

[ARTS JOURNAL]

Superman and Pokemon as you've never imagined

Yang Mao-lin has a taste for the profane and brings it out by eroticizing childhood icons

BY **CHANG JU-PING**
STAFF REPORTER

As you walk into Lin & Keng Gallery, you are greeted by a large picture near the door. On the canvas is pictured a clear blue sky and green grass providing an idyllic background for familiar Japanese comic figures, Superman, Hello Kitty and Pocket Monster — and, incongruously, two nude women in positions that leave little to the imagination.

A further step in and one sees more of Superman and his Japanese counterparts: Victory Gundam, the BB fighter and Mazinger-z, the icons of overblown masculinity that make up the world of artist Yang Mao-lin's (楊茂林) exhibition titled "Inviting the Immortals II: Baby, You're Amazing."

The nine pieces on display are a clear comment on popular culture and society, with a bit of nostalgia for childhood toys on the one hand and a sarcastic take on the obsession with male sexual potency on the other.

Yang puts his comic warriors in contexts that intentionally present the current scene of the country's culture — a shallow hybrid, venting and directionless. So Superman and Mazinger-z, apparently in an off-duty moment, are bent in erotic positions. The images may be unsettling, but they are reflective of the environment to which young adults are exposed in current-day society and reveal inner desires below the conformed self.



Hyper-sexualized Japanese toy robots, as shown here in *Baby are you Lonesome Tonight*, make for interesting social commentary. PHOTO COURTESY OF LIN & KENG GALLERY

Art Notes

WHAT: YANG MAO-LIN SOLO EXHIBITION: *BABY, YOU'RE AMAZING — INVITING THE IMMORTALS II*
(楊茂林: 請眾仙 // 寶貝你好神奇)

WHERE: LIN & KENG GALLERY (大未來畫廊), 1F, 11, LN 252, TUNHUA S. RD., SEC. 1, TAIPEI (台北市敦化南路一段252巷11號1F)

WHEN: UNTIL MARCH 31

Having two sons in high school, Yang considers himself up-to-date when it comes to the accessibility of explicit pornography.

"I know what they are doing in their rooms," said Yang, who has downloaded quite a few images of pornographic women for his show. "I was young before myself. I just checked their favorite Web sites."

Yang uses computer graphics technology to create montages of

cartoon characters, nude women and thumbnail pictures from the Internet to create shockingly explicit canvases. The images are astounding inasmuch as they attest to drastic changes in a society where condoms were not readily available in drugstores until the 1980s. They also say Taiwan has entered the Internet era of instant access and in which few even pay lip service to the sanctity of sex.

