

THE BATIKGUILD



A Forgotten Batik Legend in Taiwan - Ko Chuan Huang

Dr Hsin-tien Liao, Director-General of National Museum of History (Taiwan)

Before assuming the post of Director-General of the National Museum of History (NMH) three years ago, I knew very little about Ko Chuan Huang's (1919-2010) artworks. I did not realise that he had a close affiliation with our institution until I reviewed the history of NMH. One of his most noteworthy achievements was that he was selected by NMH to represent Taiwan in the Sao Paulo Biennial in the 1960s. Moreover, Mr HUANG was talented in many aspects: he was skillful in oil painting and watercolour, innovative in new photography techniques, and he discovered a simpler and more efficient way of making batik. It can even be said that he was somewhat a celebrity of his time, with his work broadcast on national television. As such, I have to regrettably admit that Huang is indeed a forgotten legend in Taiwan.

From my perspective as an art historian, I believe Ko Chuan Huang's batik artworks are especially important to Taiwanese art history. Not only is Huang's batik, with its 'cracked ice' style, visually shocking, it is also highly relevant to the modern Chinese painting movement in Taiwan in the 1970s. Artists at that time were struggling to combine Western abstract painting

and Eastern ink-wash painting, in their attempts to create a new style for a new age. Their pioneering style had aspirations to retain both traditional spirit as well as modern form on the painting surface. The prime aesthetic of Chinese art is the "vividness of *qi* and rhythm" (*qi yun sheng dong*), with such celestial philosophy being represented through organic lines and casual ink blots. Huang's "cracked ice" batik fulfilled this ideal of nature's representation, and furthermore represented a perfect amalgamation of Eastern and Western cultures. Examining various artists' works from the same period, I discover the predominant artistic language is of this kind of visual representation. Quite a lot of artists utilised the technique of frottage (*tuoin*) to replace brushworks (*bimo*); some splashed ink to create a surrealistic 'automatic fabric' on rice paper. HUANG was the only one who applied batik dye in correspondence to this art movement.

From this perspective, HUANG's batik art is unique, despite being somehow unfortunately overlooked in the art world. Lest we forget about him again, I would like to sincerely introduce the legacy of Ko Chuan Huang to dear readers in Taiwan, Asia and the whole world.



My father Ko Chuan Huang came across the eastern Batik half a century ago. Immensely popular among westerners, Batik served as a common language for eastern and western cultural interchanges. Huang thus began to create Batik works integrated with eastern and western painting elements.

In order to propel Batik from craft to the realm of pure art, Huang started to improve existing Batik techniques in his time and simplify complex dyeing and de-waxing procedures. As a result, painters could focus more of their time and energy on creative conceptualization. Huang expressed the patterns of objects such as tree trunks, flowing water, and mountains through Ice-Crack techniques to give his works a sense of playfulness.

Before he passed away, Huang taught his self-researched Ice-Crack Batik painting techniques in Taiwan, Malaysia, South Korea, Canada and so on. Thanks to the Internet, I have joined as a member of The Batik Guild on behalf of my late father and publicized his Batik artworks, hoping to enhance interchange with Batik enthusiasts all over the world and contribute to promoting Batik painting."

Ko Chuan Huang's son, Hou Ching Huang

