

# SPACE AS CORNUCOPIA

## Taos Fine Art Gallery features the work of Mimi Chen Ting and Richard Nichols.

BY J. POINTER

From May 29 through June 12, Taos Fine Art Gallery is featuring the work of Mimi Chen Ting and Richard Nichols. Ting is a contemporary artist working in monotypes and acrylic on canvas. Nichols' oils and charcoals are representational. But despite the contrast in styles, these artists share interests and enthusiasms, and the unexpected interplay between new and traditional expression makes this exhibit one of the most interesting events of the Spring Arts season.

Gallery co-director Chuck Perna says, "Ting and Nichols share an exuberance about art and life, and each artist's work is characterized by harmony. Presented together, their art is richly complimentary. We like to think of this show as a beautiful surprise."

The art of Mimi Chen Ting delineates the poetic space between life's dualities—birth/death, separation/unity, memory/invention. There's a luminous intelligence at work here, as comfortable with big themes as it is delighted by small, playful moments. Best yet, it's accessible magic. We need no interest in philosophy to appreciate the handsome, colorful geometry of these monotypes and acrylics on canvas. "It's how I talk to myself," Ting laughs. As simple as that.

"It's all process. I love to explore potentials and promises and the language of my tools." Her explorations are elegant tidings, honoring all pauses and digressions, in forms of mandalas and grids, moons, sculptural figures, and small signature slashes of contrasting colors that invite dance in so much room to move. In this artist's disciplined hands, space becomes a cornucopia.

When Ting says, "It's almost what is not visible that's most important," she acknowledges the mystery of her vast terrain and answers Carl Jung's call for "the union of opposites through the middle path, that most fundamental item of inward experience which could respectably be set against the Chinese concept of Tao." The artist's "mental monologue," as she calls it, assimilates East (space as possibility) and West (precision perspective).

Born in Shanghai, China, Ting came to the U.S. to study sociology and literature in 1965. In 1976, she received her M.A. in art from San Jose State University. She now maintains a studio in Taos, a place, she says, that returned "a sparkle" to her eyes.

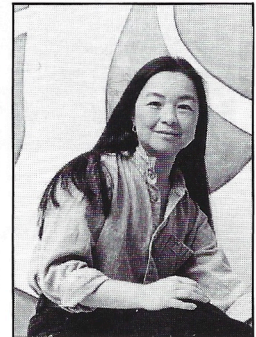
The variety of Ting's cultural experience enhances the texture of her modernist expression. Western humanities, of course, was forever altered by exposure to the art and thought of the Orient and by oddly compatible theories

of relativity. Ting's artistic sensibility charts the evolution in unique order. She cites the influence of the 15th century Italian artist Piero della Francesca, whose paintings were characterized by a scientific perspective and systematic simplifications of natural forms.

Ting says, "Some of my earliest awareness of aesthetics was through Buddhist temple sculptures, Beijing opera style of music and performance, a culture that defines its fates through stark scripts and rituals as well as opulent decorations and ceremonies. These lessons were often hard to reconcile with my concept of expression. Somehow when I first saw Piero's works, I felt I understood that there was a way to absorb and filter it all. I learned to combine figuration and abstraction in the literal sense, how to describe time through the use of space."

Figure and landscape abstraction are the foundations of her art. "They help me tell stories," she says, "and ask questions. Through these, I gain an understanding of relationships and commonalities. I'm dealing with universal images, images fundamental to humanity."

Her triptych *Habitat* embodies a characteristic fascination with geometry and its potential to render myth. Female figure in repose, architectural allusions, mountains sculpted in mist. A full moon illuminates "empty" space. Pale blue ladder contrasts in angle and value to the red contours of peaks and valleys. Chinese calligraphy appears in two of the panels. "One within the mountain," Ting translates. "The right symbol is 'persona,' the center one



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represents mountain, and the left pictograph means 'enter.' It's multi-levelled. Entry, submission, surrender." Despite its theatrical composition, and the political weight of the word *submission*, the overall effect of this painting is serene.

"In *Habitat*, I was conscious of embracing my roots," she says. "As the arch of that bridge becomes broader, my reach becomes deeper and the embrace stronger in time." As Ting speaks, she expands, modifies, poeticizes. One can feel the process that organizes her art, the ripple effect of an answer to a single keen question. The curiosity that motivates her work appears as limitless and as joyful as a child's.

"I'm filled with wonder about nature, and I am intrigued by all identities and perceptions. I love quirks and deviations. My father said that my skull, as an infant, didn't fuse, which means, he said, my mind will always be open."

The serendipity of printmaking accommodates her wit, vigor, and literary proclivities. Her monotype *Inbound*, for example, is a splendid tale of fragility and tenacity.

Her big acrylic canvasses are remarkable for the flatness of effect which has been compared to that of Matisse. She resembles her "second muse" in other ways, too: color and drama. As Matisse turned an everyday parlor into a stage, Ting makes theatre of ordinary dreams and spontaneous associations. (One critic wrote, "Ting's abstractions are apparitions from the collective unconscious.") It is her tracking of the tension, its unpredictable rhythm, that dramatizes the ultimate refinement of her canvasses. The viewer is safely seated in the eye of a hurricane, and in her best work, Ting, like Matisse, uncovers the grandeur in tranquility.

"I'm painting to find my voice. Sometimes I say that I want it to be a whisper heard loud and clear. And though



Mimi Chen Ting, *Inbound*, monotype on arches, 22 by 18 inches.

it is, as I'm working, a communication with myself, the greatest reward is in knowing it has become a dialogue with the viewer."

Mimi Chen Ting's work is widely collected, appearing in public, corporate, and private collections around the world.



Mimi Chen Ting, *Habitat*, acrylic on canvas (three panels), 54 by 87 inches.