

Chunming Yu and His Art

Yu Chunming was known as a talented artist in the Bay Area even when I first met him two years ago. His paintings bear a unique style that on one hand embodies his profound training in both Chinese and Western painting and on the other hand conveys an integration of Western humanism and Chinese habitation culture. What impresses me most about this artist is his persistent pursuit of portraying folk houses. Beginning in the 1980s, Yu made numerous trips to even the remotest areas in China and brought back thousands of sketches and snapshots of folk houses. Even his family's immigration to the U.S. in 1997 didn't change his path. Instead of relying on commercial paintings to make a living, Yu continues to paint folk houses. To me his decision signifies not only an artist's style and talents, but also a thinker's devotion, perseverance and wisdom. The recognition of his work both by critics and the public shows the value of his style: the distant gaze helps him depict folk houses that are close to reality and expressive of cultural implications.

Yu's recent paintings took a departure from his earlier realism, and revealed his new interest and new capacities in creating an imaginative world of his own. These paintings echoed Yu's long time thinking and reflection on history and traditions; conflicts and harmony between individual and family. While the subject matter is always his beloved folk houses and villages, integration of ancient fables and metaphors added new dimensions. Yu also innovatively brought lights into some of his images; they are now illuminated with warmth.

It is a great pleasure to witness a painter's experiments and evolution. Perhaps not everyone can fully appreciate the culture substance at once, but Yu's paintings never fail to provoke viewers' sense of longing for a world forever lost.

Dongfang Shao, Ph.D.
Curator and Head Librarian
East Asia Library
Stanford University