

A PASTEL *Awakening*

An international exhibition and conference
in Suzhou, China, highlights an expanding
and flourishing universe of pastel.

BY ANNE HEVENER

J. Harburg



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CHINA'S HISTORY IS UNFATHOMABLY ANCIENT. POTTERY has been found that dates back 20,000 years. History traces the beginnings of rice farming to 7500 BC and the invention of silk to 3630 BC. And Pingjiang Road, a still-bustling market street in Suzhou, appears little changed since its creation during the Song Dynasty more than 800 years ago. Given this old and storied history, it's astounding to find oneself witness to anything in China that feels nascent, but that, it turns out, is precisely the situation for pastel.

The pastel medium, which was unknown to Chinese artists until the 1900s, is currently experiencing a grand awakening. And, last October, I got to experience some of this excitement firsthand when I traveled to China for the Second Biennial (Suzhou) China International Pastel Art Exhibition along with a group of international guests that included four U.S. artists—Liz Haywood-Sullivan, Desmond

O'Hagan, Stan Sperlak and Alain Picard—and English artist Tony Allain.

The highlight of the nine-day event was the opening of a spectacular pastel exhibition, but other festivities included workshops, presentations, demonstrations, plein air excursions and visits to local schools. The conference attracted artists, art teachers and students, many traveling from as far away as Beijing, about 725 miles to the north. All participants came eager to learn as much as they could about this marvelous medium. "The students are so hard-working," says Picard, who taught three one-day workshops on portrait painting. "They soak up every piece of instruction and instantly apply it."

O'Hagan, who—along with Sperlak—offered a number of painting demonstrations for workshop attendees and for students at two local schools—also spoke of this intense passion for learning. "I'm in awe of the students' enthusiasm for art," O'Hagan said. "We showed them a variety of

ways to approach pastel painting, and you could see the lightbulbs going off." Sperlak, who has traveled to many places all over the world, said he was unprepared for how much the Chinese artists share the same interests and inspirations. "We've been introduced to kindred spirits who also love art," he said.

As special international guests, the five artists and I were warmly received everywhere we went, receiving recognition from a number of local dignitaries, including the revered artist Hang Mingshi and his wife, artist Ding Wei; Li Xiao Lin, the head of the China Art Association; Shuang Hong of the International School in Beijing; and artist Yang Yan, who came to the conference with a number of Beijing art educators. At the graduation ceremony for workshop participants, Yang pronounced the occasion historic. "Everything we've learned we will take back with us to Beijing," he said. "Pastel art has entered a new age."

On pages 22 and 23:
Canal II (21¼x27½) by Haihong Jin

1 We visited a charming market area located in Suzhou's "old town."

2 Suzhou is dubbed the "Venice of the East," due to its picturesque canals and winding waterways.

3 A trip to the ancient water town, Tongli, included a blissful boat ride down the canal.

4 Colorful lanterns added bright warmth to a local shop.

5 A nighttime show at The Master of the Nets Garden featured classic Chinese folk music and performances.



PICTURES *at an Exhibition*

The Second Biennial (Suzhou) China Pastel Art Exhibition featured 100 pastel paintings by 60 international artists and 40 Chinese artists. Fourteen countries and five continents were represented in this massive display of pastel ingenuity. The pastels were beautifully presented at several venues in Suzhou—the Ming Gallery of Art, the Ming Jia Arts Education Center and the Yuan Rong Harmony Plaza—and remained on view through November 20.

As president of the International Association of Pastel Societies, Haywood-Sullivan was one of the speakers to address the audience at the exhibition's opening ceremony. "This exhibition

elevates the medium of pastel in the worldwide artistic community," she said. "China has always been greatly respected for its legendary artists. It's important for the world of art, and especially the pastel medium, that China is hosting this exhibition—celebrating the pastel medium and the excellence of pastel artists not only from China, but from around the world. Artists who work in pastel are grateful for your endorsement and support of this brilliant and important artistic medium."

1 After working in oil for many years, artist Jinghan Wu, from the Beijing Province, decided to try pastel. His piece, *Misplaced Portrait*, featured on our cover, is only the artist's second pastel.

