My art, my world, my piano

Wen-Hua Chen

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.rit.edu/theses

Recommended Citation

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Thesis/Dissertation Collections at RIT Scholar Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses by an authorized administrator of RIT Scholar Works. For more information, please contact ritscholarworks@rit.edu.
MY ART, MY WORLD, MY PIANO

by

Wen-Hua Chen

This Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Fine Art

College of Imaging Arts and Sciences

School of Art

Rochester Institute of Technology

Rochester, NY

July, 29, 2013
Committee Approval:

Luvon Sheppard
Chief Advisor

Date

Thomas Lightfoot
Associate Advisor

Date

Zerbe Sodervick
Associate Advisor

Date

Carole Woodlock
Administrative Chair

Date
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... 4  
Introduction ..................................................................................................................... 5  
Section I: Taiwanese Pattern Series ............................................................................ 6  
  A. Beginning Ideas – Separate Panels ........................................................................ 6  
  B. The Content of the Taiwanese Patterns .................................................................. 8  
  C. Techniques ............................................................................................................... 10  
  D. Evolution .................................................................................................................. 12  
     Background color and fluidity ................................................................................. 12  
     Tones ....................................................................................................................... 14  
     Hand-Painted or Computer Reproduced ............................................................... 15  
Section II: The Piano .................................................................................................. 19  
  A. Why a piano? .......................................................................................................... 19  
  B. Process and Problem Solving ................................................................................ 19  
    Ideas and Designs .................................................................................................... 20  
    Process: The Base .................................................................................................... 21  
    Process: coloring ................................................................................................... 22  
  C. The Performance .................................................................................................... 25  
  D. Music Selection ...................................................................................................... 26  
Section III: The Exhibition .......................................................................................... 28  
  A. Hanging the Show and Rehearsal .......................................................................... 28  
    Moving the Piano .................................................................................................... 28  
    Planning the Exhibit Space ..................................................................................... 29  
    Invitation cards ...................................................................................................... 30  
    Performance Rehearsal ......................................................................................... 31  
  B. Opening Reception Night ....................................................................................... 32  
  C. The Future ............................................................................................................. 36  
References ..................................................................................................................... 0
Abstract

The topic for this thesis is how Taiwanese and Western cultures have influenced me both as an artist and an individual.

In my thesis, I paint Taiwanese floral patterns. Along with a number of paintings and prints, the most complex work involves painting on a piano. The watercolor paintings are in grid format to demonstrate the concept of pattern, and the piano has a single large peony on top and other decorations on the sides. My research focuses upon the art of Taiwanese culture. I choose Taiwanese floral patterns as my subject matter because of their variety of elements, and those elements, in fact, refer to the cultures that have influenced Taiwan throughout history. Combining a Western instrument with a Taiwanese pattern also demonstrates how Western culture has influenced Taiwan. My thesis project represents traditional floral patterns through my own interpretation and presents them in a contemporary way.
Introduction

Like most artists, I learned painting and dreamed of being an artist when I was a child. As I grew older, I could not take being an artist seriously because of realistic considerations. I enrolled in one of the best universities in Taiwan and majored in Philosophy. While I was pursuing my bachelor’s degree, I took classes in a variety of fields, such as Science, History, Medicine, and Art. I enjoyed doing art projects and spent more time and money on art classes than any of my major classes. I realized that I loved art more than anything else. Therefore, I decided to apply for a Master’s degree in art in the United States, which has the most liberal environment for the arts.
**Section I: Taiwanese Pattern Series**

**A. Beginning Ideas – Separate Panels**

The idea of the *Taiwanese Pattern Series* began in summer 2011 after a trip to Chelsea, New York City. I saw many artists using separate panels or frames to create a group of artworks. This art attracted me immediately; it seemed more than just framed images on a plain wall. Grouping images interested me because they presented a stronger visual impact at first glance. In addition, the relationship of each image allowed the audience to experience multiple interpretations.

