20th Century Chinese Female Artist Series
The Hong Kong Jockey Club Presents

SONG OF SPRING
PAN YU-LIN IN PARIS

TEACHER RESOURCE GUIDE
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Learning Objectives

- To understand the life and works of Pan Yu-Lin in the context of 20th century China.
- To appreciate Pan’s use of color, subject of painting, and the combining of Western and Chinese painting style.
- To stimulate students’ thought on the role of gender in contemporary society.

Proposed Outline

This resource guide provides additional information and educational activities for art educators who would like to bring their students to the exhibition. In considering how visual art education can benefit the overall development of youngsters, this resource guide is designed based on three principles: understanding art in context, communicating and interpreting art, and developing ideas. Exploring creative ideas and practices, it aims to connect aesthetic sensibilities, imagination, and thinking.
About the exhibition

Song of Spring: Pan Yu-Lin in Paris is exclusively supported and presented by The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust, the exhibition is the first major solo presentation of Pan Yu-Lin (1895-1977) in Hong Kong, and is the second instalment in ASHK’s 20th Century Chinese Female Artist Series. The exhibition explores Pan’s unique trajectory and significance to modern Chinese art history, and brings together over 60 pieces of her treasured works, many of which are grade one cultural relics, from the Anhui Museum which holds the largest collection of works bequeathed by the artist.

Born of humble origins, Pan came of age during the revolutionary May Fourth era and seized the chance to be one of the first Chinese students to study fine arts in France. Unlike most of her compatriots who built their artistic careers at home, Pan developed her unique style in the competitive Parisian art world from the 1930s until her death. Pan was the first Chinese artist to be collected by the City of Paris and followed by the National Museum of Modern Art in 1955.

With over sixty works of portraiture, nude, landscape, dance figure painting, and sculpture, the Exhibition explores Pan's second period in Paris, highlighting her artistic range and distinguished style that combines eastern and western sensibilities.

Curatorial Statement

Belonging to the first generation of Chinese students to study fine arts in France, Pan Yu-Lin (1895-1977) was a pioneer in modernizing Chinese art with western painting at a time when it was rare for women to achieve independent careers as professional artists. Pan was distinguished for her individual style that synthesized eastern and western sensibilities, as well as her academic contributions as one of the first female art professors in modern China. Unlike most of her compatriots who built their careers back home after overseas education, Pan came to live and develop her individual style in the competitive Parisian art world until her death. This exhibition explores Pan’s unique trajectory and significance to modern Chinese art history by focusing on her second period in France, with over sixty works across four chambers dedicated to the themes of portraiture, nudes, cityscape and landscape, and dance figure painting, alongside archival materials and videos that delve into a comprehensive look at the art world of Pan Yu-Lin.

Born in Yangzhou to humble origins, Pan came of age during a tumultuous era when China underwent rapid modernization influenced by western science and democracy. Under the radical intellectual currents of the 1919 May Fourth Movement, co-ed higher education was sanctioned and Pan seized the chance to enter the Shanghai Art Academy, thereafter travelling to France in 1921 on government scholarship to study fine arts. She spent almost a decade in Europe studying drawing, painting, and sculpture between Lyon, Paris, and Rome. The cornerstone of Pan’s western academic art training was life drawing, and already in her student days at the National School of Fine Arts in Paris, she excelled at figure painting, foreshadowing her signature mature works of female nudes. Yet, it was not so long ago that life drawing was still banned from women, as it was considered morally impure. In the 1910s, women life drawing with nude models provoked serious moral debates in France, which were echoed in Shanghai a decade later when life drawing was introduced in China. Art historian Linda Nochlin identifies this restriction as a significant obstacle to women’s artistic potential in her seminal essay, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” (1971), because the highest forms of painting all require mastery of painting the human figure. The taboo of life drawing in modern China. At the same time, Pan’s embodiment of the learned and independent new Republican woman speaks.

