

Chinese Art Exhibit opens with a bang

Judith van Praag

On Sunday, December 18, the "National Treasures of China" art exhibit at the Grand Hyatt Hotel, downtown Seattle, was opened with a big Bang! The Seattle International Lion Dance Team treated VIP guests (and surprised passers by) with a performance. Dancing on the rhythm of drums, the lions made their rounds, their presence symbolizing a blessed beginning for the special traveling art show.

Ms. Mei-Ling Dai, and her son Tony Dai were officially welcomed by among others, Seattle City Council President, Jan Drago, who mentioned in her opening speech that you don't have to be an academic to enjoy art.

Sponsors, local and foreign officials, as well as VIPs from the Chinese American community were honored, then invited to hold and cut the ribbon that gave access to the show.

In a large group show, balance is not always guaranteed, either in quality or attraction. The work of some artists may speak to you, while work by others doesn't touch you at all. The paintings in the exhibit at the Grand Hyatt Hotel covered a period of time stretching from late 19th to mid/ late 20th century. The variety of artists gave viewers a good chance to compare and find something to their personal liking.

Sometimes it's the mere use of color that speaks to you, as may have been the case with the vivid blue background in a painting by Yu Feiang (1888-1959). Many of the pieces in the exhibit were truly traditional in approach, some, such as a painting by Liu Haisu (1896-1994) executed in bold colors and brush strokes, showed the influence of Western abstract art.

A 19th Century painting by female artist You Xiaoyun —on

display in a corner, without a spotlight— made Jeffrey Parker, Consul General of Canada, express his surprise the piece hadn't found a home in a gallery or museum.

Particularly interesting was a collaborative piece by Wang Xuetao (1903-1982) and Yu Zhizhen (1915-), in which a colorful rooster, his feathers and expression outlined as clear as the lines in a wood cut, is juxtaposed against a sullen colored background, where delicate crickets hide in subtle brush strokes.

A painting by Jiyou Liu (1918-1983) of a maiden riding an ox, showed an odd —perhaps European— sentimental value, not seen in any of the other paintings.

Tony Dai, who prides himself to be an expert of traditional Chinese art, provided comprehensive information about each piece in his collection. Guiding Ms. Drago and Mrs. Maria Koh through the exhibition on Sunday, he explained that in Chinese paintings there's always (spiritual) meaning behind the detail; artists put their hearts in a landscape.

Thanks to the Dai family bringing the show to Seattle, and Mr. Dai's seminars in Chinese Art Collecting and Investing, some of the visitors may have come away with renewed interest in their family heirlooms, or will start their own collection now.

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