

# Artist finds a fondness for leisure 闲情逸志寄画中

## Wang Jie

Artist Wu Yiming has always preferred a low profile, partly due to his personality and partly due to the media he adopts.

Wu has chosen Chinese ink and rice paper even though he eschews traditional subjects like trees, flowers, animals and landscapes. His work falls clearly in the contemporary art category.

Occupying a spacious studio that boasts a good view overlooking M50, a collection of galleries and studios on Moganshan Road, Wu says he is comfortable with himself at his "shelter."

Wu confesses that as an old M50 "resident," he has a strong emotional bond with the place.

"I spend nearly 10 hours at my studio every day," said Wu, a Shanghai native born in 1966. "It is such a relaxation for both my body and soul. Sometimes I do nothing here, but you know idling away the time can be a fantastic thing."

Although Shanghai is his home, his ancestors are from Suzhou, a city that has made a deep impression on the artist.

"Have you ever been to Suzhou? It is a city that provided many imperial

goods, varying from the silk clothes the emperor wore to the royal ceramic teapots and the hand-made furniture the emperor used.

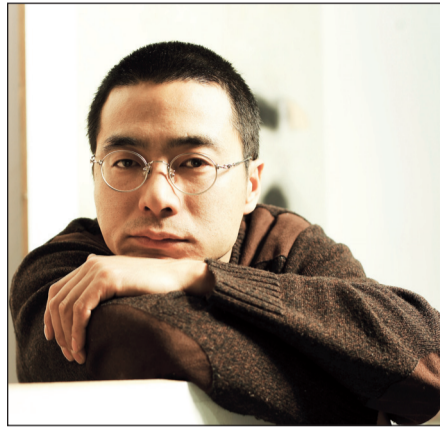
"There are also the gardens. The philosophical thoughts hidden in the garden are profound and contain the essence of Chinese culture."

He says art has always been his destiny and he even turned down offers from prestigious universities like Tsinghua University to pursue his passion.

"Art is my 'belief' and its form suits me," he said. "I am glad that I made the decision."

Art critic Zhu Qi is an admirer of Wu's painting.

"Li Yu, a scholar from the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) once wrote a book with a title that loosely means 'random thoughts of a mind at leisure.' The book recorded the different playful reflections of an introverted scholar on occasions after he had eaten his dinner and drank a good cup of tea. This is what I think about when I look at Wu Yiming's new ink paintings. They are like a diary of his mental state. It is not that he is digging for the difficult meanings of life; but rather that he depicts the scattered thoughts of his mind when at leisure."



Artist Wu Yiming

Ming and Qing scholars often projected their inner longings and spiritual pursuits through their obsession with certain objects. Similar to these scholars, Wu's ink paintings depict life's playfulness and enjoyment of leisure, such as looking at the branches of a blooming orchid, a corner of a water pond, a portrait of a friend or a pair of dancing swans in a lake. In each painting he adds contemporary elements such as a car, the spectrum of a neon light, several landscape photographs, a still from a film sequence

or designer playing cards.

But Wu's "leisure" has something he has "learned" after going through some difficult times.

"There existed some moments when I was so disappointed in myself, as if I had come to a deadlock in art," said the graduate of East China Normal University. "But no one could help, I had to climb from the abyss on my own."

A combination of factors including financial pressure, a mental block and the rocketing fame of his peers led Wu to doubt himself and his ability.

"However, one day I suddenly realized that it wasn't a big deal," he said. "I just painted what I wanted because that is what art is all about."

Wu is also unusual in that he places the rice paper on the ground while painting because it has no "bonds."

He also confesses to being an amateur gardener.

"Believe it or not, I am very good at nurturing plants," he said, "Look at this asparagus fern. I have nurtured it for nearly a decade. As if by fate, I am now painting plants. I find that I have a special attachment toward ordinary items in life."

He also says he has avoided what he calls "Taobao fever" as it "deprives us of the variety and fun part of life."

## Designer turns over a new leaf

HAVING designed for five-star hotels, clubs and boutique shops for more than 15 years, designer Wang Jingjia is turning over a new leaf. She has started her own art company Jing Jia Wang Art Co to try her hands in new areas.

"Interior design is always about long-term projects. It usually takes about six months to one year to see the ideas materialize, which can become unbearable," Wang said.

So she turned to other formats to present her design and ideas in a much shorter period. It also gave her more freedom to try her hands in oil painting, clothing, luggage and jewelry design.

Wang said she is often inspired by "the kaleidoscopic patterns forged in daily life and nature," such as the toughness of life as seen when a dying tree, though tilted, keeps hanging in there. Or when a gold fish sticks to a corner of the pond hoping for food. She later designed a dress featuring a gold fish in a pond in silk embroidery.

"Sometimes the patterns and lines just present themselves to me," she said. "Once my husband was breaking his fast in the dining room when the sun's rays radiated from the back. I could see the lines just jump right in front of me. I told him to sit still and I rushed to grab my sketch book."

Architecture is another major inspiration. "Interior design is pretty much about how to properly arrange the space to showcase a certain layout," she said. "Fashion design, likewise, is how to properly use every piece of garment to showcase the curves of



the body. Basically, all designs are the same," she said.

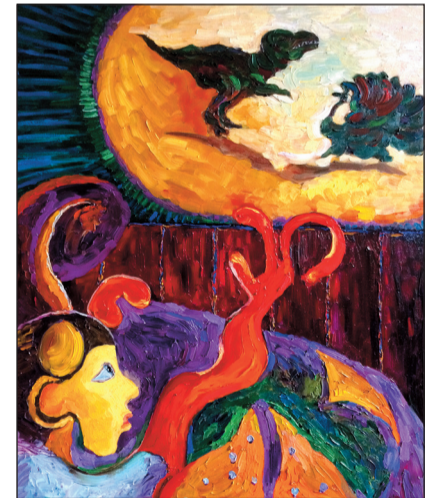
Having been involved in the business for years, Wang is deep into aesthetics forged in space and structures which she later applied into fashion design.

Her latest women's wear collection is influenced by townhouses and castles in European cities, paired with a series of handbags and clutches featuring patterns of marble columns, vases and stone carvings.

Elements of traditional Chinese architecture can also be found in Wang's manuscripts, such as wooden carvings on lintels, the extraordinary tenor structure and engraved windows.

Her family also gives her sufficient inspiration. She is working on a kidswear collection titled "Babies" that feature eight paintings inspired by her 4-year-old son. The paintings record the micro-moments of his daily life, such as mother and son playing shadow games in bed while he played dart. She is also working on a k-gold jewelry collection inspired by her son, titled "Angel."

Her next step is to try blending her fashion designs with ethnic minority techniques, including the embroidery works by Chinese Miao and Yao ethnic groups, and the plant dying that prevails in southwest China's Yunnan and Guizhou provinces.



Left: Wang Jingjia in her studio  
Above: Oil painting "The boy who plays shadow games in bed"

"The dying works that are found in the market can never match those done by the Yunnan ethnic craftsmen that I used to see when I was young," said the Yunnan native.

She said she'd love to find a way to present these delicate fine works in a modern way.

The designer is preparing to stage her first solo exhibition later next year that will showcase some 900 designs varying from womenswear, handbags and clutches, jewelry and accessories, to oil painting and chinawares.

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