

The Asian Arts & Culture Program UMass Amherst Fine Arts Center

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WHAT: **Spotlight Taiwan: A Grant from Ministry of Culture**
Taiwan supports artists' visits to the Five Colleges

WHEN: **September 2014 through September 2015**

WHERE: **UMass Amherst Fine Arts Center Venues**

The Asian Arts & Culture Program at the UMass Amherst Fine Arts Center in collaboration with Five Colleges, Incorporated are recipients of an award from the Government of Taiwan Ministry of Culture. The award will be used to showcase exemplary Taiwanese artists at the Fine Arts Center with additional associated academic and community activities in the Five Colleges and public schools in western Massachusetts. The signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on July 1 at the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Boston confirms an eighteen month cycle of presentations featuring music, puppets and dance. The series closes with a concert by the renowned **Cloud Gate** Dance Theatre of Taiwan.

On September 17, 2014 UMass Fine Arts Center Asian Arts and Culture program presents **Sheng Dong** (A Moving Sound). The performance company, based in Taipei, Taiwan, creates a new musical expression fusing Taiwanese, Chinese and other Asian musical ideas in inspired modern song compositions. Lead singer and dancer, Mia Hseih showcases songs unique to Taiwan's aboriginal tribal groups. The six member band uses both traditional Chinese instruments such as the bowed fiddle called the Erhu, the Zhong ruan (Chinese guitar), as well as a blend of Western instruments. Sheng Dong artists will present multiple activities in the area colleges as well as in the public schools.

Sunday, March 1, 2015 brings the famous **Taiyuan Puppet Theatre Company** from Taipei, presenting Taiwan's unique and ancient arts and crafts tradition of hand and glove puppets. The matinee performance of ***A Sea of Puppets*** is set against the backdrop of a traditional carved wooden stage. The puppet ensemble uses highly skilled techniques to manipulate the puppets in a series of lifelike gestures- both delicate and bold-as they perform exciting fighting scenes and acrobatics. Audiences will have the rare opportunity to glimpse the characters of traditional Taiwanese puppet theatre: the young lady, the scholar, clowns and the villains. Powered by the virtuosity of the Taiwanese puppet performers and accompanied by traditional music, this show needs no dialogue and is suitable for all ages. Dr. Robin Ruizendaal, director of Taipei's landmark Lin Hsin Puppet Museum, artistic director of Tai Yuan Puppets and an eminent sinologist presents a pre-concert talk. Multiple residency activities take place in the colleges and the public schools.

Finally, the Spotlight Taiwan series showcases the world renowned **Cloud Gate Dance Theatre** of Taiwan in concert on September, 22, 2015 at the Fine Arts Center Concert Hall. Presenting their singular production *Rice*, created to mark the Company's 40th anniversary, the artistic director and internationally renowned choreographer **Lin Hwai-min** was inspired to honor the land that has nurtured "Asia's leading contemporary dance theatre" (*The Times*). Using the landscape and story of Chihshang in the East Rift Valley of Taiwan, he was awed by the immense waves of grain rolling across expansive fields of rice, and inspired by the environmentally-conscious farmers. **Lin** took the dancers to the township, where they joined the farmers in harvesting the rice. In *Rice*, **Lin** has created exuberant yet powerful movements woven through Soil, Sunlight, Wind, Water and Fire. Previously tainted by the use of chemical fertilizer, this farming area has now regained its title as Land of Emperor Rice by adopting organic farming that came about as a result of the dancers experience in the field. Folksongs in Hakka, the oldest among the existing Chinese dialects, and operatic arias from the West, as well as the rustling of grain, sighing of wind and pealing of thunder recorded on-site, complete the accompanying soundscape. Immersed in this landscape, the formidable **Cloud Gate** dancers, trained in Qi Gong and internal martial arts, enact a human drama parallel to the life cycle of rice. This is a work about death and rebirth, devastation and resurrection. **Lin Hwai-min** draws his initial inspiration from traditional Asian culture and aesthetics in *Rice*.

Today, **Lin** is heralded as "the most important choreographer in Asia," (*Berliner Morgenpost*) Dance Europe exclaims: "No company in the world dances like Cloud Gate. It presents a distinct and mature Chinese choreographic language. The importance of this evolution in Asian dance is no less profound than the impact of Forsythe's Ballet Frankfurt on European classical ballet."

Tickets for the September 2014 and March 2015 shows will be on sale for the general public starting August 1, 2014. For information please check: www.fineartscenter.com

Spotlight Taiwan events are funded in part by the Ministry of Culture, Republic of China and Special patron Dr. Samuel Yin, with additional support from the Five Colleges, Incorporated. Additional support comes from Baystate Health & Health New England, Hadley Meeting House, and the Massachusetts Cultural Council.

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