

Wang Jie

It is a difficult task to select a group of representative artists from a particular century for one exhibition.

Titled "Among All Essence," the 2021 China-Europe art invitation exhibition currently running at Shanghai Jiushi Art Museum obviously endeavors to take on that task with a fine spread of 72 artworks created by 38 artists.

The exhibition "reviews the mainstream art styles in modern Chinese art history over the past 100 years, starting from Lin Fengmian (1900-1991)," said Chen Hailan, the curator.

"The exhibits also examine three important subjects in contemporary art — 'life and death,' 'time and space,' and 'stars and seas, plants and creatures' — via a cluster of contemporary artworks by Chinese contemporary artists such as Fang Lijun, Sui Jianguo and Zhang Qikai."

Stepping into the exhibition hall, visitors immediately encounter prints and paintings created by the two artists — Kathe Kollwitz (1867-1945) and Lin — both had seminal influences on Chinese modern art that came later.

In 1931, the September 18th Incident touched off the military conflict between China and Japan. To protest against the slaughter of the five members of the Zuolian (League of Left-wing Writers), Lu Xun created a black-and-white woodcut print of Kollwitz's work called "The Sacrifice."

Featuring realistic ideas, Kollwitz's art was well liked in China, and had a profound impact on emerging print artists who witnessed the transition from wartime to peacetime.

As for Lin, according to Chen, he noticed Westerners' appreciation of ancient oriental civilizations in France in 1919, upon the outburst of the modern art movement in Europe.

The exhibition "Among All Essence" has amassed some 70 artworks of representative artists over the past century.



Where East meets and collides with West

In 1925, Lin returned to China and dedicated himself to educating local people and developing Chinese art by fusing it with Western culture. He wanted to be a "Chinese Cezanne" and founded the National Academy of Art in Hangzhou in 1928 and became its first principal.

Because of his time in Europe, Lin is renowned for combining late Impressionism, Expressionism and Fauvism with traditional Chinese aesthetic taste, exemplified in his paintings "Landscape" and "Ancient Lady" showcased at the exhibition.

"Lin and Kollwitz, one from the East and the other from the West, introduced a variety of choices offered by Western modern art forms to China, and kept exploring the possibility of modernizing Chinese traditional art through their creativity and unique artworks as the prototype opening the 100 year era of Chinese modern

art," Chen said.

Like Koliwitz's influence on China's modern art, another influential foreign artist exhibited is Bulgaria's Maryn Varbanov (1932-1989).

Varbanov's "Butterfly," created in 1979, is a "soft sculpture" made in fabrics in the shape of a pink butterfly. Its tender body and wings resemble a blossoming flower, representing freedom and beauty. The sculpture opened the possibilities of contemporary sculpture in China.

Chinese sculptor Yang Dongbai obviously follows the same path with his interpretation toward the extension of sculpture.

Yang builds his "mountain and water," a predominant subject in traditional ink-wash paintings, with slices of colored glass and stainless steel. He depicts the familiar scene of "layer upon layers of green hills" by overlapping materials



Yang Dongbai's sculpture "Wild Valley," glass and steel



Maryn Varbanov's "Butterfly," goat wool — Photos/Ti Gong

in his hands, conveying an oriental spirit in a modern way.

Likewise, Pang Maokun fuses something new into his classic and realistic depictions of Western masterpieces. At first glance, the painting "Portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini and his Wife" looks to be a copy of the old masterpiece created by Jan van Eyck (1380-1441). On closer inspection, however, visitors

will find Pang has painted himself sitting in the backdrop of the tableau.

"This exhibition is a platform where cultural differences collide and merge," said Chen.

Dates: Through January 9, 2022 (closed on Mondays), 10am-6pm,
Venue: Shanghai Jiushi Art Museum
Address: 6/F, 27 Zhongshan Rd E1

Intertwined art and literature from China and Italy

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INSPIRED by the magnificent literary heritage from both East and West, the exhibition's artists have used their abundant imaginations and creativity to pay homage to the literary classics, trying to build artistic connections with the contemporary world.

Titled "Encounter of Imagination: Dialogue between The Divine Comedy and Classic of Mountains and Seas," the exhibition underway at the Pearl Art Museum through February 20 presents more than 70 works from Italy and China in a rich array of means, including archives, paintings, prints, paper-cuts, installations, videos and artists' books.

"The Divine Comedy" and "The Classic of Mountains and Seas" both shine with the magic of fantasy and magnificence.

To mark the 700th anniversary of the death of Dante, the poet and father of the Italian language, the first part of the exhibition showcases new artworks related to the epic masterpiece "The Divine Comedy," created by five Italian artists: Silvia Camporesi, Leone Contini,



Leone Contini's installation "Purgatory Mountain," rubbles, soil and plants — Courtesy of Pearl Art Museum

Valentina Furian, Marta Roberti and Marinella Senatore.

One of the highlights of the first part is Contini's latest work called "Purgatory Mountain." The installation is made up of fragments of building rubble, soil and plants — a reconstruction of Dante's mountain of atonement.

The work has been central in Contini's research for some years: artificial and spiral-like hills built in many European cities from the rubble of buildings destroyed during World War II; and

"purgatorial" places of the contemporary age, where war devastation has been turned into something for civic use in the shape of public green spaces.

The corresponding Chinese section focuses on the ancient mythical text "The Classic of Mountains and Seas." As the second part of the exhibition, it features distinctive pieces by seven Chinese artists: Chai Yiming, Peng Wei, Qiu Anxiong, Shao Yinong, Sun Xun, Wu Jian'an and Wu Junyong.

Using visual art to activate older texts, all the participating artists aim to build a new era of dialogue between the Chinese and European cultural past.

"The Classic of Mountains and Seas" is widely considered as the one of the most magnificent Chinese ancient books compiled during the Warring States Period (475-221 BC).

Today, there are 18 chapters in "The Classic of Mountains and Seas." Although there are only 31,000 characters in the entire book, it features more than 5,300 named mountains, over 250 named bodies of water, more than 120 kinds of animals and over 50 kinds of plants.

Besides myths and legends, the book offers enlightenment and evidence on matters related to geography, history, religion, folklore, astronomy and calendars, animals, plants, minerals, medicine, anthropology, ethnology, geology and even oceanography.

The artworks in this section are not intended to be the "illustrated footnotes" to the original text, but rather a visual adventure full of Eastern philosophical and contemporary thoughts.

For example, Qiu created an amusing set of illustrations for his own version of "New Classic of Mountains and Seas" via traditional woodcut printing techniques, providing these new and strange animals with authentic stories about their origins.

Dates: Through February 20, 2022 (closed on Mondays), Tuesdays-Thursdays, 10am-7pm; Fridays-Sundays, 10am-10pm
Tickets: 80 yuan
Venue: Pearl Art Museum
Address: 8/F, Aegean Shopping Center, 1588 Wuzhong Road