



■ Clockwise from far left: Sun Museum director Yeung Chun-tong; Yu Zhongbao's *First Month of the Year*; Liu Chengmui's *Rest*; and Pan Yulin's *Nude Beauty*.



Blended in oils

Lisa Kao

As globalization brings the world closer together, artists are also taking a leaf from each other's books. Oil paintings by Chinese artists are an example of that.

Oil painting first arrived in China in the Qing dynasty, when Western missionaries introduced its techniques to the imperial court.

The cultural exchange continued from 1912 and into the 1920s, when young artists studied art abroad.

But does this mean they are giving up on their Chinese roots? Sun Museum director Yeung Chun-tong says no. Although the oil paintings by Chinese artists may look "very Western" at first sight, there are Chinese elements hidden within them.

"From the selection of objects and scenes, the things the painters wanted to express and their use of lines, we can see a Chinese shadow in the little details," said Yeung.

At a time when various art events have been canceled due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Sun Museum is presenting a new exhibition from April 14 to show the story of Chinese traditions in Western oil paintings. "Our planned public lectures were postponed to avoid large numbers of people, so the gallery was empty," said Yeung.

"I looked at the 20 oil paintings we owned and the topic came to mind, so I decided to make use of the time."

Based on the existing works they had, Yeung began curating oil paintings by Chinese artists from different periods to form a comprehensive picture. "We started planning in early January and did not face many challenges in borrowing paintings from collectors."

The gallery will show 46 oil paintings from legendary female painter Pan Yulin, "Matisse of the East" Ding Yanyong and Paris' "three musketeers" Wu Guanzhong, Chu Teh-chun and Zao Wou-ki.

The Western-style paintings, which date from the early 20th century to the present day, are full of Chinese secrets. Yeung revealed that one way to find them is in the selection of objects and scenes.

"Unlike Western painters, Chinese painters produced imaginary and selected compositions instead of realistic depictions," the gallery director said.

He compared them to traditional Chinese *shan shui*, or landscape paintings, which do not necessarily depict the scenery accurately, but rather show an artist's inner thoughts.

One example of this is *Father's Potted Plant* by modern artist Aries Wu, who studied abroad in Australia.

"He did not place any objects in the middle," Yeung explained. "The



pot and leaves in the painting are like the stones and leaves in *shan shui* paintings. Instead of recording the scene, the emphasis is on what Wu was thinking."

The tranquil and eternal ambience he conveys through the scene reveals his simple and humble attitude toward life – a message more important than the objects in the painting.

Chinese details can also be found in the nude oil paintings of Chinese artists, ranging from first-generation artist Pan Yulin to contemporary painter Liu Chengmui. "Unlike Western painters, Chinese ones hardly ever portray nude women."

Although Pan painted a Western nude, Yeung said the expression of the woman is very Chinese. "The woman looks shy, which is a common expression in Chinese paintings," he said. "Also, female figures in traditional Chinese paintings are often beauties, and the woman in Pan's painting is a beautiful woman."

Similarly, Liu's nude painting *Rest* looks "Western," yet preserves a "Chinese" mood through the use of lines.

"The use of orange and blue colors is rare in Chinese paintings. The vibrant colors make the painting look like a contemporary piece from the West," said Yeung. "However, the lines used in the paintings are like the ones we see in traditional Chinese calligraphy."

Liu also believes the human body represents human civilization, evolution and self-consciousness, which coincides with ancient Chinese philosophy.

Yeung encourages people to pay a visit to find the hidden Chinese elements themselves. "We are lucky to have some paintings by masters here. The only pity is that there is nothing from first-generation masters like Xu Beihong and Lin Fengmian."

Though he expects a decrease in visitors due to the coronavirus, he believes the exhibition can still serve as a good venue for public education. "We are maintaining a positive attitude under this tough situation."



■ From far left: Zhong Yao's *Lei Yue Mun*; Wu Guanzhong's *Paris Montmartre*; Zao Wou-ki's *5-4-99*; and Aries Wu's *Father's Potted Plant*.



An adventure with Tiddler

Chao Yat and Tiddler's *Chinese Word Pool*, part of an initiative to create multi-media Chinese language teaching materials for primary students, now has its own show.

The exhibition displays Chao Yat's original sketches and drawings of the animated series featuring cute protagonist Tiddler. At the exhibition, visitors can also take part in online sentence-writing and coloring competitions.

When: until April 30

Where: Hong Kong Art Centre, Wan Chai



Meeting of minds

Creating art may seem like a solitary path, but inspiration can strike when ideas are shared in good company.

For the latest *Art in MTR* exhibition, four veteran local artists share with visitors how their interactions with their proteges are mutually enriching. The works on display include contemporary Chinese ink, ceramics and Western painting.

When: until May 20

Where: Exit/Entrance J, Central station



A dazzling of the eyes

The inaugural exhibition at the newly opened Metropolis museum seeks to immerse its audience in Claude Monet's Impressionistic vista of light and shadow.

Each of the three themes in *Monet, Perception of Light and Colour* – the French countryside, cityscape and Monet's garden – covers his significant works. The reproductions are complemented with advanced digital and print technologies.

When: until September 25

Where: 17/F, Genesis, Wong Chuk Hang

CARA CHEN