**THE EASTERN ART GROUP (*DONG FANG* or *TON FAN*)** (東方畫會)

The Eastern art group, or *Dong Fang* (*Ton Fan*), was one of Taiwan’s first modern art groups. It was formed in November 1956 by a group of artists who came to Taiwan from Mainland China during the mid-late 1940s, and most were graduates from the Taipei Municipal Teachers College. Although their artistic styles were dissimilar, these artists shared a common purpose in modernising Chinese painting by synthesising traditional Chinese aesthetic values with Western modern art forms, particularly American abstraction. The Easternart group evolved under the guidance of artist-educator Li Chung-sheng (Li Zhongsheng, 李仲生), who arrived in Taiwan in 1949 from Mainland China. Li played an instrumental role in the development of modern art in Taiwan, mentoring many artists, including members of the Eastern art group, and he is often referred to in Taiwan as ‘the father of modern art’*.* Influenced by surrealism and abstract expressionism, he encouraged his students to delve into the subconscious and to embrace free and spontaneous artistic expression.



Hsiao Chin, *Oltre Passare La*, 1995, acrylic on canvas, 70 x 90cm, private collection.

Artists in this group included Chen Tao-ming (Chen Daoming, 陳道明), Ho Kan (Huo Gang, 霍剛) (original name Huo Xuegang, 霍學剛), Hsiao Chin (Xiao Qin, 萧蕭勤), Hsiao Ming-hsien (Xiao Mingxian, 蕭明賢) (original name Xiao Long, 蕭龍), Hsia Yang (夏陽) (original name, Hsia Zuxiang夏祖湘), Li Yuan-chia (Li Yuanjia, 李元佳), Ouyang Wen-yuan (歐陽文苑), and Wu Hao (吳昊) (original name Wu Shilu, 吳世祿). These eight core members were often referred to as “The Eight Bandits” ( *Ba da xiang ma*, 八大響馬) because of their rejection of artistic convention and of academic training.

In November 1957, members of the Eastern art group held their first exhibition in Taiwan in which they affirmed their commitment to modernise Chinese art, and over the next decade they regularly held exhibitions. Their works generated some criticism amongst conservative commentators and scholars who accused these artists of being anti-academic and depraved. By the end of the 1960s this modern art movement lost its momentum as several artists in this group left Taiwan to go overseas and the group disbanded in 1971. Despite the fact that the Eastern art group was short-lived, its historical significance lies in the fact that it was the first modern art group in Taiwan which attempted to assimilate Chinese cultural tradition with modern artistic trends.

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