

A Short Visual Art History of Macao, from Past to Present

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ABSTRACT: This article surveys visual arts in Macao from a thematic perspective that is presented chronologically. Its aim is to serve as an introductory text for a further development of each historical period or theme. This text focuses on the variety of art in Macao, including traditional Chinese painting and calligraphy, modern art expressions of Western tradition and new media, surveys their internationalization through collecting strategies, refers to overseas representation in international shows while advancing the main inter(national) trends that characterized the arts in Macao throughout time.

KEYWORDS: Art History; Chinese Art; Western Modern Art; New Media; Internationalization.

Introduction

When one thinks of the Macao SAR, what immediately comes to mind is casinos, gambling, the Grand Prix and the Pearl River Delta economic zone. It is rarer to remember Macao for its artistic uniqueness, even if this is a small town in which East

and West are effectively blended in a true intercultural meeting. One of Macao's characteristics is that for every monument, garden, cemetery, achievement or artist of Portuguese tradition there is an equivalent example of Chinese tradition to balance it. In some exceptional cases, the two cultures intertwine and enrich each other. The most notable example of such blend is the city's most well known monument, the façade of Saint Paul's cathedral, now named the Ruins of St. Paul's. Its exceptionality resides in the use of granite, a hard stone, for a delicate decorative programme of inlays and reliefs. This façade, built by missionaries under the supervision of Italian Jesuit Carlo Spinola, reflects the architectonic style of the Order of Jesus. Generally, Jesuit churches display austere and undecorated façades that contrast with rich, hyper-decorative and rich interiors. To this day, the churches' ornate façade programme in stone remains a topic of debate, as it displays a complex fusion of worldly references, of European, Chinese and Japanese origin. The fact that the decoration "localizes"

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its symbolism through the addition of Asian elements makes it a symbol of Macao's artistic exceptionality. We could consider the façade's syncretism a leitmotiv of Macao's art, which, in this text, follows the symbolism of the number 9, a number locally connotating durability, longevity and eternity to refer to the main aspects or categories of Macao's art.

1. The Historical Names

As in the rest of the world, the arts in Macao have had a significant role throughout history. Macao's cosmopolitanism prompted, throughout centuries, the arrival of several foreign artists to the territory. It is thanks to international artists that Macao's history includes drawings of erudite and classic quality. From these, the drawings made by three foreigners—Auguste Borget (1808–1877), French, who painted the Temple of A-Ma and a view of Macao from China, English Admiral Robert Elliot (1801–1875), and English artist William Purser (1785–1856), who drew famous views of Praia Grande Bay—have penetrated collective conscience. Their popularity stems from the fact that they were adapted for engraving by other talented artists. Technologies of reproduction allowed these city landscapes to enter the popular sphere.

In addition to these Europeans, Georges Chinnery (1774–1852) equally stands out as an indispensable figure for the arts of Macao. Graduated from the Royal Academy in London, Chinnery died in Macao in 1852

and his funeral tombstone resides there. We owe to Chinnery—an Englishman who traveled to the East Indies between 1802 and 1825, and then to Macao and Canton between 1825 and 1852—the most notable 19th century drawings from India and southern China (including Macao, Hong Kong, which became a colony in 1842, and Canton). Thanks to Chinnery, for example, we can access what the interior of the Ruins of St. Paul's looked like.¹ Chinnery produced a drawing, now belonging to the V&A collection in London in which the interior of the church was depicted. Its housing at such prestigious institution confirms the artistic quality and the importance of Chinnery's drawings.