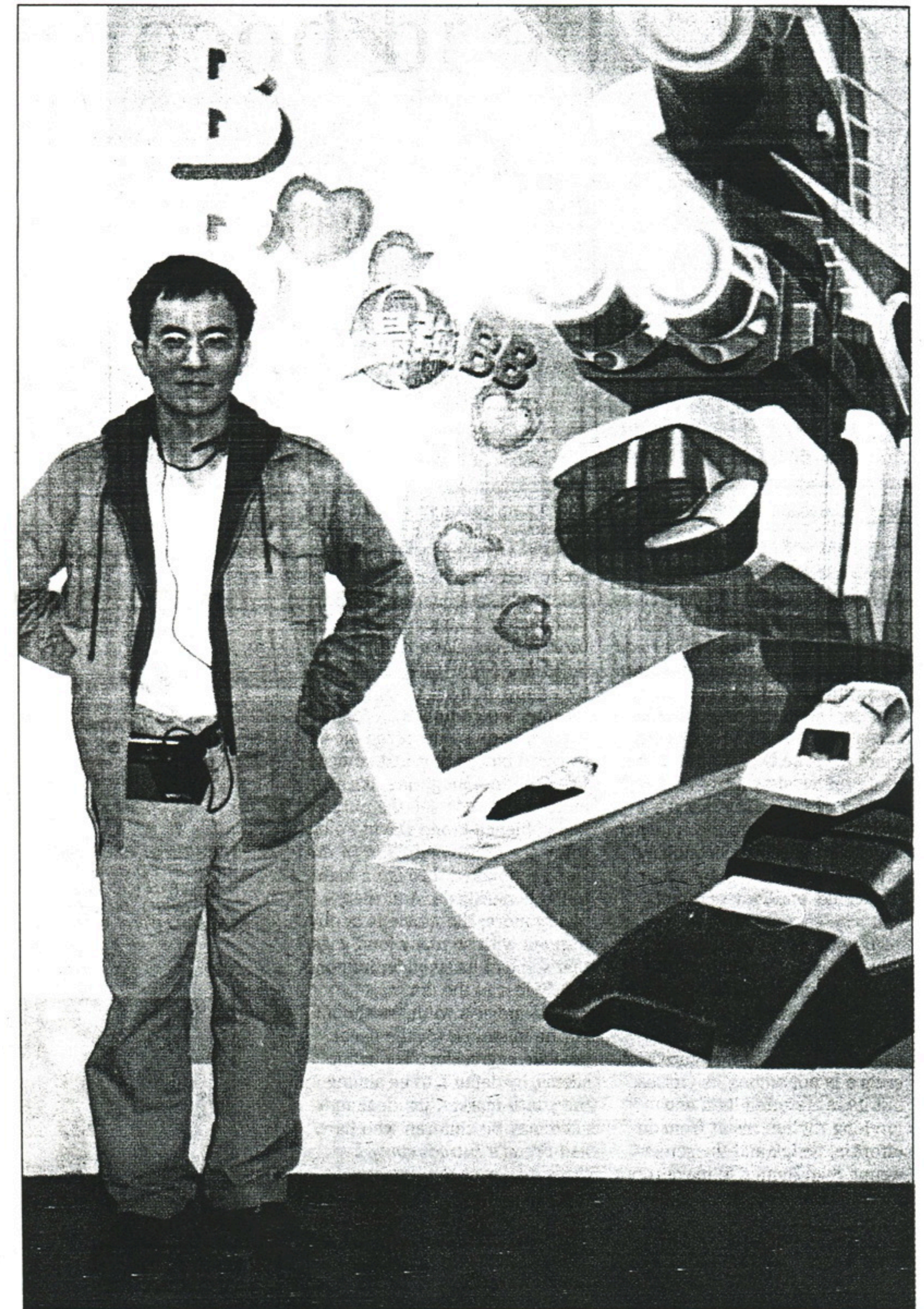
Nonetheless, Yang hesitates to pass judgment with his canvases.

Yang infuses his works with a raging masculinity, which is then undermined by sentimental phrases, such as "Are you lonesome today" or "Summer Kiss Winter Tears" that suggest men, despite their chest beating, still seek intimacy.

Another major theme in Yang's works is that of "cultural mating." This theme is particularly relevant to Taiwan, as it strives to establish an identity that can reconcile Chinese culture and the host of other cultures that wash up on the island's shores. Taiwan comes across in the images as the bastard child of Chinese, Japanese and American influences — ugly, chaotic and in flux.

Yang's computer-generated productions are the second installment in the cultural intercourse theme from a 1999 show titled "Inviting the Immortals," which used the same methods of montage and cultural mix.

These works are a sharp departure from Yang's art in the mid-1990s, which were an investigation into his cultural history. There was plenty of emotional attachment in those oil paintings, famously marked by the industrial trademark phrase "Made In Taiwan." One piece from his Made In Taiwan series is on view on the second floor of the Taipei Fine Arts Museum as part of the museum's 100-year retrospective of Taiwan's art history.



Yang Mao-lin, shown next to one of his canvases, looks at the prominence of sexuality in society and subverts notions of masculinity through homo-eroticization of childhood comic heroes in his art.

PHOTO: CHANG JU-PING, TAIPEI TIMES