

ART PROBE

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- Shristi Sainani

Exhibition : *Song of Myself*

Artist : *Fu-sheng Ku*

Venue : *Eslite Gallery (Taipei, Taiwan)*

Dates : *17th April – 31st May 2021*



Lifting off (detail, 2012)

Source : Eslite Gallery

Running from 17th April to 31st May 2021 Taiwan-based, *Eslite Gallery* exhibits an online show, *Song of Myself*, as a homage to the late contemporary artist, *Ku Fu-sheng*. The digital exhibition covers more than just *Fu-Sheng's* body of work; it explores in-depth, his intimate relationship with *Eslite* and the famous writer and curator of *Song of Myself*, *Pai Hsien-Yung*.

Born in Shanghai (b.1934), *Ku Fu-sheng* completed his formal education from the National Taiwan Normal University in 1958, after which he was invited to join the Fifth Moon Group.¹ In 1961, he moved to Paris, then to New York in 1962, where he studied at the Art Students League (New York, USA). Through his art he expresses and records emotions of love, desire and yearning. He passed away in 2017.

¹ The Fifth Moon Group was a group of Chinese artists who pioneered the modern art movement in post-war Taiwan between the mid-1950s and the 1970s. The group's iconic style is a hybridisation of bold brushstrokes of Eastern calligraphy tradition and the shapes and colours of Western aesthetics, characterised by an innovative representation of freedom, conceptualisation, and format of painting. The founding members of the Fifth Moon Group include: Chuang Tse, Feng Chung-jui, Kuo Tung-Jung, Li Fang-Chih, Kuo Yu-Lun, Chen Jing-Rong, and Ku Fu-Sheng

Favourites from the show 'Song of Myself' are:

1) **Waiting for Angels, 1998**



Source : Eslite Gallery

'Waiting for Angels (1998)', is a mixed media on paper, measuring 56 x 71 cm. In this piece, *Fu-Sheng* puts together images of misery alongside a pop, quirky, floral background. What one sees in front of them as a focal point, is a primary subject in white. The figure is headless and is crouching, a posture of defence or servitude. Similarly, there are secondary, smaller-sized figures which oppose the visual quality of the background. For instance, there is a male figure placed on the bottom-left of the composition. He seems defeated, perhaps drunk and unwilling to budge from his position. There is also a subsidiary image of a laying, blonde figure alongside recumbent angels on the top right. The contrasting formal quality of the polar backdrop accomodating cut-outs of melancholic people, makes this work compelling. It allows space for two clashing sentiments to sit in harmony with one another while maintaining a visual balance.

2) Garden of Eden, 1996



Source : Eslite Gallery

Measuring 44 x 59 cm, '*Garden of Eden (1996)*' is a fantasy-filled mixed media on paper. Visually stunning, this piece embodies dynamism. What one sees in front of them is a brimming landscape with flourishing tress — scantily leafed in greens and reds but full of vitality. The trees sit under a vigorously blue and lavender, bright sky. The brushstrokes used to paint out the sky are quick and urgent. The branches of the trees, dominating the canvas, are energetic; the grounds beneath them, lush with strokes of blue which enliven (even more so) an atmosphere of movement. The blue strokes hint at perhaps, slender steams flowing through the landscape, sparkling under the comforting sunny sky. The composition is surreal, a dream-like depiction.

This sense of motion is further fuelled by the subjects in blue, placed at the right-hand corner of the composition. Although their physiognomies are absent, it is evident on studying their anatomies, one is a male figure while the other is female. They are frolicking, with nimbleness in their feet. Justifying its title, '*Garden of Eden (1996)*' portrays a terrestrial paradise, inhabited by Adam and Eve.²

² *Garden of Eden*, in the Old Testament Book of Genesis, biblical earthly paradise inhabited by the first created man and woman, Adam and Eve, prior to their expulsion for disobeying the commandments of God.

3) Children's Hour, 2010



Source : Eslite Gallery

A quintessential trait of *Fu-sheng's* work (other than using vibrant, bold colours) is a portrayal of physiques radiating a carefree playfulness. The subjects display liberation with bodies soaring, open arms, gleefully afloat, descending carelessly towards ground space. One can spot a similar body in '*Children's Hour (2010)*' along with other young people emitting a spirit of content and elation. They are composed within a background of an extensive field of yellow poppies. In Chinese culture, yellow poppies represent prosperity and abundance, which is exactly what this piece brings to the table — a sense of fulfilment.

The work is a mixed media on printed calico,³ measuring 98 x 64 cm.

³ Calico is a type of cotton cloth, typically plain white or unbleached.

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