Lam Qua (1801–1860), a Chinese from Canton, is another notable name in Macao's 19th-century art. He was the first Chinese to exhibit his portrait art in the West. There are some who claim that in the 1820s Chinnery was his teacher, but Chinnery refutes this possibility. However, Lam Qua imitated Chinnery's realistic genre with great mastery. His apprenticeship made him a famous painter at the time, and his works surpassed the commercial value of those by Chinnery. His artistic practice of portraiture is divided into two groups, the bourgeois and the scientific. Between 1820 and 1835, Lam Qua produced portraits for a wealthy audience in Canton and Macao. From 1836 onwards, Lam Qua produced a series of medical portraits for Peter Parker, a medical missionary from the United States. These anatomical studies are now in the collection of the medical library at Yale University, a fact that attests to their importance as scientific and artistic objects.²

Macanese Marciano Baptista (1826–1896) is another prominent figure from the 19th century. As a student at the São José Seminary, from an early age he became an assistant apprentice to Chinnery, who lived nearby. Over the years, the relationship between teacher and disciple developed and Baptista became an important watercolour artist in Macao. His landscapes refer to a Macao that has disappeared, with Praia Grande



Vue générale de Macao, 1808–1877. Artist: Auguste Borget. Graphite on paper.

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Bay inhabited by reeds and other boats. Baptista went to live in Hong Kong, annexed as a Crown Colony by the British after the First Opium War. There, he associated himself with Chinese painters with whom he came to cultivate one of the first meetings between the two schools, the Western and the Chinese. Art historian César Guillén Nuñez considers that this contribution “would play an important role in the evolution of contemporary painting in Canton.”³

2. The Moderns

Modernism, as an artistic current, stems from the academic globalization that occurred during the colonial period, since the late nineteenth century. Classicist academic teachings spread throughout the colonies, notably through elite colleges. An artistic solution of rupture, the modernist style, markedly abstract, would flourish from the beginning of the 20th century, in Europe, and from the 1930s, in the

colonies. After the colonial period, the modern style was understood, in countries that had recently become independent, as an avant-garde art, thus more in line with the new political times.

Macao was no exception. Although one cannot speak of a colonial and post-colonial period, as in other areas of the world, modern manifestations took place in the territory since the second half of the 20th century, namely through Macanese who moved to the West (usually Portugal) to pursue higher studies. One of the protagonists of this trend is Luís Demée (1929–2014), a classicist painter (obtained through apprenticeship with George Smirnoff, a Russian architect and painter residing in Macao) who held a degree in Fine Arts from the University of Porto. His classicism would later give way to a markedly abstract painting of modernist nature. Demée started to use all the potential of industrialization, expressing himself in various media, such as mural art, printmaking,



Saint Tiago of Barra Fortress, c. 1875–1880. Artist: Marciano António Baptista. Watercolour on paper. Courtesy of Martyn Gregory Gallery.

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Autographic. Artist: Nuno Barreto. Serigraphy, 35x41.6cm, 1976. Macao Museum of Art A-PP1998-000083.

painting and tapestry. Luís Demée became a Professor at the Academy of Fine Arts of Porto, where he died in 2014.

Herculano Estorninho (1921–1994) is a case of a unique watercolour artist, a practice he maintained throughout his life, in parallel with other professional activities. In the 1940s, he began painting in watercolour under Demée's supervision. While in Timor, between 1968 and 1970, Estorninho produced a remarkable archive of the landscapes and customs of that territory which would serve as an inspiration for many of his later works. Art historian Margarida Marques Matias considers that Estorninho's loose and expressive brushstroke results from the appropriation of the "fauve" rebelliousness of modern Italians.⁴

In addition to Estorninho and Demée, Macao received foreign modernists during the first decade of the 20th century. Portuguese Fausto Sampaio (1893–1956), born in Anadia and trained in Paris during the late 1920s, stands out. His extensive travel painting work through the Portuguese colonies (São Tomé, Goa, Macao and Timor), in addition to the Philippines and Cochinchina, earned him the title of "Painter of the Empire". His programmatic choice, one with a markedly Orientalist spirit, originates in his

direct contact with the French cultural elites, who had opened up to the "primitive" and the distant "Other". Their success in the artistic capital of the world surely affected Sampaio. His realistic style is one of transition to modernism and evidenced in his loose brushstroke, in a quasi-impressionist register.

