Abstracts

Panel I: Hybrid Identities

Yunchiahn C. Sena, Lecturer, Wesleyan University


Controversies concerning Kenkō Jinja, a Japanese Shinto shrine designed by Ide Kaoru (1879–1944) for the Japanese colonial government in Taipei, Taiwan, started as soon as the shrine was completed in 1928. Questions were raised regarding its peculiar, eclectic style and unconventional material—instead of the traditional gabled roofs and wooden pillars, the shrine, entirely made of concrete, comprised an Italian Renaissance-style dome, a Byzantine cross-shaped hall, and an entrance topped with Chinese-style tile roofs. Previous studies of the shrine have focused on the connection between its unique architectural features and corresponding European models, especially those of the Neo-Byzantine style in the late 19th century. This paper adopts a broader and more contextual approach to explore the relationship between the Kenkō Shrine and its Taiwanese visitors. It examines the ways in which Taiwanese visitors participated in the rituals of the monument intended by the Japanese authority, as well as alternative functions not commonly seen at a Shinto shrine. It concludes that rather than forcing Japanese colonial identity onto its visitors, the Kenkō Shrine offered them interactive ways to engage with modernity and to forge the connection to a universal and enlightened ideal, which was closely associated with Japan.

Ching-hsin Wu, Assistant Professor, Rutgers University

Paper: “Surrealist Paintings in Wartime Taiwan”

This paper examines artworks exhibited at the Futen (Taiwan sōtoku-fu bijutsu ten-rankai)—the Taiwan Governor-General’s Exhibition—from 1938 to 1943, especially focusing on works in Surrealist modes included in the Western-style paintings section. In contrast to the strict political surveillance in Japan during the war, which occasionally led to censorship of artworks viewed as opposing military policies promoting healthy and positive images of Japanese militarism, it is intriguing to see several images of ruins exhibited at the main public exhibitions held in wartime Taiwan. In this paper, I situate these paintings within the broader development of Surrealism, consider the motif of ruins and its social context, and elucidate the impact of the war on paintings in Taiwan. In the process, the paper sheds new light on the practice of modernism in Taiwan, especially focusing on how artists used it to navigate ambiguous and contested relations between self, society, and the authority.

Su-hsing Lin, Associate Professor, Tainan National University of the Arts
Cai Caoru (1919–2007), born in Tainan during the colonial period, began to learn the “useful skills” (such as drawing from life) when a new education system was introduced by the Japanese. Yet, after graduating from elementary school, he began apprenticeship as a professional artisan and learned traditional Chinese painting along with folk arts under his uncle, Chen Yufeng, who was a well-known professional painter in Tainan at that time. Such diverse artistic training prepared him for the new political and cultural environment after Japan’s defeat in World War II. The purpose of this study is to investigate why and how Cai Cao-ru could win so many prizes between 1946 and 1960 at the Taiwan Provincial Fine Arts Exhibition after the Kuomintang took over the rulership of the island. This study illustrates how an artist adapted to new demands by employing particular subjects matter and techniques.

Chia-ling Yang, Associate Professor, University of Edinburgh

This paper discusses the drift from collective to independent abstraction from the 1980s to the present, and the ways in which abstract painting has evolved from Lee Chun-shan to Ava Hsueh. In Taiwan, how have the “rediscovery of viewpoints” and the transformation of form been put forth in abstract works? The layering of viewpoints generates a continuously explosive release of speed and physicality that expresses the intensity of life, intangible phenomena, the dimensions of space, and the depth of history. Being connected to today’s realities while asserting formalist innovation is the challenge many abstract artists face. Placing the focus on post-1980s abstract art, this study aims to investigate how this category of painting has been transplanted in Taiwan in relation to China, Japan and the United States. This paper argues that artists aim to transform and exit from their existing boundaries and realities, and ultimately, strive for democracy and assert their Taiwanese identity.

Discussant: Alice Tseng, Interim Chair, Associate Professor, Boston University