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Andy Chan Interview

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Interviewer: David Escobedo  
Artist: Andy Ho-Sui Chan  
Date/Time: 04/30/2011 2pm  
In person interview  
Location: artist’s studio in Chicago’s Chinatown on Cermak Ave.

Andy Chan at his exhibition at Palette & Chisel Academy of Fine Art in 2009.  
(Photo taken from exhibition blog with permission from Andy Chan and blogger, Chris Miller).

Bio: [by David Escobedo] Andy Chan is a Chinese immigrant that does a new style of Chinese traditional painting. His art career began in Hong Kong where he attended the Lingnan School and learned the Lingnan style of Chinese painting. Andy Chan is a well-known and established artist in his community in Chinatown Chicago. His art is beautifully done in composition and rendering. Andy is currently facing struggles with his health, which imposes on his ability to create large works and plans to make large art shows.

David Escobedo: So, I would like to get to know you a little more, and I’m really interested in your story, can you tell me a little bit about yourself?

Andy Chan: My name is Andy Chan, Andy Ho-Sui chan. I born in China. And I grow up and study in Hong Kong, then move to Canada, Vancouver. And stay there after the immigration. I made citizenship there in Canada. And then my father asked me to move here to Chicago. Now I live in Chicago forty---two years already. Before you were born.
DE: oh wow, that’s a long time.

AC: Yeah and my father open business. He want me to take over and stay with him so my wife and my son come over here then until now. So, In forty-two years I do my artwork; Chinese painting and teaching and oh the time passed so fast! Now I got many students and I did lots of Chinese paintings here and lots of time I demo here for the students of art schools or university like 10, or 20, 30, even 40 people. I demo or lecture for them. Or people ask me go to this school or some other place to lecture for them. So almost, many many times in the year and past last 30 years. So, even I have open business, I let my wife take care of that and I do my art work and teaching. So that’s what, that’s what my life. No? In past 30-35 years. Almost about the same. No?

DE: So what interested you in art and specifically the kind of art that you do?

AC: Now I’m doing Chinese painting. We call Lingnan School. Because our style from Congton [Canton?] and Hong Kong. So my teacher, Professor Chao Shao Ang, who live in Hong Kong, 60 years teaching over 10 thousand students. I learn brush painting from him. So we call Lingnan School. So, Lignan School the style is very alive. So we do all kinds of things. All kinds of subjects like flowers, bugs, animal, people, landscape. Everything. Ok. And that’s what I like. I do. I do water buffalo, horse, and tigers and flowers and bugs, and ants many many many things. All kinds of flowers. So the colors very beautiful too. The composition is very special. Change, change, change a lot. You know you can tell the, my painting, the colors so bright and beautiful. Right?

DE: Right.

AC: So this looks very strong.

DE: Yeah!

AC: Yeah that’s what I Like. So I still working on.

DE: So I read that you were born in Taishan right?

AC: Taishan. Yeah that’s right.

DE: and later you moved to Hong Kong where you attended the Lignan School, can you tell me more about your school?

AC: My teacher he had a studio called Cao ling Sai in Hong Kong. And all the students come to his studio and he teaching and demo and explain the painting and what he was doing and the strokes the composition and color. Everything. And tell us about the history, art history, and the details of the paintings. And we… we really paid attention in class and watched him do the paintings and we learn from him and we practice a lot. So that’s why we getting better, better, better. Many many of the classmates is very famous. They do very good painting. And of course
the time pass and we all getting old - 60 years old, 70 years old, and even 80 years old. So many students very famous.

DE: is the school still open?

AC: Yeah. And the world now. Split. They split. We a 3rd generation of Lingnan School and now we have 4, 5, and 6 generation of Lingnan School of students all over the world. Many many people. We don’t know how many people.

DE: That’s very impressive. So I read in a review, the one from palette and chisel, the writer commented that the Lingnan School was “perhaps the least traditional of all, having begun in the early twentieth century as an attempt to modernize Chinese culture,” What do you think about that?