3. A New Paradigm and its Promoters

From the mid-1980s, Macao gradually changed the face of its artistic activity, thanks to a new generation of Macanese, Portuguese and foreigners. Among the illustrious Macanese who contributed to a new start is António de Conceição Júnior (1951–), one of Macao's most versatile artists. Graduated in Fine Arts in Lisbon in 1975, Conceição Júnior's work can be divided into two streams: that of creator and that of intellectual. As creator, Conceição Júnior acted as fashion designer, painter and illustrator. His creations always contain a postmodern allure, filled with quotations from the past and promoting interculturality. As promoter of the arts, Conceição Júnior stands out for supporting the practice of various artists that appeared in Macao. His impact has been greater as a researcher and curator, activities in which Conceição Júnior served Macao from 1977 to the present day.

In 1988, the Portuguese painter Nuno Barreto (1941–2009) arrived in Macao. Equipped with a Portuguese, British and American academic background, Barreto became an academic at the Porto School of Fine Arts, a position he left to be professor and director of the Visual Arts Academy of the Polytechnic Institute of Macao. Locally, Barreto lectured the generation that would emerge and impact the city's artistic panorama during the 1990s. While in the territory Barreto was a prolific artist, and one who represented Macao and China in a unique way. His quotations and his exclusive "red lacquer" colour made him famous among the Chinese, in what can be considered the continuation of a long history of mutual inspiration between Western and Eastern artists.

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Carlos Marreiros at the opening discourse of ARTFEM on 8 March, 2018. Image courtesy of AlbergueSCM/ALBcreativeLAB.

Carlos Marreiros (1957–) is one of the most famous artists from Macao. A trained architect, university professor on several continents, since his return to Macao in 1983 he has made a career as artist and curator. Conceição Júnior says that his work “starts from the abstract towards the neo-figurative and has always been marked by the cultural ambivalence that is inherent in Macao.”⁵ Marreiros was the first solo artist to represent Macao at the Venice Biennale in 2013. He is equally a distinguished promoter of projects such as *Review of Culture* in 1987, or *ARTFEM, Women Artists International Biennial of Macau*, which opened in 2018.

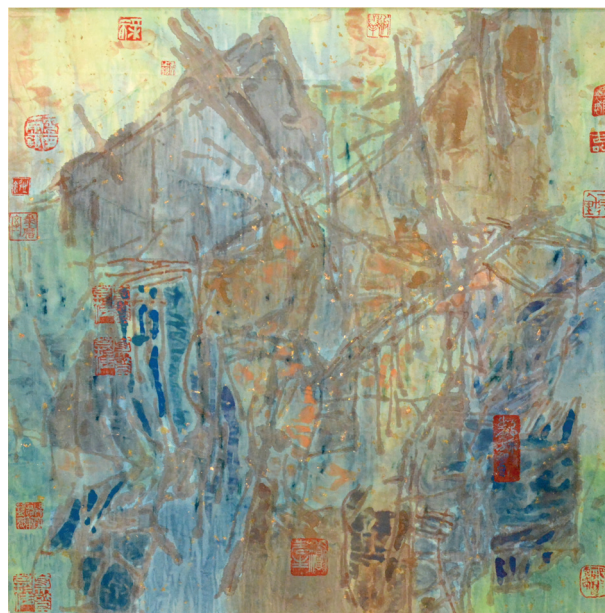
4. The 1990s

The formation of the “Circle of Friends of Culture” in 1987 changed the artistic landscape of Macao. The group’s manifesto, initially constituted by Kwok Woon (1940–2003), Carlos Marreiros (1957–), Victor Marreiros (1960–), Guilherme Ung Vai Meng (1958–), the couple Un Chi Iam (1941–) and Mio Pang Fei (1936–), presented itself as a “material complex”. They stated that, due to the moment’s circumstances, their creations were not “avant-garde” because their voices were not loud enough. The decision was therefore to act only on environmental problems that affected the artistic panorama of Macao.⁶ Joana Ling, wife of Kwok

Woon, said that the group and its close associates could, with the variety of personal styles that each member brought into the art scene, represent the city.⁷

Mio Pang Fei is nowadays one of Macao’s most important artists, having earned the respect of the PRC and achieved international admiration. In 2015, he represented Macao at the Venice Biennial with the exhibition *Path and Adventure*. Mio’s “neo-orientalism” is a double endeavour: an intellectual strategy and an artistic practice that results from the study and reflection of Chinese representation merged with European aesthetics. His work has always sought to harmonize these two artistic forces, which are commonly seen as antagonistic. As a senior member of the group, Mio proved to be influential in the artistic production of the other members. He introduced all artists to Chinese techniques and materials, which would instill in their Western styles a traditional Chinese brand. In return, his relationship with the other members allowed him to be prominent in the artistic society of Macao.

