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 tenrankai)—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

Paper: “To Exit – Post 1980s Neo-Abstract Art in Taiwan (from Lee Chun-shan to Ava Hsueh)”

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

Panel II: Visualizing the Land 1:30-3:00

Mia Liu, Assistant Professor, Bates College

Paper: The Politics of Pictorialism: Topography, Location, and Iconography in Lang Jingshan’s Photographic Works in Taiwan

This paper examines Lang Jingshan’s oeuvre in Taiwan from the 1950s until his death in 1995, addressing both his photographic works and his activities as an important institutional figure in Taiwanese art. In particular, it examines how Taiwan as a location configures in his composite photography art during this period, what topographic features he favored, and the iconographic criteria he used to make his choices in his landscape
compositions. This paper also considers how his works were exhibited and received. Furthermore, I examine his role as a photographer in the artistic and cultural debates regarding the discourses on the identity of Taiwanese art during these decades. Through these careful readings of his art and his writings, this paper hopes to further our understanding not only of the complex history and discussions of Taiwan’s photography history, but also the social and political engagement of Pictorialist photography, an international movement that is often thought of as a form of disengagement and an apolitical aestheticism.

Peter R. Kalb, Cynthia L. and Theodore S. Berenson Associate Professor of Contemporary Art, Brandeis University

Paper: Televisuality and Analog Landscapes in Turn-of-the-Millennium Taiwanese Video Art

This paper examines two strategies by which turn-of-the-millennium Taiwanese artists have addressed the integration of immersive televisuality with analog physicality that informs contemporary video art. From early examples such as Kuo I-Fen’s *Dream in the Dream, Meditation on Existence* (1986) to Wang Jun-Jieh’s *The Night of Sodom* (2016) there has been sustained interest in contextualizing the experience of video in sculptural environments often alluding to nature. This tradition suggests that the medium’s relevance lies not in projecting content beyond the frame, but rather, in integrating the work into our experience of real space. Complementing this approach are works that locate landscape within its narratives to address our combined existence in and off screen. Some cases, such as Hung Su-Chen’s *On the Way Home* (1994) presents landscape in a sculpted landscape setting, while works such as Chen Chieh-jen’s *The Route* (2006), convey the journey and the landscape with vision alone. In both, however the impact of the filmed narrative assumes rather than provokes viewers’ embodied experience of video. Theorist Paul Virilio has argued that our ability and desire to connect on-screen now has overwhelmed our appreciation of the poetics of being sentient here. The artists under consideration offer tools to imagine how we might thrive in a reality of video and body, here and now.

Shelley Drake Hawks. Lecturer, Middlesex Community College


This paper analyzes the aerial cinematography and musical score in Chi Po-lin’s documentary film, *Beyond Beauty* (2013), from the perspective of Asian philosophy, landscape painting, and Taiwan’s aboriginal culture. An important characteristic of the film is the central importance assigned to non-human elements (mountains, rivers, trees, ocean, birds, and clouds). There is no human voice until five minutes into the film and no visual sign of humans for nine minutes more. The un-peopled landscape receives the viewer’s full attention. Like a slowly unrolling handscroll, majestic peaks appear one by one from a level perspective, as the Cineflex camera mounted on a helicopter, flies by
each rock face at close range. In what respects is Chi’s approach in the film reminiscent of, or a departure from, Chinese and Taiwanese landscape painting? How does the structure of his film, camera angle and movement, use of color, and musical score shape audience reaction? This paper compares and contrasts Chi’s aesthetic program with selected Chinese and Taiwanese paintings, including works by Chang Dai-chien (1899-1983), Lin Fengmian (1900-91), Chen Cheng-po (1895-1947), Yen Shui-lung (1903-1997), Chen Hui-kun (1907-2011), and Liang Dan-fong (b. 1935).

