



曾国和的秋斋藏画，都是去芜存菁后的精品。(Photo: 龙国雄)

仰望一座大山 PROTECTOR & DEFENDER

拥有独到的艺术品味和前瞻性眼光，曾国和是新加坡收藏中国近现代书画的一座高峰。

With a sense of aesthetics and vigour for heritage that his peers rave about, Chan Kok Hua stands out in the field of Singapore collectors of modern Chinese art

TEXT 胡文雁 / WOOMUN NGAN

在新加坡中国书画的收藏历史中，曾出现过一批重要藏家，上世纪三四十年代有黄曼士、陈之初；五六十年代有刘作筹、杨启霖，更近一点的80年代，除了有郑应荃、陈金川、沈怀祖、蔡玉荣，还有一位重中之重的曾国和——虽然他不会承认。

行事极其低调的他在有限的访问中，从不见以藏家自居，他说：“藏家应该像张伯驹、王世襄那样，有情有识，有气度，也有气节，不论收藏的是国宝级书画，或是民族工艺精华，都能有自己的性格，更有民族的情操。”

但凡走过必留痕迹。曾国和从80年代开始经营新华艺术中心，突破营业范畴，以个人眼光和素养，系统收藏近现代南北画派各代表性中国水墨。他的“秋斋”现藏有过百件任伯年、吴昌硕、黄宾

虹、齐白石、张大千、徐悲鸿、傅抱石、李可染、林风眠、陆俨少、吴冠中等名家名画，无论质或量，皆洋洋大观。

2010年，这批藏画的128件精品首次受邀在北京保利博物馆展出，因完整呈现一场20世纪中国水墨书画的视觉盛宴而轰动一时。与海内外中国书画行家、藏家说起曾国和，他们都认为他继承了早期南洋藏家对待艺术的赤诚，是新世纪新加坡收藏中国书画的一座高峰。台湾权威的《当代艺术新闻月刊》亦在去年2月号，评选曾国和为2012年度“十大风云人物”之一，认为他为东南亚中国书画的传承扮演最佳护持者角色，非但受到华人艺术圈的热烈喝彩，也为风来市俗气息浓郁的艺术市场传来佳话。

窥见名家真迹

生于1956年的曾国和祖籍广东潮安，早年从事新闻工作，既无祖业可荫也无企业背景，纯靠对中国书画的热爱放弃摇笔杆的卖文工作，一头栽进收藏的漫漫长途。他创办新华艺术中心，有幸与北京字画店荣宝斋合作，连续10年在新加坡举办荣宝斋画展，每次都非常成功。

荣宝斋是300年老字号，除经营字画，还库存大量书画精品作为研究和鉴定的依据。曾国和因为难得的机缘，和荣宝斋首席鉴定师王大山关系亦师亦友，不但在他的教导下掌握许多鉴赏奥秘，还有机会进入荣宝斋不对外开放的巨大库房，一窥古今书画名家的真迹精品，大大开拓了眼界。

访问中，曾国和不止一次提及王大山，“我从他身上学到最重要的一点是，经营画廊，不能只顾着买卖。过我手的好画不计其数，应尽量力把一些留下来，建立丰富的收藏。”

从此，曾国和领悟到经营书画和收藏之间不存在矛盾。他开始一点一滴筑造自己的“后花园”，并把收藏范围锁定以1840年鸦片战争为上限的近现代中国书画。“近现代离我们比较近，更能产生共鸣。这个时代也是中国书画一个重要的大时代。面对西方文化的冲击，这时代的作品具有不同的社会面貌，能掀起千层浪。我很幸运能生在这个时代，并有机会结识包括李可染、陆俨少、吴冠中在内的名家，从他们身上学到很多刻苦向学的精神和做人的道理，终身受用不尽。”

