

History museum puts a brave face on new show

Legends of Heroes: The Heritage of the Three Kingdoms Era takes a romanticized and superficial look at one of China's most turbulent historical periods

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EXHIBITION NOTES

WHAT: Legends of Heroes: The Heritage of the Three Kingdoms Era (英雄再起—大三國特展)
WHEN: Until Sept. 9. Open daily from 10am to 6pm
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) 2361-0270
ADMISSION: NT\$250
ON THE NET: www.nmh.gov.tw



▲ Ming Dynasty bronze statue of general Guan Yu.

◀ Wu Kingdom pottery figure husking rice.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF NMH

The National Museum of History has recently mounted several notable exhibitions on China's history. The Smiling Kingdom: The Terra-Cotta Warriors of Han Yang Ling (微笑彩俑—漢景帝的地下王國), for example, provided an in-depth look at societal changes through funerary objects excavated from the mausoleum of an early Han Dynasty emperor.

But there have been misses, too. A Drop in the Ocean: Modern Contemporary Chinese Calligraphy and Painting Exhibition (滄海一粟—近現代書畫展) threw up hundreds of calligraphic scrolls and ink paintings without adequately explaining the exhibits' context.

Legends of Heroes: The Heritage of the Three Kingdoms Era (英雄再起—大三國特展), a new exhibition on the museum's first floor, is of the latter category.

"By presenting the era from different angles and on different levels, and by adopting wide-ranging approaches, it should be possible to present a comprehensive picture of military affairs, technology, economy, daily life, art [and] religion ... in the Three Kingdom era, as well as the influence that the history of the Three Kingdoms has exerted on later generations," the show catalog says.

What we get, however, is a romantic glimpse of the period that lacks historical rigor. Aside from focusing on the era's heroes, the exhibition only superficially links the age's rulers and the societies they dominated.

The museum borrowed 146 artifacts from 32 museums in China, including sculptures, seals, calligraphy, ceramics and gold and silver jewelry

excavated from 70 historical sites dating back to the kingdoms of Wei (魏), Shu (蜀) and Wu (吳).

Legends of Heroes focuses on three broadly chronological themes: official histories of the era; the period as depicted in the Ming Dynasty novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (三國演義); and later representations of the era's heroes, whether found in the hand scrolls and wood carvings of the Ming Dynasty or contemporary animation and computer games.

The museum uses the Qing Dynasty *Albums of Emperors and Famous Officials* to present the stories of the Three Kingdom's movers and shakers, including the tyrannical though highly organized Wu kingdom founder Cao Cao (曹操) and brave Shu general Guan Yu (關羽).

But the connection between the historical figures and the objects on display is never made explicit, with visitors left to fill in the blanks. The exception is the section on Zhuge Liang (諸葛亮, also known as Kong Ming (孔明), which illustrates

the relationship between his curious personality and the inventions that appeared during his reign.

What a shooting and hunting scene or a celadon pot in the shape of a frog has to do with Zhao Yun's (趙雲) bravery or Zhang Fei's (張飛) courage is anybody's guess.

One of the highlights is the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* section that includes scrolls depicting the Battle of the Red Cliff, which provide valuable insights into how different artists from various points in time viewed that period.

The contemporary display items, however, are barely worthy of a museum. One room houses four monitors that show computer games based on the Three Kingdoms, while another room houses an interactive display of cartoon characters of Kong Ming and Guan Yu.

"How cute!" exclaimed a young viewer.

The flashy and forgettable use of technology is made even more disappointing because interactive media have been used to great effect in Huaxia Artifacts (典藏華夏文物展), an ongoing exhibition of ancient Chinese artifacts on the museum's third floor.

Too many of the objects on display are only tangentially related to the overall theme of heroism and its subsequent depictions in art and popular culture. Limiting the objects to the exhibition's theme would have created a more coherent and less frustrating experience.

