Revolutionary Artist

LiQin Tan creates unique works of art combining natural and digital elements

革命性的藝術家: 譚力勤創數碼自然藝術

The past confronts the future in the trend-setting artworks of LiQin Tan. Combining the ancient artistic traditions of his Chinese homeland with the latest computer technology, the Rutgers-Camden professor creates a digital vision of the natural world.

未來面對過去，古老聯接現代——譚力勤深沉地融合中國傳統藝術的精華與現代電腦科技，獨創一種數碼自然的藝術世界。

"我一直在探討的旅程上"，譚在他的新州羅格斯大學辦公室對我解釋着，"我內心真誠堅信我能創造出一種與眾不同的數碼藝術"。

譚指向其近作"樹結＋４"，此系列作品展現道教中自然的五行元素：水、金、火、木、土。每一元素有其三維數碼造型，并印制于木板上或者獸皮上，在每一幅作品上方有一液晶電視機播放五行元素的三維動畫。

作為三維數碼藝術的先驅之一，譚的系列作品引起數碼影像和傳統裝置藝術家的關注，"我的作品結合原始和現代技術于一體"，譚解釋道。

譚，48歲，任教於羅格斯大學五年，擔任電腦動畫和多媒體教授，與太太、兩小孩居住於新澤西州櫻桃山，全家十幾年前成為加拿大公民。

兩年前，譚開始了他的革命性的藝術創造，着重于動畫裝置和印制數碼動畫圖像於原木和獸皮上，其自然五行動畫增強其數碼自然的圖像感覺。

"我發現譚作品的美妙之處在于他的各種材料的探索"。安倫.艾斯比雷士說着。他為譚羅格斯大學的同事和藝術系教授。

此種探索為他動畫藝術背景所驅動，在其藝術作品中，他嘗試打破和擴展二維藝術

"I am on an experimental journey," explains Tan in his Rutgers office. "I need to create something. I really believe in myself and my ability to make something different."

Tan points to his recently finished BurlHead+4, a series of works that illustrate the Taoist elements of nature (water, metal, fire, wood and earth). Each work has a digital image printed on wood and is illustrated by an animated film displayed on a small monitor attached to the image.

Works like this trailblazing series have attracted the attention of video artists and traditional painters alike, says Tan. "My work combines new technology and old techniques," he explains.

Tan, 48, joined the Rutgers-Camden faculty five years ago. The assistant professor of art teaches computer animation and graphics. He holds Canadian citizenship and resides in Cherry Hill with his wife and two children.

Tan began making his revolutionary art works two years ago. He decided to experiment with printing digital images on wood and rawhide and using animation to reinforce the images he created of the natural world.

"What I find fascinating with Li's work is his exploration of materiality," says Allan Espiritu, Tan's colleague in the Rutgers art department.

"This push to find different canvases is a response to his background as an animator. In his fine art work, he tries to break and stretch the boundaries of the two-dimensional plane in a way that enhances the textures and form of his work."

Tan's artistic journey began in China. He comes from a family of educators. His artistic talent was discovered during the Cultural Revolution which threw China into turmoil as educated families were sent to farming areas.

Tan caught attention at the age of 9 when he created a portrait of Chairman Mao in sand. He was placed in a collective of artists who shared their mastery of Chinese calligraphy and painting.

"I was working in a group of artists. I was the youngest, an apprentice to masters who passed on their knowledge to me." he recalls.

Continuing his education, Tan earned diplomas and certificates in fine arts and art history from the Hengyang Teachers' College, the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing and the Hunan Normal University in Changsha. After working as an art instructor and art editor, he decided to leave China in 1987.

"In China, when you are 30 years of age, you have to establish something for your career. I decided to go to Canada to continue my studies."

Tan sold everything he owned to finance the trip. He enrolled at Concordia University in Montreal, where he earned a master of arts in art education before studying computer animation at Sheridan College in Oakville, Canada.

To finance his studies, he created a company that sells Chinese art. He had outlets in Canada and the United States.

Tan laughs at the thought of a child who created portraits of Mao Tse-tung and painted propaganda

Robert Baxter
Art Critic of Courier Post, New Jersey

slogans on walls becoming a capitalist. "I needed to make money," he explains.