When Pan returned to Paris she lived in Montparnasse, the heart of artistic life and arguably world modernism, in the vibrant milieu of other artists such as Picasso, Delaunay, Chagall, Dali, Ernst, Foujita, and Sanyu. She also lived close by Académie de la Grande Chaumière, a laissez faire art school that provided models and studio space on cheap entrance fee. The many striking portraits Pan completed during her time working in the Grande Chaumière opens the exhibition. In Chinese art, portraiture was never an esteemed genre, but in western art history, portraiture had historically asserted the status of the sitter. The fact that Pan, a Chinese woman artist, often depicted herself at the easel bears unique significance: an assertion of her individual identity and the appropriation of western art modality for new expressions in modern Chinese art. Pan’s iconic works of the nude—the genre that she dedicated her life’s effort to experiment and develop—continue the exhibition. Depicted in sketches, ink and color, and oil, Pan’s female nudes reveal how she could capture the natural expression of the body involved in activities like dressing, reading, or even sleeping, with her subjects often oblivious to our gaze, completely at ease in their physicality. Many of Pan’s nudes combined the fluid lines of Chinese calligraphy with western pointillist approach to color, creating a unique modern aesthetic that bridges eastern and western sensibilities. Pan’s female nudes broke down creative and gender stereotypes by symbolically appropriating what had strictly been a male privilege. It is also interesting that Pan often represented women of color, possibly speaking to her experience as an émigré artist in France. The exhibition concludes on a flourish with Pan’s humanistic vision in a series of dancing women that spotlight free expression of the female body in idyllic visions, as well as reveal her ability to translate the vitality of three-dimensional human body on canvas.

Pan’s success at finding her own artistic voice is marked by being the only Chinese female artist considered part of the School of Paris, a diverse group of expatriate artists against the conservative academic style who infused their modernism with their native culture. Pan widely exhibited in the salon circuit and was the first Chinese artist to be collected by the City of Paris in 1942, and then by the National Museum of Modern Art, which would later become part of Centre Pompidou, in 1955. She won numerous awards overseas throughout her career, with her proudest achievement being the 1959 Thorlet award from the University of Paris granted by the municipal government. As the first ever solo exhibition of Pan Yu-Lin in Hong Kong, this exhibition brings treasured works, many grade one cultural relics, from the Anhui Provincial Museum, which holds the largest collection of Pan donated by the artist upon her death, to local audience in a rare presentation. The life and art of Pan Yu-Lin is invaluable for learning about the impact of Western painting on modern Chinese art and the significance of revolutionizing culture in the making of modern China. At the same time, Pan’s embodiment of the learned and independent new Republican woman speaks to the greater history of Chinese female emancipation and sheds light on contemporary gender discourses that are increasingly urgent today. This exhibition is curated by Dr. Eric Lefeuvre, Director of Cernuschi Museum in Paris, with Joyce Hei-ting Wong as assistant curator.
CHAPTER 1: Knowing the Artist

1.1 Era of Pan Yu-Lin

Pan Yu-Lin was born in Yangzhou to an ordinary family. She lost her father at the age of one and lost her mother at the age of eight. Living with her uncle and without a solid economic and social backing, there was no opportunity to receive education, let alone art education. However, along Pan’s growing up years in the early 20th century, national salvation and social reform had brought about an urge of educational reform to allow girls’ access to public education. In art, the first change was teaching needlework and drawing in girls’ school, as reformers considered the mission of girls’ school was to foster “good wives and kind mothers”. Later, the reform expanded to art education, allowing girls to enrol in co-ed art colleges and the newly formed girl’s art schools. In her 19, Pan Yu-Lin married Pan Zaihui (1885-1959), an open-minded army officer and writer who supported the revolution. Since then, Pan was admitted to girls’ secondary school and China’s first co-ed art college, the Shanghai Art Academy. Having the chance to receive art education, Pan embarked on a path to becoming an art professional.

