

# **Translation of Spirit – The Conversation between Psychiatrics and Art**

**Date: 2001.9.8~11.17**

**Location: Cheng Shiu University Office of Arts and Culture**

**Date: 2001.9.14~10.21**

**Location: Trend Art Gallery**

**Curators: Tsai Hsien-Yiu, Hsu Su-Chen**

**Artists: Feng Wei-Wen, Lee Huey Jiuan, Pong Hong-Zhi, Wang Shiu-Ru,  
Wang Wu-Shen, Liu Jiu-Liang, Liu Shr-Fen, Shi Jin-Hua, Abugy,  
Gau Show-lien, Chung Pu, Cheng Shuen-Ju, Lu Ming-Dae,  
Li Ming-Zhe, Liang Zen-Houng, Su Wong-Shen**

## **"Translating the Spirit-The Conversation between Psychiatrics and Art" Contemporary Art Exhibition --Analysis of the Spiritual World of the Contemporary Art in Taiwan**

By Hsu Su-Chen

In this era that both our spirit and body are full of desires, what has the status of our spirit become? Does the mental condition of the artists somehow implicate and reflect that of the general human being?

### **Tissue Differentiation and Mental Connection**

The spiritual world is boundless and is often out of our imagination. It is also an active area full of possibilities. With the rapid evolution of human civilization, our life experience has been changed constantly, but the learning about our spirit has never been stopped.

Ever since the publication of "Interpretations of Dreams" by Freud in 1900, psychoanalysis has continuously grown in the human world and developed in many fields. Among them, the two main streams are psychiatrics and art. During this period of time, they have had some conversions or some dialogues, but most of the time, they remained as two independent streams. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to see that from the early 20th century to date, these two fields still interact with each other. Reflecting in the medical field, the result is the constant amendments and arguments in analysis training and clinical therapy; and in the art field, it is the nutrients for creation. The art therapy in psychiatrics and the Surrealism Art and the Expressionism Art are the best examples.

In fact, since the ancient Grecian, people have associated artists with craziness. More interestingly, the so-called melancholia today was actually considered as "a property of a creative artist" in the time of Aristotle. This idea has prevailed for

several centuries. Although modern studies indicate the risk for the artists to encounter psychiatric diseases is similar to that for general population (Juda, 1953), the art from the 20th century has demonstrated the similarity between the two. For example, both the works of the schizophrenia and the Expressionists or the Surrealists described the inner world of the creators and they all use numerous strange obscure symbols. From here, it seems like the creation of the artists and the arts of the psychiatric patients actually have the same psychic apparatus and the diagnostic and therapeutic functions of art therapy for psychiatric patients may have the same effects for artists. He/she may analyze personal problems through artistic activities. This kind of inductive release may be a way for him/her to ease feelings and to prevent the hiding psychiatric problem from appearing. This certainly has its therapeutic effect. This apparatus can also be applied to the general population. Art has its meaning to the public and it actively affects the public, this is maybe why the human being is so attracted to art down through the ages.

### **The Fermentation of Art in Its Culture Plate**

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### **The Fermentation of Art in Its Culture Plate**

During art creation, the creators communicate in ways other than languages. This will help them to reduce their defensive mind-set and transform their original inner activities into their works. Therefore, using art creation as a way of expression can usually break the limit of the verbal language and through this conversion, the creators can express their opinions and feelings consciously or unconsciously. The artists have the ability to make their inner feelings become subjective, and the admirers may find their own windows while studying the works, reinterpret the materials and even analyze the motivation and psychology of the authors in creating the works. However, this does not completely reflect the mental condition of the author and the author is not responsible for the psychological part of his works; the admirers have left their present position and started a conversation in absentee. To predict the mental world of the creator, the admirer must enter the past world of the creator. Because there is always a distance between the past and the present, the admirer has to self-explain psychologically and then gradually blend into the process. Therefore, the admirer can often find some life qualities that are similar to theirs. With this projective effect, the admirer shifts their feelings and makes himself the main character.

All the mental status of art works has some substantive innate level. Sometimes it is obvious that the work implies something about the creator. Through the study in psychiatrics, we are hoping to remove the mask of the underlie meaning and to study the motivation of the creator in creating this work, that is, to understand the behavior pattern of a person via art. We want to not only provide our interpretation about art, but also go across the subject theories and study the origination of art as to express the basic care to the human.

We hypothesized that by studying the psychological nature of the works by the artists, we may find the purposes of human behaviors, that is, to study the psychological life and mind activity of the creators as to understand the behavioral motivation of individuals and groups. Through the way of exhibition, we may further understand the meanings of human existence and the phenomena of the social cultural activities

### **The Sensitivity Test of the Contemporary Art in Taiwan**

Studying psychiatrics and contemporary art, we found the same creation motivation in the creators from both fields and the psychic apparatus they are often involved. The opinions from the following sessions cover from the basic biological inner drive to the historical and cultural compositions. We do not intend to accept all theories and concepts entirely, however, the existence of an individual and the form of human behavior are themselves complicated and diverse. The establishing of each single theory requires the supports from other theories to be more completely understood. Therefore, the construction of the whole exhibition is to describe the relationship between conscious experiences and the human being by the introspection and analysis of humanity and the discussions on the "Existence" of human being. In the exhibition, we have some creators and their creators of the contemporary art in Taiwan related to psychology. We set the age of the creators at between 25 (born in 1976) and 55 (born in 1946) and the works have to be finished within the past five years. The purpose of this arrangement is to study how creators living in different eras

(before and after the martial law) and at different ages, express their feelings to the outer environment and the inner world in their works:

#### 1. "Playful Paradise":

The creation itself has a desire to play and is playful. The game therapy in psychiatrics and the playful property in art are both miraculous cures to mind relief. Just like life, the game is full of uncertainties and all kinds of possibilities. Converting the abstract game playing into the concrete behaviors can achieve the highest freedom. This completely absorbed playing behavior is the combination of an imaginary space and imagination. It usually becomes a part of the original life of a person and makes the person achieve satisfaction at this ecstatic and over joyful status. This attempt to pursue both physiological and psychological freedom also reflects the "unwilling to be controlled" nature of the human being.

