

EXHIBITIONS

Kuo Fang-rong, *Afternoon* (2009).

PHOTO COURTESY OF SINGART

Lush gardens, open fields and orchards are among the landscapes Kuo Fang-rong (郭芳榕) depicts in the bucolic paintings at his solo exhibition at Singart. Kuo's realist eye for detail suggests a bountiful world that one wants to get lost in.

■ Singart (新心藝術館), 67 Shengli Rd, Tainan City (台南市勝利路67號). Open Tuesdays to Sundays from noon to 8pm; closed Mondays and every second and fourth Sunday. Tel: (06) 275-3957
■ Until Feb. 5

Frontiers Beyond the World (在世界之外的邊境) is a solo exhibition of Chinese landscape ink paintings by Taiwanese artist Wu Chi-tao (吳繼濤).

■ Moon Gallery (月臨畫廊), 6, Ln 589, Yingcai Rd, Taichung City (台中市403英才路589巷6號). Open Tuesdays to Sundays from 11am to 6pm. Tel: (04) 2371-1219
■ Until Jan. 31

Making Waves (漢字弄潮) is a group exhibition of contemporary painting, installation and sculpture from Taiwan, Japan and China that seeks to highlight the latest art trends in Asia.

■ Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall (國立中正紀念堂), 21-1 Zhongshan S Rd, Taipei City (台北市中山南路21-1號). Open daily from 9am to 6:30pm. Tel: (02) 2598-7557 X117
■ Until Jan. 11

Although the Chinese-language title of Chinese artist Qi Hai Ping's (祁海平) exhibit was changed from "Chinese Ideology" (中國境界) for its Shanghai show to **Ideology (境)** for Taiwan, the contents of this solo exhibit of abstract paintings remain the same. Qi's aesthetic style is a blend of abstract colors and shapes informed by traditional Chinese landscapes.

■ 5000 Years Fine Art Gallery (五千年藝術空間), 295 Qingnian 1st Rd, Kaohsiung City (高雄市青年一路295號). Open Tuesdays to Sundays from 10:30am to 9pm. Tel: (07) 334-6848
■ Until Jan. 30

A new series of abstract expressionist paintings by **Chien Chang-ta (簡昌達)** are currently on display at Cathay United Art Center. Chien's canvases employ a palette of primary colors tinged with white to depict snowy landscapes and mountain scenes that display a striking resemblance to the style of Chu Teh-chun's (朱德群) later expressionist paintings.

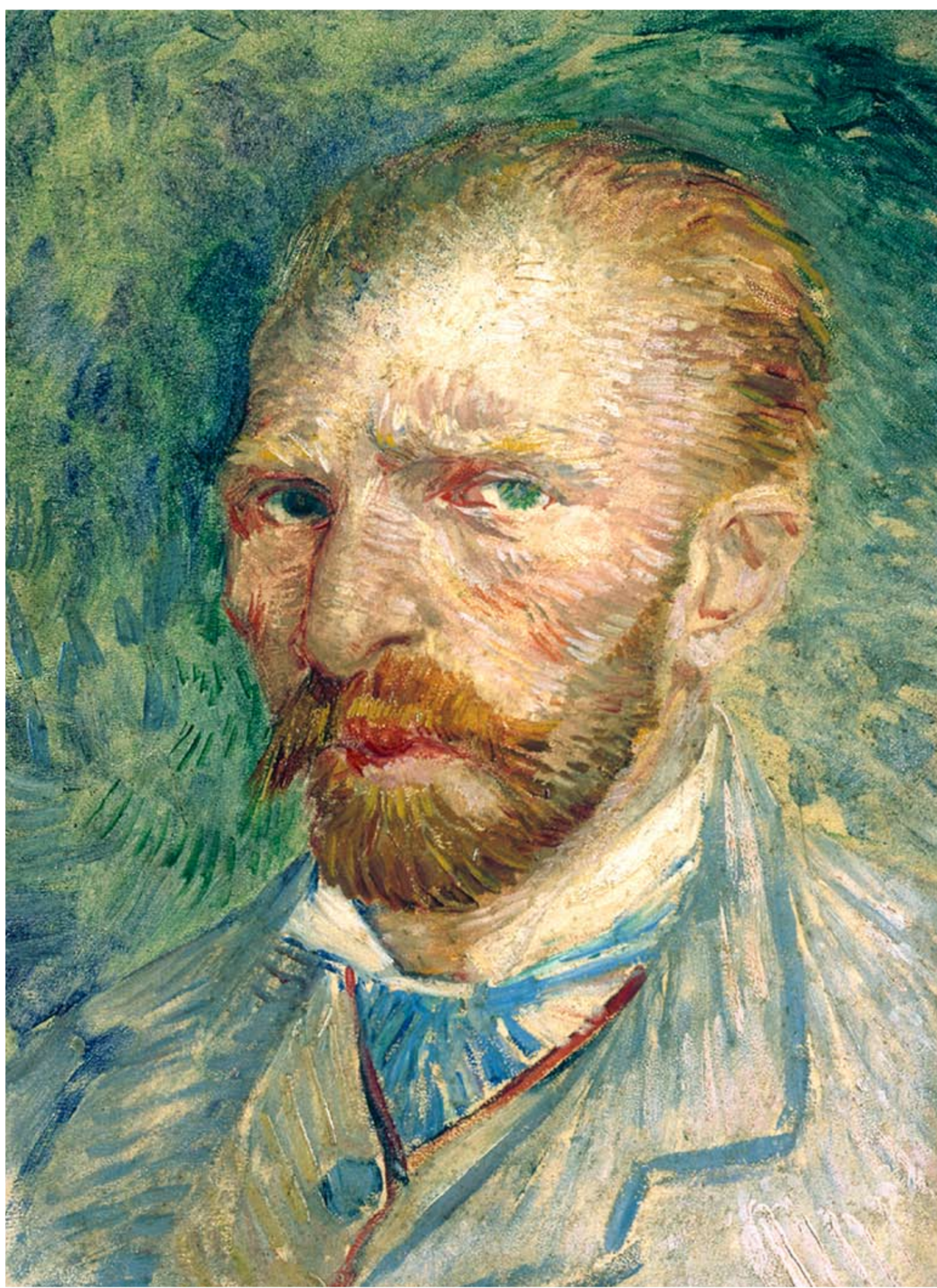
■ Cathay United Art Center (國泰世華藝術中心), 7F, 236 Dunhua N Rd, Taipei City (台北市敦化北路236號7樓). Open Mondays to Saturdays from 10am to 6pm. Tel: (02) 2717-0988
■ Until Jan. 16