Besides education reform, the tide of national salvation also provoked propositions for “new woman”—They are working women independent of men, economically and morally. Liang Qichao (1873-1929), for instance, warned that a nation without women’s education will lose half of its productivity. In his formulation, women without education cannot develop their initiative to work alone and have to rely on men’s leadership. To save the country, one must transform women from “share” to “producer” of national power. Later, Qiu Jin (1875-1907), the revolution heroine, reformulated Liang’s notion from a feminist point of view, “it is thus natural that those learned, insightful and hardworking men had the rights and we become their slaves”. Qiu argued that in order to strive for the equal rights of men and women, women need to be as knowledgeable and productive as men. From the 1920s, career woman became more common and was widely discussed in media. In June 1924, the Ladies’ Journal published their Special Issue on Work Problems. One of the writers observed that there were three types of working woman. First, the “working woman for life” type, those who did not have sufficient family income and found it necessary to work for extra income. Second, the “awakened working woman” type, these well-educated women were aware of the importance of independence and wished to seek a professional practice. The third type was the “working woman for leisure” type which worked not because of economic reason but to beat boredom. Pan Yu-Lin belonged to the type of “awakened working woman”.

1.2 Pursuing a personal style

Early in 1917, As a student of Shanghai Girl’s Secondary School, Pan Yu-Lin developed her interest in art from the embroidery classes. As a result, in 1917, Pan sought to learn painting at the private lesson by Hong Yee (1889-1932), a professor from the acclaimed Shanghai Art Academy who specialized in the teaching of colour theory. As one can find the frequent use of complementary colours in Pan’s painting, Hong’s lecture, which possibly involved a lot about colour theory, could already make an influence on Pan.

In 1920, encouraged by Hong Yee and recommended by Liu Haisu (1896-1994), the schoolmaster of Shanghai Art Academy, Pan was admitted to the Shanghai Art Academy to pursue a tertiary education in art. Under the influence of Cai Yuanpei’s (1868-1945) aesthetics education reform, the once vocational Shanghai Art Academy was repositioned for fine art education. Since then, painting, sculpture, music, art history, and foreign languages were taught in the academy. Flourished with art societies, exhibitions, art publications, this new environment shed new light on Pan—To be a painter can be professional, intellectual and with high social status.

In July 1921, Pan was accepted by the Lyon Sino-France College with state stipend, beginning her 8-year-long art studies in Europe. Pan first studied at the National School of Fine Arts of Lyon. From 1922, Pan studied painting after the academic masters Pascal Dagnan-Bouveret (1902-1929) and Lucien Simon (1961-1945) in Paris and was admitted to National School of Fine Arts of Paris in 1924. In 1925, Pan moved again to Rome to study sculpture and painting and earned a diploma from Academy of Fine Arts of Rome. The academic training Pan received in Europe provided intensive courses on nude studies, laying a solid foundation for her later female nude paintings. Outside of the academy, Pan also followed the trending modernist painting, assimilating the outdoor sketching technique of Impressionism.

From 1928 to 1937, Pan returned to China to assume professorships in Shanghai Art Academy and Central University in Nanjing. In this period, Pan began to develop an interest in national culture. She organized outdoor sketching to Anhui, Beijing, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Shandong, and Jiangxi to capture national scenic treasure, albeit using Western painting technique. Pan also visited some ink painting master during 1930s, namely Qi Baishi (1864-1957) and Zhang Daqian (1899-1983). Attempting to synthesize Chinese and Western painting, in 1937 Pan developed her “New Linear Drawing”, a technique which uses calligraphic lines in life drawing.

While Pan was busy at academic and social activities as a university professor, Pan feared that her artistic development was stagnant. In 1937, Pan sojourned to France again for inspiration. Early in her second period in France, absorbing the passionate and vivid colour of modernist paintings, such as those by Renoir, Cézanne and Matisses, Pan got rid of her naturalistic colour and began to paint with vibrant colour.

The early 1950s marks the mature period of Pan’s stylistic development. Learning from historical and modern Chinese paintings, she employed elements from Chinese literati painting in her watercolour works, such as mountain-rock, colonne structures, flat perspective, light and colour, and using blank areas, creating a unique visual style of synthesized eastern and western sensibilities. One should be aware of that until now, in Pan’s painting, colouring and figure drawing were still done with Western techniques (i.e. anatomically accurate).

At the end of the 1950s, Pan transcended the limit of life drawing and began to paint her imagined paradise. After years of life drawing practice, Pan was able to create the Song of Spring series and the dance series, inhabiting imagined, poetic figures (nude or clothed) on the delightful landscape of waterside and meadow. In this period, Pan also explored the composition of horizontal scroll such as the “Singing and Dancing” in this exhibition, reflecting her lifelong commitment of synthesizing eastern and western art.

