

## **Lee Sun-Don**

### **An Artist with a Mission**

Lee Sun-Don is a creative writer, classical music composer, self-taught pianist, talented painter, and advanced chess player. He is a science essayist, offering insights into the mysteries of the universe. He is also a humanitarian entrepreneur, dedicating profits for philanthropic activities. But above all, Mr. Lee is a Buddhist Master from Taiwan.

Mr. Lee took refuge in Buddhism in his late twenties under the mentorship of Yuan-Dao Bodhisattva, and was later authorized as the third Dharma Heir of Buddhist Forshang in March 1989. As a Buddhist practitioner as well as leader, he commits himself to bringing awareness to one's innate Buddha nature and to glorifying the spirit of Buddha nature. To fulfill this commitment, Master Lee established The Forshang Buddhism World Center in 1989, including the primary lecture hall in Taipei, and several branches in southern and central Taiwan, Japan, Canada, and the US. The ways he preaches Buddha dharma are creative, versatile, and beyond tradition.

To apply Buddhist doctrines to secular practices, Master Lee then went and set up the non-profit organizations—Forshang World Foundations—in Taiwan, Los Angeles, Toronto, and Vancouver with a goal to promote charity activities and international exchanges in the fields of culture, scholarship, education, art, and medicine.

Beginning 1997, under Lee's design and supervision, a Tang Dynasty-style spiritual sanctuary went under construction and

was completed in August 2000, financed and collaboratively built by the volunteer workers who are the disciples of Master Lee. This magnificent sanctuary, located in the outskirts of Taipei, Taiwan, is called Yuan-Dao Guanyin Temple, named after the 2<sup>nd</sup> Patriarch of Buddhist Forshang, and has since become one of the must-see spots for tourists and local visitors as well.

Considering himself as a humanitarian entrepreneur, Lee establishes the thesis of “Fifth Economic Theory.” He proposes a flat organizational structure in which not only are workers cultivated with compassion, but also profits earned from business operation are mainly for charity – producing profits for public benefits. Applying this theory to practice, Lee founded an all-natural body-care and totemic energy jewellery line company -- GP DEVA -- in 2003, with current Flagship Store in Beverly Hills in USA, a sales outlet at Yokohama in Japan, and the Global Master Store in Taiwan. Lee is the mastermind behind all the product design. With the corporate motto—“Real business is to bring meaning to life”—GP DEVA under Lee’s spiritual leadership has been actively engaging in philanthropic activities in the fields of art and culture, international aids, sports and recreation.

Lee is also a man with science vision. He has written on various advanced science theories, namely “The Ninth Seal Series.” In this series, he shares with us his perceptive insights in various arenas: universal system, mathematics, human life science, cosmology, genetic medicine, food and health, and so on. These writings bring about rethinking on what most famous scientists like Steven Hawking have proposed and been studying. Lee’s theories, in fact, not only offers Buddhist scientific visions and approaches; more importantly, it introduces to mankind the outlook of life that is positioned based upon the concern of the whole universe.

In his earlier years and before he formally converted to Buddhism under the teaching of Yuan-Dao Bodhisattva, Lee was a popular martial arts novelist. His first martial arts novel had even been adapted into a television drama series and created a sensation among the viewers at that time. In 1999, after ten years of deliberate incubation, he began the writing of another novel, Ningfeng Tianxia. Published in 2003 and was the top three best sellers at a major bookstore chain in Taiwan. **Ningfeng Tianxia** has been praised for introducing a new Zen literary style to the genre of martial

arts novel. Lee artistically incorporates Buddhist teaching of wisdom and compassion into his story line, thereby allowing readers, Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike, to be enlightened while entertained.

Just like the literature, music is another area of arts in which Lee has developed a unique talent through profound practice of Buddhism. Although never learned piano before, Lee, during the period between 1998 and 2001 and in the spirit of gratitude and remembrance of his beloved mentor, composed, played, and distributed piano suites, entitled "A Memoir of a Great Patriarch Series." These works had been rearranged into a suite for piano and orchestra, performed at the National Concert Hall in 2003. In 2006, they were rearranged into a suite for violin and orchestra, of which the melody "Perfection" was nominated in 2007 as the "Outstanding Composer of Traditional and Art Music" by the 18<sup>th</sup> Golden Melody Award – the greatest honour for the music industry -- in Taiwan. Despite an extremely demanding schedule for painting, exhibition and preaching Buddhism, Lee is expected to continue his music creation in honour of his mentor.