Discussant: Pu Wang, Helaine and Alvin Allen Chair in Literature, Brandeis University

III. Nativism and Critical Responses: 3:30-5:30

An-yi Pan, Associate Professor, Cornell University

Paper: Xiangtu—The Formation of a Local Artistic Movement

It is generally assumed that artistic Nostalgic Localism followed the path of that movement in literature. This study will reveal the precursors of this movement, dating back to the late period of Japanese colonial rule and to the post-1949-era, had focused on local cultures. The post-1949 wave was particularly crucial as it delineated the philosophical and dialectical foundations for the later Nostalgic Localism movement. Although Nostalgic Localism is Taiwan’s self-awareness, self-determination movement, its original consciousness was China-centered, utilizing Taiwan’s locality to boost Chinese patriotism because the vast majority of people on Taiwan at the time identified as Chinese, and believed they represented the sovereignty of mainland China. By examining post-1949 policies toward art and literature, and how artists from the mainland had begun to engage local cultures prior to the inception of Nostalgic Localism, this study sheds light on the formation of this influential and widespread movement in Taiwan during the 1970s.

Hsin-tien Liao, Professor and Dean, National Taiwan University of Arts

Paper: “Aesthetics and Difference: Ju Ming and Nativism in 1970s’ Taiwan”

The 1970s was a high time of Taiwan nativism and also when Ju Ming first emerged on the art scene. In most art criticism, Ju Ming and Hong Tong (a naïve painter) are usually bound together under the broad meaning of nativism. Such discussion is inadequate for differentiating the two. This “bounded” framework brings confusion and an uncertainty of interpretation to Ju’s works. This paper argues that previous perceptions have clouded the representation of this native-soil promoter’s realistic ideals. At the very least, re-adjusting the viewpoint can avoid a wrong track in assessing Ju Ming and Hong Tong, and can clarify the relationship between Ju Ming and nativism. Finally, it can help to re-write the early stage of Ju Ming’s art, his future works, and artistic achievement as a whole.

Kai Sheng, Associate Professor, National United University, Taiwan
The Taiwanese contemporary artist Hou Chunming was born in 1963 and entered the National Art Academy in 1982. When he was a student in the Department of Fine Arts at the academy, the nativist movement was beginning to fade out and modernism was regaining strength in Taiwan’s cultural field. However, as a young artist Hou did not follow the current of time, because he was not fully convinced by the modernist doctrines such as the autonomy of art. After graduation, Hou created several engravings, such as Erotic Paradise (1992), Anecdotes about Spirits and Immortals (1993) and God Hates You (1999), as revolts against modernism by alluding to folk culture. On the other hand, Hou never accepted the nativist ideology as nationalism, but parodied the folklore with a kind of grotesque style. In Hou’s works, his primary concern is always the contemporary society of Taiwan rather than the nostalgic sentimentality or the pastoral scenery, so he is neither modernist nor nativist. This may be one of the reasons why Hou was selected to represent Taiwan at the 46th Venice Biennale in 1995. This research investigates Hou’s paintings in 1990s and perceive how he transformed folklore into his artworks with a creative approach so as to surpass the academic doctrines and nativist ideologies.

Andrew Shih-ming Pai, Professor, National Taiwan Normal University

Paper: “Beyond Nativism and Modernism: Hou Chunming as an Insubordinate Artist in 1990s Taiwan”

Under the powerful influences of Chinese, Japanese, and Western colonizing forces, how should modern Taiwanese art overcome its passivity to form a global, “borderless” perspective, while staying true to its local cultural values? Interestingly, role reversals in de-Japanization and re-Sinification did not bring new cultural opportunities, as “political correctness” and political manipulation continued to erect barriers to the free development of art. The postwar authoritarian government reduced society into a state of “democracy vs. communism” and that anyone who was not a friend was an enemy. All forms of culture became anti-Communist instruments and part of political manipulation. Taiwanese artists living under this restricted freedom and false democracy did not give up on their ideals of understanding of the world around them. Nevertheless, the emergence of nationalism has made artists dependent on the political wings of nativist revival. Ultimately, Taiwan will have to transcend the suppressions of imperialism or semi-colonialism in order to explore the true margins of the “world” and clarify its own identity and culture.

Discussant: Aida Yuen Wong: Nathan Cummings and Robert B. and Beatrice Mayer Associate Professor in Fine Arts, Brandeis University