

Cheng's visual dynamic of line, color, and space is music to our internal world and it beckons the curious eye to follow her on her adventure, demanding that one look hard at the flowing lines and swirls and blocks of inviting color—from rich, deep blues to pulsing reds, from soft swirls of green to invitingly enigmatic grey—so as to make the experience one's own so that it will travel in the mind wherever one goes.

Works such as *Ancestors/ Genealogy* (2008), with its quiet images that speak subtly but vigorously of the cultures of both the East and the West; *LotusTangle – Summer* (2004), with its rich blue pools of color surrounding an enigmatic leaf with its center glowing like a sun is held together by flowing green, black, and brown lines that can be seen as nature's umbilical cords that are forever within nature, and *Flouertree – Spring* (2004), which speaks, within its swirling green circles, of the fecundity of nature and its great diversity of forms. At the same time, these paintings have a flower or a leaf in their centers that suggests an opening into a world beyond. These works, like so many of Cheng's creations, are electric in their lyricism, and are like small vibrant tapestries of abstraction from a magical place

that is both organic and cosmic. Occasionally one half expects Alice to skip out of the heart of this Wonderland.

Emily Cheng's art is also an expression of pure emotion, one that, when it is audaciously fresh and geometrically nuanced, engages the eye and the imagination immediately. Cheng breathes such a force of life into her organic images that one must sit up and take notice. This is only possible because she understands colors and their myriad hues in making art live. Cheng has that exquisite gift of the meticulous and well-informed artist to see all art, from whatever period, as a colossal entity pulsing with life that speaks across time to inform even the most cutting-edge work in the contemporary visual arts canon.

There are certainly viewers who will see Cheng's art as merely decorative. There is a strong decorative element in her art, which cannot be denied, but it is of the surface. Behind her colorful surfaces and within the spaces of her lightly textured surfaces, Cheng seeks something of the spiritual truth that lives beyond our ken and which only reveals itself at odd moments in life. That these moments may be the result of a Buddhist or Christian revelation is not important to Cheng;

what is important is that they happen and must be grasped if we are to understand ourselves and the nature within which we exist.

Cheng is also dealing with the confusion of memory that forms a deft abstract narrative of mind and body, of reality and illusion in her artworks in which space plays a vital role. Cheng's art places us forcefully in her space: it is a place where the pulse and swirl of nature sweeps us away from the exterior world and into our own interior selves where true search for the understanding of our humanity can begin.

Ian Findlay

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Jyoti Duwadi at Sundaram Tagore Gallery

Nepali art is only occasionally talked about today in the broader context of the contemporary Asian art world. This is a pity for it has a small and active art community that deserves greater recognition. Although a small country surrounded by giants, Nepal has produced a number of significant artists who have not only drawn on their rich cultural heritage, but have also

engaged fully with the vagaries of the modernist art canon.

Among these artists are Tej Bahadur Chitrakar (1900–1960) and the renowned Lain Bangdel (1919–2002), a well-known art historian, novelist, and painter who studied at the École des Beaux-arts, Paris, in the 1950s [see, *Asian Art News*, Volume 2 Number 4, July/August 1992, pp 26–31].

Following on from these artists is Jyoti Duwadi, who was educated in Nepal, India, and the United States, to which he moved in 1971. Duwadi's recent show, entitled *Wu Xing: Five Elements*, is his first in Hong Kong and is in celebration for the Year of the Dragon. The whole of *Wu Xing: Five Elements* is in essence a large mixed-media, installation work comprising more than 28 pieces. Duwadi uses Nepali paper, canvas, earth pigments, turmeric, and gum Arabic as well as beeswax in his installation.

A sculpture entitled *Year of the Dragon 2012* is the centerpiece of the work, standing tall in sand before three paintings. In front of the sculpture is a potted red flower to represent Hong Kong's national flower, and in front of this is a small singing bowl that rings with soothing tones when struck with a wooden mallet. For Duwadi it is important that all the materials

that he uses in his art-making are natural as his art speaks to old traditions and about the place where culture and art come together as one.

The five elements—earth, fire, water, metal, and wood—are each powerful artistic subjects in their own right. Here, in *Wu Xing: Five Elements*, Duwadi brings them together to form an expressive and coherent whole that engages the mind on physical, aesthetic, cultural, sculptural, and painterly levels separately and as one entity.

