

September 16, 2020

RE: Review of Mr. Han XuDong's doctoral thesis **Classical Myth Complex**  
**Behind Art - the inspiration of classical myth to my artistic creation**

## FOREWARD

I am pleased to review Mr. Han Xu Dong's doctoral thesis and portfolio of artwork presented to me in consideration of his Ph.D. defense at the Faculty of Graphics and Media Art at the Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Fine Art and Design in Wroclaw. I first became aware of Mr. Han when I was a Visiting Professor at the Academy from October 1, 2018 to February 4, 2019. We occasionally worked concurrently in the Lithography Studio of Professor Pawel Frackiewicz. Subsequently, I have received his complete dossier, including his thesis and art reproductions submitted to me in August 2020.

While I am relatively new to Mr. Han's artwork I do have extensive experience with the Eugeniusz Geppert Academy in general and the Graphics and Media Arts area in particular. Since 2009 I have been actively engaged with the faculty and students of the Academy while a Professor of Art at the

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University of Tennessee and then as the Director of the School of Art at Ball State University. I was a Visiting Artist in April 2017 and as mentioned above a Visiting Professor in Graphics (drawing) for the winter semester, October 1, 2018 – February 4, 2019. I am keenly aware of the mission of the Eugeniusz Geppert academy of Art and Design, the high quality of their students and faculty, and their rigorous commitment to learning and professional practice.

In addition to my activities in Poland I have extensive experience in China. Since 1995 I have been a guest of 18 universities and academies including notably the Central Academy of fine Art in Beijing, the Sichuan Academy of Fine Art in Chongqing, Beihang University in Beijing, and Sichuan University in Chengdu where I held the position of Guest Professor. My work in both China and Poland encompassed academic exchange, exhibiting, teaching, lecturing, and curatorial work involving students, professors, and noted artists such as Gu Wen Da, Chen Dan Qing, and He Gong. I believe I am uniquely positioned to comment on Mr. Han's dissertation, artistic output, and potential.

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#### ASSESSMENT OF CREATIVE AND PROFESSIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS

Mr. Han has a strong record of creative and professional achievements that is indicative of his commitment to mature studio practice, outreach, and professional development. He is well adept in historical and contemporary practices in printmaking, and is thoroughly engaged in the critical discourse of contemporary art, pedagogy, and professional practice. His submitted materials clearly document his participation in exhibitions (regional, national, and international), conferences, workshops, and publications. I note his inclusion in exhibitions in China, Poland, and the Czech Republic, and cite as examples the 37<sup>th</sup> International FISAE Exlibris Exhibition in Prague, CR; the Print and Ceramics Exhibition in Liberce, CR; the Traditional Woodcut Print Exhibition at the prestigious Sichuan Academy of Fine in Chongqing, China; and his ambitious solo exhibition of recent prints and drawings, Changing, at the ASP Glass Gallery in Wroclaw Poland. Reproductions of his work have appeared in numerous exhibition catalogues of regional, national, and international exhibitions.

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Mr. Han has an extremely impressive record of workshops and presentations of printmaking practices to professional and student audiences. Of particular note is his participation in the Southern Graphics International Conference at the University of North Texas in 2019 where Mr. Han presented demonstration on Traditional Chinese Relief Hand Printing, Watercolor, and Rubbing Techniques. This annual conference is a major event that attracts printmaking professionals and students from around the world. He also conducted workshop/lectures on traditional Chinese woodcut printing at the Sichuan Academy of Fine Art in Chongqing, China and at the National Museum in Wroclaw, Poland.

## ASSESSMENT OF PEDAGOGICAL AND CURRICULUM INVOLVEMENT

I admire Mr. Han's consistent engagement in all aspects of his professional artistic and pedagogical practice. He successfully blends his extensive training

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in traditional Chinese printmaking techniques and contemporary methods into teaching and outreach (as discussed above). This is evident in the numerous workshops and lectures he has conducted for students and professional artists that introduce traditional Chinese practice and methods to a western audience. It gives him an opportunity to demonstrate and, importantly, to explore and challenge more deeply his keen interest in fusing eastern and western concepts and practice. The numerous opportunities he's had to share his expertise and research, I'm certain, has been a valuable and welcome contribution to the diverse curriculum of the Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Art and Design in particular and the printmaking community at large. In the semester that I was teaching at ASP I was able to observe Mr. Han working in Prof. Frackiewicz's Lithography Studio and his interactions with undergraduate students. As a Studio Assistant he was always conscientious, thoughtful, thorough, and professional and was able to clearly communicate technical and conceptual information specific to each student's needs.