Feeling the Chinese Characters: Interactive Installation Exhibition (文字互動展) offers a series of interactive installations that examine the evolution of Chinese characters and where they might be heading in the future.

■ Digital Arts Center (台北數位藝術中心), 180 Fuhua Rd, Taipei City (台北市福華路180號). Open Tuesdays to Sundays from 10am to 6pm. Tel: (02) 7736-0708
■ Until Jan. 24

Following on the heels of its popular inaugural *R/evolution* exhibit, which featured a wide array of modern Asian masters, Tina Keng Gallery (大未來畫廊) returns with *R/evolution II*, a group exhibition of contemporary artists from China and Taiwan. Participating artists include Hou I-ting (侯怡亭), Tu Wei-cheng (涂維政) and the ubiquitous Yang Mao-lin (楊茂林) from Taiwan and Peng Wei (彭薇) and Wang Tian Tian (王田田) from China.

■ Tina Keng Gallery (大未來畫廊), 15, Ln 548, Ruiguang Rd, Taipei City (台北市瑞光路548巷15號). Open Tuesdays to Sundays from 10am to 7pm. Tel: (02) 2659-0798
■ Until Feb. 21



Clockwise from left: Vincent van Gogh's *Self-Portrait* (1887), *Road With Cypress and Star*, (1890), *Flower Vase With Thistle* (1890) and *Olive Grove* (1889).

PHOTOS: TAIPEI TIMES AND COURTESY OF NATIONAL MUSEUM OF HISTORY

VAN GOGH REVEALED

A new exhibit at the National Museum of History explores the evolution of the Vincent van Gogh's career, from his early sketches to his post-impressionist masterpieces

BY NOAH BUCHAN
STAFF REPORTER



Vincent van Gogh's reputation precedes him.

A failed preacher who later lived with a prostitute; a tormented artist who cut off part of his ear after arguing with Paul Gauguin and ended his life at the age of 37 with a self-inflicted gunshot wound; a painter of radiant pictures that today are among the most expensive of any artist in history.

Although the title, Van Gogh: The Flaming Soul, hints at the scandalous aspects of the post-impressionist's life, the National Museum of History frames its exhibit in a different manner by showing his evolution as an artist — from his early drawings to the later oil paintings.

Over a year in the making, an insurance policy worth almost NT\$30 billion, a renovated first and second floor, and 15 security guards ensured that this exhibit was going to receive a lot of press. The 77 drawings and 20 paintings on display from the Netherland's Kroller-Muller Museum, plus *Vase With Flowers and Thistles* on loan from Japan's POLA Art Foundation, make this the largest show of van Gogh's work ever to be seen in Taiwan. It certainly presents a feast for the artistic appetite.

