NO FRONTIERS
THE ART OF
DING YANYONG
丁衍庸 (1902-1978) 生於廣東茂名。1920年，他遠渡東洋，考入東京美術學校，並醉心於法國巨匠馬諦斯及「野獸派」的畫風。歸國後，他積極從事西畫創作及美術教育。自1930年代，他開始研究八大山人、石濤及金農的水墨畫，並搜羅古器物，從而展開融合中西藝術的漫長征途。1949年，他隻身來港，於1957年參與籌辦新亞書院藝術專修科（即香港中文大學藝術系的前身），並任教至1978年辭世。丁氏在貧困中堅持創作，並不斷拓闊其藝術領域，由油畫到水墨畫，繼至書法、篆刻，最終兼容其體，成就其融古匯今、跨越東西的藝術道路，為二十世紀中國藝術添一新章。

Remembrances of Master Ding

Ding Yanyong (1902-1978) left his hometown in Guangdong for Japan and enrolled in the Tokyo Fine Arts School in 1920. He adopted the styles of Matisse and those espoused by Fauvism as the basis for his own art. Upon his return to China, he became an active promoter of modern art and art education. In the 1930s, he began studying Chinese painting through the artwork of Qing masters Bada Shanren, Shitao and Jin Nong and by collecting ancient implements of crafts. It was at this point that he inaugurate his life-long exploration of a synthesis of Chinese and Western art. In 1949, he moved to Hong Kong. In 1957, he helped found a special art course at the New Asia College, the predecessor of the Fine Arts Department of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, and taught there until his passing in 1978. Over the years, he faced adverse situations with a strong sense of will and continued his artistic pursuits. With diverse media at his creative disposal — from oil painting to ink painting, then to calligraphy and seal-carving — he extended the borders of both Chinese and Western art, adding a glorious chapter to the history of Chinese art of the 20th century.
Weathering Hardships

In fervent response to the calls for reforms, many young artists returning from overseas studies in the 1920s aspired to modernize Chinese art. Among them was Ding Yanyong, who passionately rallied behind the Western Painting Movement in Shanghai upon his return from Japan in 1925. In his early paintings, Ding used large colour patches and sketchy brushwork in a largely two-dimensional composition is characteristic of Fauvism. These give way to minimalist and linear representation and a preference for flat and primary colours in the 1930s, as consistent with Matisse’s late style. These two styles continued into Ding’s late years. Portrait and Two Nudes (Fig. 1, 2), for example, the vigorous lines and contrasting colours are the hallmarks of the Fauvist school. Similarly, Ding’s landscapes are strongly reminiscent of the Fauvist painters, namely Derain, Vlaminck and Dufy. In Seaside of Sai Kung, Hong Kong (Fig. 3), conventional perspective is replaced by a sense of space and rhythm conjured by lines and colours, echoing the typical Fauvist landscape.

Despite all the hardships after resettled in Hong Kong since 1949, Ding insisted on painting even if it meant having to paint over a previous painting again and again as confirmed by infrared scanning. Even the back of a painting would not go to waste when supplies were short. Indeed, in the practice of art, Ding was the exponent of the spirit of “weathering hardships” advocated by the New Asia College, which he joined in 1957 at Ch’ien Mu’s invitation and helped launch the fine arts programme.

![Image 1](image1.jpg)

![Image 2](image2.jpg)

![Image 3](image3.jpg)
When he realized that Western artists were drawing inspiration from the primitive art and oriental art, he cast his eyes back on China's age-old culture and literati tradition. Beginning from the 1930s, he revisited Chinese art through the artifacts he collected. The goal was dual: to explore the power and beauty of primitive art on the one hand and to marry Chinese and Western art on the other. Thus, the ancient Chinese culture preserved in seals, pottery and bronze-and-stone script became his source of creative ideas. In Civilization, Fantasy and Hong Hu (II), Ding tries to blend ancient Chinese elements with modern Western surrealism and abstraction. A further example is Painting in Painting (Fig. 5), a thought-provoking surrealist composition with the suggestive one-stroke cat on the easel, the calendar reading “17” on the wall, and the characters “yang” (goat) and “sanyue” (the third month) in oracle-bone script.

Ding’s attempts to synthesize the East with the West is also best exemplified by his oil painting with a Chinese flavour as in Farewell My Concubine (Fig. 4). Portrait of Wong Yi is the most recent among Ding’s extant works. The vivid representation of the subjects in sweeping calligraphic contours scraped off the red background brings to mind Matisse’s The Red Studio and Ding’s own seal carving. The ingenious paintings have visually demonstrated how the artist has straddled the East and the West.
Venting Emotions

Through the art of Qi baishi, Wu Changshuo, the Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou, Bada Shanren, Xu Wei and bronze inscriptions, Ding eventually came to understand the beauty of Chinese lines. The compositional elements and formal motifs in Qi’s and Wu’s paintings that he was attracted to as still reflected in Bird and Guards.

