

**臺北市立美術館新聞稿**

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**Effusive Vitality: Chuang Che Retrospective Exhibition**

展期：2015 年 9 月 26 日至 2016 年 1 月 3 日

地點：臺北市立美術館 3A, 3B, 3C 展覽室

**Curator:** Liú Yung-Jen

Starting his creative journey as a child, the exceptionally talented artist Chuang Che rose up in the art world of the 1960s. He proved to be a key pioneer of this era, and along with others of his generation, launched the Taiwanese modern painting movement. Chuang was born in 1934 in Beijing, China, and spent his formative years in Taiwan. In 1954, he entered the Department of Fine Arts at National Taiwan Normal University, and after graduating in 1958, joined the Fifth Moon Group, becoming an important founding member. In 1965, Chuang held his first solo exhibition at the National Center of Arts (today's National Taiwan Arts Education Center), which began his long creative journey. From 1963 to 1973, he taught in the architecture department of Taichung's Tunghai University, and received a grant from the John D. Rockefeller III Fund to study international contemporary painting in the United States in 1966. In 1972, he moved to the U.S., ultimately taking up residence in New York where he lives and works today.

Chuang grew up in an artistic family, and was influenced by his family education, becoming a reserved and scholarly artist. He spent many years assiduously exploring art, especially painting and theories of abstraction, which over the years established his solid foundation in these areas. In his abstract landscape painting, he starts with observations of the natural world and then moves toward his ultimate goal of finding the essence of art. He incorporates calligraphic lines and compositions into his paintings, using brushwork that is ethereal with quick transitions to create intrepid, high-spirited momentum. His brushstrokes are modulated and follow lyrical colors turning in space with ecstatic joy. Natural drips and splashes of paint, as well as collisions, moments of solemnity, dense mist, and strength often appear in his paintings. Profound rhythms of drawing in and pushing out glide chaotically through his compositions, and open pathways revealing the artist's moments of epiphany and wisdom.

*Effusive Vitality: Chuang Che Retrospective Exhibition* is a comprehensive presentation of the artist's work and philosophy over the course of his career. Chuang has consistently developed his bold painting and calligraphic style, as well as critical writing since the 1960s. He started in Taiwan and then set his sights on the international art world. Following the development of different stages of the modern art movement, Chuang has created a rich and impressive body of paintings and writing. Presenting the evolution of Chuang's artistic style from the early 1960s to today, the exhibition is divided into five sections: 1- *Writing, Texture and Collage*; 2- *Refining the Essence of Natural Landscape*; 3- *Dialectical Extensions and Figurative Series*; 4- *Hand Feel and Physical Space*; and 5- *Vigor beyond the Primordial*. Exhibited works include over 150 oils, acrylics, and relief and free-standing sculptures, carefully selected from among hundreds of works. The documentary section of the exhibition includes sketches, photos of Chuang and his work, a chronology, exhibition catalogs, dozens of reviews and books, valuable manuscripts, and film interviews with Chuang

discussing his life. These documentary items along with his sincere and poignant artworks form a complete picture of Chuang Che's oeuvre.

### Writing, Texture and Collage

In the 1960s, Chuang Che introduced Chinese characters into his paintings, and adopted the fusion of collage, ink painting, canvas, and *xuan* paper as his experimental core. Works of this period are filled with poetic overtones abstracted and transformed into visual imagery. Chuang's radical technique was to produce varied visual effects by choosing Japanese shoji screen paper based on its fibrous nature, different textures, patterns and colors, which he then tore, cut, and trimmed before puckering the paper with wet glue and adhering it to canvas. Characters weave through tears and layers to emphasize the vigor of paper's strength and flexibility while creating both visual and tactile effects. The irregular edges and placement of the paper, as well as its wetness, reflect the subjective and random quality of the artist's practice. His movements while working leave traces that also constitute his paintings' visual effects. Chuang uses western media and techniques, but expresses an eastern spirit with his spatial compositions. His core content is the deconstruction of natural landscape in dialog with historical culture.

