

Lee Sun-Don: An All-Round Artist with Cosmos Vision

I will strive earnestly with my whole life to accomplish “Greatness” – for no reason but let everyone realize that my beloved mentor, Yuan-Dao Bodhisattva, the 2nd Patriarch of Buddhist Forshang, is the “Ultimate.”

Lee Sun-Don’s Motto

Lee Sun-Don is a creative writer, music composer, pianist, self-taught painter, and chess player. He writes about science; he is also a humanitarian entrepreneur. But above all, Lee is a Buddhist Master, who considers his calling to bring awakening to the true essence of life – the essence of glory, perfectibility, and kindness intrinsic to all sentient beings, the so-called “innate nature” or in Buddhist terminology, “Buddhahood.”

Lee was born in 1959 in Kaohsiung of southern Taiwan. Although raised as a Christian, 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. Being a Buddhist Master, Lee’s major challenge is to employ all expedient means – preaching, social relief, literary creation, music composition, art performance, spatial construction, scientific dialogue, or even entrepreneurship – to transmit Buddha’s wisdom and glorify Buddha’s compassion, in the hope of sparking a sense of awakening and transcendence in all sentient beings.

Preaching, Charity, and Spiritual Sanctuary

To take up this challenge, Lee’s top priority is to institutionalize the perpetuation of Buddha heritage and dissemination of Buddhist doctrines. In 1989, Master Lee in no time founded The Forshang Buddhism World Center, which comprises the primary lecture hall – the Da-Yuan Association – in Taipei, with branches established later in southern and central Taiwan, Japan, Canada, and the United States. To furthermore apply Buddhist doctrines to daily practice, Master Lee set up the first non-profit Forshang World Foundation in Taiwan in 1994 for promoting charity and international exchange in culture, scholarship, art, and medical science, with premises now located in Los Angeles, Toronto, and Vancouver.

In addition, to glorify the foremost and ultimate Buddha of the universe, the so-called “Na Mo Ben Shi Da Zi Zai Wang Fo” (literally “taking refuge in one’s innate Buddhahood”), Master Lee began designing and supervising the construction of a spiritual sanctuary in northern Taiwan in 1997. Completed and initiated in 2000, this Tang-style construction called Yuan-Dao Guanyin Temple, named after the 2nd Patriarch of Buddhist Forshang, provides a space where ordinary people, religious or non-religious, could find inspirations for deep contemplation and mind-purification. It has now become a local attraction for visitors worldwide.

Zen Literature, Cosmos Science, and Memoir in Melody

Writing and music composition are also the means by which Lee shares his reflections of the true reality, spiritually and emotionally. Lee had written more than ten sets of martial arts novels; his latest novel, *Ningfeng Tianxia*, was even praised for initiating Zen renaissance in the genre of martial arts literature. He lyrically infused Buddhist worldviews into the story lines, thus allowing readers, Buddhists and non-Buddhists, to be enlightened while entertained. In addition to popular literature, Lee has also written a series of advanced science theories, called “The Ninth Seal.” Covering the issues of cosmic mathematics, human life science, cosmology, genetic medicine, and food and health, the series of “The Ninth Seal” not only lends Buddhist insights into science, but introduces to mankind the outlook of life with a concern for the entire dharma universe.

As to music composition, it romantically expresses Master Lee’s deep reminiscence of his beloved mentor, Yuan-Dao Bodhisattva. Since 1999, in the spirit of gratitude and commemoration, Lee has been composing, playing, and distributing piano and orchestra suites, entitled “A Memoir of a Great Patriarch Series,” dedicated purely to Yuan-Dao Bodhisattva. One of his compositions, *Perfection*, was nominated for Outstanding Composer of Traditional and Art Music of the 18th Golden Melody Award 2007, Taiwan.

Philanthropic Entrepreneurship

It may be hard to believe, for some conservatives at least, but Lee as a Buddhist Master is indeed also a perceptive economist and humanitarian entrepreneur. In 1997, he proposed the thesis of “Fifth Economic Theory” to foster a flat organizational structure, according to which not only are workers required to be cultivated with compassion, but also profits earned from business operation are used for charity. Applying this theory to practice, Master Lee founded GP DEVA in 2003 in Taipei, with current Flagship Store in Beverly Hills in USA, and other branches in Taiwan, China and Japan. GP DEVA was first known by its skincare line characterized by perfectly formulating pure essential oils with the energy catalysts of sound, light, and form for activating the holistic regenerating power of one’s innate being. GP DEVA is now transformed into GP DEVA – Frontier Art, with business expanding to include publication, fine arts, interior design, jewelry, and multifarious aspects of “Aesthetics of Energy” and “Life as Art.”

