

## **Ha Bik-chuen (2004)**

**Lam Suet Hung, Anne**

Ha Bik-chuen was born in a simple Chinese family. In 1949, he fled to Macau and eventually settled in Hong Kong in 1957. Living in grinding poverty in his childhood and experiencing the difficult wartime period, he could not get any formal training in art. In his early years in Hong Kong, Ha earned his living by making decorative mirrors, paper flowers and bamboo baskets. In a flash of time, he had engaged in the making of handicrafts for more than thirty years. Nevertheless, his zeal and quest for artistic endeavor remained unchanged despite years of trials and tribulations. On the contrary, the difficulty of real life was transformed into colorful and well-constructed abstract symbols in his works, fully manifesting his optimism, self-confidence and persistence in artistic endeavor.

As a self-educated artist with initiative, Ha Bik-chuen never confines himself to certain art media. From sculptures, prints, photographs to ink paintings in recent years, the artist, with his spirit of exploration, has endowed his artworks with strong characters and local characteristics. Life in Hong Kong in the sixties was rather difficult. Even though Ha did not have spare money to buy books of art, he still frequented evening stalls, browsing through pages of relevant magazines to enrich himself. His job as a technician also gave him training in the processing of different materials and use of different production tools. In the early seventies, he began to use materials such as bamboo and iron for making sculptures. Ha's artistic career began with processing stuff easily available from nature with his exquisite skills.

To the artist himself, daily life is a spring for his artistic inspiration, raw materials for making art can be picked up everywhere. Like a pair of old shoes from his son, a crushed tin can... artist can render them with personality like a magician, to tell people his feelings towards city life. Pairs of old boots explore human relationships like the problems of identity, gender, social status, etc. Wooden textures become humorous facial expressions to make busy visitors laugh from their hearts. As said by the artist, the 'Boots and Figurative' series satisfied his desire of 'making art out of old stuff', and fulfilled the old oriental philosophy: 'magic of immortalizing the decayed' at the same time.

In 1964, Ha met the famous sculptor Mr. Cheung Yee, who was holding an exhibition of prints at the Hong Kong City Hall. This meeting kicked off Ha's artistic creation of print. Print in this period was mainly made from wood carving, which represented a continuation of Ha's sculpture made of easily available stuff. These prints were chiefly made up of natural elements, with leaves being the most commonly used. To the artist, even a flower or a leaf embodies the mystery of the nature. "A flower, a world; a leave, a Bodhi tree", they represent the advance and retreat of four seasons and the ever-revolving cycle of life. After 1984, Ha attempted to add new elements into his print.

Harmonious colors have been turned vibrant while static images vivacious. The grain of natural wood has been replaced by carton paper and prints have become diagrams for practicing *qigong* (deep breathing exercises).

Moving into the 21st century, Ha's artistic life enters into a brand new phase — creation of ink painting. Different from sculpture and print, ink painting carries with it a strong Chinese tradition and constraints. To break away from traditional ink painting, Ha focuses on the tone of ink painting to bring out the texture of sculpture. Through repeated experiments, the artist has invented a unique brushwork that creates an effect of gradation characterized by overlapping ink spots, then exaggerates the focal part with heavy ink application. In this exhibition, visitors will have the opportunity to view this groundbreaking ink painting technique. As for subject matter, Ha attempts to draw inspiration from ancient Chinese characters as well as daily life experience, in an effort to open up a new vision on traditional media for visitors and to shed light on new possibilities for Chinese ink painting.

Apart from sculpture and ink painting, this exhibition also features Ha's photographic works over the past twenty years. Photography has not only trained the observation skills of the artist, but also enriched Ha's creative inspiration. This batch of photos, on a premiere exhibition in Hong Kong, has recorded images of numerous Hong Kong and Mainland artists and scenes of exhibitions, and has all along been stowed away at Ha's home, waiting for its best destiny. From 1992 to 2003, I made several visits to Ha's workshop, where I came across this batch of photos and learned more about the development of the art circle in Hong Kong. I was also deeply impressed by the undeclared support his wife gave him. May I wish that this batch of invaluable photos, together with the Ha's couple themselves, be recognized and cherished. After all, it is indeed worthy of praise to be able to persist in artistic creation for half a century in such a commercial society as Hong Kong.