收藏不惜代价

收藏讲究机缘，曾国和不少藏品是直接通过这些密切交往的名家购得的，称得上真稀奇；也因为他收藏态度严谨有如做学问，对画家画流派和作品背景出处有深入研究及系统梳理，名头没有的、内容缺漏的，就竭尽所能设法补遗，其收藏规模因此非常完整且具有深度。

当然，收藏过程是异常艰苦的，曾国和没有家传背景，也没有雄厚资金，一路上都是靠以画养画——买小鸡，小鸡养大了，卖了鸡去买小羊；小羊养大了，卖了羊去买小牛——如此这般耗尽毕生精力，才有今天的收藏成就，个个甜酸苦辣岂是外人所能体会？

他曾经为了买画和银行申请抵押贷款，也曾经为了得到一张画提出以房子作为交换条件。这种不惜一切代价的“癫狂”，除了出于对中国书画的

执著与热爱，曾国和还带有一种文人风骨和侠义之心。他说：“新加坡曾是中国书画收藏重镇，这是经过几代人努力苦心建立起来的。但2000年以后，中国经济腾飞，富起来的中国人财力大，也很敢买，于是大批新加坡藏画排山倒海似的迅速回流中国，怵目惊心，这可是好多藏家一辈子的心血，这么多精彩的作品离开新加坡，可能永远都回不来了！”

曾国和觉得对一个国家来说，这是重大的文化损失，也是文化纽带的断裂，于是他奋力抵抗时势的巨浪洪流，虽明知个人力量微薄，仍希望尽量利用手边一点资源，争取把一些有价值的作品留在新加坡。

购回重要作品

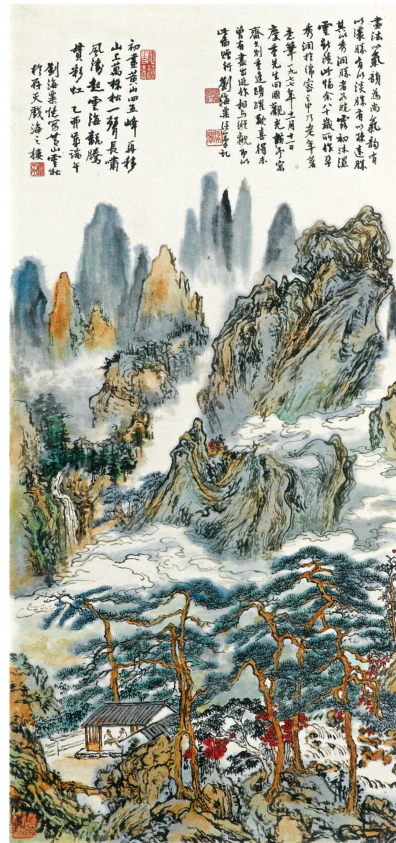
在他的努力下，任伯年的《东坡操琴图》、刘奎龄的《五伦图》、陈少梅的《游山听泉图》、溥儒的《江南岩岫》、徐悲鸿的《饮水情义图》、刘海粟的《云海贯彩虹》、李可染的《苍岩耸翠图》、黄胄的《丰收歌》等一些本地藏画都被留存下来，其中包括已经流散海外但被曾国和购回的珍品，意义更见重大。

35年的收藏之路，曾国和积淀出独树一帜的审美视角与逸趣，逐渐领悟去芜存菁之必要。他说：“收藏不在量而在质，我可以卖掉10张画只为换回一张画。优秀的藏家必需有思维性和计划性，此外还要有前瞻性和素养，不能因为有钱就漫无目的的收。哪些画家该以完整性为主轴，哪些画家该以代表性为脉络，都应该方向清楚，专心致志，如此才能够让藏品的文化价值找到适当的定位。”

他强调文化价值而不是金钱价值，“这不是收藏的初衷和本意。只要六个月时间，我就能把35年的心血变成一堆数字，但这些都是艺术品啊，不是商品，如何能以数字衡量？”