Guilherme Ung Vai Meng is possibly Macao’s first installation artist. Described by Conceição



Scenery in Dream. No date. Artist: Un Chi Iam. Chinese painting, 65 x 65 cm. Image courtesy of the artist.

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Júnior as an expressionist, “disobedient of the current artistic trends,”⁸ Meng also works in performance, painting and drawing. His installations were the first incursions of conceptual arts with a traditional tone, a practice he keeps to this day. The recent exhibition *(De)Construction of Memory* with Chan Hin Io at the Berardo Museum, revealed fragments of a no longer existing Macao that remains alive in the collective memory of the city and its inhabitants. This sense of a lost culture can be regarded as nostalgia and desire to halt Macao’s continuous transformation. Today, despite the numerous futuristic casinos, Macao’s celebrated cultural heritage assets continue to be its hybrid architecture and the cultural fusion practiced by its cultural agents.



(De)Construction of Memory. Artists: Ung Vai Meng & Chan Hin Io. Installation detail, 2019. Image by Leonor Veiga.

Kwok Woon arrived in Macao in 1980, where he found fertile ground to express his passion for Chinese culture. The city’s unique meeting of Western and Oriental culture allowed him to create modern and contemporary art containing a markedly Western symbolism and filled with Chinese elements. His work is postmodern and reveals “his right to exist and rebel against any form of cultural slavery.”⁹ Chinese critic Huang Xiao-Feng recognizes that Woon’s works were equipped with a “historical critical cultural awareness.”¹⁰

This group was very important for the establishment of a postmodern currency on Macao’s visual arts; their work followed international trends that the artists localized through their own personal account and cultural agency. Their impact was so evident that they remain relevant today as practicing artists and cultural agents.

5. International Artists Today

As in the past, the presence of international artists in the city continues today. Of these, Konstantin Bessmertny (1964–), Russian, also a member of the Circle of Friends of Culture since 1992, has largely contributed to highlight Macao internationally. His work retains the mark of its Russian background, namely through iconography, but his narrative style has been adapted to integrate his life experiences in Macao. His satirical analysis of the city focuses especially on its occult side: the gambling culture and the famous *iam-cha* lunches were depicted through his Russian eyes, observes Joana Ling.¹¹ This syncretism has been behind its success since his arrival in Macao in 1992.

Australian painter Dennis Murrell (1947–) has resided in Macao since 1989. His abstract work has revealed all its expressive capacity in Macao. Since 1992, Murrell developed a unique technique, which appeared almost accidentally. He recalls, “I used a piece of tissue to clean some paint that had splashed onto the floor of my apartment and was impressed by the intriguing and very beautiful dark red stain that appeared on the paper. Consequently, I resolved to experiment further and so began a long journey exploring the possibilities of combining the vivid colours of acrylic paints with the subtle textures provided by tissue paper. For me, that journey is far from complete.”¹²

Macao has always been a welcoming city for international artists and continues to be so. In the post-handover period, the number of foreigners has increased, but it is too early to say whether they are settling in the city and changing its artistic landscape as in past times.

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Monumento da Taipa, 1985. Author: Dorita de Castel-Branco (1936–1996).
Photo by Eloi Scarva.

6. The Women

If, over time, Macao has had an enormous number of male artists, the scarcity of female voices is, by comparison, of great importance. The artistic practice of Mio Pang Fei's wife, Un Chi Iam, was sacrificed so that his career would achieve a greater projection.¹³ Un Chi Iam's painting is characterized by a markedly Chinese matrix that contrasts with titles and subjects. Instead of following the Chinese tradition of adapting the story composition, Un Chi Iam chooses to break this tradition. However, the Chinese values of lightness, serenity and delicacy remain present in her work.