The possibility of using separate panels with variable arrangements came to mind. I have always been interested in small paintings. However, most small artworks have the disadvantage of being overlooked, at first, by audiences. Creating a group of artworks of a similar size and displaying them altogether helped me build a powerful and attractive statement much stronger than a single image.

The first group I created was *Taiwanese Pattern #1*. This collection was a whole pattern before I trimmed it into squares. I chose the square as the basic unit because this format offered greater possibilities for making different configurations. If I used rectangles, the rotation of individual parts would not have been as easy.
To create units, I divided the flower pattern into squares, and inside each square I laid out a different composition. Some compositions are a single peony slanted to the center; some of the squares contain two peonies, and some are less structured with only tiny decorative flowers and leaves. The squares look similar in color, but each one is done as a single painting. Together all of them become a set of artworks that produces a distinct pattern.

The panels can be rotated and exchanged, and there are even the possibilities of zooming in and out by giving more or less distance between squares. The result of using separate panels and the shape of squares means that this series of artworks can be arranged in a different composition each time it is displayed.
B. The Content of the Taiwanese Patterns

Taiwanese patterns were chosen because of the variety of elements reflecting the cultures that influenced Taiwan throughout history. The pattern was designed by Hakka ethnic in Taiwan\(^1\) and was widely used on bedclothes in the early 1960s. Decades later, when the Taiwanese people tried to find features of Taiwanese culture, they discovered these flower patterns, which recalled their memory of times past. These patterns became popular once again. The bright colored patterns, especially ones with vivid pink, no longer belonged solely to Hakka culture. Today, these fabric designs have become one of the important features of Taiwanese culture.\(^2\)

There are a few elements that are specifically related to cultural features from different countries. The following flowers are the most frequently favored:

Peonies — The peony is one of the most popular flowers in Chinese culture because in ancient times only rich families could grow this flower. The peony is the symbol of richness\(^3\), and it has been widely used in all kinds of decorations and paintings in Asian culture.

Chrysanthemum — Some Taiwanese patterns involve the chrysanthemum, which is also another favorite traditional flower in Chinese culture. The chrysanthemum is interpreted as being

---

\(^1\) Hakka Affairs Council announced that the patterns were the symbol of Hakka culture and named the Taiwanese patterns as Hakka Pattern. There was a story that the Floral Goddess brought the colorful flower fabrics to thank the Hakka people. However, some research refuted that fact and indicated that the very first floral patterns were brought to Taiwan from Japan and were redesigned and known as Taiwanese Pattern. There is no proof now that Hakka people remade the pattern at the beginning. On the other hand, with the promotion and assistance of Hakka Affairs Council, some new patterns were designed recently.

\(^2\) 吳清桂 (2008), 台灣的設計寶庫：傳統花布圖樣 150 , Taiwan: 如何出版社, p.12

\(^3\) The Symbolic meaning of the various flowers has been passed down for generations and is understood by all Chinese people just as Westerners know that a rose symbolizes love.
morally good, which symbolizes being faithful. However, in Japan the shape of the chrysanthemum is simplified and represented as the noble flower of the Imperial Family.\(^4\)

![Picture 1](image1.png) ![Picture 2](image2.png)

Picture 1 and Picture 2 are examples of two typical painting styles of chrysanthemums are found in Taiwanese patterns, and both of them involve line drawings. The former one draws the outline to describe the chrysanthemum, which is more like the traditional Chinese methods to paint the chrysanthemum (see picture 2\(^5\)); the latter simplifies the chrysanthemum and make the flower more cartoon-like, much like the Japanese method.

Cherry blossom and plum flower — Cherry blossoms and plum flowers both grow in high-latitude areas. However, Taiwan is a tropical climate. Then, why do these two flowers appear in the patterns? Both flowers have historical meaning to Taiwan. The cherry blossom was

\(^{4}\) According to the *Imperial Family Law* (皇室儀制令) no.12 and no.13 (1926), the chrysanthemum shape (see picture 4) was prohibited from use by non-Imperial Family.

