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Modern Taiwanese art mirrors new relationships

Abstract

Extract:

A major exposition of contemporary Taiwanese art was inaugurated on the Gold Coast in Southeast Queensland in a special Gala opening on the evening of July 24, 1994. The display of over 100 artworks was the culmination of an art link developed through Wollongong University and Taiwanese organisations including the Council for Cultural Planning and Development, and through the sister city relationship between Gold Coast city and Taipei.

Keywords

contemporary Taiwanese art, Gold Coast, traditional, modern, exhibition

| GALLERY VIEW.

Modern Taiwanese Art Mirrors New Relationships

A Centre Report

A major exposition of contemporary Taiwanese art was inaugurated on the Gold Coast in Southeast Queensland in a special Gala opening on the evening of July 24, 1994. The display of over 100 artworks was the culmination of an art link developed through Wollongong University and Taiwanese organisations including the Council for Cultural Planning and Development, and through the sister city relationship between Gold Coast city and Taipei. It is one of the largest modern exhibits which allows Australians to gain a glimpse of contemporary Chinese life and culture. Furthermore, it demonstrates a shift beyond straightforward economic and political relations, towards a more mature social and cultural exchange of ideas and viewpoints. Called *ArtTaiwan*, it is a tribute to the artists of East Asia generally, and shows the breadth of cultural and social influences now at play in a new generation of thinkers and creators.

The opening was attended by over 500 invited guests, including local members of the Chinese community and other Gold Coast residents, the Mayor of Taipei and the Major of the Gold Coast, representatives from Taiwan's Ministry of Education, from Wollongong University, from the Gold Coast City Council, and from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Canberra. The gala event was opened by several speeches and a series of Chinese folk dances, followed by a champagne supper and extended tours through the gallery. Works included oil and acrylic paintings, graphic works including prints and calligraphy, as well as sculpture and avante-garde mechanical creations. As a whole, the images represented a mixture of the modern and traditional, humorous and tragic.

One of the most impressive was a series of paintings and 'medallions' called *Icon and Images of Taiwan - 8 Generals III*, by Kuo Jen-Chang (born 1946). Photographs of 8 famous and infamous personages from Taiwan (ranging from Sun Yatsen to a scholar, a businessman, through to a young child) had been transformed and overpainted into large mask-like faces charged with emotion. The work seems to reveal a mixture of the reflective and sardonic, and charts some of the complexity of the life in 20th century Taiwan. Another ironic work by Lien Teh-cheng was simply titled *Confucius Says* (1992), and seems to draw on erotic traditions in Chinese art and similar styles found in the Japanese 'pillow-books'. The ironic and explicit nature of the work thoroughly undercuts the traditional propriety of much that 'Confucius says' in the *Analects* attributed to him. Erotic themes also underpin the calligraphy, poetry and wood-block printed images found in Hou Chun-ming's *Erotic Paradise*. In this artwork primitive entwined figures support an almost Taoist call for a positive openness to love and physical closeness with other human

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beings. More brooding emotions are found in the almost surreal *The Lioness in Deep Thought* (1990) by Lien Chien-hsing, a picture at once universal in its style but showing a concrete sense of place with its industrial imagery. Several graphic and ink works of Professor Frank Chi-Hua Wu, a local Taiwanese resident of the Gold Coast, reflect the more traditional influence of earlier water-colour and coloured-ink styles.

The exhibition was retained in the Gold Coast City Art Gallery until August 16, making it one of the most important visiting collections to have been seen in Queensland. On its Australian tour *ArtTaiwan* has also visited the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney, and will visit the Canberra School of Art Gallery (September 29 to October 21), and the Wollongong City Gallery (December 8 until February of next year), thereby gaining regional as well as capital city representation. The wide range of support for the travelling exhibition, including the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, the Gold Coast Taiwan Association, and a range of sponsors including the Taiwan Women's League of Queensland, the Taiwan Institute of Australia, the Multicultural Times, and several commercial organisations, indicates a growing community awareness of the importance of such exchanges.

Exhibitions and other artistic festivals are much more than 'cultural events': they are prime opportunities for new relationships to emerge across national boundaries between cities, regions, social groups and individuals. Another major cultural exchange was held on August 21 to 27, 1995, on the Gold Coast, when a delegation of more than 300 Japanese came to Australia to demonstrate and display traditional arts and skills as part of *Festa Kanagawa*. Among the attractions was a Gold Coast - Kanagawa (Japan) student art exhibition of 260 paintings, with venues at the Gold Coast City Council premises and at Bond University.