



Manuel Valencia's "Letter" (above) and "Islados" (below) series are good examples of his innovation in using media and support. Mixed techniques are employed to show lines and veins of different shades, qualities and densities.

Spanish envoy links East, West with art

Chen Huiyan

Manuel Valencia has multiple identities. He is a diplomat, the Spanish ambassador to China; he is an artist with a distinct style that stems from the West and is nurtured by the East; he is also a writer of three books. He is a Westerner, and also a fan of oriental culture.

This week Manuel Valencia the artist is holding his ninth solo exhibition, named "Sea Poems," in Shanghai.

"A European stroll through Eastern art," is an expression Valencia often uses to describe his drawings. His works have the free and expressive gestures and bold outlines of Western art, as well as a nude simplicity of oriental art.

With frequent visits to China and Japan, Valencia formed a fascination and his own understanding of Asian art, and that explains why he adopts many oriental elements in his artwork. Two of his solo exhibitions are named in Japanese—"Haiku (2007)" and "Gaijin (2004)," referring to "a form of Japanese short poem" and "foreigner." He also mingles calligraphic elements into his drawings, possibly influenced by traditional Japanese and Chinese art where combining painting, calligraphy and poetry is a common practice. In some of his works in grey, black and white, viewers can easily perceive simplicity and elegance that resembles Chinese ink wash paintings.

Valencia is also practicing Asian philosophy during his art creation. When drawing his "Blind Flowers" series, he observed flowers and leaves closely and let the gaze lead him to meditation on the human condition. "Oriental art and its philosophy have done that for centuries; Western not," wrote Valencia in 2008.

However, though he absorbs a lot from classical oriental art, Valencia's art is not "traditional." Successfully he combines Western and Oriental art in a modern and contemporary way. His abstract expression and experiments of painting support and media in particular, labels him a contemporary artist.

Using various papers as support is one of Valencia's explorations in new forms of art expression. He likes to frequent the old markets in Beijing Liulichang to carefully choose papers—often delicate traditional Xuan handmade rice papers—with different textures, thickness and types of cellulose to use as one of the essential parts of his drawings.

For drawing media, he develops his personal formula of ink. Graphite and acrylics are also used. His "Letter" and "Islados" series are good



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Valencia's love for nature is obvious. Nature is featured in his solo exhibitions such as Botanical Poems (2009), Blind Flowers (2008) and Poemas Naturales (2010). He has long studied the relations between nature and human nature. By looking into the mysteries of nature, via keen observation, he finds out that everything is connected. He regards botany as his own mirror.

Since he was appointed the Spanish ambassador to China in 2013, the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Spain, Valencia has laid great emphasis on promoting cultural and educational exchanges between the two countries. He is active in many cultural activities and now is exhibiting his own works.

Born in 1954, Valencia began his art education in 1988 in the Netherlands, learning from renowned artists including Bob Bonis and Pien Hazenburg. He has held eight solo exhibitions in Spain, Cuba, Serbia and China.

The exhibition is open in Mao Space Jing'an Kerry Center through December 14.

UK landscape artist's flirtation with light

Liu Xiaolin

BRITISH landscape and figurative artist Sarah Butterfield described herself as an "eternal student of light." Fascinated by the natural world, Butterfield devoted nearly 30 years to explore and convey in her works the relationship between man and nature.

"I like to capture all these different colors when the light creates highlights and the shadows. Light is always changing," the 51-year-old London artist told Shanghai Daily.

"Morning light, which tends to be a bit bluer; the light at midday, which you think would make everything obvious and clear but actually in midday—when light is falling vertically and the shadows are compressed—can be very mysterious. It's a paradox, really."

After capturing iridescent afternoon sunsets in several series of works, Butterfield now focuses on the transition from sunset to night, and has done a series of paintings titled "Ocean lights and palms." The series, which unusually includes cars and human figures that are commonly seen in her works, is among the 36 paintings exhibited in Shanghai for her solo exhibition that ended last Sunday.

The artist sat down with Shanghai Daily for a talk about her works and understanding of painting. She wore a lemon dress paired with an ocean blue flannel jacket, and her eyeshadow, in a bold palette of orange, peppermint, blue and purple, revealed her obsession with the interplay of colors.

Before being fully involved with painting, Butterfield was a self-employed architect for a couple years, which she said was "quite a struggle."

"Doing architecture strengthened me. It was difficult—you have to think abstractly and came up with solutions. It was a very good mental discipline for me... (and) gave me confidence," she recalled. "But painting has



Sarah Butterfield

always been where my heart lies."

She picked up her paint brush when she suddenly ran out of jobs as an architect. In 1975, she went to the Ruskin School of Fine Art in Oxford, where she learned how to paint with complimentary colors.

She knows how hard it is to find the right instructor from her own struggle to find the right person to teach her "how to paint instead of how to draw." With that knowledge, she gave a painting demonstration called "How to paint like Sarah in five steps of color and tone" in Shanghai last Saturday. A similar video can be found on YouTube, showing how to paint a still life with a glass of water and complimentary colors.

Butterfield believes "everybody can paint as long as they are given the right instruction." "That's why I am quite passionate to teach these things... I try to make it more accessible for everybody," she said.

Though it's her first visit to Shanghai, Butterfield said she has always felt a deep bond with China; all of her works are somehow inspired by Chinese ink brush painting and calligraphy.



Butterfield's work Ocean, lights and palms VIII. The artist likes to use light as a media of her creation.