While studying at Sheridan, Tan discovered the computer. He graduated with high honors and a degree in computer animation in 1996 and then taught as a lecturer at Ngee Ann Polytechnic in Singapore before he won a position at Rutgers-Camden.

Tan divides the world of digital animation into two parts -- industry and fine arts. The industrial part -- the world of computer games and animated films -- is where digital artists make money.

"I push into fine arts," he explains. "Not as many people are doing this, but there are more choices, more views, more angles. Animation can create new forms."

Tan embarked on his new creative style in December 2003. In the spring of 2004, he displayed his synthesis of Taoism and digital animation for the first time in an exhibition at Rutgers' Stedman Gallery. He was quickly invited to display his work at Union 237 Gallery and the Da Vinci Art Alliance in Philadelphia.

In the meantime, his art works were creating a stir at digital art conventions and meetings. He won "best of show" in the iDEAa Exhibition presented by the International Digital Media & Arts Association last year in Orlando, Fla. Other awards followed at digital competitions in Los Angeles, Baltimore and Lincoln, Neb.

"Everywhere I show my art, I receive a strong positive response," he says. "I think a lot of people are going to join in what I am doing, especially the younger generation. They're seeing a new face they've never see before."

Tan calls his work "pain staking" and says the process is "laborious." To realize his artistic dreams he has had to overcome some daunting challenges.

Before he can print his images, he must prepare the wooden burl or animal skin that carries the image. Flattening the wood can take as long as 15 days. Preparing animal skin is also a time-consuming process.

He searched for a long time to find ink that would print on wood and rawhide and also to find a printer that had enough memory for his complex images. He relies on student research assistants Shaun Jennings and David Thomlison to help him.

"Professor Tan has a lot of determination, a lot of creativity," says Thomlison, a sophomore art major who lives in Haddonfield. "He knows what he wants and how to make it technically and artistically."

Thomlison describes Tan's work as "abstract with a purpose."
"Digital-Queen" illustrates Tan's unique style. The complexly layered painting

的界限，從而深化其肌理和形式。譚的藝術生涯始于中國湖南，成長于教師家庭。他的藝術才能被發現於文革時期，當時，知識分子都要到農村接受再教育，九歲的他因用沙子在木板上貼出毛澤東頭像被引起注意。他被領導推薦進入區級宣傳隊，其成員都必須擁有較好的書法和繪畫功力。

"在宣傳隊中，我最年輕，尊敬的老師和前輩曾把他們的技巧和知識傳授于我"。譚回憶道。之後他繼續深造，曾就讀於湖南衡陽師專、湖南師大和中央美術學院。任教於湖南衡陽師專和擔任湖南美術出版社《畫家》雜志編輯部執編。1987年，他決定出國深造。"當時，我已而立之年，傳統觀點，你必須在此年齡建立起自己的事業，但我決定去加拿大就讀"。

譚賣掉全部家當換來機票。他注冊於蒙特利爾康戈迪亞大學，獲美術教育碩士學位。後進入加拿大國際著名動畫學院夏爾頓學習。在學習同時，他在加拿大創立一藝術公司，其業務跨越加拿大和美國。

譚自我嘲笑着：作為毛澤東思想宣傳隊員已演變成一位名副其實的資本家。"但我需要經濟資助我的學習和家庭"， 他繼而解釋着。夏爾頓動畫學院的學習生涯使譚認識了電腦，榮獲榮譽學士後電腦動畫和圖形設計文憑。然後被該院推薦到新加坡義安理工學院電影媒體系動畫專業擔任三年講師。譚稱當代數碼動畫分為工業動畫、實驗動畫和純藝術動畫，當今各種商業動畫片、電視特效、三維游戲、電視廣告和網站動畫設計都可普遍歸為工業動畫。

"而我則把動畫作為一種純藝術的形式在探索"，他說着："目前探索此形式藝術家不是很多，大部分電腦動畫師都集中于工業動畫。其實，當數碼動畫被作為一種新的藝術形式時，你會發現它深遠的潛力和一種嶄新的創作角度"。

