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if she arranges her subjects a little more carefully before depicting them. Xu Bihe (徐碧和) and Chen Fuming (陈福明) are young and promising artists who are highly intelligent and bold. Their futures are certainly bright.

Through combined effort and diligent creation, the Ten Man Art Exhibition has become a modern force in Malaysia, establishing itself as a model for art movements. It will have a predictable influence on future trends.

Applied Arts and the Future of our Country

Singapore is a small island country with limited natural resources. Only a few industries, such as construction, commerce, shipping and tourism, provide for our survival.

From the workmanship and durability of a product to the attractiveness and price of a piece of merchandise, from the speed and safety of shipping services to personalised service in the tourism industry, all require a certain medium to promote themselves to attract customers. If art is the medium, it would be most relevant and effective.

A poster that is colourful and succinctly worded will attract more customers. Tasteful product packaging will increase sales!

If a hotel does not have a proper sign, it will have few guests. If an airline does not use photographs of famous sights from around the world and attractive personalities, it will inevitably be faced with empty flights. If the post office does not sell commemorative stamps, it will not be very profitable. If a cinema does not display large painted canvases advertising the movies, there will be a huge drop in box office earnings. If a restaurant does not have an eye-catching signboard, its chef will have no opportunity to use his skills. If a tobacco company does not have dazzling advertisements, only its boss will know the flavour of its cigarettes. Advertising has the paradoxical effect of giving people a chance to see that it is the product that truly matters!

A book needs a cover. A bar of soap needs a wrapper. A vinyl record needs a sleeve. A can of pineapples needs a brand logo. As for the wide range of cosmetics, designers have to rack their brains to please the ladies. This practice undoubtedly exists to pander to our natural inclination for pretty things, yet also adds to joy in life. In fact, however, these are but concerted attempts to persuade customers to part with their money. Applied arts are the use of quick thinking and adept skills to transfer artistic ideas onto an object in the pursuit of economic gain.

Therefore, while the objective of pure art remains of prime importance, the work of a craftsman is to simply follow instructions and complete the job.

ENDNOTES

1 While the horizontal painting is titled Floating Fair, the vertical one is in fact titled Floating Market at Donburi.
Take an advertisement for example. The designer prepares a template, determining the composition and colours before handing it over to the printer. The technician reproduces accordingly, and the job is done.

Another example is the flowery felt rug. Workers weave and dye the material according to the artisan’s draft design, colour tones and composition, after which an item of merchandise is ready for sale.

And then there are artists who are innately talented, and who also produce such works with their own hands. This is very rare. Pablo Picasso is one such rare and great master. He uses clay to mould a fruit platter, a flower vase or a jug. Once fired, it is a finished product with not only a functional purpose but also pure artistic value. This has made for an important revolution in the ceramic industry.

Art advertisements in Singapore have always been vibrant. It is a huge boost to the country’s prosperity. People in this field are usually excellent artists. They form their own societies and frequently organise activities, including art research. This time, we have enlisted members and non-members to take part in this public exhibition of art design. An exhibition of this magnitude, in size and content, is unprecedented. I believe that this beginning will lead to regular exhibitions and encourage Singaporeans’ interest in applied arts. Living in the competitive 20th century, we need to maintain a high level of intelligence and excellence in art. Otherwise, we would not excel even if we were a big country with abundant resources.

Chi Wei in the Last Ten Years

Music has been referred to as the common language of all the nations of the world. Yet, each nation’s music has its unique style and rhythm, such as the smooth and optimistic Italian opera, the solemn and majestic German orchestra, and the heavy and gloomy Russian folk song. All these differences are due to the natural environment and characteristics of the respective nationalities.

The same goes for art, even though some art critics have declared that since 1945, art schools and factions around the world have converged and are no longer different. However, in painting and abstract art the objectives of European and American art still vary greatly. Japanese and Australian artistic interests are equally disparate.

Singapore, with its advantageous geographical position and multi-racial make-up, is evidently the most suitable breeding ground for international art. However, the strong influence of traditional culture on the different races is difficult to shake off.

Chi Wei (叶之威) created his art under these circumstances. On one hand, he is influenced by the progressive spirit of the West; on the other, he maintains the solemn and unrestrained appeal of Oriental art. Here, the former refers to Chi Wei’s courage to experiment and continuously undergo transformation in order to attain perfection. The latter refers to his simple style, lofty and clean images, and the witty compositions which reveal him to be almost at the peak of artistic success.

Ten years ago, Chi Wei’s art did not catch anyone’s attention because he was working along a typical route. Although he was already excellent in technique, he was still unable to show his individuality. Fortunately, after some deep contemplation, he comprehended the true meaning of “technique is not art,” freed himself from the burden of the banal, and threw himself into a surging and glowing world of creativity. On one hand, he observes Oriental and Eastern art trends and intensively studies how he can harmonise the two; on the other, he uses the southern islands’ natural scenery and life for subject matter, merging sentiment and wisdom with form and spirit, producing outstanding works. These works have been exhibited twice in the Ten Man Art Exhibition that toured Indonesia and the east coast of Malaysia, and that shocked art circles and generated