### Refining the Essence of Natural Landscape

Chuang Che enjoys the quickness of *xieyi* brushwork seen in traditional landscape painting. The essence of his painting is in the rhythm of his brushwork, which suggests alternations between strength and suppleness, light and shadow, loose and tight, concentrated and dilute, and dry and wet. Furthermore, abrupt transitions in textures and intangible qualities seem to permeate his paintings. Chuang's abstract landscapes were deeply influenced by the classical painters, especially the great masters he admired—Shi Tao, Bada Shanren, Xu Wei, and Chen Hongshou, all of which are renowned for their unique styles. Chuang drew sustenance and established his spirit from these artists, and went on to create his bold, abstract landscapes based on direct perceptions in his mind. From the titles Chuang gives his paintings, we get a glimpse of his notions, such as his works *Blue Mountain*, *Broken Ink Landscape*, and *Looming Clouds at Jade Mountain* from the 1970s. There are metaphors for the various rhythms of life in the universe of Chuang Che's abstract painting, such as the four seasons, trees, rocks, lakes and seas, flying birds, sunlight, clouds, snow scenes, desolation and the human figure.

### Dialectical Extensions and Figurative Series

The importance of the formal language of Chuang Che's paintings does not reside in abstract or representational, but rather how his brushwork creates comprehension of an image, and the interpretation of each painting's true feeling reveals its visual core. In this area of the exhibition, the three groupings of works that are thematically arranged present the artist's ultimate goals in exploring imagery, and includes his *Sixteen Lohans Series*, *Face* series, and *Portrait Folio*. The inspiration for Chuang's *Sixteen Lohan Series* comes from the Lohan paintings of the late Tang and Five Dynasties Buddhist monk Guanxiu. Chuang used ink and tissue paper for this series, outlining the features, clothing, and poses of the Lohans and then supplementing this with ink shading and color painted with the *cun* technique. The result not only presents Chuang's incisively vivid perceptions, but also graceful and lissome lines and vigor. The artist projects his philosophy and spirit onto the Lohans to create an exceptionally novel expression. His series *Face* includes 20 small-scale

paintings created in the 1990s, and presents his ongoing exploration of portraiture. Chuang employed mixed media for the series to transcend the ordinary depictions of traditional portraiture. His *Portrait Folio* is painted on collaged newspaper images and can be seen as Chuang's multivalent coding of pure figuration.

### **Hand Feel and Physical Space**

Chuang Che starts out from alchemical, qualitative change, and continues from there to create variations in a series of work. His forms are derived from his intellect, imagination, and intuition, and thus borne of his unique personality and characteristics. His paintings emphasize form composed of brushwork, and his three dimensional work is an extension of his paintings. Primarily made of driftwood collected from the banks of the Hudson River, nails, cardboard, metal strips and ready-made objects, this series of three-dimensional work made in the mid-1990s is primal and unpretentious. Chuang is sensitive to the destruction that urbanization has wreaked on the natural environment, and therefore has cobbled together forms from wood, revealing its natural grain and transforming decay into vivid imagery. His sculpture lies between representation and abstraction and is rich in unlimited imagination. His working process is based on many variables that are tactile and beyond cognition, and he establishes forms through thinking and his will that suggest spatial potential. These primordial forms that coalesce into a pure and natural poetry have been titled the *Hudson River* series by the artist.

### **Vigor beyond the Primordial**

In eastern cosmology, there is a place beyond the primordial, which is also beyond where the sun rises. The primordial indicates the beginning of creation and the vastness of vigor and vitality. This is an apt metaphor for Chuang's copying of classical paintings when he was ten years old. His creative journey has indeed been a very long one. Diligently painting for the past twenty years in a New York art studio, Chuang has continued to explore the essence of art with depth and his fluid interpretations. He either integrates all past stages of his work, or strives to extend the unique features of certain periods. His *Human Landscape Series* is presumably a later extension of the earlier work *Man of Landscape*. In 2000, Chuang created his *Cypress Rock Series*, which are beautifully intricate, large-scale paintings with vertical compositions reminiscent of steles and a grand and impressive appearance. His more recent masterworks *Burning*, *Human Landscape Series—Space Exploration*, *Landscape Series—Cliffs* all project a desolate atmosphere of melancholy. Chuang imbues natural life with artistic significance, and transforms it into visual symbols to express the life of the entire universe.