

International

Gallery

A Journey of Ideas

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TAIWAN
CHRONICLES OF CHANGE



TAIWAN'S ART: NAVIGAT

It was since the Japanese colonisation that Art in Taiwan evolved aesthetically and conceptually in its practice. And through emerging from the little island of Taiwan are a slew of artists that are being recognised at international venues. A brief



Top down: 1. Kinichiro Ishikawa. Above the Clouds.
2. Li Mei-shu. Washing Clothes by the Clear Stream, 1981
3. Li Shih-chiao. Happy Farmers, 1946
4. Chen Cheng-po. My Family, 1931

One of the earliest influential artists from Japan, **Kinichiro Ishikawa** [1871-1945] was considered the 'father of modern Taiwanese art'. He travelled extensively in Taiwan with several students whose names would be etched into the history of Taiwanese modern art. It was the Japanese also, who introduced the gouache technique of painting in Taiwan, a technique that is originally from China's Tang dynasty, [Circa 618-907].

Interestingly, European Impressionism also inspired Taiwan's artists who developed a balance between their traditional learning and the lure of western styles. Of that period, were artists **Li Mei-shu** [1902-1983] and **Li Shih-chiao** [1908-1995] amongst others, who having imbibed the techniques, defined their expressions with individual styles, chronicling a Taiwan of their times. This was before the wave of industrialisation hit its shores. **Chen Cheng-po** [1895-1947], who was brutally shot dead by the KMT in a public space for being part of a 1947 uprising, was known for his contribution to aesthetics in art education.

Of the few sculptors from this period, **Huang Tu-shui** [1895-1930], who unlike his predecessors lived a short life, dying at the age of 36. His work has however, influenced the island's art scene forever.

Kuo Hsueh-hu [1908] is as remarkable in his landscapes as he is in his urban narratives. And **Chen Chin** [1907-1998], one of the very few women painters who made a name for herself. Her repertoire included landscapes and still-life of the early 90s, but her portraits of women at work or leisure reflected a genuine feel for the era in which they were created that was to prove her enduring legacy.

Yang San-lang [1907-1995] was one of the first western-style Taiwanese artists who painted with bold

ING A TENUOUS HISTORY

the years, it navigated several polar situations in response to history, its innumerable political shifts and dichotomies. Today, compilation of Taiwan's art trajectory since the late 1800s by the editor.

strokes and rich colours, staying within the landscape genre. Another significant artist, **Liao Chi-chun** [1902-1976] was integral to the modern art movement with works such as *Courtyard*, that won him an award at an exhibition in 1931, while **Kuo Hsueh-hu**, [1908-2012], who lived until the mellow age of 104, was known for his exuberant renderings of street life.

During Taiwan's Japanese era, it was not uncommon to find artists with their easels on the streets, very much like Paris' Montmartre. Watercolours were being replaced by oil paint and impressionism was the vocabulary of the times.

Post World War II, Taiwan being in the grip of Mainland China, witnessed another shift in perspective. With increased western influences emerged a need to revive and nurture traditional styles which would otherwise disappear. However, soon after 1957, this trend was to be again nudged aside for a conceptual return to western art practice.

In the 60s, **Liu Kuo-sung** [b.1932] was the most significant artist of the avant-garde movement and considered a rebel for his subversive tendencies towards western modernism. However, he created his own signature style, which won him several awards. Particularly unique and aesthetically compelling, are his use of negative spaces or the "tension of white lines" of the white zones on his canvas he likes to engage with. His meditations on the moon on the other hand, are a series that have taken modern art in Taiwan to another level!

RETURN TO ROOTS

With the 70s, art experimentation and subversive activities surrendered to mainstream compulsions when again, the west was seen as an intrusion and tradition was to be nurtured.



Above: Liao Chi-chun. *Courtyard with Banana Trees*, 1928
Below: Kuo Hsueh-hu. *Festival on South Street*, 1930



Chen Chin. *Accordion*, 1935



Above: Huang Tushui. *Sakya*, 1926
Below: Yang San-lang. *Sunrise Seascape*, 1997



Thus emerged the 'Native Soil Art' movement whose leading artist was the self-taught painter **Hung Tung** [1920-1987], whose unique departure from mainstream art earned him immense appreciation from the art community and media. Orphaned at three in a fishing village, he was a melancholic youth who, at the late age of 50 began his journey with art. His work was resplendent in its folk quality, in its detailed compositions of intricate narratives from daily life. With the traditional and contemporary entwined, his paintings appeal to generations across time. Hung Tung interestingly, was averse to selling his work in his lifetime, claiming they belonged to his dead parents, his family. He died alone with three hundred paintings around him. To honour Hung Tung, Cheng Chia-yin, the director of the Taipei-based drama troupe Puppet and Its Double, had launched the project "Who's Hung Tung?" at the 2011 Taipei Arts Festival where the new generation was initiated into the life of the great artist.