Mr. Lee's painting all started in 1993 when he for the first time visualized in deep meditation the totem of the universe; i.e., the fundamental image of all the phenomena and all the energies of the universe. Five years later, he came up with the idea of totemic creation. He realized that a simple composition of lines, colors, and strokes could suffice to perfectly capture the ineffably transformative manifestations of the universe. Since then, not only has he applied the idea of totemic creation to painting, but landscape, jewellery, merchandise, and interior designs as well, providing the best interpretation of "Aesthetics of Energy" and "Art for Life." More importantly, he has established a painting genre distinctively his own, called Totemic Energy Oil Painting.

Lee made his debut exhibition of Totemic Energy Oil Paintings, entitled "Ultimate Purity," at Taiwan's distinguished Chang-Liu Art Gallery in

November of 2006. The curator of the gallery, Huang Cheng-Chi, who is also a renowned art appraiser and a collector himself, remarked Lee for “instilling a new spiritual element to contemporary art.” In July 2007, Lee became the first in history to incorporate the ultimate Buddha dharma in arts using western oil painting with the exhibition at the Cultural Gallery of the National Concert Hall, entitled “Thus Is Realized”, which illustrates the entire Diamond Sutra – the enlightening Buddhist sutra -- with oil on canvas.

Lee’s Totemic Energy Oil Painting—which embodies Buddhist teaching and mystical power in aesthetics—has received global recognition. Lee has been gaining traction in Asia almost right after he started to paint. In 2008 alone, Lee’s touring exhibition covers almost all the major museums in China, including Shanghai Arts Museum and the prestigious China Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. The Museum of Kyoto in Kyoto, Japan will also hold an exhibition for Lee. In view of his achievements in innovation and creativity, the influential Peking University and Xiamen University have both invited Lee to give lectures in art and creativity. Commercially, Lee has done well in private collections. One of Lee’s paintings, *Freedom Beyond Freedom*, was sold for the highest price at an international auction in 2007, of all the artworks by contemporary Taiwanese artists.

The Western art circles are starting to take notes as well. The IL Tempo Roma Newspaper in Italy calls Master Lee “the Modern Oriental Picasso”. Eleanor Heartney, the former president of America Section of the International Art Critics Association, says Lee’s “...loose, gestural works provides lyrical representations of states of ecstasy, harmony and contemplation while literally embodying the transformative energies of the universe...” Denise Williams, the Art Director of Santa Fe Art World, told Lee: “I see many things, many powerful messages in these works... You touch my hearts.” While holding exhibitions worldwide, Lee continues receiving recognition for being accepted as member of various art societies

and winning contests. More recently one of Lee's two contested paintings just won the second place at the Rosenzweig Gallery's 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Juried Art Show "L'Chayim, To Life" by the Jewish Heritage Foundation of North Carolina -- juried by Dr. Kimerly Rorschach of the Nasher Museum of Art at the Duke University --, and the other painting was selected for the cover of the invitation postcard. Another four paintings were all selected by the Camaver Kunsthaus International to the finalist for the 6th Cesi Palace, Acquasparta Exhibition – Green Lion – in Italy. Camaver Kunsthaus International also put Lee as one of their five global "Top Artists" in seven years. In 2009 Lee would be showing his artworks at the Biennale Internazionale dell'Arte Contemporanea (2009 Florence Biennale), which will take place at the Fortezza da Basso, 5- 13 december 2009, and the Russian Academy of Arts.

The predominant motif of Lee's artwork centers on Buddhist philosophy, or the path to enlightenment. With his brushstrokes, Lee illustrates the wisdom and compassion of the Buddha in the hope of inspiring all sentient beings to uncover their self-existent Buddhahood. In his own words, "If my totemic energy artwork could make Buddhist doctrines more accessible and much easier to be appreciated, this would be quite a beautiful way to honor the Buddha. As a Buddhist practitioner and artist, this is what I have been telling myself everyday; it is also the ultimate momentum that keeps me creating."

With the wisdom and compassion he possesses and has demonstrated, Lee, for sure, will continue to bring wonders and enlightenment to humankind aesthetically, scientifically, socially, culturally, and religiously.