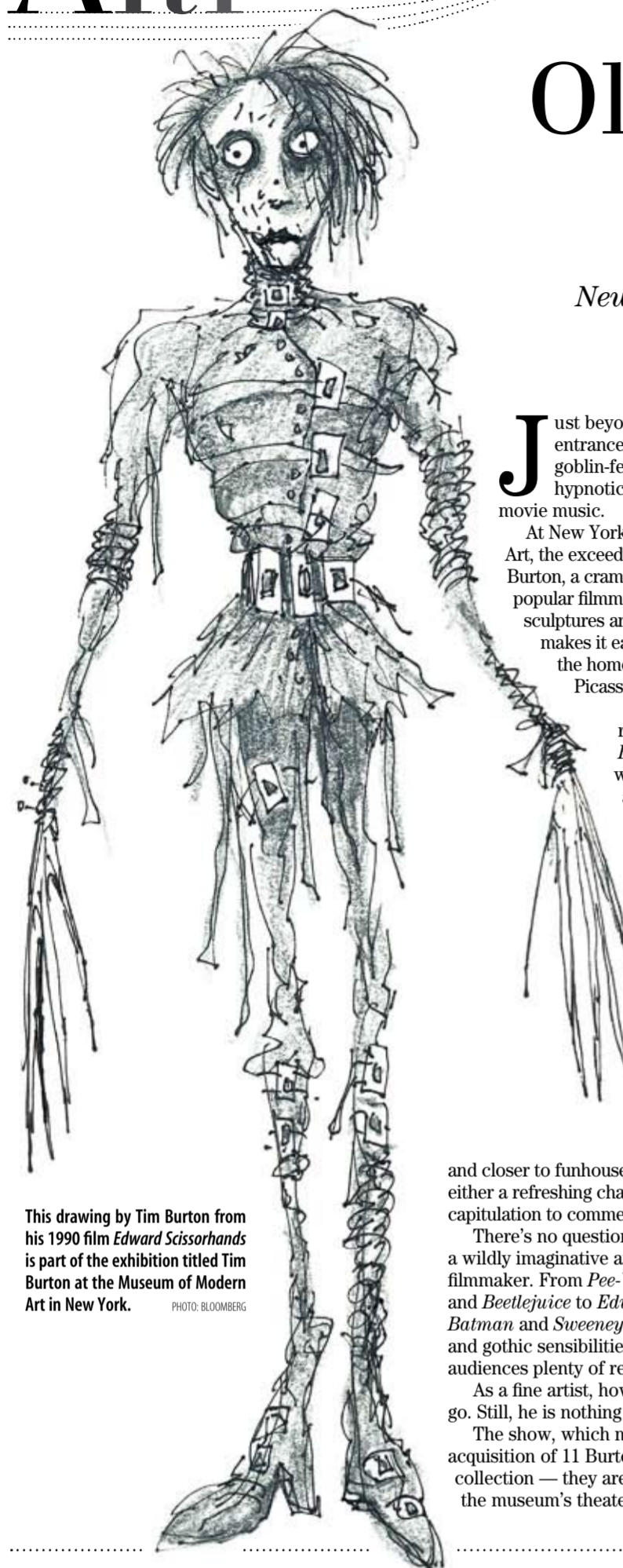


# Old monsters and lurid fantasies take over MoMA

New York's Museum of Modern Art goes lowbrow with a retrospective on the work of filmmaker Tim Burton

BY LINDA YABLONSKY  
BLOOMBERG



This drawing by Tim Burton from his 1990 film *Edward Scissorhands* is part of the exhibition titled *Tim Burton at the Museum of Modern Art* in New York. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

Just beyond the *Monster Mouth* entrance, a black-lighted, goblin-festooned carousel turns hypnotically to dorky horror-movie music.

At New York's Museum of Modern Art, the exceedingly lowbrow Tim Burton, a cramped retrospective of the popular filmmaker's drawings, robot sculptures and animated shorts, makes it easy to forget that this is the home of Monet, Matisse and Picasso, not Disney.

MoMA has even replaced Rodin's *Balzac* in the lobby with a 6.4m-tall, blue-and-white balloon character that looks like a cross between a giant light bulb and a boy's wide-eyed face — at least for opening week.

While guaranteed to create a new generation of young art viewers, the exhibition spins the museum in a whole new direction — away from sober modernism and closer to funhouse carnivalism. This is either a refreshing change of pace or a bald capitulation to commercialism. Or both.

There's no question that Burton is a wildly imaginative and entertaining filmmaker. From *Pee-wee's Big Adventure* and *Beetlejuice* to *Edward Scissorhands*, *Batman* and *Sweeney Todd*, his antic humor and gothic sensibilities have given movie audiences plenty of reasons to guffaw.

As a fine artist, however, he has a way to go. Still, he is nothing if not prolific.

The show, which marks the museum's acquisition of 11 Burton films for its collection — they are being screened in the museum's theater throughout the run

— puts no fewer than 700 items on display in just a few small rooms. While it feels comprehensive, the spread delivers mainly minor amusements in the form of sight gags and puppets.