\(^{5}\) 李秀雲,(2008), *中國名花工筆線描繪譜*：菊花, China: 安徽美術出版社, cover page.
brought to Taiwan between 1895-1945, when Taiwan was a Japanese colony. On the other hand, after Taiwan was taken over by Republic of China, the plum flower was assigned as the national symbolic flower in 1964\(^6\).

There are many types of Taiwanese patterns, and most of them involve similar elements as described above.

**C. Techniques**

The square paintings in the series are painted in watercolor.

I observed the Taiwanese pattern and reduplicated the form. I laid the lines with pencil, and some of the lines may be seen through the applied paints. I drew freehand without the aid of a projector or tracing tools. I believe that the less technical support is used, the more humanity is involved. There is no doubt that the outcome is different from the original pattern, because every line and shape has been redefined and repositioned. In this way, the painting is a unique art piece, not just a mechanically generated product.

Before coloring, I used Winsor & Newton Art Masking Fluid to mask the highlighted areas I planned to create. The masking fluid is a bright yellow color and is removable so that I could see the painted area after the mask had been applied. After applying masking fluid, the brush was

---

\(^6\) Office of President, Republic of China (Taiwan)(2013, June 29), “The plum blossom, *Prunus mei*, was officially designated by the ROC Executive Yuan to be the national flower on July 21, 1964. The plum blossom, which has shades of pink and white and gives off a delicate fragrance, has great symbolic value for the Chinese people because of its resilience during the harsh winter. The triple grouping of stamens (one long and two short) represents Sun Yat-sen’s Three Principles of the People, while the five petals symbolize the five branches of the ROC government.”

damaged by the fluid and naturally spread like a fan. Usually watercolor painters will try to avoid this happening or will simply dispose of their brush. However, I utilized this condition in a way that benefited my paintings. The spread hairs of the brush resulted in a shape that was appropriate for painting the highlighted shapes on the flower petals.

After the masking fluid dried, I first painted the background color. When painting a large area such as a background, brush strokes are visible. To minimize these brushstroke marks, timing became an important consideration. The longer it took to finish the area, the more brush strokes I would get. To speed up the entire coloring process, I masked some of the leaves, branches, and decorative flowers and then started painting carefully but fearlessly from the smallest areas into more open space.

The second subject painted was the peonies. In this step, the color application determined a three-dimensional illusion for the flowers. The center part of the flower is deeper than the edges. Since the reserved areas, such as light spots and stamens, were masked by the masking fluid, I painted the peonies without stress. To create a smooth gradation in depth, I used a wet-on-wet technique. First I painted the basic color, which was usually light rose. While this color was still wet, I applied more saturated rose to the center part. Sometimes I would not wet the entire peony at once, because my research showed that the water dries in seconds. If the paper dried before I applied the saturated color, it would not show a smooth gradation. Instead, the dried paper caused obvious edges of brush strokes. The more petals I drew in the composition, the more complicated the layout became, and consequently the more time it took to paint. Painting the flower petals one by one might not look as natural as painting the whole peony at once, but it was far more successful than losing the gradation that depicted depth.
Through my research in using watercolor as a medium, one of the outcomes was the wrinkling of the paper, especially when using a wet-on-wet technique. If the paper was not stretched on a board or canvas, it would dry wrinkled. Using heavier weight papers helped some, but the paper still could not become as flat as an unpainted sheet of paper. To solve the problem, I attached my paintings onto foam board with double-sided tape. In this way, the edges of the watercolor papers remained flat. In addition, I avoided a distinctive frame outside of the square.

D. Evolution

After a few sets of patterns were completed, I started considering more of my personal preferences. The line works involved my own interpretations of Taiwanese patterns. I questioned my selection of a color palette. I asked myself if it was possible to invent a new set of colors but retain the original feeling of Taiwanese patterns?

