



Foreign Teachers

Ushiroshoji Masahiro

Foreign teachers played a very important role in the development of modern art in Asia, but individual circumstances, as well as the nature of their roles, differed between countries and regions.

Among those who contributed greatly in Southeast Asia, perhaps the first one to be pointed out is the Italian sculptor Corrado Feroci. Feroci was invited to sovereign Thailand as part of the government's modernization policy and from 1933 onwards trained younger generations at the University of Fine Arts. In recognition of his dedication to the country, he was granted the Thai name Silpa Bhirasri from the King and died as a Thai national. He is considered "the father of modern art in Thailand" and is highly honored to this day. While Feroci himself received academic training as a sculptor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence, in terms of educating others, he emphasized the importance of fusing Western modernism with traditional Thai aesthetics.

In colonized countries as well, artists pioneered unique techniques under the guidance of foreign teachers. In French Indochina, the French painter Victor Tardieu established a full-scale art school in Hanoi in 1925, which incorporated a Western-style curriculum. In addition to oil painting and sculpture, the earliest generation of graduates also developed unique techniques such as silk painting and lacquer painting and consequently built the foundation for modern art in Vietnam. Aside from Tardieu serving as Director, French artists such as Alix Aymé and Joseph Inguimberty also taught younger generations of artists at this school.

Even after World War II, it was under the tutelage of foreign teachers that the first generation of modern artists in Southeast Asian countries flourished. Dutch artist Ries Mulder, who taught at ITB (Bandung Institute of Technology) and its preceding school in Indonesia trained many Cubist artists during the 1940s and 50s, and English painter Peter Harris led the Wednesday Art Group established in Kuala Lumpur in 1952.

When speaking of “foreign teachers,” we are likely to think of Westerners staying in Asia, but in Singapore during the years before and after the war, it was the Chinese artists who played a big role in training young artists. Included are Lim Hak Tai, who was invited from China and founded the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, and Tchang Ju Chi, among others. Japanese teachers must also not be overlooked, such as designer Mounet Satomi (Munetsugu Satomi) who left a great impact on the Thai art scene during and after the war, Suzuki Shigenari who trained artists for many years at the National Art University in Phnom Penh from just after the war, and designer Kono Takashi who was a leading figure at the Keimin Bunka Shidosho (Japanese Culture Center) in Java under Japanese military occupation.



The Democracy Monument, which Feroci and his students took part in the making of.
Photo: Ushiroshoji Masahiro, April 7, 2019.

Related Keywords

Silpa Bhirasri