

# A bright meteor of Taiwan Sculpture that fell too soon and the Peers who Continued His Incomplete Journey

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The origin of Taiwanese sculpture serving the needs of life and religion can be traced back to Aboriginal art and the folk sculptures of Mainland China, traces of which can still be seen in our daily lives. Another example can be found in the unearthed prehistoric objects, in which artifacts from our ancestors can be traced to island people of the Pacific Ocean. Huang Tu-Shui's trip to Japan to study sculpture is often considered the starting point of modern sculpture in Taiwan. Sadly, Huang died young, but he did hand down a number of works to us. At that time, two other pioneering sculptors, Pu Tian-Sheng and Chen Hsia-Yu, also returned from Japan. However, Taiwan lacked sculpture departments to keep official records of their legacies for educational purpose. It was not until 1962 that National Taiwan Academy of Arts set up College of Fine Arts, with departments for Chinese Painting and Calligraphy Arts, Fine Arts and Sculpture. 1967 marked the year when sculpture became an independent discipline in the academies of Taiwan.

The teachers of the first seven years of the Sculpture Department (1967-75) were, Li Mei-Shu (Tokyo Fine Arts School), Ho Heng-Hsiung (Assistant Professor), Chiu Yunn (Hangzhou National College of Art), Hsu Ho-Yi (Assistant), Professor Chen Houei-Kuen (Tokyo Fine Arts School), Lin Ruei-Jiao (Department of Fine Arts, National Taiwan Normal University), Huang Guei-Li (Woodcarver), Chien Fang-Hsiung (Stonemasonry), Wu Shu-Ren (Real Academia Catalana de Bellas Artes de San Jorge), Liu Ying-Hung (Stonemasonry), Jen Chao-Ming (Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando), Yang Chin-Tien (Associate Professor), Ju Chuan-Tai (Ju Ming, Technical Expert), and Chen Chen-Huei (assistant). They brought together aesthetic influences from Japan, Mainland China, Spain, and local Taiwanese culture and introduced the idea of "the Eastern learning as substance, and the Western learning as application", all of which helped to shape the first generation of local academic sculptors. Some of them went abroad to continue their

studies and returned to work within Taiwan art education. They taught sculpture at different universities, and included prominent artists such as, Tu Kuo-Wei (Tainan National University of the Arts), Chang Tzu-Lung (Taipei National University of the Arts, known as TNUA), Tsai Ken (TNUA), Wang Hsiu-Chi (Mingdao University), Chen Chen-Huei (National Taiwan University of Arts, known as NTUA), Lai Chi-Man (TNUA), Chou Jui-Min (NTUA), Wang Ching-Tai (NTUA), Wei Tao-Huei (NTUA), Tsai You (NTUA), Lee Kuang-Yu (TNUA), Ruan Weng-Mong (Fu Jen Catholic University), Chen Lien-Shan (Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts), and Kao Jen-Yi taught at various vocational high schools. Thus this generation of sculptors influenced all levels of sculpture art in Taiwan. Today, most of the sculpture art in Taiwan, including works in various exhibitions, are more or less directly related to the NTUA sculpture department. Today, most of the teachers in the Department of Sculpture in NTUA have studied art abroad. In the past, modeling in clay was the main focus of the education, later on the courses were supplemented by stone and wood carving. In order to restructure and update the Department of Sculpture in NTUA, courses on metal art and the application of mixed media will also be introduced.

When I entered the Sculpture Department of National Taiwan Academy of Arts in 1983, I heard that senior student there, Lin Jui-Chen, was very talented in modeling and went abroad for further study in Italy. Next time I heard of him was just before my graduation in 1986. Apparently, he had passed away in a car accident. I only remembered he was hailed as the Taiwanese Rodin and that he shared the same fate as Huang Tu-Shui who died young. What a sad coincidence. When Yilan Museum of Art prepared to organize an exhibition based on his life and oeuvre I got the opportunity to interview a few alumni with the curator, Dr. Chen Kuang-Yi, and I gradually gained a better understanding of his significance as an artist. In order to effectively reflect the life and work of Lin Jui-Chen, it is important to understand the circumstances of sculpture in Taiwan at the time. To better present the development of sculpture in Taiwan,

we decided to focus on the fourth year of the Department of Sculpture when Lin Jui-Chen enrolled there. We invited alumni who graduated in the three years prior and three years after, as well as some of the people who had closer contact with him. The group consists of 18 artists still creating sculptures (including Lin Cheng-Jen and Sheu Wei-Jung, who are geographically related to Yilan). These old friends of Lin Jui-Chen will provide examples of sculptures of that period for the exhibition. We are truly grateful for the works provided and their participation in our interviews. Together they have helped to commemorate the period of his time and honor the memory of the bright meteor of Taiwan Sculpture that fell too soon. It was they who completed Lin Jui-Chen's creative journey.

