



Ink and Play
The art of Chinese opera in ink painting

Castle Garden Bazaar, Palace of Guards (1013 Budapest, 2 Ybl Miklós tér)
9 December, 2016 – 19 February, 2017

In December 2016, a new exhibition signals the extension of the cooperation between the Kovács Gábor Art Foundation and the Shanghai Liu Haisu Art Museum. Following *Two Faces of Shanghai*, held at KOGART Exhibitions Tihany in November 2015, the two institutions now open a joint display in the Palace of Guards at the Castle Garden Bazaar. The exhibition centres around traditional Chinese theatre, better known as “Chinese opera.”

China never had theatre in the European sense: there were no prose performances before young Chinese artists who had studied abroad started to experiment with the form. Traditional Chinese theatre essentially relied on singing (and was consequently referred to as “Chinese opera” in Europe), because the culture of the vast country is far from being unified: there are such differences between the dialects of the different regions that make verbal communication all but impossible. Further, music also varies across the regions, and countless varieties of Chinese opera have emerged: today there are still almost three hundred known varieties.

The Beijing opera that provides the theme of the exhibition at the Palace of the Guards is but one of these “Chinese operas.” It became popular as it was held in high esteem at the last, Manchu imperial court, which gave it much prestige. Its standing was further increased by the celebrated star, Mei Lanfang, who toured the world between the two world wars playing dominantly Beijing opera. The success of this tour had considerable repercussions at home, as everyone started to consider Beijing opera the true representative of Chinese culture, even though it was one of the least euphonious “Chinese operas” for European ears. This is because it is less melodic, and percussive instruments dominate in the orchestra.

The theatres of the different regions vary not only in their language, but in their genres as well. Historical subjects are much favoured in Beijing opera: the struggle for power, fairness, loyalty and treason form its main interests, and love stories are often placed in such contexts. Many of the dramas culminate in a duel or impressive battle scene, which ensured popularity for the Beijing opera both at home and abroad. Almost without exception, the stories have a symbolic value: they represent great figures of Chinese history and mythology, or tell a Confucian tale of abiding validity, about perseverance, loyalty and truth. The costumes and makeups always carry meaning, and serve to make the story easy to follow.

The essence of stage performances forms the material of the *Ink and Play* exhibition. In the coloured ink drawings selected from the ink painting collection of the Shanghai Liu Haisu Art Museum, each character can be seen in a special, symbolic moment of the stage. What is more, though Chinese ink painting has centuries-old traditions, almost all of the exhibits were created by contemporary artists, who thus seek to establish connections between things old and new, between tradition and modernity.



On view from 9 December, the exhibition has been realized with support from the Ministry of Human Resources, and was jointly organized by the Kovács Gábor Art Foundation, the Shanghai Liu Haisu Art Museum, and the Castle Garden Bazaar.

Curators of the exhibition:

Ágota Révész, sinologist, post-doctoral researcher (Dahlem Humanities Center, Freie Universität Berlin)

Wang Xin, art historian, senior research fellow, Shanghai Liu Haisu Art Museum

Ágnes Szalay, art historian, Kovács Gábor Art Foundation

Visitor information:

Castle Garden Bazaar, Palace of Guards | 1013 Budapest, 2 Ybl Miklós tér

Website: www.kogart.hu | www.varkertbazar.hu

Opening hours: Tuesday – Sunday, 10 am – 6 pm

Download photos from:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/su10cdomowmi8qr/AAA4KSQ3GmADNatfdKzInaS7a?dl=0>

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