

# Free China Review



VOL. 43 NO. 3 MARCH 1993

**SPECIAL SECTION  
ON FINE ARTS:  
FOCUS ON PAINTING,  
CRITICS, GALLERIES,  
AND ART EDUCATION**

**POLITICS: FOUR  
ANALYSTS CRITIQUE  
THE ELECTION**



**COVER**—*Turn Around Four Times*, by Taipei Art Group member Lee Min-chung, illustrates an eclectic style frequently seen in Taiwan's contemporary art scene (see our *FINE ARTS* section)—photo courtesy of the artist.

# Free China Review

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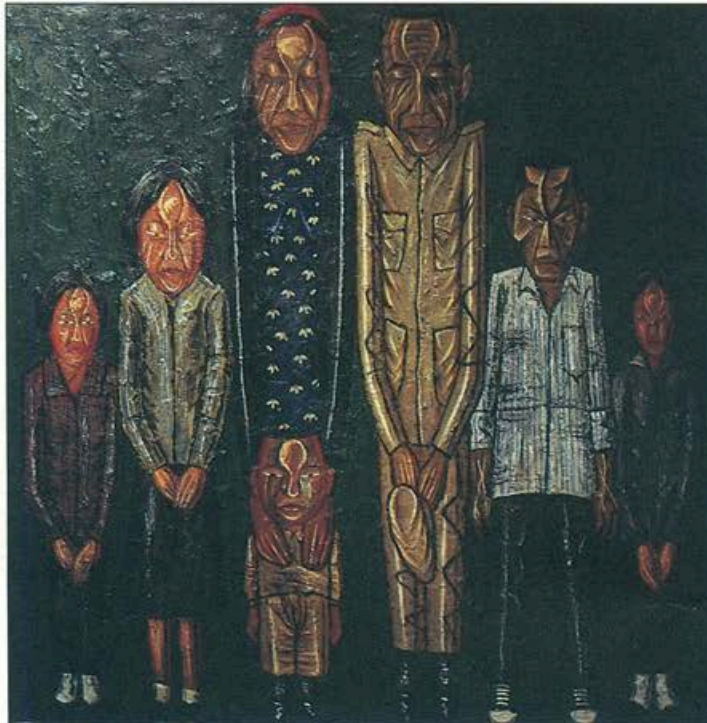
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**Recent art goes on the block—** hundreds of private, commercial galleries have opened during the last six years. Here, Grace Top Art Development Co. in Taipei holds "Self-Contemplation," an exhibition showing work by seven young painters.

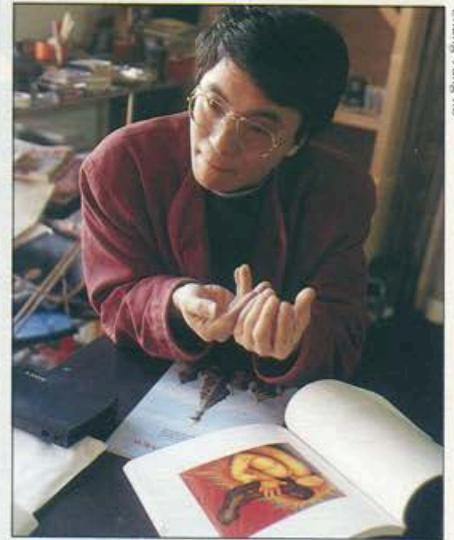
initial "anything goes" euphoria at the end of martial law started to be refined. Greater freedom also brought increased responsibility—some tougher thinking about what art was supposed to be, and what it was supposed to do. And as thousands of people took their first international trips—bringing them face-to-face with foreign architecture, paintings, and sculpture—the return home was aesthetically sobering. Young artists took another look at China's traditional and folk arts, then became a little more tolerant when judging their older peers. And a lot of parents and educators started thinking about boosting the time spent on art education in the schools. Aggressive diversity still rules the scene, but artists have started to put down deeper intellectual and aesthetic roots.

Although change, redefinition, and rethinking are the order of the day, it's a good time to take stock, to look at what has happened in the past few years in contemporary art. The artistic environment is stubbornly difficult to characterize and impossible to summarize. Any selection of artists or works will draw praise and derision from segments of the field. It's fun anyway to explore—however subjectively—what is going on.

## Digging Into Local History

**T**he career of Yang Mao-lin (楊茂林) has in many ways mirrored the turbulent course of the island's art movements over the last two decades. In the 1970s and early 1980s, Yang expressed his concern about the lack of local identity in Taiwan art by dealing with themes such as the difficulties of urban life and the dangers of environmental destruction. After co-founding the 101 Modern Art Group in 1982, Yang began digging deeper into history to incorporate images from ancient Chinese mythology and the cultures of the island's indigenous peoples.

His most recent works incorporate historical elements, cultural images, and current affairs. Like many other contemporary artists, 40-year-old Yang has been greatly influenced by the sweeping changes since the lifting of martial law. "In the past, I applied mythology to sati-



**Yang Mao-lin—** "I want to reawaken memories of our past."

Courtesy of the artist



size and criticize," he says. "But beginning in 1987, I began celebrating the emerging power of people as manifested in street demonstrations."

Yang is best known for his "Made in Taiwan" paintings—the title of the series is a clear reference to goods manufactured for export, the source of Taiwan's economic miracle and an indirect cause of the island's social, political, and cultural changes. Begun in 1990, the works reflect ideas and images drawn from contemporary society, aboriginal culture, Chinese mythology, and Yang's own symbolism.

In 1991, he began depicting subjects often associated with Taiwan, such as the cloud leopard, sweet potato, wild lily, and sea shells. His use of these images emphasizes the need for respect about the island's indigenous peoples and concern about the environment. Yang is also concerned with preserving Taiwan's history. "I want to reawaken memories of our past," he says. "It may seem utopian and idealistic, but I think it is meaningful to people here." ■



*Yun Mountain Memorandum*, XL9201, 1992, 263 x 350 cm, oil & acrylic.



A reference to the Dutch occupation of Taiwan—*Zealandia Memorandum*, L9201, 1992, 193 x 97 cm, oil & acrylic.

Courtesy of the artist