Background color and fluidity

Most Taiwanese patterns have only one background color, but one of the Taiwanese patterns I chose had two background colors because the designer wanted to create a heart shape by circling the area with branches. This special consideration surprisingly created a better result in my artworks. Compared to those sets that originated from a one-color background pattern, the two-color background pattern allowed more fluidity and options among squares.

When the viewers look at the set of paintings, their eyes move toward the peonies and also follow the direction of the painted branches. The branches in the compositions allow a viewer’s eyes to move freely among the square paintings. In addition, the two different colors on each side of the branch affect the viewing experience. We tend to follow the direction of the same color.
Therefore, when I display a set of paintings, another important consideration becomes arranging two different colors next to each other to create a sense of movement.

Because few Taiwanese patterns have a two-color background, I selected a second color of my personal choice. This became the first step of my evolution and research into colors.

Fortunately, there are commonly used colors for Taiwanese patterns. They are dark red, Chinese red, rose pink, bright pink, sky blue, pale yellow, and sometimes purple. In the past few years I added some other colors for background usage. The new palettes included grass green, sapphire blue, and black. However, none of these colors had been combined previously into a two color background. The only Taiwanese patterns that utilized two colors for the background were taken off the market and are no longer produced.

The first set of paintings in which I tried to create my own combination of a two-color background was Taiwanese Pattern #4 and Taiwanese Pattern #5. They were created at the same time but differ because of the quantity of squares. In these experimental sets, I chose red and purple as my two background colors. The red was created by mixing a saturated rose pigment directly from the tube and painted with only a small amount of water. The purple corresponded to the traditional purple that had been used in other Taiwanese patterns. These choices were made because I wanted to create something new while maintaining the essence of existing tradition. I still wanted people to recognize my paintings as Taiwanese patterns from the colors used.
The results were satisfying. For foreign people, the artworks are still recognized as Taiwanese; from my viewpoint, they became both fresh and familiar.

**Tones**

Contemplating the sets of colors that represent Taiwan from the existing historical patterns, another idea emerged. Did the sets of colors make the Taiwanese pattern look like Taiwan, or did the layout and content make up the pattern of Taiwan? Taiwanese patterns were characteristically in bright colors. What if I replaced the whole color set with other tones for a new painting translation?
With these ideas in mind, I picked a series of possible antique tones for further experimentation. The basic background colors are pale brown and a little darker brown than the previous one. For the peonies, I chose navy blue and purple. By adding brown to the flowers, the saturation was toned down to better fit the tone set by the background color. It was difficult to decide on using lemon-yellow for the decorative flowers, because yellow is such a bright color which could break the harmony. Adding a little highlight to the tone was also considered.

The result for this experiment was neither satisfying nor distasteful. As an artwork, *Taiwanese Pattern #6* was unique and became an exception to other series. However, for me *Taiwanese Pattern #6* was less Taiwanese because the personality of the Taiwanese pattern had been changed so much. The personality of Taiwan is young and vibrant, not aged and sluggish.

**Hand-Painted or Computer Reproduced**

I chose to reproduce the patterns without assistance of technology such as a computer or projector, because I believe that through hand painting the pattern, the action had a special meaning and interpretation.
The line drawn by hand had special meaning because it contained the person’s habits and subconscious. No two lines were the same; this is why hand-painted artworks become fascinating because they involve the emotions and thoughts of a human being. Reproducing the pattern by hand recaptured the feelings and connections to the designs that the original artists must have had. This helped me to understand more about how the patterns were made and how the designer organized the elements. The act of reproducing the Taiwanese pattern became an act of interpretation through my hands.

During the layout process, I sometimes made changes to fit the composition within the squares. Sometimes I eliminated some of the decorative flowers around the peony. Sometimes I changed the angle of the branches. These modifications would not happen naturally if I scanned the original pattern into the computer. Overall, making art with my hands gave me more freedom as an artist.

To show the differences between computer-generated art and hand-painted artworks, I made an experimental set of patterns using digital printmaking. First I made an image on the computer, and later I printed it onto a special transparent sheet as a plate. The image was then transferred onto printmaking paper. During the process of printing the image, a few traditional printmaking techniques such as Chine-collé7 might also be utilized. However, most of the processes were computer generated and provided the artist many conveniences by using pre-existing digital files.