大半生在水墨书画世界驰骋，曾国和的下半生依然只会虔诚地做着同一件事。即便如此，他从不认为自己能永远把艺术品“占为己有”，而只是暂时性地拥有一段美好的因缘。

2010年，曾国和曾把一批他收藏的本地画家作品捐给新加坡美术馆，未来，如果国家需要，他也



“秋斋”收藏之一：刘海粟（1896-1994）《云海贯彩虹》，1975年作，137 x 64公分，设色纸本。

不排除考虑把他的中国书画收藏同样捐给国家。他动情地说：“新加坡已经没有多少年轻人知道徐悲鸿、齐白石、李可染了……一个真正的国际大都会不能只有高楼大厦而没有文化积淀。中国书画是华族文化很精致的一部分，有机会让它扎根自己生长的地方，是很值得做的事。”



2010年，“秋斋”128件精品首次受邀在北京保利博物馆展出，轰动一时。



Chan Kok Hua's acquisition effort allows Xu Beihong's A Picture Of Gratitude (《饮水情义图》) to remain in Singapore.

Like masts on the landscape of Singapore's art collecting history, these names stand out as key figures of their time: Huang Manshi and Tan Tsze Chor in the 1930s and 1940s; Low Chuck Tiew and Yeo Khee Lim in the 1950s and 1960s; and Zheng Yingquan, Chen Jinchuan and Shen Huaizu in the 1980s, were respected for their knowledge and insight into Chinese art.

And then there is Chan Kok Hua, but the low-profile art connoisseur would never accept the accolade. He feels unworthy next to "a true art collector" like Zhang Boju or Wang Shixiang, he says. "They were not only full of passion and knowledge about art, but also endowed with good qualities such as integrity. Their individuality and feelings for the different cultures came through whether in their collection of national art treasures like Chinese painting or the best of arts and crafts of the minorities."

Since the 1980s, Chan has run the Sin Hua Gallery and set out to systematically collect the key works of modern contemporary Chinese ink paintings by artists of various stripes. Currently, his collection is home to more than hundred artworks by important Chinese artists such as Ren Bonian, Wu Changshuo, Huang Binhong, Qi Baishi, Li Keran, Lu Yanshao, Zhang Daqian, Xu Beihong, Fu Baoshi, Lin Fengmian and Wu Guanzhong.

In 2010, 128 artworks from this collection were exhibited for the first time at the Poly Art Museum in Beijing, which drew much attention by virtue of its comprehensive presentation of 20th century Chinese ink art.

Industry players and collectors both within and outside Singapore commonly consider Chan to have inherited the passion of early South-east Asian collectors for art, and as a key figure among Singapore collectors of Chinese art.

Chan was even named as one of the 10 People of the Year by Taiwan's authoritative Chinese Contemporary Art News magazine in its February issue last year, with the periodical citing his role as a key protector of South-east Asia's Chinese art heritage as the reason for the honour. Chan's selection has been hailed by the broader Chinese art world and has brought a welcome breath of fresh air to the usually bottom line-focused art market.

Collecting The Masters

Chan, born in 1956 to a family in Chao'an in what is Guangdong Province today, was a journalist before founding the Sin Hua Gallery.

He has partnered Beijing art store Rong Bao Zhai to hold the Rong Bao Zhai art event in Singapore for ten years running to great success. Rong Bao Zhai is a 300-hundred-year-old institution that is in possession of numerous

quality calligraphic and painting works for the purposes of study and appraisal. Chan was fortunate enough to make the acquaintance and later friendship of Rong Bao Zhai's chief appraiser Wang Dashan, who taught Chan much about the art of collecting and art appreciation and also allowed him to peek into Rong Bao Zhai's inventory (usually off-limits to the public) that includes the works of several masters over the ages.

In the course of the interview, Wang's name was constantly on Chan's lips. He says: "The most important thing I learned [from Wang] is, it is not enough to just care about buying and selling when running a gallery. I should try to keep some of the artworks that come my way to build a good collection."