## OBSESSIVE CARTOONIST

Among the hundreds of inked illustrations, sketches and pastels are grimacing stick figures with exaggerated lips, electrified coils and stitched limbs, as well as horribly deformed monsters aching for love.

Burton, 51, is essentially an obsessive cartoonist and an animator of the very first order, though his drawings and illustrations owe a big debt to Roald Dahl, the source of another Burton film, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.

They also recall Aubrey Beardsley's fashion illustrations and Hillary Knight's *Eloise* drawings, absent the wholesome attributes.

Expressionistic, film-related drawings and dolls (created by collaborators) as well as metallic robots created by Burton's own hand appear in the show. A nearly life-size model of Edward Scissorhands is here, as well as maquettes for *Beetlejuice*, a diorama and video episodes from *The World of Stainboy* (a series of animations made in 2000 for the Internet), drawings for unrealized projects, and amateur movies Burton shot with high-school pals in suburban Burbank, California — an inspiration for several of his feature films.

## REINDEER TOPIARY

All of this adds insight into Burton's vivid imagination and gives MoMA a populist profile, but it hardly qualifies as consuming art. The outstanding works may be a 30-second animated commercial for the show and a reindeer topiary (as Scissorhands's fingers might have fashioned it) in the sculpture garden, which isn't usually given to satire.

In the show's catalog, Burton writes that as a child growing up in the cultural wasteland of Burbank, he went to horror movies, made drawings and embraced the local cemetery as his playground. Later, when he started going to museums, he says,



"I was struck by how similar the vibe was to the cemetery."

His first show in a major museum may bury Picasso in la-la land, but it does so with a liveliness that could prove contagious — if only that weren't quite so unhealthy for the cause of art.

On the Net: [www.moma.org](http://www.moma.org)



Above: Creations by filmmaker Tim Burton are on display at the Museum of Modern Art in New York until April 26. PHOTO: APP

Top left: Tim Burton poses with one of his works during a media preview for his show at New York's Museum of Modern Art on Nov. 17. PHOTO: APP

Untitled (*Ramone*), is part of the Tim Burton exhibition at New York's Museum of Modern Art. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

# Chinese paintings beat estimates as buyers do battle in Hong Kong

In its sale of Chinese art, Christie's saw furious bidding for works by established artists as investors sought to convert their currency holdings into assets

BY LE-MIN LIM  
BLOOMBERG

An abstract painting of falling snow by Chinese artist Chu Teh-chun (朱德群) fetched a record US\$5.9 million in Hong Kong, the surprise top lot of an auction that saw bidders vie for the priciest artworks.

*Vertige Neigeux*, an oil-on-canvas diptych that took France-based Chu about a decade to complete, topped estimates and went to an unidentified Asian private buyer. There was a five-minute tussle among bidders on the phone and in the packed hall of about 400 people at Christie's International evening sale of 20th-century and contemporary Asian works on Sunday night. Including the daytime auctions of modern and ink Chinese paintings, the company tallied US\$79 million yesterday.

"Works by established Chinese artists such as Chu and Zao Wou-ki (趙無極) are the most sought-after; they are driving prices," Anthony Lin, a Hong Kong-based art consultant, said in an interview after the sale, at the harbor-front convention center.

Chinese buyers drove prices higher. Inflation concerns in China and a sagging US dollar are driving the Chinese to convert currencies into assets such as art. They are choosing pieces by living masters such as Chu and deceased artists Fu Baoshi (傅抱石) and Xu Beihong (徐悲鴻) because they are more likely to retain value than contemporary works by Chinese artists in their 30s and 40s.

A 1944 scroll of ink-and-color on paper by Fu (1904-1965) called *Landscape Inspired by Dufu's Poetic Sentiments* fetched an artist record of US\$7.7 million in the day sale. In the evening, a 1950s blue, white and pink oil painting of potted flowers by the late Chinese master Sanyu (1901-1966), the cover lot and tipped by Christie's to fetch the highest price, sold for US\$4.5 million, against a presale estimate of US\$1.5 million.

Almost every painting by Paris-based abstract Chinese artist Zao did well. His blue-and-white *19-11-59* sold for US\$3.9 million, more than twice the presale estimate. Zao's orange-hued *05-03-76* fetched US\$1 million, against a US\$1.3 million estimate.



Above: *Untitled (Hospital Series)* by Chinese artist Zeng Fanzhi was sold for HK\$19 million (US\$2.5 million) after fierce competition involving Wang Wei, wife of millionaire Chinese stock-investor Liu Yiqian, and one other auction-room bidder at Christie's International Hong Kong auction on Sunday. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

Right: *Landscape inspired by Dufu Poetic Sentiment* by Chinese artist Fu Baoshi was hammered off for HK\$60 million (US\$7.7 million) at Christie's Hong Kong auction on Sunday, a price market experts said was around four times higher than its 2006 price. PHOTO: REUTERS

"The huge price gap between these two like-sized paintings by Zao shows buyers have matured and are focused on the best works by an artist," said Eric Chang, head of Christie's Asia contemporary and Chinese 20th-century art department.