## ASSESSMENT OF CREATIVE WORK AND Ph.D. THESIS

In his thesis, "CLASSICAL MYTH COMPLEX BEHIND ART", Mr. Han successfully articulates his interest in using myth as a means to fuse eastern and western approaches to ideas, images, and symbols. He ably describes the importance of myths in culture and how they can be used as a means for exploration and for artistic and intellectual growth and enlightenment. Importantly to him, the nature and existence of myths serve as an apt metaphor for the art making process. Mr. Han demonstrates a clear and cogent progression in his exploration of myths and their influence on his work. He rigorously researched the nature and structure of western mythology through depictions by artists as well as through the scholarly works of notable researchers such as Joseph Campbell. Importantly, Mr. Han clearly recalls through example and his life experiences the history and unique aspects of Chinese myths and their cultural and perspectival differences to western mythology. His research into the nature and structure of western mythology further enhanced his understanding eastern mythology.

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Mr. Han effectively describes and illustrates the importance and use of myth in his printmaking projects, and clearly outlines his future plans. Mr. Han like numerous Chinese artists over the last several decades has endeavored to fuse ideas, materials, and approaches to art making that incorporate east and west philosophies and traditions. This comingling of cultures offers him the means to explore anew and reinterpret traditional Chinese methods. Myths become an essential component and catalyst to this process.

Mr. Han clearly compares and contrasts the secular nature of eastern mythology with the inherent universality of western mythology as described in Joseph Campbell's essays regarding the "*Monomyth*" and "*Hero's Journey*". Mr. Han avers that western mythology is god focused whereas eastern myth is human focused and explored through multiple deities. He goes on to cogently discuss the flexibility, adaptability, and constantly changing and less systematic structures in eastern mythology as influenced by Hinduism, Taoism, and Buddhism. Whereas western mythology looks ultimately to god and addresses as a spiritual need generated by humans, eastern mythology often

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adapts to the times and connects to the relationships between humans. Eastern myths often have double meanings, a quality Mr. Han uses in creating images and context in his artwork. Mr. Han successfully incorporates these diverse concepts and interpretations to redefine myth competing perspectives of east and west as an inspiration for artistic creation. Myths act as a call to adventure and a means of crossing over into unexplored territory. They can be a spiritual need generated by humans and as way to offer feedback. They allow the consumer to move from nature to human nature. They are a means to maturity and enlightenment. They are often a challenge to the status quo. Mr. Han prolifically embraces this exploration of new possibilities in creating a beautifully executed, evolving, and diverse body of artwork. Artwork that is conceptually unified and questioning while grounded in a strong understanding and mastery of traditional concepts and techniques. Mr. Han is extremely inventive with images, symbols, and relationships derived from his research and experiences. For me his recollections of Chinese myths are sincere and compelling. Western mythology acts as a catalyst to new artistic exploration, approaches, and concepts. This combined with his



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knowledge and innate understanding of eastern myths makes for a richly complex and interconnected body of work. He seeks to determine his uniqueness through his personal call to adventure and create his own place in art world and universe.

## CONCLUSION

Mr. Han's writing demonstrates a high level of competency and understanding of the project he proposed, researched, and ultimately realized in his thesis exhibition. His methodology was rigorous, comprehensive, and convincing. He was very successful in internalizing his research into eastern and western mythology in a way that created a unique and highly personal body of artwork. I am impressed with his mastery of printmaking techniques and his ability to combine these with new technology, traditional forms drawing, ink painting, and calligraphy. He is clearly a well-rounded artist who has positioned himself firmly in the mainstream of contemporary art and pedagogy. His commitment, work ethic, curiosity, good humor, and history of success strongly suggest that he will continue to be a productive artist and effective teacher.

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Mr. Han through his multi-leveled thesis and exhibition has demonstrated that he is a versatile and accomplished artist. Following my analysis of his dissertation and creative output as well as his professional practice in the field of art, I highly recommend that she be awarded an academic Ph.D. title in the visual arts.

Respectfully,

Thomas J. Riesing

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Director, School of Art, Ball State University (2010-2015)

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