Singaporean artist Joana Ling arrived in Macao in 1980 with her husband Kwok Woon. During the 1990s, she stood out for her watercolours (made in acrylic) on rice paper. Her work recalls a past long overdue and is distinguished for the reduction of layers and for chromatic overlays. After Woon's death, Ling has spent a lot of time keeping his memory alive in Macao.

The Portuguese artist who, in my opinion, left a deeper mark on Macao was Dorita de Castel-Branco (1936–1996). The *Monumento da Taipa*, a large 300 metres high work made in 1985 on the island of Taipa, is now a pilgrimage site. Located in front of the city's "Old Bridge", the Nobre de Carvalho Bridge, this monument, inspired by the Great Wall of China, merges the modernist line of Castel-Branco with the living traditions of 1980s' Macao.

Cristina Mio U Kit (1964–), daughter of Un Chi Iam and Mio Pang Fei, is also an artist. Her academic training is completely Western, so Cristina obtained training in Chinese art from her parents. As in the work of her parents, the fusion of the two cultures is also felt in Cristina's work who even experiences the combination within herself. Hence, her work differs from those of her parents; its postmodern character is evident in the Chinese brushstroke and is revealed in contemporary themes such as urban life and pop culture.

There are many more female artists in Macao. Among them, some were art teachers who have equally projected themselves as independent artists, such as Anabela Canas. It is thanks to them that current generations exist, as they contributed for coming times.

7. Public Art: Celebrating Cultural Encounter

The last decade of Portuguese institutional presence in Macao was marked by a strong commitment to public art. The city underwent several interventions that would mark its cultural heritage, even after the handover. When walking in the city it is easy to comprehend the authorities' concern to represent Chinese culture and Portuguese culture on equal terms through large-scale works symbolizing East-West friendship in general and harmonious relationships between China and Lusophone culture in particular. Of all, the most grandiose monument is "Portas do Entendimento", designed by Charters de Almeida to celebrate the good understanding between Portugal and China. Located

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in the Largo da Companhia de Jesus, next to the Ruins of St. Paul's, lies a sculptural complex by Lagoa Henriques, entitled *Meeting Between East and West*. It shows, as an act of acceptance, a Chinese woman offering a Portuguese man a lotus flower. During the 1990s, the lotus flower became Macao's emblem: it appears on the city's flag, it decorates the fence of the Government's Palace, it permeates the banknotes produced by the Bank of China and is part of the AirMacau logo. In continuation with its traditional use, the lotus appears as basis for several statues of Buddhist gods that were equally erected in the Macao Peninsula and on the adjacent islands of Taipa and Coloane. In addition, Macao's typical architecture was recovered, Portuguese sidewalks appeared decorating the city's most important squares, making the town a "total work of art".

Some projects, including the sculpture "The Year of the Dog" by Lagoa Henriques and an arch by Zulmiro de Carvalho were not well received by the

community. The city's transformation was immense, and only surpassed by that which occurred in the first 20 years of the Macao SAR.

8. Post-Handover: SAR Period

After the handover, Macao has undergone an immense transformation. The opening of the gambling monopoly has taken contemporary art into casinos, a place where art is not very often seen. The city's artistic world has adapted to this new context and kept pace with changes in the global art world. Today, Macao's artistic community works in Macao, Zuhai, Shenzhen, Shanghai and Hong Kong. There are more professionals linked to the artistic area working in both institutions and the liberal regime. Independent producers and curators are essential to the growth of the city's art; their institutional independence has enabled to establish relations with artistic communities that continue to flourish worldwide. Neighbouring Hong Kong, which has played a key role in the growth of the



Links, 2018. Artist: Cristina Mio U Kit. Tempera on rice paper, 113 x 59 cm. Image courtesy of the artist.

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Southeast Asian art market, has also contributed to the growth of Macao's artistic community.

