

Exhibition of Yang Mao-lin's art depicts changes to the nation over past 30 years - Taipei Times

By Jake Chung / Staff writer, with CNA



Artist Yang Mao-lin poses in front of one of his paintings in an undated photograph.

Photo courtesy of Taipei Fine Arts Museum

An exhibition titled “Made in Taiwan: Yang Mao-lin, a Retrospective,” running until April 24 and featuring the works of artist Yang Mao-lin (楊茂林) at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, featuring his works from the past 30 years that not only capture a multifaceted view of Taiwan’s political and social developments over the past three decades, but also form a veritable diary of the artist’s own progression and maturity.

Yang said that the term “made in Taiwan” symbolized the significance and uniqueness of Taiwanese products on the international market and the impact of European and US culture on Taiwan, while reflecting how Taiwan made its economic rise as the original equipment manufacturer of foreign firms.

The exhibition, which contains almost every piece of artwork Yang has produced with the exception of his earliest works, depicts Yang’s attempts to explore the possibility of using art and themes to express a critical view of Taiwan’s politics, history and culture, the museum said, adding that the exhibition has been divided into five sections that broadly categorize the themes and focus of Yang’s work into periods.

The collection includes paintings, sculptures and assembled works — almost every piece of art Yang created since 1983, the museum said.

His earlier works in the “National Epic” section, composed and painted during the Martial Law period, were strongly critical of the then-Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) administration, while his later works were inspired by the influence on Taiwan of martial law being lifted, Taiwan’s rapid economic success

and its connection to the rest of the world through trade, the museum said.

The exhibition's five sections illustrate the changes to Yang's technique and themes, retreating from his earlier criticism of authoritarian regimes in the "National Epic" section to his search for a historical identity in "Avant-Garde Epic," then on to his use of cartoons and anime in an exploration of merging or clashing cultures in "Bad Taste," the museum said.

The "Immortals" section embodies Yang's attempts to move away from "traditional" two-dimensional art into sculptures, marking not only a watershed moment in his creative career, but also allowing him to further internalize and provide maturity to themes explored in "Bad Taste," the museum said.

"Wonderland," which features his most recent works, also sculptures, departs from the themes of social issues and living environment and moves toward a greater focus of himself, the museum said.

In that section, Yang, then just having entered his 50s, sought to express what is purely himself, a fulfillment of his desires and what he defines as his quintessential self, the museum said.

Commenting on the exhibit, Yang said that any artist would feel "happy and loved" to see work spanning half of their lifetime featured in a single exhibition, adding that he was especially moved when he saw his earlier paintings and drawings placed side-by-side with his more recent sculptures.

Museum curator Lin Ping (林平), who considers Yang to be one of the founding members of what is now considered the "Taipei School" of drawing, said that throughout his career as an artist, Yang has continuously challenged the times he lives in.

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