But all the hype surrounding the exhibit and the artist's life are just an appetizer for what might turn out to be the year's best show. The planners throw up his drawings first (located on the second floor) — as though museumgoers have to nourish themselves on a sumptuous repast of sketches and studies before they can get to the rich paintings (on the first floor) for dessert.

Arranged chronologically, *The Flaming Soul* begins when van Gogh, 27, set out to become an artist after failing as a preacher. He was under no illusions that he was coming to art relatively late and consequently spent much of the next five years devoting himself to sketching

from photographs and prints by masters — such as realist peasant painter Jean-Francoise Millet — all the while studying books on composition.

The virtue of this exhibit is that it lets the sketches illustrate the process van Gogh underwent to become a great artist without distracting the viewer with commentary (the exhibition catalogue adequately provides this). What the dozens of studies of farmers and fishermen, women and weavers reveal is van Gogh's aspiration to become a painter of peasant life.

The Potato Eaters (1885) can be seen as a culmination of these studies and was the first work he felt could establish his reputation. The oil painting shows five farmers sitting around a table inside a cramped room, their faces illuminated by a single lamp from above. The tones, like most of the pre-1885 paintings in this show, are a dark and somber mixture of chiaroscuro blacks, grays and blues reminiscent of Rembrandt's gloomy interiors, with a touch here and there of beige.

Reviews from friends and acquaintances, however, were scathing. After receiving a print of the lithograph, van Gogh's older artist friend Anthon van Rappard wrote, "[W]hy is everything observed and treated in a superficial manner? That coquettish little hand of the woman at the back, how unrealistic!" the letter screams.

"You dare invoke the names of Millet and [Emile] Breton? Come now! It seems to me that art is too esteemed to be treated so nonchalantly."

After reading the letter (many of his letters can be found online at www.vangoghletters.org) van Gogh promptly returned it. But it seems that the ideas contained in van Rappard's appraisal left a deep impression on the burgeoning artist, for in the summer of the same year he

sent his brother a letter stating that he wasn't seeking the exact representation of Millet, but expressiveness. Although he mentions the artist and art dealer Charles Serret in the letter, it could have been a response to van Rappard's earlier rebuke.

"Tell Serret that I would be despairing if my figures were good, tell him I do not want them to be anatomically correct ... Tell him that my greatest desire is to reveal such inaccuracies, such deviations, revisions, alterations of reality, that they may be, well — lies if one pleases — but truer than the literal truth."

It was only after arriving in Paris in 1886 and meeting up with and taking courses from impressionist artists that van Gogh was able to develop the visual language that expressed a truth "truer than the literal truth." The transition from draughtsman to painter was quick. Van Gogh imbibed the vibrant colors and experimental ideas of the impressionists as though quenching his thirst after finding his way out of a desert.

The dotted contrast of reds and greens on the wall and a mixture of yellow and purple on the floor of *Interior of a Restaurant* (1887), for example, show signs of Paul Signac's pointillist influence on van Gogh and mark a departure from the gloomy interior of *The Potato Eaters*.

But van Gogh was also applying these newfound colors and textures to landscapes.

View of Sainte-Maries-de-la-Mer (1888) — which bears a resemblance to Paul Cezanne's vibrant landscapes — presents a farmer's field rendered in dashes of lavender purple and cornflower blue with short brushstrokes of emerald green in the foreground rising up towards orangish-yellow buildings, the shadowed elements set off by turquoise, and reaching up to a subdued sky.

But it was only with the dancing brushstrokes (in this show at least) of *Olive Grove* and the built-up and undulating dabs of paint found in *Country Road in Provence by Night* that van Gogh attained a distinctive and imaginative style. Other oil paintings in this exhibit — *Self-Portrait* received the oohs and ahhs that one might hear at a fireworks display — help to round out this must-see show.

More than anything else, however, by exhibiting early minor works alongside the later masterpieces, the museum highlights the importance of learning the fundamentals and persevering in the face of failure. Van Gogh might not have been the best draughtsman, but because he understood his own "flaming soul" he was able to create a unique body of work.

EXHIBITION NOTES:

WHAT: Van Gogh: The Flaming Soul

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). Tel: (02) 2746-3513

WHEN: Until March 28. Open daily. There are three entrance times for the exhibit: 9am to noon; 1pm to 5pm; and 6pm to 9pm. The exhibit closes at 5pm on Mondays and Tuesdays

ADMISSION: NT\$300

ON THE NET: vangogh.ishow.gmg.tw