The affluent 80s ushered in a deeper interest in the arts and other creative disciplines with new forays into aesthetics, pop art, minimalism, and surrealism, and the boundaries of creativity seemed to stretch infinitely.

Art in Taiwan today, is a vibrant energy of painting, sculpture, multimedia, video and installation art. Several of the contemporary figures include Yang Mao-lin, Wu Tien-chang, Wang Wen-Chih, Wang Chien-yang, Sakiliu Pavavalung, Chen Chieh-Jen, Lu Hsien-ming, Long Bin-chen, Li-Chen, Hou Chun-min and Hong Wen-lin, amongst others whom unfortunately we were unable to include, are informed by a socio-political context that articulates their narratives within their chosen paradigms; their individual perspectives.

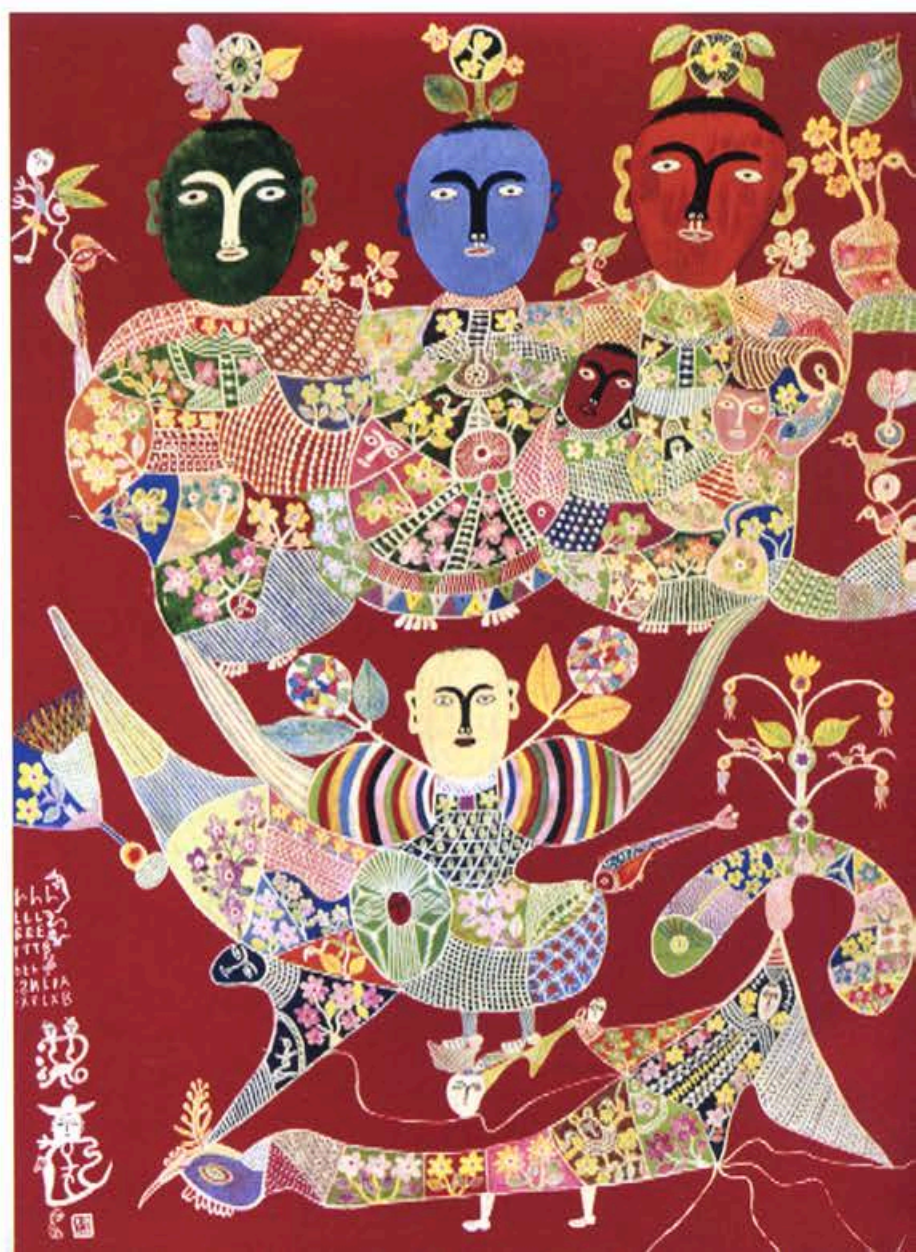
Even as they are being recognised outside their island on a larger international map, Taiwanese artists are deeply rooted to their soil and their identity.