7 “Chine-collé, also called paper collé, refers to the process of simultaneously printing on and mounting a thin sheet of paper onto a sturdier backing sheet.” Shure, Brian (2000), Chine Colle: A Printer’s Handbook, San Francisco; Crown Point Press, p.13
Taiwanese patterns have been recorded and published as digital files\(^8\). I used these resources to produce *Taiwanese Pattern #7*. I opened the file that I wanted to use in the computer and trimmed the images into square formats. Because the file was digital, when I made selections for inclusion in the square composition, I sometimes did not have much choice about excluding things I did not want. Even though my concept for this series was the same, the images were directly made from the originals. To reduce the stiff feeling of digital files, I applied several filter effects in Adobe Photoshop. The applications made the images look more like fabric or pastel art pieces.

---

\(^8\) Three books had been published with a disk of digital files: 陳宗萍, (2012), 花樣時代：台灣花布美學新視界, Taiwan: Yuan-Liou Publishing Company; 吳清桂, (2010), 台灣花布：收藏台灣最美麗的情感與記憶, Taiwan: Locus Publishing Company; 吳清桂, (2008), 台灣的設計寶庫：傳統花布圖樣 150, Taiwan: 如何出版社
After all the files of squares were determined and prepared for printing, each square was printed separately on different transparent sheets. In this way I could arrange them the way I did to display my watercolors. I drew grids as templates for placement of squares on the paper and then soaked the paper in water, which is a necessary preparation for the printmaking process. The next step was arranging the squares before putting them through the press. The plates with square images were placed face down on dampened paper and run through the press. Since the entire process of arrangement was time consuming, the ink on the plate became dry and caused some white dots on the finished print. Accidents are common in printmaking, and there are pleasures and challenges. The imperfection contributed to making the artworks unique.

The outcome for the experiment was pleasing. The pattern’s vivid color and the composition of squares made the finished artwork delightful. Compared to paintings with watercolors, this series was done less directly by human hands. The tricky thing was that I modified the image to resemble hand-made art pieces, and most people found it difficult to recognize the source taken from a product of a digital file. This experiment informed me that people look at art based on its concept and presentation more than the process behind it. As the artist who gave birth to it, I might be the only person who cares about the philosophy of methodology. For me, investing a lot of my creative time working on a computer is not an enjoyable way to make art.
Section II: The Piano

A. Why a piano?

The main piece of artwork in my thesis exhibition was a piano that I painted. Painting on a Western instrument as the canvas for Taiwanese patterns are both a personal and cultural. Regarding the personal aspects, the piano is one of my childhood memories. Even though I did not practice as regularly as a professional pianist, playing piano became one of my recreational outlets for confronting my emotional feelings, defining both my sadness and happiness. Creating music and making art have been the primary ways that I express myself.

From a cultural perspective, combining a Western instrument with Taiwanese patterns relates to Taiwanese identity. There are many questions about that identity. How did Taiwan become Taiwan? What is unique about Taiwan? Except for food and festivals, how is Taiwan different from other countries with Chinese culture?

Starting with my generation, Western culture was advocated by the government, and the entire society was filled with Western values. The piano was the evidence of how Western culture has influenced me, my childhood, and my daily life, and how much Eastern and Western cultures blended together.

B. Process and Problem Solving

Due to budget limitations, the piano was a secondhand Malcolm baby grand piano that I purchased from a family in Rochester, New York, who no longer needed it.
The medium for this piano project was oil paints. Watercolor was not appropriate for wood, although I did contemplate wrapping the piano with watercolor paper. This was not a realistic idea because the paper would present many technical problems, and there was no evidence of the longevity of this surface application. The best way of succeeding with the project was to apply primer to the piano and paint it as canvas. Acrylic paint was also a good choice. However, since I did not use acrylic as my primary paint medium before, it seemed risky to use an unfamiliar medium for such an important project. Even though oil paints dried slower, I had a good understanding of and skill for controlling the medium.

