

Taiwan artist Yang Mao-lin raises question of Koxinga as 'Taiwan's colonizer'

By Nancy T. Lu
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Yang Mao-lin is one of the contemporary Taiwan artists, who are preparing — and hoping — to make an impact at the Venice Biennial to open in June.

"When visitors drop by and see my paintings in Venice," said the 46-year-old Yang last Saturday, "they will be heartened by the sight of the westerners' portraits in my works. They will in most likelihood be pleased to find a Taiwan artist honoring figures from the West like they were heroes."

But all is not to be taken at face value. Yang's seven paintings should invite a closer, longer examination.

Let's hear from Yang himself. He put it this way: "When I look at Taiwan's history, I take the perspective of an artist from Taiwan, one born to this island. The subjects in my paintings — from Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama to Chinese general Koxinga — were part of Taiwan's history."

Then came the jolting statement: "They were all colonizers of Taiwan."

Even Japan-born, Ming dynasty loyalist Koxinga (also known as Cheng Cheng-kung whose family home was in Fukien province), who threw

out the Dutch in Taiwan and established a regime on the island after failing to defeat the Manchus on the mainland in the 17th century, in the eyes of Yang Mao-lin was a "colonizer" of Taiwan. Yang painted two cannons literally pointed at Koxinga's head in one of his works in the Zealandia Memorandum series. Next to Koxinga's portrait was that of Coyett, the last Dutch leader who surrendered to the Chinese general.

Fort Zealandia in Anping, less than a half hour's drive from downtown Tainan, was built by the Dutch in 1623. When Koxinga seized control of Fort Providentia, the Dutch retreated to this fort. Koxinga's siege of Fort Zealandia ended after nine months with the surrender by the Dutch.

Yang's participation in the Venice Biennial is being made possible by private sponsorship. The Lin & Keng Gallery will highlight the works of Yang and Huang Yong-ping, a Paris-based mainland Chinese installation artist, at the San Basso church very near Piazza San Marco during the 1999 Venice Biennial.

"VOC — Handle With Care" is how curator Yang Wen-i calls the two-man show.

Yang explained: "For the first time, the two artists will team up in narrating or re-presenting histories from the past



Taiwan artist Yang Mao-lin highlights Coyett, the last Dutch leader in Taiwan, and Koxinga, the Chinese general who threw out the Dutch, in this painting from the Zealandia Memorandum series.



"VOC — Handle With Care" also features the installation art of Huang Yong-ping about the Dutch East India Company. The Dutch were the first western settlers to set foot on Taiwan.

and the present. They will meet in their shared interest in the Dutch East India Company's historical impact on the coastal region they originate

from. The intention of the exhibition is to add a new and fresh viewpoint to the much-discussed issue of colonialism and post-colonialism."