Wu Xing: Five Elements is a strong work with a singular dynamic as it is not a single piece but a combination of many distinct pieces that need to be addressed separately and then imagined as a whole site-specific work. Duwadi notes that the installation is not simply to be looked at as it “offers a multi-sensory experience of smell, sound, and touch using natural materials and found objects such as bamboo baskets and vessels from Hong Kong and Nepal.”

The rectangular paintings that make up the installation are covered with a wide range of flowing lines. These lines and the forms that they make are suggestive of natural energy and balance. Indeed one might view them together as the strange notation of a natural symphony in which both action and contemplation are key ingredients.

Wu Xing: Five Elements is a thoroughly engaging and thoughtful work in which each element of the collective has been carefully worked out. The individual pieces invite one to ponder on the origins of the content, while the installation as a whole invites one to be still and to contemplate.

Ian Findlay

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Chu Teh-Chun at Feast Projects

The Chinese painter Chu Teh-Chun, who moved to Paris in the mid-1950s, is the subject of *Process and*

Transformation. The exhibition comprised 15 oil paintings and a series of calligraphic works that explore the hybrid nature of Chu's practice. His works on paper are intimate studies from the 1970s and 1980s, two of the most compelling decades of the artist's career.

Born in 1920 in Jiangsu province, Chu trained in calligraphy from early childhood. After relocating to France in 1955, he maintained a daily ritual of writing traditional Chinese poetry in silence. Among the most dynamic works on view are three interpretations of a single poem: Liu Bang's *Eulogy to the Wind* (1985). In each version, Chu has rendered the characters with different rhythm and density. As his cursive script unfurls across the three surfaces, the poem takes on new dimensions.

This series was produced during one of the most financially trying periods of Chu's life. Instead of using traditional paper made from rice, mulberry bark, or bamboo, he turned to sheets of brown craft paper.

With a raw, experimental quality, the works offer insight into a little-known area of his *oeuvre*.

In contrast to the quiet, cerebral mood of the ink poems, Chu's oils possess a louder presence. The rows of rectangular paintings are like small ruptures of color in the white walls. They operate on a visceral level, immediately demanding the attention of viewers. Filled with emotion and drama, it is as if the *Sturm und Drang* of the natural world has been made palpable in paint.

Unlike his meditative approach to calligraphy, Chu listened to Western classical music when working with oils, creating dense compositions swollen with color. Early in his career, aspects of classical Chinese paintings figured prominently in his work. Critic Jean-Francois Chabrun famously described him as “a Song painter of the 20th century.” By the 1970s, however, Chu had gravitated away from figuration to move deeper into abstraction. Calligraphic lines and elements of Song dynasty

landscape painting disappeared into the background of his paintings.

In a work such as *Untitled* (1973) one discerns traces of mist-covered mountains and streams but they lie beneath a tangle of brushstrokes. Diagonal swathes of green paint are punctured with sharp bursts of yellow and white. Rather than a faithful depiction of a mountainous landscape, Chu gives free reign to his imagination here. He appears to be interested in vaster, intangible qualities of nature. Placed next to his delicate calligraphy, the viscosity of the paint has a heightened effect.

Walking through this exhibition, one is confronted by contrasts: ink and oil; line and color; tradition and innovation. Seen together, Chu's works confirm the complexity of his *oeuvre*. The abstract-expressionist canvases for which the artist is known form just one facet of his work. Despite embracing European traditions, Chu never strayed too far from his roots. Ricocheting between East and West, his works are a rich platform upon which cross-cultural dialogue flourishes.

Payal Uttam

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INDIA

Kolkata

Dhiraj Choudhury at Academy of Fine Arts

At seventy-five, one's past is much longer than one's future. Not many artists can celebrate the passing of three quarters of a century with the aplomb of the Kolkata-based artist Dhiraj Choudhury. After retiring in 1996 from the College of Art, New Delhi as professor of painting and initiator of myriad art activities, he has paused momentarily to celebrate.

Choudhury's exhibition, displayed in all the five gallery's of the Academy of Fine Arts, Kolkata, was special because, apart from his own works, more than 75 artists, including



Jyoti Duwadi, *Wu Xing: Five Elements*, a site-specific multimedia installation, Sundaram Tagore Gallery, January 2012.



Chu Teh-Chun, *Untitled*, 1973, oil on canvas, 65 x 50 cm. Image: Courtesy of Feast Projects.