Discussion
Assume you have chosen art as your lifetime career. Which path will you choose? Applied arts or fine arts?

Suggested Answer
Students should define applied arts and fine arts with examples.

Students may answer freely. They can justify their answer with economic reason, social status, parents’ expectation, job satisfaction, and personal goal etc.
CHAPTER 2: Knowing the Art

2.1 Line, Brush and Ink

Traditional Western painting places a high importance on religious and history painting where these genres, fabricated with a stage of human figures, in turn, place high importance on life drawing. To excel in life drawing, one must study human anatomy and practice through life modal sketching. Life drawing emphasizes the realistic depiction of body proportion, muscles, bones, volume, posture, and light and shadow. Conversely, traditional Chinese painting emphasizes “spiritual likeness” which puts formal likeness to a lower attention. Learners practice human figure drawing from drawing guidebook—They learn by copying sample posture as well as facial elements and by understanding the theory of human gesture and emotion. Calligraphic lines are the foundation and passion element of the human figure, while ink wash and colour can be added to texture the figure. “Linear figure drawing” is a variant of Chinese painting which colour, texture stroke and ink wash are omitted, leaving alone the calligraphic lines to manifest the human figure.

2.2 Color

Pan Yu-Lin have a special interest in colour. According to Pan, colour triggered her enthusiasm for art and her determination to become a painter, not to mention that Hong Yee, Pan’s first painting teacher, is a professor who specializes in color theory. Colour theory is a set of practical knowledge developed to enhance visual effects. The theory divides colour into two contrasting ends, i.e., the cool colours of “purple, blue, green” and the warm colours of “red, orange, yellow” where the former is associated with stimulation and passion while the latter is associated with relaxation and calm. Modernist painting movement, e.g. Impressionism, Post-impressionism and Fauvism, all applied colours according to the principle of colour theory, unleashing a powerful visual and emotional impact. Upon her second travel to France, Pan paid special attention to the “colourist” masterpieces from Impressionism to Fauvism and assimilated their colouring methods into her painting.

Activity

Prepare a picture of an object. The size of the picture should be about the size of an A3 paper. Each student picks one drawing tool to do the line drawing of his/her object. (Drawing tool option: pencil, marker pan, Chinese ink brush, flat head paint brush.)

- Discuss the pros and cons of these drawing tools.
- Compare the visual differences of the lines drawn by different drawing tool.
- Discuss the relation between the forms of line and the chosen object. Describe what feeling the lines have gave to the object.

Discussion

Appreciate Pan Yu-Lin’s nude painting 23 and 24.

1. Identify the similarities of the use of lines in these painting. (long or short / thick or thin / dark or light / solid or void)
2. Base on 23 A Female Body Lying on Her Back, explain the characteristics of “Linear figure drawing”.
3. Do you think the use of lines in these painting matches the female body? Why? (strong / delicate?)
2.3 Figural forms

There are numerous examples in figure painting as artists can employ visual language in different ways corresponding to their attitude toward the human body. The artist's choice is essential to the creation of a unique style. Lines—this element that defines the nude from the background. How would hard and angular? Or... 

3.2 Figural forms

The figural forms in Pan Yu-Lin’s painting can be summarized into three major types: Pan’s earliest figures found their origin from Dagnan, her painting teacher in France who is one of the leading naturalist painters. Naturalism is an aesthetic movement that applied different art forms in figure painting. Naturalism features an impartial realistic rendering of the human model, rejecting both idealization and abstraction. Later, Pan employed a slight change to the model’s realistic form to express her attitude toward the nude genre. Lastly, with reference to the planar and simplifying attribute of classical Chinese painting, Pan developed her third style in which she created elegant imaginary female figures based on her lifelong experience in life drawing.

Discussion

Appreciate 20 21 22
Discussion: how painting can show the beauty of human figures. By realistic form? By abstraction? By idealization?

Activity

Collect images of figure painting and classify according to beauty.

- Realistic form
- Abstract form
- Idealized form

Discuss in class the similarities of the collected paintings. Students can discuss the artists’ aims, ideas and visual impacts.