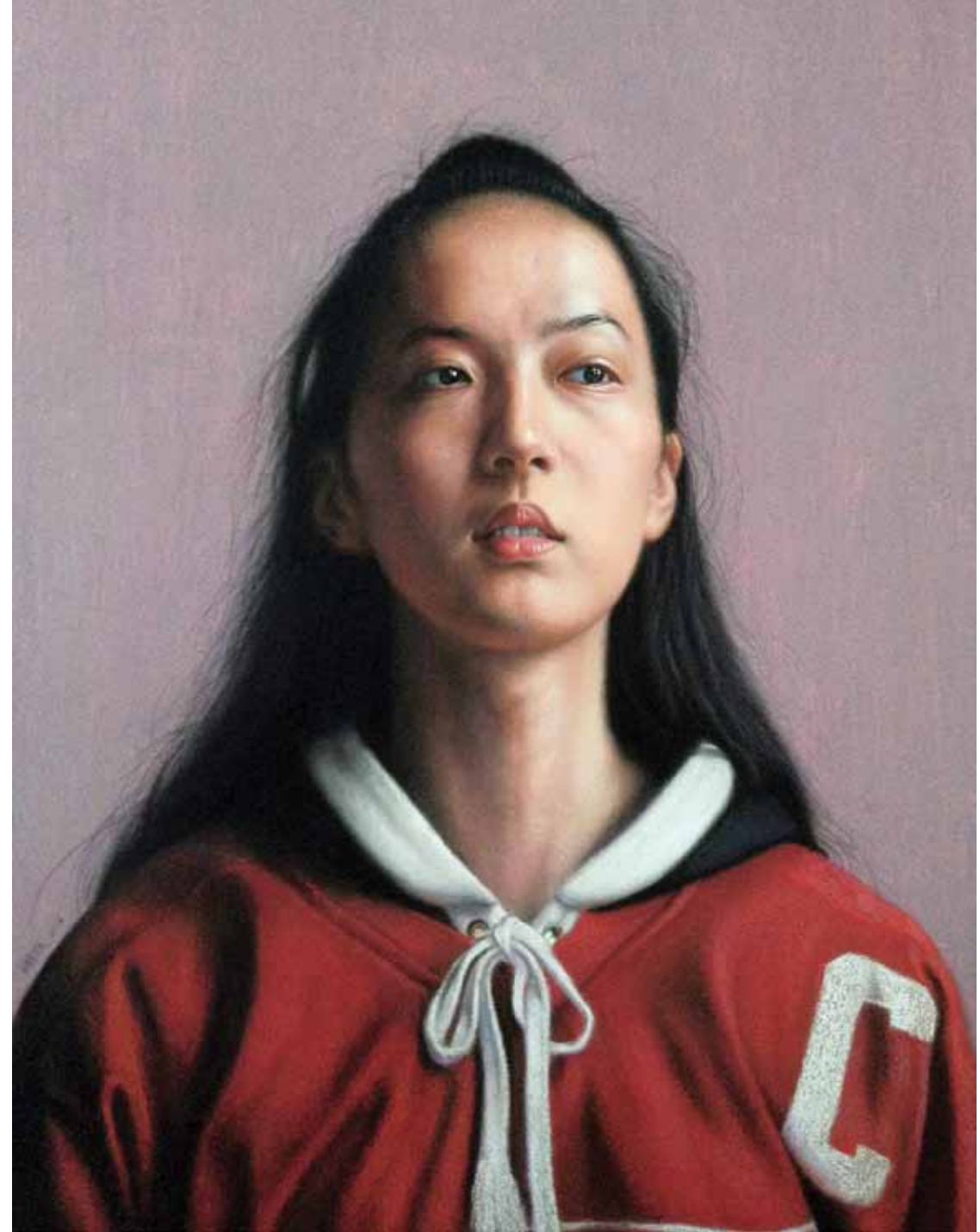
2 The exhibition opening took place at the Ming Gallery of Art, a beautiful space to enjoy art—and live cello music.