AC: Lingnan School from Gao Jian fu, Gao Qifeng brother, my teachers teacher. So they at that time and Chinese painting, Cong Ton, The Cong Ton Chinese painting, that area, so they just copy the people. The Ming Chin Dynasty, the arts, they don’t want to change anything. So Gao Jian Fu, Gao Qifeng, The brothers, and Chen Shu Ren, and three others. Three masters, they wanted to do a different new style. They learn anything from old Chinese art history and they learn western painting and do something like water color, drawings, mixed together. So, old and new. East and west. Were all combination together. Do their best. Make a new style. So that what’s important in that school.

DE: Oh ok. I see. Where do you draw your inspiration from?

AC: mmm ?

DE: Where do you draw your inspiration from? For your artwork. Do you just draw from nature or from your experiences or…?

AC: Oh ok. Many ways. Of course the first thing is that you learn from your teacher. Now he teaches you and shows you how to, for example, like painting flowers. He show you how to do the steps painting a flowers, and the color, the compositions, the strokes, all that. Then you practice. Study it. And then you look at the real flowers… Excuse me a phone call. We… For me, I have lots of pictures, and videos and books, you know. Many many ways. Many many things. Anything I can get. Like horse, I bought a lot of books about horses. And I make the sketching, the pose, and shape. Anything I want to put in the painting. So I got a lot of information. Many many things. So then, after you do many many times, you remember how they look like. Like a tiger. I can start, do a tiger painting and start from the tail, or the body, or the feet. Anywhere, you know because the whole tiger it already in my mind. Chinese painting we don’t need to look at the real thing. You know. You remember that so that you can do it. So very interesting. It surprises people.

DE: Yeah I didn’t know that. That is very interesting. Do you ever address Asian or Asian American identity, themes, or history in your work?
AC: Oh yeah. Before I do the Chinese painting. When I was young I took western painting. Oil Painting. Portraiture, landscape, and still life and watercolor and lots of drawings. So, I knew very well about the western art history and of course Chinese history. So, when you are doing this you have to study a lot.

DE: Do you identify your work as Asian or Asian American?

AC: What?

DE: Would you consider your work Asian or Asian American?

AC: Of course even if you painting, sometimes you do the painting, the Chinese painting, for abstract style but you still, still do it on rice paper, and brushes, and Chinese painting colors and ink. So, compared to the old style our style is new. It’s a 21st century painting. So people like it. Still like it.

DE: Have you even been included in an exhibition that was labeled Asian or Asian American?

AC: Now. Like that’s what we doing now. It’s a, we have an art show. Its called east meets west. So it has Chinese painting and oil painting. 50 artists. And about 150 paintings at the Murphy Hill Gallery it’s 3333 W. Arthington St. the opening day is April 9 to May 20. Still on. So anybody like to go see it you can go there. They open from Tuesday to Saturday from 11 o’clock to 7 o’clock. They closed Sunday and Monday. So that’s East meets West about the culture and culture exchange. At the grand opening, that night we had about 500 people come. Very big show. 20 thousand square feet. Very big. Very nice place. So under the Chinese Artist Association of North America I organized the art show. So we have many many artist.

DE: Very interesting. Can you tell me of any recent projects you are working on currently besides the gallery?

AC: Something like what?

DE: Like…maybe I don’t know any plans you have for a future painting or something that you’re working on that’s kind of big right now?

AC: In the past 10 or 20 years my health very bad. So I have 2 times kidney stones already. 4 times surgery. Last year I had a stroke, a minor stroke. So I have high blood pressure, high cholesterol. So my health not that good. So, I do lighter things now. Easy things. And take it easy. And I sit there and do the paintings. I don’t want to work too hard and dangerous because I’m afraid I’ll have another stroke. Very bad for me. So I’m not planning to have big art shows and to Hong Kong, China, and Taiwan. You know. I didn’t planning anything about that. Just take it easy.

DE: I’m sorry to hear that.

AC: OK.
DE: Well, I think that about concludes the interview thank you for your time.

END

Work Samples: These photos were taken at Andy Chan’s Studio on May 25, 2011