4.2 Social and Private Lives of Women

The works of Pan Yu-Lin cover a wide variety of subject matters such as figure painting, still life, landscape, and allegorical paintings. In short, these are the subjects derived from the academic art training she received in the early stage. Later, inspired by Impressionism as well as their passion for capturing outdoor scenery and everyday life, Pan also painted numerous small cityscapes on the street with rough brush strokes and vivid colour, recording the people and the environment around her.

Pan is well aware of her woman artist identity and she reintegrated each subject matter from a woman’s point of view. One may compare Pan with Mary Cassatt (1844-1926), a woman Impressionist painter who pioneered in recording the life of 19th century new women. From Pan’s cityscapes works, we can notice her special attention to women’s everyday life, like chatting, reading, afternoon tea, drinking, resting in parks, child caring, and dating.

Discussion

Appreciate 17
1. The artist composed this painting by combining serval individual figure paintings made earlier.
2. In the exhibition, please find out those individual figure paintings from the collage.
3. Discuss why the artist chooses to paint these people. Find out the similarities between them.

Activity

1. Discuss the daily life of Hong Kong people between us. Pick a specific group of Hong Kong people (e.g. male / female / social class / age group / ethnically) and create a collage for them.
2. Collect images related to the group’s daily life from your own photo or the Internet. Choose the characters you interested and print them out. Cut the characters out and paste it on the collage. From this collage, students can discuss the relationship between the characters and the environment. It can think of a title to conclude the theme of the collage.
CHAPTER 3: Woman Artist and 20th Century China

3.1 New Woman and Artistic Creation

In her groundbreaking essay Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?, Linda Nochlin points out that the reason why there are so few women artists in history is not because of the different innate talent between men and women, but is due to an institutional discrimination against women. What influences can an unfair social institution bring about? In education, do boys and girls have an equal opportunity to study what they want? For a career, can women make their living with art? In terms of artistic freedom, is there any topic is taboo for women artists? Concerning family status, will the pressure of family care force the artist to give up her artist pursuit?

According to academic studies, in premodern China, only women from the particular class might have the chance to become artists. They were daughters, wives and female relatives of scholar-officials which were better known as gentry women—They belonged to the leisure class who had access to art and knowledge, plus they were free from the burden of family duty. Besides, there were some opportunities for courtian and singing girls, too. As times have changed, the Republican administration began to reform women’s education. In such background, Pan Yu-Lin seized the opportunity to learn by entering the Shanghai Girls’ Secondary School for general education and subsequently the Shanghai Art Academy for studying Western painting.

There were two new trends emerged in the rapidly changing Republican art scene. On one hand, some suggested women should choose applied arts such as sewing and embroidery as their career option. On the other hand, Cai Yuanpei’s Aesthetic Education ideal set off a new wave of reform for fine arts education. Generally speaking, women from Pan’s time will choose the former, given that many of the women’s art schools at that time were vocational. Daring to succeed, Pan chose to pursue fine arts education, a path more difficult to attain but with higher social status. In 1921, Pan was accepted by the Lyon Sino-Franco College with state stipend, enabling her to study art in France and Italian for the next eight years.

On her return to China, Pan’s primary objective was to seek a stable source of income to finance her artistic creation as her state stipend was ended. She did not want to rely financially on her husband but to share the cost together. In an interview in 1936, Pan mentioned her view on family finance,

“Some family adopt a total financial independence which leads to so many problems. No matter how much the wife can save, she cannot stop the husband from overspending. I support the disclosure of family account and the practice of family accounting. Husband and wife should share both prosperity and adversity.”

As a result, Pan chose to teach at the state-funded Central University instead of the reputable but lower-paid Shanghai Art Academy for higher income. Much later, the fact proved that Pan’s decision was wise, as the high income freed Pan from part-time teaching jobs, allowing her to spend more time on her own artistic creation.

Discussion

1. Please find a woman artist whom you think is great. Why do you think she is great?

Suggested Answer

This discussion requires students to collect information such as the biography and the creative path of a woman artist. By doing so, students try to understand the different circumstances between men and women artist. Students also can examine the different criteria for success between men and woman artist.