譚革新的藝術首創於2003年12月。2004年春季，他在羅格斯大學Stedman藝術畫廊成功地舉辦了他的個展。緊接着，他被邀請于費城Union 237畫廊和達芬奇藝術聯盟畫廊舉辦個展。

同時，他的藝術作品在國際數碼藝術會議和活動中獲得廣泛贊揚，如國際數碼藝術媒體協會展覽頭獎；費城達芬奇藝術聯盟金獎；林肯時代畫廊優秀作品獎和柏達摩國際媒體大賽優秀獎。"每到一處，我都會得到當代媒體和藝術家正面贊揚"，譚說着："我深感許多藝術家會加入我的行列，特別是年輕一代，他們已感到一種嶄新藝術所賦予的使命"。

譚描述他的藝術創作過程是一種痛苦的磨練，為實現他的藝術夢，必須克服不可預測的各種技術難題。

在印制數碼三維動畫圖像於原木和獸皮上之前，其準備工作是非常辛苦和費時的，制造和绷獸皮都需使用原始的技術，印制油墨

features the image of a woman placed under a pair of flaring animal horns printed on rawhide. The animal hide is stretched onto a frame of tree limbs with metal clamps and strings.

Thomlison says the process begins with sketches on paper and then moves to the computer as Tan and his assistants model the image and add textures. Then they work on the animation in "countless hours" of work.

"Digital-Queen" synthesizes Tan's interest in Taoism and early American culture.

"I am interested in religion and spirituality," he says. "Taoism is still in my body, but I find many similarities between Chinese and early American cultures."

Like a man who has unleashed a genie, Tan does not know where his artistic path will lead.

"The core spirit, the core conception and artistic view cannot change too much, but we cannot imagine the changes that can occur in animation and digital art in the next 10 years," he notes. "The technical changes will impact on my artistic view."

"This is my life, to blend the old techniques with the new technology. I like to play, but I have no time."

"Watch TV? No time. I need a balance between my work and play, but for now I work. I enjoy it. This is what I really want."

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濕度和印刷機的速度控制是另一難題。譚雇傭了他的兩個學生為助手——山.吉尼斯和大衛.湯姆利森。"譚教授有很多的想法和創造力"，湯姆利森說，第二年級動畫專業學生，居住於新澤西州漢頓福，"他知道他需要什麼，也知道怎樣運用現有技術和藝術創作去制作之"。
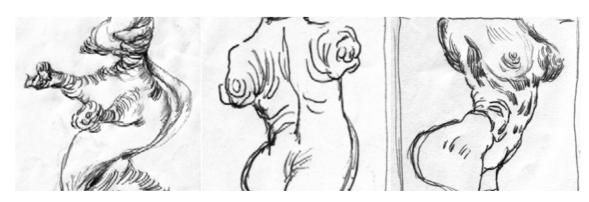
湯姆利森描繪譚的作品是一種"有意追求的抽象"。

"數碼原始女皇"作品是譚的代表作，多層次數碼原始的女人體置身於閃光的牛角和皮子的背景中，印制後的獸皮被鋁夾和棉繩緊綳於初獷的木框上。

湯姆利森說，創制始于素描草稿，後轉入於電腦三維，造型加上色彩，肌理和光綫，最後則是冗長的動畫和成像制作。"數碼女皇"結合了譚對道教和北美先民文化的興趣。"我對宗教和精神靈氣感興趣"，譚說："道教好象已被我身心接受，同時我已發現許多中國文化和北美先民文化的相同之處"。當藝術創作充滿豐富的創作力之時，譚也并不很清楚他未來的藝術走向。

"其主要的内涵、精神不會變化很大，但未來的數碼動畫技術變化則無法預測"，譚加上："新的數碼和動畫技術將影響我的藝術思考"。"這是我的生命，不斷探索新的和舊的技術，其實我也願意休閑玩耍，但目前沒時間，也無時間觀看電視。當然我需要平衡其工作和業餘休閑，目前，我探索着，工作着，并深深喜歡之，因為它是我真誠渴望的事業"。

二零零五年三月

BurlBody, Draft Sketches; 樹結人體, 素描草稿, 2005