

BIOGRAPHY OF ARTIST



Li Fuyuan was born in Kunming, China in 1942. He was a top student of the world renowned Chinese artist, Wu Guanzhong. After he graduated from Beijing Art Academy, he was appointed lecturer at the Beijing Art Professional College. Li's works have been exhibited and collected in many countries including Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, UK and USA. In addition, several of his paintings were put under the hammer at Sotheby's including Lot 1241, Sheep Flock (hammer price HKD 75,000) sold in October 2008 at Sotheby's Hong Kong. Recent exhibitions include the 20/21 International Art Fair (2008 & 2009), Royal College of Art, London, UK.



Trio, 2006 ink & colour on paper 66 x 79 cm



Zesty Morning, 2007 ink & colour on paper 58 x 56 cm



Campanion, ink & colour on paper 48.5 x 58 cm



Farm House, 2008 ink & colour on paper 67 x 66.5 cm

Seeing your work in London has been especially interesting for me, as I was introduced to Wu Guanzhong and his work during his ground-breaking exhibition at the British Museum. Nothing like that had come out of China before and, although there have been emulators, Wu Guanzhong still holds the fort with his singular style! How has he influenced your life as an artist?

In my student days, I yearned to learn from the richer and more interesting art forms of the other countries as I was not satisfied with the solely former Soviet system of art education in China then. And as fate should have it, I was fortunate to become a student in Wu Guanzhong's Studio for my professional training in oil painting.

With Wu's guidance and encouragement, my two oil paintings, Chun Pu De Fu Ren, which I did in 1961 and my 1962 piece of work, Shandong's Weishan Hu, were nominated by him for the joint art exhibition by my school and the city of Beijing. My graduating art work, Xia or Summer, in 1963 was completed with his full instruction from him.

It was Wu Guanzhong who introduced me to the world of art and to learn to fight for survival. I am a wanderer in this world who does not turn his back.

Wu Guanzhong, in his comment on your work, remarks that you are ruthless with your hand. This obviously is a great compliment and a reference to your strong lines and your style. Do you feel your style has changed since the days when it was first noticed?

As a student of Wu Guanzhong, I love to comprehend his theories on art. I learned about his art theories but not his art

forms. Everyone's cultivation in the arts and artistic qualities come with their lives' experiences. They are all very different and often they remain unchanged.

Though there can be many techniques in art and art forms, my pursuits in art have remained unchanged since I was a young man. In my paintings, I strive to express my feelings and aim to seek changes in forms, colours and compositions. I would often re-arrange my subjects in order to create a new composition.

I place importance on the organisation, arrangement and effective use of space on the canvas. My attention when painting is also focused on changes in the colours I use and their strong contrasts, for example between white and black.

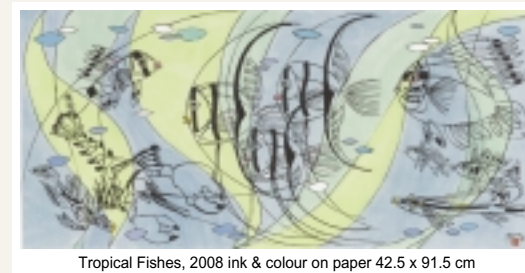
As an art educationist with a visionary philosophy on the arts, rich experience and knowledge and warm attention for his students, Wu Guanzhong could discover the potential of each of his students to give them the right guidance and encouragement each of them needed. It was with Wu's encouragement and guidance that I was able to thread on my artistic journey with confidence.

It has been suggested that you have more emphasis on expression than on narration. Having looked at a great range of your work, I get the feeling that your expression is your narration, ie the expressive force of each work tells its own story. What is your own view: are you telling stories or simply releasing your creative urges as they come — or are you doing both?

I agree with your views and analysis of my work. I place great emphasis on artistic expression. Yes, my artistic expression



On the Plain, ink & colour on paper 29 x 55.5 cm



Tropical Fishes, 2008 ink & colour on paper 42.5 x 91.5 cm



By the River, 2008 ink & colour on paper 29 x 56 cm



Abstract Leopards, 2008 ink & colour on paper 42.5 x 91.5 cm

is also my narration. In each forceful expression, I am also telling a story of my own. I am doing both: I told my stories while releasing my creative expression at the same time.

There is always a story in each of my work. I decide on the ways to express myself through my paintings after analysing the story content to determine their aesthetic qualities. Should it be representational, imagery or abstract? Or a mix of all three?

In my works, I used my chosen art form to express and narrate all the earthly emotions of happiness, anger, sadness and joy. I also showed man's resilience against all odds in the world. More importantly, I expressed my praise and love for my beautiful country and its people.

All life's happenings and emotions can stir up my creative urges. It was with deep and silent thoughts, a quote from Paul Gauguin, and my own artistic expression that I have been able to communicate my thoughts to my viewers.

The great diversity in Chinese art, especially in the works from the so-called minorities, is often seen as distinct from the mainstream Chinese art, but that may be an inadequate interpretation. Your own works, colour schemes and strong lines suggest a Yunnan heritage but one distilled through and through, having assumed a distinct identity in the process. How does Yunnan figure in your consciousness when creating your work?

I spent some years of my childhood in village farms in Yunnan and Guizhou. The natural beauty and habitat of the two places created a lasting impression on me, especially its forms and the strong and unusual colours.



Emperor Penguins, 2008 ink & colour on paper 48.5 x 86 cm



A Happy Family, 2008 ink & colour on paper 67 x 66 cm

These had certainly influenced my artistic flair and ideas about beauty. They are today a special quality in the blood of each native from Yunnan. This is perhaps the origins of what we know as the 'Yunnan Culture'. Throughout my artistic career, I have learnt and picked out the best from the arts and cultures of other countries and civilisations in order to improve my work in art. I have never bothered myself with the so-called 'mainstream Chinese art'.

Contemporary Chinese art has gone through phases since it first came onto the world stage in a big way in the mid-1970s. The Tiananmen phase was a turning point and then the whole socio-economic scene changed, with dramatic results as we see them. Now Chinese art evokes mixed feelings in the world. While the majority admires it, there is a community that feels that Chinese art risks losing its special magic because of imitation of other influences, especially those from the West? Your thoughts on this?

The art world is in fact a big garden where all flowers bloom. The art of each nation has its own special characteristics and attraction. Everyone is learning from one another. They learned from the best from the others to help develop their own artistic expression and create a new art form which is appealing to others all over again.

I don't think we need to worry that Chinese art risks losing its original appeal simply because it had learnt or influenced by others.



Artist Li Fuyuan and his mentor, Wu Guanzhong