In the 1960s and 1970s shortly after the Second World War, while the Vietnam War was still going on, the overall human society had started to move on rapidly. It was the post war period when people started to reflect on their lives and made adjustments. In the Western art world, abstract expressionism, minimalism, conceptual art, video art and computer art took place and developed, whereas happening art, and various artistic creations evolved around events and social concern. Although Taiwan can receive the waves of Western Art while under martial law, the art circle could not quite catch up due to social and cultural traditions and background. The Eastern Painting Group established in 1956 and the Fifth Moon Group in 1957 are the painting groups who pioneered the modern art movement in Taiwan. But the development and reform on sculpture art was much slower than that of paintings. At this time, the development of Taiwanese art shifted from localization to nativism. Sculptors such as Yuyu Yang, Ho Heng-Hsiung, Chou I-Hsiung, Kuo Ching-Jyh, Ju Ming, Chen Ting-Shih and so on started to break away with realistic school or work on experimental style. However, if you opened the albums of the Provincial Fine Arts and National Art Exhibitions, you will find that almost all the jurors and participants' works of the sculpture group from 1967 to 1975 were modeled human figures or sculpted head portrait / busts. Perhaps we can deduce that the influence of Rodin's sculptures arrives at Taiwan through Japan and Mainland China. A craze for sculpture has caused academic or folk sculptors to use various public venues as a platform to compete on their skills. Therefore, the aesthetics of Western sculpture developed over long history has been indirectly absorbed and digested by Taiwanese sculptors. Or it may be also seen as a forming period for the gradual development of self-style. After all, this must have been related to the social demand on memorial statues for political purpose at that time. Judged from the fact that most of the sculptors, either those who went to Japan to study before the war, those who came from the Mainland postwar, or the local Taiwanese, all worked on sculptures of human figures and took it as their main expression. Even though the school teaching has begun to introduce stone and wood carvings, nothing of this materials has been produced yet at that time.

At that time, Lin Jui-Chen's works were particularly influenced by Michelangelo and Rodin. Traces of his efforts can be found in the large amount of sketches he left behind. Several of his award-winning sculpture groups were relatively rare in style. Perhaps we can describe the period when sculptures are dominated by figures as enlightenment on Lin's peers. They have continued walking on Lin Jui-Chen's incomplete journey of sculpture. The senior artists in this exhibition are all regular visitors of public group exhibitions, and they have accumulated outstanding achievements in sculpture art, public art, education and even ceramics industries, and other industries. The artists like Chen Chen-Huei, Hsieh Tung-Liang, Wei Tao-Huei, Tsai Ken, Wang Hsiu-Chi, Chou Jui-Min, Kao Jen-Yi, and Sheu Wei-Jung presented figurative works for us to recall the sculptural features of the period, while Chen Sung, Chang Tzu-Lung, Leo Lee, Lai Chi-Man, Lee Kuang-Yu, Huang Chia-Heng, Wu De-Chun, Arthur Yang, and Lin Cheng-Jen exhibited sculptures that deviated from the traditional performance of the time.

Yang Cheng-Chung has put on display the first prize work for the design of the Vatican Commemorative Gold Coin, awarded by Pope John Paul II in 1987. Hsieh Tung-Liang was the first sculptor in Taiwan to be granted a permanent exemption qualification for the "Taiwan Provincial Fine Arts Exhibition" in 1982. Wang Hsiu-Chi won the exemption qualification for the "Taiwan Provincial Fine Arts Exhibition" in 1985 and the prime award by Sun Yat Sen Academic and Cultural Foundation in 1990. Lai Chi-Man was awarded the First year of "An Exhibition of Contemporary Chinese Sculpture in the Republic of China" at Taipei Fine Arts Museum in 1985. In 1982, he was accepted as a member of the Dutch Beeldende Kunstenaars Regeling (BKR) project (the first Dutch government-sponsored project for selected artists). Wei Tao-Huei has studied anatomy and artistic composition throughout her life and has applied to her teaching in the Department of Sculpture. Sheu Wei-Jung was granted exemption qualification for the "Taiwan Provincial Fine Arts Exhibition" in 1987. Tsai Ken won the grand prize in the "Contemporary Sculpture Exhibition in the Republic of China" held by Taipei Fine Arts Museum in 1989. Wu De-Chun won the Grand Prize of the "Metal Sculpture Biennale" in the City of Commercy, France in 1989. He has participated in the Art Monte-Carlo, an international exhibition of contemporary art, the "Besancon Tri-Annual Art Fair", the International Sculpture Exhibition in Collioure, the "Contemporary Art Joint Exhibition" at Centre Pompidou. Chang Tzu-Lung has won the 32<sup>nd</sup> and 42<sup>nd</sup> Outdoor Sculpture Awards at the "Ichiyokai Exhibition" in Japan and the Grand Award at second the "Contemporary Sculpture Exhibition R.O.C." in 1986. Lee Kuang-Yu was invited to have a grand solo exhibition "To Have and Have Not" at the National Pavilion of San Marino in the "57<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale" in 2017. During the pandemic period, he was invited to exhibit in the Cloud Forest, located at Gardens by the Bay in Singapore this year and received great acclaim. Today, they all have important performances and won their places in the sculpture world. They continue to walk on the path of Lin Jui-Chen's incomplete journey of sculpture.