#### 2. "Body Map":

For a long time, the Western Scientific Positivism has regarded the human body as an object and despised the study of human body as metaphysics. Such idea that body and spirit are separated has changed in the 20th century. Along with studies in psychiatrics, we now know that in addition to memorization and actual sensation, our body also stores the special code of our mind. The release of our spontaneous imagination from our unconscious world during art creation is an example of expressing our inner world in images. Through the senses of hearing, seeing, touching, tasting, and smelling, our body converts the real world into the spiritual world and stores the information in our unconscious world. This kind of body memory that cannot be explained at the knowledge level often reflects the most vivid truth about the individual. In contemporary, body also has conflicts with the restrictions of society and quite often became the battlefield for fighting with the restrictions. As a result, the contemporary artists like to use their works to reveal the real fields that the battles between our mind and body occur.

#### 3. "Spiritual Guidance":

In contrast to the playful desire, some creators also have the wish to create orders, including religion, belief, and meditation. This part is usually interpreted as a passive way to protect oneself from the reality, or use religion as a self-defense mechanism to escape from responsibilities, a conscious expression in searching for a protection for our mind outside of the reality. But some people consider this a mind integration of an individual, not the process of moral perfection as in a saint, therefore, is positive. They pay attention to the existence of their spirit, though a process similar to spiritual cultivation, deeply introspect and reflect about themselves. This is a way of purification and distillation. Indeed, at the turn point of the century, the human being is facing the ever-greater technology speeding and information turbulence. Religion has become the spiritual trust for many people in this mighty current. Among these people, many artists try to be the blacksmiths in the city jungle. Thus, the ancient religions and believes are refined and become the guidance of contemporary artists. New life philosophies of humanity, including the imagination of the unification of the nature and the human being are all being presented in the art works.

#### 4. "Childhood Photo Album":

Many problems in the adulthood are actually resulted from the childhood experiences or memories. This life photo album composed by the physical part, psychological part and memories of life can sometimes become the designated fate that one can never get rid of. Through the unconscious creation, the "appearing meaning" of the work shows the recent experience of the creator, but the "underlie meaning" of the work actually reveals the childhood experiences, which are no longer recalled in conscious state. The situations during childhood stored in the memory are also the inspiration for creation.

#### 5. "Cultural Symptom":

The condition of an individual also implies the structural changes of the society. Under the influences of the social environment, different space and different environmental atmosphere are often factors that affect the thoughts and behaviors of an individual. Here we move from the determination of instinct to the effects of culture and population, and discuss the social issues as the inspiration for creation. The social symptoms, including the reaction to the lost and negative pressure from life and any member of the society, family, and related person, the social symptoms derived in every individual is exogenous, as is different from the endogenous personal factors. Surrounded by the various exogenous factors, the artist is not an outsider, but the responder to the political trend and social system of the big environment.

#### **The Catalyst in the Spiritual World**

As we turned the last page of the 20th century and entered the 21st century, the cross-field and cross-subject developing trend of art will continue to glow in this century. But what is the substantial meaning of this development? Do the different subjects just become the adjectives of each other and then go their separate ways, or they have really incorporated with the other field and begun their interactions? The later, is the goal for this exhibition. We pick Psychiatics, the subject that is closely related to the art creation itself and to art history, as our first exploration. We would like to know if we can release art from its indigenous scope and enter the enchantment that cannot be explained by the creators, but appears over and over again in the works of the creators. With this exhibition, we hope to encourage the interaction and communication between different subjects and to open up a broader view for everyone. Today's contemporary art seems to be getting far away from the human. In this project, we use psychiatics as our topic to let the admirers have enough space for interpretation. This is the best way to decrease the distance between the admirers and the works, and it certainly promotes the controllability of the audience to the understanding of art works.

Therefore, the purpose of this exhibition is not to define "art" and "non-art", or "normal" and "abnormal", but to let the public feel the spirit the artists expressed while seeing these works that closely combine art and soul, instead of merely sensing the pure visual beauty. These works are not only the language of soul itself, but also the most honest truth of the heart. We hope the public will view psychiatics and art differently after experiencing the interaction and communication between the two. Communicating with another soul (the audience) through the activity of human mind (creative art) is the most important purpose of this exhibition.

Furthermore, we would like to propose a typical thinking pattern of the human being by studying the way that an artist presents his life experiences and opinions. The direction to this search is to start from caring the sorrows and happiness of an

individual then to consider the common feelings of the entire human being. Through this exhibition and the media and materials designed by the creators, the truthful inner experiences of the creators brought to the audience the cherishing life experience as one returns to him and an in-depth spiritual activity. With the works describing the individual experiences, human retrieve the connection of living and life.

This is an era that appearance constantly renewed and a society where outlook is beautiful but bizarre. With the new integration of psychology and physiology, this exhibition is no longer a short-term displaying activity; the new value of spirit from others' life experiences will lead to the understanding of oneself as well as the state of the society, and eventually renew our mind. We hope the spirit of reexamining the mind activity in this exhibition can renovate the materialized heart of the human being in this turmoil society.