**Ideas and Designs**

Before I really began painting the piano, I made little piano models in order to plan the best design. Following the idea I developed for the *Taiwanese Pattern series*, two background colors were separated by the peonies on the top of the piano lid. I wanted the two background colors to be both traditional and innovative.

The first idea that came to mind was a red and white paint palette. Red is the most popular and traditional color of Taiwanese patterns, and white, on the other hand, is one of the favored colors for manufactured pianos. Red and white in combination make a powerful impact. My other choice was to replace the color red with my favorite color, ultramarine blue, and combine it with white. From my advisors and peers, I got more great ideas on what to do with the piano, such as preserving part of the original wood and partly painting the piano, using red and wood colors to create an antique appearance. Another consideration was to prime the piano with black gesso...
rather than white gesso. Painting on either white or black would make a huge difference for the colors applied on top of them.

To help clarify these concepts for selection, the little piano-shaped models were carefully made from watercolor paper and then painted with the colors proposed. The decision to paint the piano in red and white was quickly acknowledged as the best option, as it had the most impact.

**Process: The Base**

Just like painting on any canvas, the first step was to prepare the surface for accepting and stabilizing paints on top of the wood surface. However, the piano manufacturer had already used a varnish finish, which meant that the paints would not adhere. To prepare the surface, I used sand paper to remove the varnish. Because the piano is a delicate instrument, any consideration of using a sanding machine was eliminated. Electric equipment might cause damage to the soundboard and the action system. I hand sanded the entire piano with sheets of sandpaper. This process took approximately one month. There are technical rules for oil paintings, and one of them is to never put a water-based medium on top of an oil-based medium. If this occurs, the water-based medium will easily peel off the oil-based surface. I tried to follow this rule by sanding off the varnish since I was going to use a water-based white gesso before painting with the oil paints.

The next step was to prime the piano with gesso, which unknowingly consumed more time than I had anticipated. According to my original plan, I intended to prime a layer of gesso and sand the gesso three times to build up the painting surface. However, in the end, I probably did this two-part cycle eight to twelve times. As a barrier medium, the gesso was not able to stop the stain used on the wood from bleeding out from the wood grain. This was a surprise because the
situation had not occurred previously when painting on canvas or even on a new, clean piece of wood. After three attempts to sand and gesso the piano’s surface, I realized this had become a problem that needed to be solved. I tried to apply more layers of gesso to see if the thickness would block the yellowish stain, but this strategy did not work. Yet, still I was not willing to accept that defect on the white base.

It took me a while to figure out the solution. I consulted with my advisors, peers, and professionals at home centers retail stores that sell finishing products and finally came up with the decision to prime the piano with shellac. There was no guarantee as to archival permanence by using shellac with gesso; no one was able to determine how long the surface would be stable when applied on a vibrating instrument. It was a risk for such a special project.

Fortunately, applying shellac worked well and stopped the stain successfully. The only thing I was not satisfied with was the color of the shellac. Even though it was labeled as white, it was creamier than the gesso. Bright white was necessary for the impact that I needed. Therefore, I applied three more layers of gesso over the shellac, and it finally gave me the result I wanted.

**Process: coloring**

As on the rough design of the little piano model, I drew the layout on the actual piano with oil-based red pencil so that the lines would dissolve into the oil paints. Inside the piano lid, I painted two peonies instead of one in the middle. I carefully connected the inside surfaces with the other sides of the piano. One challenge I faced was that I had sanded the surface so smoothly that the oil paints would not adhere to the surface as canvas. There were unexpected
brush strokes, but these were also the exciting part of the painting. In addition, because there is a vast difference between watercolor techniques and oil painting techniques, I also invented a special technique to achieve a similar wash effect as in my watercolors. When I used the product Magic Eraser to remove overdrawn outlines, I accidentally found that it could be used in a positive way. I handled the sponge product like a wipe-out painting tool. Because the Magic Eraser only wipes out a little paint at a time, it also could create a subtle gradation effect to the applied area. Combining the Magic Eraser and painting with very thin layers of pink oil paints, the result presented a transparency on the white gesso just like a wash technique I used in watercolor. Magic Eraser was the magic I found in this project, and it was also easy to control.