EXHIBITIONS



Sung Yi-chang and Hsiao Tsun Hsien, *Overwhelming Parent* (2009). PHOTO COURTESY OF TWAC

When Rembrandt Meets Audubon (當林布蘭遇見奧杜本) brings together the ornithological photographs of Flickr sensations John&Fish, the moniker for photographers Sung Yi-chang (宋宜璋) and Hsiao Tsun-hsien (蕭尊賢). Employing detailed compositions reminiscent of Rembrandt's portraiture combined with an obvious fascination for all things avian, the brother and sister duo traveled to Taiwan's remote areas to capture birds in their natural habitats and show them building nests, catching fish and feeding their young.

- Taiwan International Visual Arts Center (台灣國際視覺藝術中心), 29, Ln 45 Liaoning St, Taipei City (台北市遼寧街45巷29號). Open Tuesdays to Sundays from noon to 6pm. Tel: (02) 2773-3347
- Opening on Saturday at 3pm. Until Aug. 1



Building the Berlin Wall (1961).

PHOTO COURTESY OF GERMAN INSTITUTE IN TAIWAN

The **German Institute in Taiwan** will hold a photo and poster exhibit marking the 20th anniversary of the reunification of Germany. The 20 posters are from 1989 and 1990, when Germans celebrated the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War. The 12 photos on display show scenes from the two Germanys between the 1960s and 1990s.

- Zhongshan MRT Station, Taipei City
- Begins tomorrow. Until July 31

South Wind Blows (南風吹) is a solo exhibition of painting, sculpture and installation by Jun T. Lai (賴純純) at her recently opened gallery, Jun' Space. The inaugural show, a kind of retrospective presented by and for the artist, illustrates Lai's use of color in her art practice and presents work that she created during stints in Tokyo (1977) and Dulan (2007), as well as her ongoing Taipei-based output.

- Jun' Space (純空間), 5, Ln 87, Yitong St, Taipei City (台北市伊通街87巷5號). Open Thursdays to Saturdays from 2pm to 9pm, or by appointment. Tel: (02) 2507-5128
- Until Sept. 11

For those who can't make it to the Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts (高雄市立美術館) for the retrospective of Taiwan-born, London-based artist Richard Lin (林壽宇), Jia Art Gallery currently offers an abbreviated look at his work and career in a solo show entitled *Soliloquy* (獨白). Like the Kaohsiung exhibition, the gallery displays work covering Lin's entire oeuvre.

- 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
- Until July 25

Time (時光) presents oil, acrylic and mixed media works by three emerging Chinese artists. The exhibitors — Yang Shuangqing (楊雙慶), Liu Yujie (劉玉潔) and Yu Hongbo (余洪波) — employ realist and surrealist styles to illustrate what they perceive to be the conformity, desperation and loneliness afflicting their country's youth.

- Michael Ku Gallery (谷公館), 4F-2, 21, Dunhua S Rd Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市敦化南路一段21號4樓之2). Open Tuesdays to Sundays from 11am to 8pm. Tel: (02) 2577-5601
- Until Aug. 8

Hyper-Perception is a group exhibition displaying digital images, sound art and interactive installations created by five multimedia artists that highlights the dearth of more subtle sensory experiences in contemporary life.

- National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts (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 Sept. 26

An Assorted Tapestry of Lustrous Beauty: Export Porcelains From the Museum Collection (錦繡自玲瓏—院藏寶易瓷特展) offers a comprehensive look at how the export of Chinese porcelain influenced the crafts of its neighbors. Divided into two sections, The Diversity of Chinese Export Porcelains and Exchanges in the Art and Craft of Ceramics, the exhibition examines the changes that took place in the styles and designs of Chinese export porcelain, ranging from the 9th century to the 19th century, and the influence Chinese ceramics had on firing practices in other Asian countries.

- National Palace Museum (國立故宮博物院), 221, Zhishan Rd Sec 2, Taipei City (台北市至善路二段221號). Open daily from 9am to 5pm, and until 8:30pm on Saturdays. Tel: (02) 2881-2021. Admission: NT\$160
- Until Aug. 1