Sunday's auction showed prices of Chinese contemporary art, while trailing those of older paintings by a wide margin, are starting to recover, said Lin.

Zeng Fanzhi's (曾凡志) 1994, oil painting, *Untitled (Hospital Series)*, the star Chinese contemporary lot at the evening sale that was expected to fetch as much as US\$1.5 million, sold for US\$2.5 million

after fierce competition involving Wang Wei (王薇), wife of millionaire Chinese stock-investor Liu Yiqian (劉益謙), and one other auction-room bidder.

Wang lost, though she won other lots at the evening sale, including Liu Ye's (劉野) scarlet-and-pink acrylic-on-canvas *I Always Wanted to be a Sailor*, for which she paid US\$930,000, against a presale top estimate of US\$774,000.

Saturday, the first day of the five-day auction, Christie's sold US\$5.2 million of wine, including a 78-bottle lot of 1999 Domaine de la Romanee-Conti, which fetched US\$186,000.



## EXHIBITIONS

Works by Zao Wou-ki (趙無極), Chu Teh-chun (朱德群) and Lin Fengmian (林風眠) are among the 227 lots up for sale at **Ravenel's autumn auction** of contemporary Asian art. Even if you don't have an extra couple of million NT dollars lying around to spend on a painting by Chinese artist Sanyu (常玉) or a sculpture by Taiwanese artist Ju Ming (朱銘), the previews are a great opportunity to check out some rarely seen works of art. Previews will be held on Friday and Saturday from 10am to 7pm, with the gavel hitting the auction block on Sunday beginning at 2:30pm. ■ Fubon Life Building (富邦人壽), B2, 108, Dunhua S Rd Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市敦化南路一段108號B2). On the Net: [ravenelart.com](http://ravenelart.com) ■ Preview: Friday and Saturday from 10am to 7pm. Auction: Sunday from 2:30pm to 8:30pm



Zao Wou-ki, 17.4.64 (1964). PHOTO: COURTESY OF RAVENEL

their doors this weekend for **SuPerArt**, a two-day event that offers the public an opportunity to catch a glimpse of artists in residence. The event kicks off with a guided tour of Grass Mountain Artist Village at 11:20am and Taipei Artist Village at 2pm on Saturday. Other highlights include exhibitions by individual artists, artists' talks, music and workshops. The multicultural cast of artists hails from Poland, Australia, Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Lithuania and Taiwan. A shuttle bus to Grass Mountain Artist Village leaves Taipei Artist Village at 10:30am on both days. The bus will return at 1:30pm. For reservations call Ms Li at (02) 2862-2404 or (02) 3393-7377 X208.

Contemporary Taiwanese photographer Tseng Miin-Shyong's (曾敏雄) **Face's Talk (台灣頭)** showcases 116 photographic portraits of Taiwan's literary figures, artists, musicians, religious leaders, performing artists and politicians as well as a new generation of innovators. Along with the portraits, four photographic slideshows — *One Day With Ko Si-chi* (柯錫杰的一天), *One Day With Hsieh Li-fa* (謝里法的一天), *50 Years of Chao-tang* (蔡堂五十) and *50 Years of Ju Ming* (朱銘五十) — will offer revealing and intimate visual profiles of well-known artists. The exhibit also features an activity — Everyone Is a Taiwan Head (人人都是台灣頭) — where Tseng will personally photograph 20 visitors every Tuesday until the end of the year. ■ Taipei Fine Arts Museum (台北市立美術館), 181, Zhongshan N Rd Sec 3, Taipei City (台北市中山北路3段181號). Open daily from 9:30am to 5:30pm, closes at 8:30pm on Saturdays. Tel: (02) 2595-7656. Admission: Free, except for the Cai Guo-qiang exhibit, which is NT\$250 ■ Until Jan. 17

Taipei Artist Village (台北藝術村) and Grass Mountain Artist Village (草山國際藝術村) will throw open

■ Taipei Artist Village (台北藝術村), 7 Beiping E Rd, Taipei City (台北市北平東路7號); Grass Mountain Artist Village (草山國際藝術村), 92 Hudi Rd, Taipei City (台北市湖底路92號). On the Net: [www.artistvillage.org](http://www.artistvillage.org) ■ Taipei Artist Village's open house is Saturday and Sunday from 2pm to 6pm. Grass Mountain Artist Village's open house is Saturday and Sunday from 11am to 4pm

**I Love NY (I 愛 NY)** is a solo exhibit of laser images by Taiwanese artist Chen Ching-yao (陳擎耀). Chen examines the cultural heterogeneity of New York by creating composite photographic and collage images of its people, places and objects, injecting the photographs with his own humorous flourishes. ■ Soka Art Center (索卡藝術中心), 2F, 57, Dunhua S Rd Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市敦化南路一段57號2樓). Open Tuesdays to Sundays from 11am to 9pm. Tel: (02) 2570-0390 ■ Until Dec. 20