To dissipate the sadness and loneliness of having to live alone in Hong Kong after 1949 following the political changeover, Ding turned to the art of Bada Shanren, Niu Shihui, Shitao and Shixi for sympathy and even identified himself with these Ming descendents. The painting By the Lotus Pond of 1963 evidence Ding’s attempts to emulate the compositional connection and appearances of the bird and the lotuses borrowed from Bada Shanren. Bada’s arrogance is transformed into humour in a style invented by Ding.

With regard to Ding’s inventions, the frog stands out most prominently from all the rest. The caricature-like frog seems to voice the artist’s grievances against the injustices in life. As if to rival his models, Ding often complements his frog with Bada Shanren’s lotus and Qi Baishi’s crabs and shrimps as in Aquatic Family and Lotus and Mandarin Ducks (Fig. 6, 7).

Ding confessed his solitude and alienation in his landscapes where mountains, boats, trees and architecture combine with the inscriptions as in My Home Where the Lone Tree Stands to exude a sense of desolation and the artist’s yearnings for home.
遊戲古今

電影（粵語片、西片）、廣東大戲、電視和報刊雜誌等道文化直接影響了丁衍庸晚年的畫風。他的人物畫，以漫畫般手法，創造出一種通俗喜劇式的詼諧效果，當中卻隱含種種戲謔、諷喻。

中國戲曲與文學為丁氏提供無限的想像空間。例如《貴妃出浴》（圖8）中一眾宮女簇擁侍候赤裸身體的楊貴妃，便突破了舞台表演的限制，純粹作為畫家借題發揮之所。此外，丁氏亦喜歡傳媒人物的題材，時更將三界神魔與市井人物共冶一爐，如《上中下三界人物卷》（圖9），便具有通俗喜劇元素，與其對世態人情的嬉笑怒罵，互相呼應。丁衍庸筆下的人物有摩登女郎和西部牛仔，後者就是看了當時流行的西部牛仔電影之後所作。由此可知，丁氏是借助不同的人物題材，探索中國繪畫現代化的表現方式。

丁衍庸追求天真童稚的藝術趣味，他晚年創作的「一筆畫」，本身便帶有濃厚的兒童遊戲色彩。他用寫草書一樣的流暢筆觸，一筆畫成一隻動物。如其《一筆貓》，畫家就好像拿起筆在紙上隨便一筆便完成，但細看其用筆的疾徐、提按的輕重、筆觸的墨色濃淡變化，便知這是千錘百鍊的成果。

Amusing with Art across Time

Cinema, both local and foreign, Cantonese opera, television, newspapers and magazines played an indispensable part in Ding Yanyong’s late-year art. His caricature-like figures are marked by a humour tainted with satire and irony whether it is history, myth, legend, literature, Chinese opera or real life that is being alluded to.

Chinese opera and literature have provided Ding Yanyong with an inexhaustible supply of ideas. In Yang Guifei Bathing in the Huaping Pool (Fig. 8), it is the legendary beauty that tickles the painter’s and in turn the audience’s fancy. As for Daoist and Buddhist figures, as in Figures from the Three Realms (Fig. 9), the comical effect commonly seen in movies and on television is employed to sweeten up the painter’s scathing comments on weird social phenomena. In addition, there is no lack of modern figures under Ding’s brush such as modern ladies and cowboys which were inspired by the Westerns he saw. In an attempt to modernize traditional Chinese painting, Ding has borrowed from various sources for his figures.

To Ding, childlikeness was an ideal. This is most evident in the playful one-stroke paintings that he did in his late years. As the name implies, a motif is produced with nothing more than a single stroke. His One-stroke Cat, for instance, is made up of just a freely stroke and yet the painter’s sophistication reveals itself fully in the calculated speed, strength and tone of that single stroke as well as the sparseness of the composition that serves to accentuate the contrast between the void and the solid.
Writing Calligraphy and Carving Seals

Ding was fascinated by Mi Fu of the Song, Xu Wei of the Ming and Bada Shanren of the early Qing, as well as his contemporary Yu Youren, for the respective expressiveness and simplicity of their calligraphy.

Ding did not start carving seals until late in his life. He did not feel obliged to abide by the rules governing the structuring of characters. Instead, he let his imagination take over and would freely cannibalize the unusually formed oracle-bone script and bronze script for new designs for his seals. As for carving techniques, Ding adopted Qi Baishi’s method to produce a whole stroke with a single thrust of the carving knife. To achieve simplicity and archaism, Ding made reference to motifs found on antique objects. (Fig. 10, 11) In his daring attempts, he turned the seal surface into a painting surface for depicting scenes like Yang Guifei Bathing. Under his carving knife, even portraits can be turned into seals. In art, it is obvious that Ding refused to be restricted by the boundaries of either genre or subject.
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