3 Alain Picard, Chinese artist Defu Wu and other guests enjoy the opportunity for conversation.

4 The Chinese and international artists in attendance for the exhibition opening gathered for a group photo.

Just Blooming (30x35) by Erfu Chen





The Cloud in the Heart (47¼x31½)
by Pengyue Chu

Inspired Teachers, GRATEFUL STUDENTS

As it is for pastel societies throughout the world, education is at the heart of the mission in Suzhou. One area of focus has been the introduction of pastel education into area elementary schools. Our group of international artists was welcomed into two local schools to participate in educational forums with teachers and in paint-along activities with the young

students. Sperlak and O'Hagan were the demonstrating artists for these occasions, and both painters packed tons of instruction inspiration into an hour.

The other three artists, Haywood-Sullivan, Allain and Picard, offered three one-day painting workshops, presenting a variety of pastel techniques, insights and approaches to an eager group of students, many of whom were also art teachers.

Although the services of an interpreter were greatly appreciated throughout the various activities, one didn't need the aid of a translator to comprehend an "aha moment" in a workshop or to recognize a look of illumination on the faces of a demo audience. We all made an important discovery: If you speak the language of art, you can speak to anyone anywhere in the world.

1 Desmond O'Hagan demonstrates a cityscape painting for students.

2 Liz Haywood-Sullivan shares insights with her workshop students with the help of Liu Shu (Natalie), our excellent interpreter throughout our stay.

3 Stan Sperlak brought plenty of fun to the paint-along sessions at local elementary schools in Suzhou.

4 Tony Allain observes this young student's brilliant start during a paint-along-with-Desmond session.

5 Alain Picard demonstrates for students in his pastel portrait workshop.





Three Pastel Friends (19½x27½)
by Yishan Chang

A Global PASTEL FAMILY

Singapore artist and Suzhou Biennial organizer Isabelle V. Lim told one of the assembled audiences that pastelists, wherever they are in the world, are a part of “one family.” It was a real pleasure to witness the expansion of that pastel family during our stay in China. After nine days to view and discuss great art; to paint and teach pastel; to enjoy opportunities for sightseeing, dining and laughing together, it’s quite clear that the greatest benefit of cultural exchange is the extension of friendship. This is why this old saying, shared by several of our Chinese counterparts, truly resonates: “How happy it is to see friends coming from afar.”

What a joy to extend the hand of friendship to what is sure to be a flourishing community of new Chinese pastelists. 🌸

1 Liz Haywood-Sullivan and I were honored to meet the venerable Chinese artist Xiangzhen Wang, whose work was in the show. Wang is one of the men pictured in Yishan Chang’s painting, *Three Pastel Friends*, above.

2 Revered artist and teacher Mingshi Hang (center) and his friends attended many of the exhibition events. Master Hang and his wife, artist Ding Wei, also welcomed the international artists to the Hang Mingshi Pastel Art Museum for a tour.

3 Workshop students scout a sketching location during a plein air excursion to the park at Tian Ping Hill.

4 New pastel enthusiasts stand in line for a book-signing opportunity with Liz Haywood-Sullivan, whose book, *Painting Brilliant Skies & Water in Pastel* (North Light Books, 2013), was recently translated into Chinese.

5 Artist and key Suzhou organizer Isabelle V. Lim, who was named a Friend of Pastel in 2015 by the Pastel Society of America, is pictured here with Yu Mei (May). Mei is one of many staff members of the Ming Gallery of Art who welcomed our group so warmly. In addition to these two, our gratitude extends to many others, including Yang Hui (Simon), the Ming Gallery director and a creative force behind the pastel movement in Suzhou; and Liang Shan (Cecelia), Zhao Bo Xin (Matthew), Zhao Gui Ying (Junny), and Zhang Ming Xing all of whom worked so hard to host and promote this spectacular show.

Pastel Journal editor-in-chief ANNE HEVENER gave a presentation, highlighting 40 contemporary masters of pastel, at the Suzhou University of Science and Technology.



“How happy it is to see friends coming from afar.”
— Old Chinese Proverb