## 夏碧泉(2004)

林雪虹

夏碧泉出生於一個樸素的中國家庭，1949年逃難至澳門，輾轉於1957年來港定居。自小清貧的生活和艱苦的抗戰年代令他沒法接受正規的藝術教育。來港定居初期夏氏以裝飾鏡屏、製作人造紙花和織籃為生，技工的歲月一晃已超過三十多年。但艱辛的歲月並沒有磨滅夏氏對藝術的熱衷和追求。相反地，現實生活裡的困苦在他的作品中幻化成色彩斑斕、結構嚴謹的抽象符號，充分表現了他樂觀自信的性格和對藝術創作的執著。

作為一位自學自發的藝術家，夏碧泉從不局限於某類特定的素材。從雕塑、版畫、攝影以至近年的水墨畫創作，藝術家本著探索者的精神創造出賦有強烈個性及本土特色的作品。六十年代的香港生活頗為困苦，儘管沒有閒錢購買美術書籍，夏氏仍經常流連於夜市攤檔翻看有關雜誌以

充實自己。作為技工的操練亦令他慣於處理不同的物料和掌握各種製作工具。七零年代初，他開始以竹、鐵等物料製作雕塑。大自然的俯拾物配以卓越的手藝開展了夏氏的創作生涯。

對於夏氏來說，日常生活是他創作靈感的泉源，藝術素材更是俯拾皆是。兒子的舊皮鞋、壓扁的金屬罐……藝術家如變魔法般賦予它們獨特的個性來訴說城市生活的點滴：一雙一對的靴子探討人與人之間諸如身份、性別、地位等等的問題；木版的紋理變成了富有幽默感的表情，令忙碌的城市人發出會心微笑。正如藝術家所言，〈靴·人系列〉實現了他多年來「將破舊東西變成藝術品」的宿願，亦體現了「化腐朽為神奇」這古老的東方生活哲學。

**1964**年夏氏認識了當時在香港大會堂舉行版畫展的著名雕塑家張義先生。此次會面啟動了夏氏的版畫創作。這時期的版畫以木刻為主，亦是夏氏俯拾雕塑的延續。這批版畫以自然元素為主，其中以樹葉最為常見。對藝術家而言，一花一葉都包含大自然的奧秘。「一花一世界，一葉一菩提」，它們代表著四季的興替和生生不息的輪迴。**1984**年後，夏氏嘗試為他的版畫加入新的元素：和諧的色彩和靜態的造形變成了色彩鮮艷的天真人物；瓦通紙取代了自然的木紋，版畫變成了練習氣功的圖象。

踏入廿一世紀，夏氏的藝術生涯又進入了一個全新的階段——水墨畫的創作。跟雕塑及版畫不同，水墨畫有著強烈的中國傳統及規限。為了在傳統的水墨畫上進行突破，夏氏著眼在水墨畫的紋理上帶出雕塑的質感。通過反覆試驗，藝術家發明了一種獨特的筆法，以重疊的小墨點製造出一種漸變的效果，再以重墨渲染焦點部分。在這次展覽中，觀眾便有機會一睹這種嶄新的水墨技巧。至於題材方面，夏氏嘗試在古老的中國文字中摘取靈感，再結合日常的生活體驗，以求在傳統的媒體上為觀眾開拓新的視野，為中國水墨畫揭示新的可能性。

除了雕塑及水墨畫外，是次展覽亦展出了夏氏廿多年來的攝影作品。攝影除了鍛鍊藝術家的觀察力，亦豐富了夏氏的創作靈感。這批首次在香港展出的相片紀錄了無數香港和國內藝術家的形象和展覽實況，一直收藏在夏氏的家中，等待最佳的歸宿。**1992**至**2003**年期間多次到訪夏氏的工作室，有機會接觸這批照片，對香港藝壇的發展有了更深入的理解，而夏夫人對丈夫的默默支持亦留下深刻的印象。在此祝願這批珍貴的相片和夏氏夫婦一樣，能得到大家的認同與珍惜，畢竟在香港這個商業社會中能堅持藝術創作半個世紀實在是難能可貴的。

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