Robert Lettner: In Dialogue with the Chinese Landscape
Chinese Landscapes explored through Austrian eyes

April 25, 2017

Robert Lettner: In Dialogue with the Chinese Landscape is co-presented by the University Museum and Art Gallery (UMAG) of The University of Hong Kong and City University of Hong Kong (City U). The exhibition displays more than 50 watercolour landscape paintings and ink still lifes from the distinguished career of Austrian artist Robert Lettner (1943–2012), spanning the 1970s to his final years. Several Chinese works of art also have been selected from the UMAG permanent collection as a way to encourage visitors to experience the common spirit found within the landscapes and still lifes of Eastern and Western cultures.

An opening ceremony of the exhibition was held at UMAG today (April 25). Officiating guests included Consul General, Austrian Consulate General in Hong Kong and Macao Dr Claudia Reinprecht; Dean of School of Creative Media of CityU Professor Dr. Richard W. Allen; Student representative of Cuatroial Project Zhenhan Xu; Associate Professor of School of Creative Media of CityU and Director of UMAG Dr Florian Knothe.

Lettner immersed himself in the natural world, vividly depicting his vision on paper—whether representing the vast ocean, the sun’s warmth or an endless line of mountains and clouds. As an influential artist in Central Europe, Lettner also relied on an extensive library of Eastern culture and art, and he was particularly drawn to the cultural distinctions within the ideas of Chinese and Western landscape paintings. Lettner’s watercolour landscapes synthesise Western techniques and Eastern spiritual philosophies, exhibiting dynamic and deft brushwork paired with the poetic beauty of the “Void” found in Chinese aesthetics. Beginning in 2008, Lettner turned increasingly to the medium of ink, depicting in black and white each minute detail of living forms. These vital pieces showcase the visual power of Chinese ink painting through a more contemporary set of tools. He used ink pens instead of traditional brushes to draw the outlines, which resulted in a much longer process and in his distinctive ornamental forms that were enlightened by the 1960’s edition of the Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting (1679–1701). Lettner also explored new artistic languages through computer-generated algorithms and models, producing classical ornaments within his digital paintings, which led to a significant expansion of traditional genres of painting in both style and spirit.

The integration of East and West, of contemporary art with traditional culture, is a common trend in a globalising world. The current exhibition classifies Lettner’s watercolour landscapes into the three dominant elements seen in Eastern and Western artists—“void”, “colour” and “perspective”. In Dialogue with the Chinese Landscape serves as both an extension of Lettner’s art and an exploration of the philosophy of the landscape, which inevitably leads to an expansion of the vistas beyond traditional forms of painting.

Details of the Exhibition
Period: April 26, 2017 (Wednesday) to June 18, 2017 (Sunday)
Opening Hours:
09:30 – 18:00 (Monday to Saturday)
13:00 – 18:00 (Sunday)
Closed on University and Public Holidays
Venue: 2/F, Fung Ping Shan Building, University Museum and Art Gallery, The University of Hong Kong, 90 Bonham Road, Pokfulam
Tel/Email: (852) 2241 5500 (General Enquiry) / museum@hku.hk
Admission: Free
About University Museum and Art Gallery of the University of Hong Kong (UMAG)
UMAG was founded in 1953 as the Fung Ping Shan Museum. It was originally established as the Fung Ping Shan Library in 1932 in honour of its benefactor. For more information on UMAG, please click here.

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