

Asian Art News

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ASIAN ART NEWS

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Schoeni
FINE ORIENTAL ART

Proudly introduces paintings 1986-1992 by



Summer Harvesting Planting and Hoeing, 1991, oil on canvas, 81.5 x 64.5 cm
三夏·布面油畫·1991·81.5×64.5厘米。

劉大鴻
LIU DA HONG

Exhibition

November 17-21,
1992, China Club,
13/F, Old Bank of
China Building,
Central,
Hong Kong.

Full colour book
of 198 pages will be
published in
October 1992

G/F, 8 Chancery Lane, Hong Kong Tel: 525 5225 Fax: 522 1528

Young Chinese Contemporaries in Print

There are many young, well-trained painters in China today. To help spread the word about the best, Manfred Schoeni, a Swiss antique dealer, is now embarking on a publishing venture that will almost certainly surprise and delight. Here he talks to AsianArtNews about his newest project.

Art markets are fickle and full of rapidly disappearing fads. The contemporary Chinese art market is no exception, boosted as it is by a legion of people intent on quick profits. To open up new ground here is difficult but Manfred Schoeni, 46, an artist and antique dealer settled in Hong Kong, feels that he has something new to offer the art world with his first publishing venture: a high quality series of books on young contemporary Chinese artists.

For almost a year now, Schoeni's enthusiasm and plans for the first volume have been slowly taking shape. The first volume, on the Qingdao-born painter Liu Dahong is set to appear at the end of this year. Other volumes are to appear yearly as each artist completes the commissioned work. With so many fine young artists to choose from in China today, Schoeni has selected only three with which to begin his publishing venture: Liu Dahong, Wang Danxian, and Qian Ying. Selecting the artists has been no easy task and the criteria that Schoeni has set are strict.

"I only want to publish artists who have a sense of themselves in

what they paint. I don't want commercial artists who move from nudes today to landscapes tomorrow," says Manfred Schoeni. "The main thing is that the artist must have his own style and he must be willing to set aside the commercial aspect and concentrate on the artistic value of his work. The quality of the painting will speak for the artist."

"I only have three artists at the moment but we are presently talking with many others. In the long term, I would like to publish one artist every year. I have given them a time span of two years for somewhere between 12 and 20 paintings. But every painting has to be top quality. It is not the number that is important, it is the quality. If it is going to take longer and the books have to be delayed another year, then so be it."

"I went into Chinese paintings because I thought as China was opening up, artists were freer to express themselves. I like traditional Chinese painting but I have always been worried about copies so I became involved in oil painting. I met a young Fukienese man called Lu Jie in Shanghai who was in charge of the sales at an exhibition. I told him that I wanted to survey the market and see the difference between the commercial and serious artists."



Liu Dahong, *The Twelfth Month*, 1987, oil on canvas, 98 x 160 cm.

Most of them lean towards European painting but still there are some who want to go their own way. Some want to go the commercial way and there are others who are totally lost. So I hired this man and we surveyed mainly Shanghai, Beijing, Hangzhou, Fujian and now we will go to other parts.

"During my trips I found that there were many artists who were looking for someone to assist them. There were those who had pushed aside the commercial game and placed their art first. That is what I want to promote, to promote art."

"I go with my natural feeling. My interest is towards very strong paintings and the moment I saw Liu Dahong's paintings I wanted to do something for him. I think that what Chinese artists today don't understand is that without someone to support them, without the financial reward, they will not succeed in sustaining a long term creative struggle. With Liu Dahong, it was the first time that I had

met a Chinese artist who had, with the exception of two, kept all his paintings since 1986. It was interesting that he had kept all his paintings together which makes it possible for an interesting book. Exhibitions come and go but a book remains."

Over five years Schoeni plans to spend around HK\$2 million on his venture. "There are many ways to produce a book but I think these books will be different, educational, and of high-quality. The books will be in a large format, around 200 pages, hard cover, thread sewn with a first printing of 1,000 copies of each edition. The colour separation, design and printing will be done in Hong Kong. Each volume will cost around HK\$800 and will be sold through galleries and bookshops. In the long run I am looking for contact with foreign publishers that will expand the potential market. I am hoping also that in the future there will be second editions of the books. The plan is to follow the artist through

eight to ten years.

"I have had no official help. But I hired some professional writers and translators because the book is published in Chinese and English. There are a number of texts by various people for the book, including an explanation of the work by the artist. It was interesting to see different views here because of the complexity of Liu Dahong's work. There are texts also by Don Cohn, Zhu Dake and Dr. Qingli Wan."

The target market is in Asia, and Schoeni thinks that younger Asians are now more interested in their own artists. "I think that young people in Asia are now rediscovering their own heritage," says Manfred Schoeni who has lived in Asia for 18 years. However, Schoeni recognises that the interest for many people in contemporary Chinese artists is the curiosity value and many works are overrated and overpriced.

"If China prospers then there

will be a big market for local artists. But at the moment the market is supported by Westerners and Asians who can afford it. I think that a lot of them do not understand what money is. Many of the young artists are spoiled because foreigners have given them the money that they want. The artists have been too spoiled by their situation."

In Hong Kong many shows of young artists are not selling well because of the outrageous prices charged at these exhibitions. He thinks that the market needs to cool down and people have to be more careful in choosing the work, art dealers and representatives.

"The good artists will prevail. I see a big future for oil painting in China. There is a strong figurative market. And Chinese painters have been trained well and they are technically superb. To develop their ideas, I always tell them that they should look to their own heritage and not to the West." ■