The desire to globalize Macao's art led to the formation of the Circle of Friends in the 1980s. After 2000, this tendency has grown, as active artists accumulate curatorial functions. In some cases, they opened spaces: in 2003, *Creative Macau*, a non-profit platform that promotes the city's creative industries, was founded. Shortly after, in 2007 the *AFA – Art For All Society* was founded to accommodate the growth of contemporary art in the city and to promote it outdoors. In 2007, the multidisciplinary festival *This is My City* was founded. It aims to stimulate Macao's, Zuhai's and Shenzhen's culture internationally. It has had international presence in Portugal, China and Brazil. In 2009, *AlbergueSCM/ALBcreativeLAB* was opened. Its dedication to the city's creative industries has resulted in various annual or biannual projects, from which the *Moon Lantern Festival* and *ARTFEM: Women Artists, International Biennial of Macau* are the most notable examples. *ARTFEM* started in 2018 and it aims to bring a wide range of internationally renowned artists to Macao every two years.

Since 2009, Macao has had a pavilion at the Venice Biennale of Art, the largest art event in the world. The first editions were group shows, but in 2013 the strategy was changed and each show has focused on one artist. In 2010, *Video Art for All* (VAFA), a festival dedicated to video art in Macao, began. Its international vocation is evident, having brought artists from all over the world to the city through partnerships with international counterparts.

9. What is the Future of Macao's Art?

The expansion that has taken place in the past two decades has seen an increase in the last year. In September 2019, the government opened a new platform for the city, *Art Macau*. This project includes the commercial space *Macao Legend* and *Galeria Lisboa*, a commercial space dedicated to promoting Macao artists that partners with the *Circle*

of Friends of Culture, the *Macao Artists Association* and *ARTFEM*.

Will Macao be a place of arrival and residence for more and more global artists in the future? The Pearl River Delta region, where Macao is located, is increasingly important in the world context. With such dynamic agents and so many platforms set up, Macao is expected to remain cosmopolitan "on the inside" and global "on the outside". Through this text, I tried to show that Macao arts were quickly started by a few of the city's citizens, but in the last three decades the creative sector has established itself as one of the city's industries. To this end, the government's continued support for the city's artistic community and its great atmosphere of arrival have contributed to the establishment of more artists and emergence of new events and venues. I hope to have elucidated those who do not know Macao, and consequently, did not follow its historical internationalization, that the small city has always had world representation, and that it will become increasingly globalized in the future. Macao has been, for several centuries, a worldly place, and art has always represented the cosmopolitan dimension of the City of the Name of God. **RC**



NOTES

- 1 See <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O756142/st-pauls-church-macao-before-album-chinnery-george/>.
- 2 See <https://library.medicine.yale.edu/find/peter-parker>.
- 3 See <http://www.icm.gov.mo/rc/viewer/20011/934>.
- 4 Margarida Marques Matias, *Herculano Estorninho, Aspectos Da Sua Vida e Obra* (Macao: Fundação Macau, 1995).
- 5 António Conceição Júnior, "Pintura Contemporânea de Macau," *Review of Culture*, no. 10 (2004): 131.
- 6 Huang Xiao-Feng, "Mio Pang Fei's Artistic Explorations," in *Exhibition of Paintings by Mio Pang Fei*, ed. António Conceição Júnior (Macao: Fundação Oriente, 1992), 25.
- 7 Joana Ling, Kwok Woon, interview by Leonor Veiga, 21 May, 2014.
- 8 Conceição Júnior, "Pintura Contemporânea de Macau," 130.
- 9 Huang Xiao-Feng, *Kwok Woon: A Flash of the Spiritual Vacuum* (Macao: Fundação Oriente, 1992).
- 10 Idem.
- 11 Joana Ling, Kwok Woon, interview by Leonor Veiga, 21 May, 2014.
- 12 See <http://ruicunha.org/frc/?p=5369>.
- 13 Mio Pang Fei, *Mio Pang Fei's Avant-gardism*, interview by Leonor Veiga, trans. Cristina Mio U Kit, 17 November, 2015.

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