During 1928-1937, Pan achieved tremendous scholastic success, breaking the gender stereotype of “Man are breadwinners, and women are homemakers”. Since, 1929, Pan was promoted from lecturer to associate professor and to full professor. Speaking of exhibitions, Pan organized five solo exhibitions in ten years and regularly participated in the National Art Exhibition of Ministry of Education, the highest ranking exhibition at that time. Pan also networked with other artists frequently and co-founded art societies with them, such as Moshe in 1932, Chinese Art Association in 1933 and the National Art Society in 1937. Furthermore, Pan had a high social visibility which her latest activities were mentioned by newspapers, like her intention to visit the Paris World Expo. Also, the media frequently addressed Pan as Professor Pan, this further provides evidence for her high social status.

In 1937, Pan travelled again to Europe for further inspiration and settled in Montparnasse, the international modernist community. One could never imagine that Pan never returned to China throughout her lifetime. For a married woman, leaving her family and pursuing a career as a professional artist aboard, this is unthinkable at that time and debatable even today. Early in 1938, Pan already showed her mind-blowing thought, “Couples should not live together all year long. There must be several short separations. This is the way to maintain the couples’ love”.

Since 1945, Socialist realism had taken the orthodox position in Chinese art. Although it put an emphasis on life drawing, Pan’s favourite genre, Pan refused to return and stayed in Paris for pursuing artistic freedom.

Scholar summarized the Chinese women artists from the first half of the 20th Century into three categories. 1) new gentry women who inherited the Chinese painting tradition. 2) new woman in the Western painting movement. 3) women painters who engaged in the revolution. Born into the age of rigorous social reform, Pan seized the new opportunities available to women to pursuit fine art education, economic autonomy and an influential career. Struggling for a place in the international art scene of Montparnasse, she also showed an ambition comparable to men artists. To sum up, Pan belongs to the second type, her artistic pursuit shows many attributes of “new woman”—autonomous, ambitious and independent. Among the “new woman in the Western painting movement”, only Fang Jundi, another woman artist who moved aboard for art, can compare with Pan.
3.2 Female nude and Montparnasse Modernism

Female nude is unquestionably the most representative genre of Pan Yu-Lin’s painting. Firstly, Pan’s contemporaries of the Republican period recognized her remarkable accomplishment in nude drawing and remarked it in their publication. Secondly, Pan referred to Sanyu’s work by adding white shoe series, no matter they are nude or clothed, are from 1952 with th

Discussion

Pan’s female nudes are painted in a realistic style with a solid and complete body, showing nothing of sexual intent but a sense of self-content. Sometimes, Pan also showed direct opposition to the “degenerate” nude by her contemporary artists. In her Women Peeping at the Window shown in this exhibition, Pan referred to Sanyu’s work by adding white shoe and showing big thighs in the centre of the painting. Unlike Sanyu’s sexist nude, Pan gives her models an intact body and individuality—they are not the exploited model. They are not looked but looking. They are human.

When women painters paint a female nude, she can do a life drawing of herself, creating the artist’s presence and a biographical sense to the painting. Just like the Song of Spring, this series projected Pan’s imagination for a paradise of women’s culture. One may compare the Song of Spring from 1932 with A Party in the Garden. Having known that the latter was enlarged into a painting as large as the Song of Spring, one can imagine that these two paintings are closely related to each other. Indeed, A Party in the Garden can be viewed as the gathering of women from the present world while Song of Spring represents the culture of women in paradise. In short, all the women from Pan’s Song of Spring series and the Singing and Dancing series, no matter they are nude or clothed, are the incarnation of Pan’s ideal community of women’s culture.

To conclude, on one hand, the genre of female nude acted as a vehicle for Pan to connect to the School of Paris of Montparnasse. From the fact that Pan was later introduced as one of the only two Asian artists in a documentary film about Montparnasse, we knew that Pan has incorporated in the Montparnasse art circle as an important artist. On the other hand, Pan reinterpreted the female nude from a woman’s point of view and avoided the “degenerate” style that objectifies women. Fusing the Western life drawing technique and the ink and brush from Chinese painting, Pan created her unique visual style of synthesized eastern and western sensibilities.
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