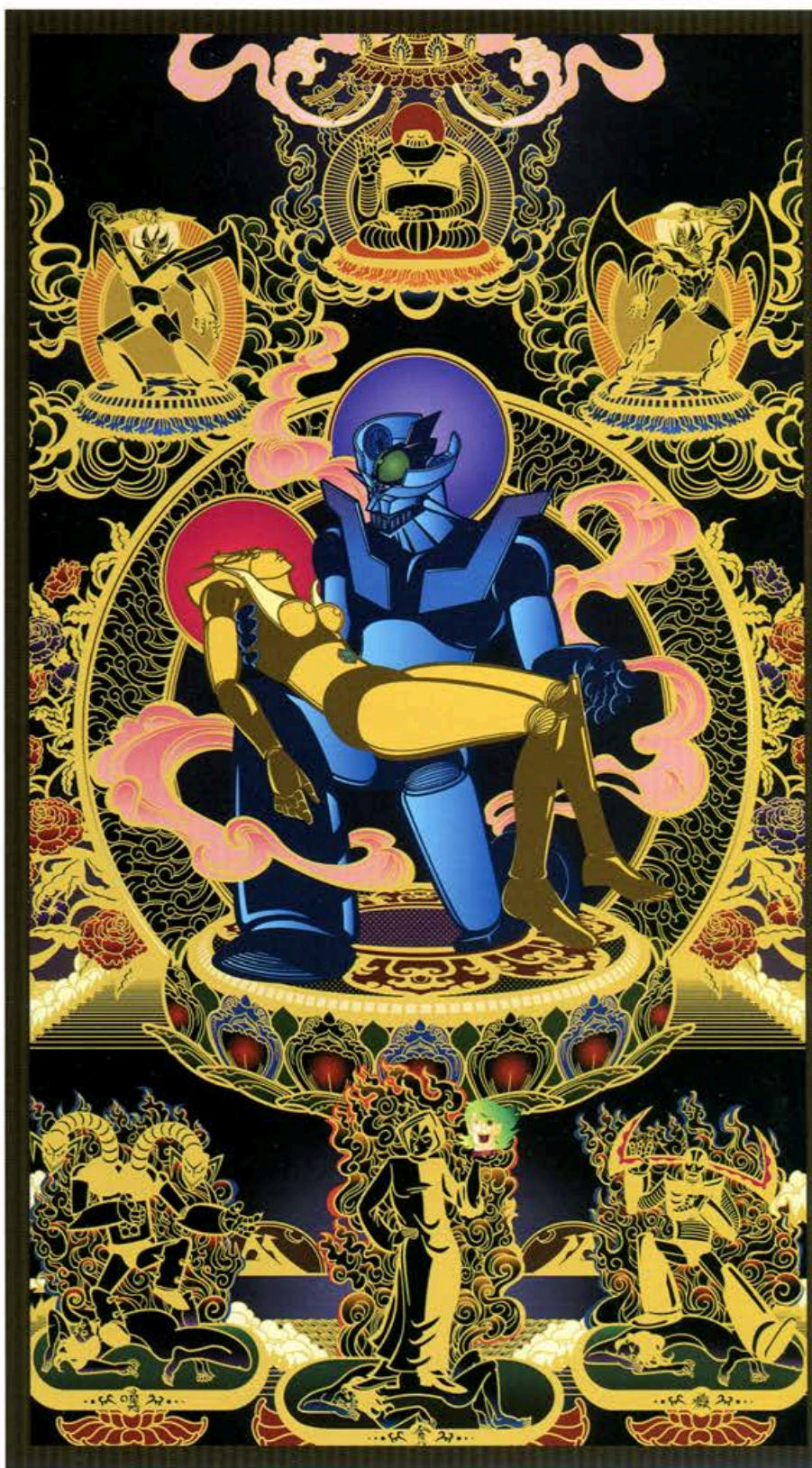


Above: Liu Kuò-sung, *Midnight Sun*, 2005. Below: *Full Moon*, 2008



Below: Hung Tung, *Green-faced, Blue-faced, Red-faced, and Yellow-faced Deities*



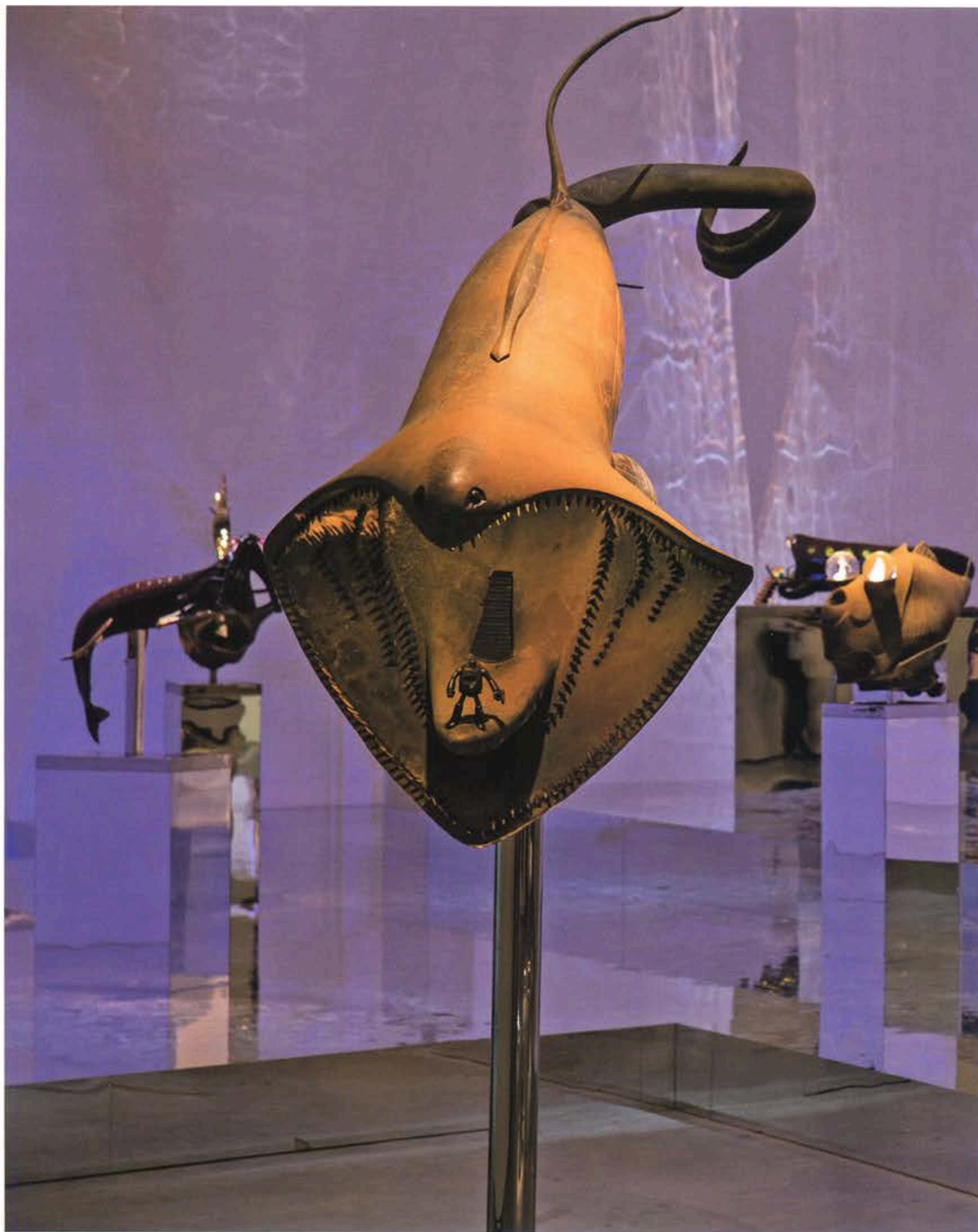


Above: *The Three Sages in the Ocean of Misery*, 2010. Metallic photo paper. 84.6 x 47 in x 3 panels. Right: *Made in Taiwan Slogan Section VI*, 1990 Mixed media. 75 x 138 in. where his works were frontal critiques. Photos courtesy: © Yang Maolin

YANG MAOLIN

“In my early 30s, my art practice tended to challenge mainstream values or were responses against dominating ideologies of the time. Through these works, I expressed my personal world view and found my own space, both, as a human being and as an artist. However, as I got older and the world changed, my attitude toward art and life changed as well. At this stage, I feel that there are many things art can do other than antagonising mainstream beliefs. I am now far more interested in delving deep into the most vivid and treasured parts of my childhood memory, in hope of exploring the relationships between my personal history and the broader cultural backdrop.” —YM





Above: *The Great Oz Swallows*, 2015. Copper, stainless steel, LED. 115 x 40 x 99.6 in. Facing page above: *Prominent Leader 002- Mix Hitler*, 1999. Video projection- architectural animation with sound. 19 m.12 secs. Photos courtesy: © Krzysztof Wodiczko



Yang Maolin [b.1953] studied painting at the Chinese Culture University in Taipei. He co-founded several artists' groups linked to the Transavantgarde movement in Taiwan, 101 and the Taipei Group in the 80s, and HantooShe in the late 90s. He is known for his politically charged paintings of the 80s, and his investigation into the political, historical and cultural aspects of Taiwanese identity during the 90s. Post 2000, he began exploring sculpture, blending Buddhist iconology with Japanese manga icons. He has shown at numerous prestigious shows in Taiwan and Asia and has participated thrice at the Venice Biennale. Yang Maolin lives and works in Taipei.

