next to his painted characters, the artist invites viewers to ponder which questions are essential to life.

A parallel is drawn between religious persons and ordinary people by naming the characters after Christian saints, though even visitors who are familiar with the Bible are likely to be at a loss without the reading the exhibition literature.

Bernhard renders his canvases in a pop art style and includes computer symbols in his work in way of an answer to the debate in Germany on whether or not a painter should make use of digital techniques.

"Should painters use computers [to create their art work]? Is it cheating if they do? It is a big question in Germany. For me, the answer is who cares. It's just a question about artists using techniques suitable [for their art]," Bernhard said.

EXHIBITION NOTES:

WHAT: Open Your Mind — New German Art
WHERE: Aki Gallery (也趣), 141 Minzu W Rd, Taipei City (台北市民族西路141號)
WHEN: Until Nov. 1. Open Tuesdays to Sundays from noon to 6:30pm. Tel: (02) 2599-1171
ON THE NET: www.akigallery.com.tw