With the corporate motto of “business as bringing forth the meaning of life,” GP DEVA has been actively engaging in philanthropic activities in the fields of social relief, art, culture, sport and recreation. These include, just to name a few: international aid on south Asian tsunami; financial support of ORBIS (an international blindness prevention and treatment foundation); fundraising for local little baseball teams to play abroad; promoting cultural development of Taiwan aborigines, funding aboriginal students’ expense on lunch meals, and sponsoring benefit concerts.

Casting the Light of Awakening on Canvas

But what Master Lee has been devoting himself to more recently is “painting as embodiment of Buddha dharma.” Lee’s career as a painting artist germinated in 1990 when he visualized in deep meditation for the first time the “totem” of the universe – the fundamental image of all the phenomena and all the energies of the universe. It took Lee eight years to finally realize how to harness the visual

vocabulary of line, form and color to perfectly represent such fundamental reality: to embody the ineffable universal reality, its essence and transformation, on canvas. Built upon his Buddhist practice and Chinese cultivation, Lee has developed a distinctive painting genre, called Totemic Energy Oil Painting – a genre characteristic of mind-awakening aesthetics that captures the harmonization of heaven and earth and aims to elicit spiritual resonance and contemplation from the viewer. Lee’s Totemic Energy Oil Painting not only transcends the domain of religion but also the horizon of contemporary art.

Pioneering Totemic Energy Oil Painting

In 2006, Lee made his debut exhibition of Totemic Energy Oil Painting, entitled “Ultimate Purity,” in Taiwan’s distinguished Chan-Liu Art Museum and won commendation for “instilling a new spiritual element to contemporary art.” In July 2007, Lee held an exhibition featuring his pictorial annotations of a highly-regarded Buddhist classic, *Diamond Sutra*, at the Cultural Gallery of the National Concert Hall. This exhibition, entitled “Thus Is Realized,” made Lee becoming the first in history to incorporate Buddha dharma with western oil art. In the same month, Lee stepped out for his first international exhibition, performing impromptu in Milan and Rome of Italy, where he was remarked as “Modern Oriental Picasso.” Since then, Lee’s totemic aesthetics has caught attention across the globe.

Within the single year of 2008, for example, Lee had won forty honorable recognitions in international juried expositions, including a Grand Prize awarded by The World and Universal Academy in Netherlands. Furthermore, he had held exhibitions in numerous first-rate museums in Paris, London, New York, Los Angeles, Shanghai, Beijing, Kyoto, Singapore, and Taipei. Recognizing his achievement, many international-celebrated art societies have granted him membership, including the 1754-established Britain Royal Society for the Encouragement of Art, Manufactures & Commerce (known as RSA). Camaver Kunsthaus International, an Italy-based art group with galleries located in EU and USA, even exalted Lee as the “Top Artist” – in the past 60 years or so only five artists in the world had received such honor. This year Lee’s itinerary includes the solo exhibition curated by Achille Bonito Oliva, a world-renowned Italian art critic, as part of the Collateral Events of the 53rd International Art Exhibition of Venice Biennale, and the exhibition at Zurab Tsereteli Art Gallery in Moscow arranged by Russian Academy of Arts.

A Man of Inspiration

As a Buddhist Master and all-round artist, Lee creatively and expediently manifest Buddha’s wisdom and compassion in diverse aspects of human lives, not only by ways of preaching and social relieving as conventionally practiced, but also in literature, art and science, through words, images, spatial construction, and even entrepreneurship. What he has achieved perhaps demonstrates not how great he is but the greatness of one’s innate Buddhahood. He testifies that we can all become “great” only if we learn to awaken the essence of glory, perfectibility, and kindness intrinsic to all of us. The potentiality of our innate nature is infinite, and it is therefore definitely certain that Lee will continue to bring wonders to the world and be an inspiration for many of us aesthetically, scientifically, socially, culturally, and religiously.