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Chinese Calligraphy Meets Modern Computer Technology

By Edmund Moy

Bay Area artist Lampo Leong's artwork and career have recently taken off. In his current solo exhibition entitled *Contemplation • Forces*, he mixes Western abstract art sensibilities with traditional Chinese calligraphy and modern computer technology to create an explosive universal visual language for the new millennium.

"Chinese brush painting and calligraphy value the unique moment when ink is put indelibly on rice paper. Each stroke declares the totality of the artist's experiences. Western art composes symphonies of color and light, texture and depth," Leong states in *The Common Ground of Light and Creativity: Contemplation • Forces*, an album containing 34 paintings from the series. "Today's unprecedented exchanges, a melding of traditions, makes possible the attempt to genuinely understand both cultures."

Born in Guangzhou, China in 1961, Leong began studying calligraphy at age 10. This early training gave him a strong sense of calligraphic tradition. After graduating with a bachelor of fine arts from the Guangzhou Fine Arts Institute in 1983, Leong moved to San Francisco and received his master of fine arts with high distinction from the California College of Arts and Crafts (CCAC) in 1988.

At CCAC, Leong's exposure to Western artwork triggered his focus

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on individual expression. And his search for an identity between two cultures became a driving force in his work.

Deeply-rooted in Taoist principles, Leong's *Contemplation • Forces* paintings are a meditation on the duality of creation and the harmonious balance between opposing forces within the universe—darkness and light, abundance and emptiness, yin and yang, and heaven and earth. Drawing from a powerful cosmic connection with nature, Leong creates paintings that burst out from the canvas.

In talking about the conceptualization, he expresses a desire to take two-dimensional shapes and instill a multi-layered three-dimensional feeling, the results of which are paintings with exquisite depth: golden shafts of sunlight illuminating the darkness; molten lava flowing unrestrained; flames burning uncontrolled; tumultuous waves tossing and turning.

At the same time, however, Leong purposely avoids resorting to cliché images of actual outdoor locations, and instead opts to create works akin to traditional Chinese landscape paintings using a mixture of Chinese pigments with acrylics, such as metallic paints. These otherworldly effects have given his paintings a luminous and vibrant color wash. The use of abstract Chinese calligraphy—often cut, broken apart and re-organized characters bearing no pre-conceived meaning—also adds energy and vitality to his work.

To create these pieces, Leong first paints the abstract calligraphic images on rice paper, cutting them up and assembling the images in a multi-layered collage on a small canvas. Leong manipulates and enlarges the images up to 15 times their original size using a computer, and then reprints them onto canvas using ink jet plotters. To complete his work, Leong layers the canvas with paints and textures.

At the d.p. Fong Galleries reception for *Contemplation • Forces* on June 24 in San Jose, Calif., Leong received certificates of recognition from the California State Senate office of John Burton and the 23rd Assembly District office of Mike Honda in recognition of his contributions to art education in universities and museums around the San Francisco Bay Area.

Last year San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown honored Leong by proclaiming November 19, 1999 as “Lampo Leong Day.” In February, Leong and his colleagues—Herby Lam, Wenyu Xu and Clayton Shiu—won the San Francisco Arts Commission open competition for a courtyard design for Woh Hei Yuen park, with their granite inlay medallion design entitled *Tectonic Melange*. And most recently, Leong earned a tenured instructing position at Mission

College in Santa Clara.

In conjunction with *Contemplation • Forces*, a group exhibition entitled *Transformations in Ink*, showcasing Chinese brush artists Binhui Yan, Tu Fang and Yu Zhang, along with a solo exhibit from Bay Area Chinese brush artist Raymond Hu entitled *Animal Portraits*, will be featured at the gallery.

The trio of artists featured in *Transformations in Ink*, play with light and darkness to explore some of the same themes of creation and destruction found in Leong's work. Hu has focused primarily on the eyes of animals to create paintings that express his deepest emotions.

All three exhibitions will be on display through Sept. 16 at the d.p. Fong Galleries, 383 South First Street, San Jose. Gallery hours are 1-6 p.m., Tuesdays through Saturdays and by appointment. For information call 408-298-877.

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