Since then, Chan realised that running of an art gallery business does not contradict the ownership of an art collection. He began building his collection with works created from the Opium Wars of the 1840s onwards. "We feel a little closer to modern contemporary art and this is also a key period in the history of Chinese art. During this time, with the impact of contact with the West, Chinese art began to take on a different social fabric and the change was profound. I am very fortunate to be born in this time for I have had the opportunity to make the acquaintance of famed artists such as Li Keran, Lu Yanshao and Wu Guanzhong. I have learnt a lot about hard work and other values from them, and the lessons are enough to last me a lifetime."

Regardless Of Price

Because Chan takes a systematic approach to collecting, when it comes to art history, he also commands an extraordinary breadth of knowledge which he uses to plug any gaps in his collection. This is why his collection is regarded as comprehensive and substantial.

The process of collecting is an expensive one and without family money or deep pockets to tap on, Chan's approach has been to build up a collection with proceeds from his gallery business. He has been known to buy artworks with the help of bank mortgages and has even offered up a property in exchange for an artwork. He also acquires from fellow collectors with whom he shares firm friendships. This painstaking and time-consuming approach has yielded a spectacular collection, but how many of us can appreciate the hard work that has gone into it?

His targeted acquisitions is the result of not just a passion for Chinese art but also a desire to do something for his fellow collectors and community.

"Singapore was once a centre of Chinese art collecting and this was a reputation forged



(Clockwise from above)
Chan Kok Hua was fortunate enough to make the acquaintance of fame artists such as Lu Yanshao, Wu Guanzhong and Li Keran.



by several generations of collectors. However, in the 21st century, with the rise of the Chinese economy, wealthy Chinese with financial muscle have appeared and many artworks in local collections have gone back to China as a result. I was very concerned. These collections have taken lifetimes to build up and once these wonderful artworks leave Singapore's shores they may never come back."

For Chan, such an outflow of artworks is a huge loss to a country's culture and could possibly ruin its cultural heritage.

Buying Back Key Works

Chan's efforts are why works like Ren Bonian's *Dongpo Playing Qin*, Liu Kuiling's *Five Relationships*, Chen Shaomei's *Enjoying Running Streams In The Mountains*, Pu Ru's *Rock Mountains In Jiangnan*, Xu Beihong's *A Picture Of Gratitude*, Liu Haisu's *The Cloud Of Mountains At Huangshan*, Li Keran's *Standing Tall And Landscapes* and Huang Zhou's *Bumper Harvest* remain in Singapore.

And when some of these important works are acquired by overseas collectors, Chan attempts to

buy them back.

"What is important about collecting is quality, not quantity," says the man who has amassed three decades of collecting experience. "I can sell 10 paintings in exchange for retaining a single artwork. Outstanding collectors must be able to think and plan, and should also be equipped with foresight and knowledge. One should not be collecting indiscriminately because he can afford to. The collector should have a good idea of which artists to focus on and which artists to include in a collection for representativeness and set out to achieve his objectives so that his collection acquires a certain cultural value."

Chan emphasises that cultural value does not equate monetary value, saying: "That is not the point of collecting. I only need six months to turn three decades of hard work into a bunch of numbers. But these are artworks and not commodities, so how can we talk of them in terms of numbers?"

Despite spending a good chunk of his life in the world of Chinese ink, Chan does not believe that his artworks truly belong to him; fate dictates who should be their custodian for the day.

In 2010, he donated a cache of artworks by local artists to the state and he does not discount the possibility of donating the Chinese art in his collection in the same way. With a trace of emotion, he says: "Not many young Singaporeans know about artists like Xu Beihong and Li Keran... A true cosmopolitan city cannot be just about the skyscrapers without culture. Chinese calligraphy and painting are an exquisite part of Chinese culture and an opportunity to help it sink roots here is a worthwhile task to undertake."

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