It took me a while to decide if I was going to paint the dampers or not. The dampers are a more sensitive part in the piano. The action of applying paints might cause damage to the dampers, preventing them from their function of stopping the sound from the strings. There were many options with the dampers, such as painting the colors that had been used in the Taiwanese pattern, or painting mini-Taiwanese patterns on the dampers. Recognizing that the process of painting detail on the dampers would be difficult, I compromised and decided to paint only white on selected dampers. Every key corresponds to a given damper. When a key is played, the corresponding damper rises up, and playing the piano becomes a dance of the dampers. I wanted those dampers to be viewed and appreciated as part of the exhibition. The selected dampers I painted were those played in *Bach’s Partita no.1*. 
I painted the inside of the fallboard, which is the lid that protects the piano keys, after everything else was painted. I felt that the whole piano was very much completed, and the fallboard should have a little rest instead of having overwhelmingly heavy paints. The fallboard was also where people’s eyes might rest during the performance. For this design I used simple oil colors to draw the outline of the Taiwanese pattern. I used pink to draw peonies, green to define leaves, and blue and gold for decorative flowers. The outcome was surprising, because it was painted differently than other parts of the piano and also described the Taiwanese pattern literally with colored lines.
C. The Performance

I considered many options for presenting music during the thesis exhibition in the Bevier Gallery, James E. Booth Hall, Rochester Institute of Technology. For example, I could play a recording from a pianist or a recording by me, or even ask a pianist to perform during the exhibition. However, all of these ideas were immediately rejected, because in my heart I so passionately wanted to perform.

I believe that there would be a significant difference between playing a recording and playing live: one was the visual impact and another was the performance itself. A musical recording would be considered something that already happened in the past; a performance would be in present time, demonstrating an immediate feeling. Most important, the topic for the thesis was about the influence of cultures in my life. The performance was like a poet telling her own story. I wanted to tell my story by myself, independent of others’ interpretations. The performance was conducted directly with the audience and me and my abilities. As an artist, doing a performance is daunting, but I made up my mind to do it.
D. Music Selection

Choosing suitable pieces of music requires a good understanding of the music. I felt that the music should fit the concept of the thesis and the bright-color painted piano, and, most importantly, my ability to perform the music at the exhibition.

I want to thank my piano teacher Siu Yan Luk from the Eastman School of Music, University of Rochester. With her expert guidance, I was able to select and learn two wonderful pieces from Johann Sebastian Bach, as well as one traditional Taiwanese folk song. Under Siu Yan’s instructions, I completed the performance successfully. I chose Partita no. 1 in b flat, Prelude, and Sarabande from the suggested music that she offered. We talked about the concept of my thesis, and I showed her my little piano models and a few sets of Taiwanese patterns. She then evaluated my level of piano skill and produced a selection of music from which to choose.

Prelude is the first movement of Partita no. 1, which is the beginning piece for dancing. I particularly loved this piece because it so appropriately fit the concept of my Taiwanese Pattern Series. My paintings used many squares, which were more structured when compared to other MFA students’ artwork. The configuration of the square is not commonly used by artists, often because it suggests a formal feeling and presents many restrictions. On the other hand, Bach’s music is as structured, as are most compositions in Baroque music. Bach was particularly good at counterpoint in composing music, using two or more lines of independent melody and blending them into one harmony. Usually in a piece of music, one hand would play the main melody, and the other hand would play the supplement. However, in Bach’s music, both hands play melody, two different melodies. For me, the two melodies are stitched together similarly to the two
background colors in my *Taiwanese Pattern Series*. The harmony created in music mirrors the same intentions that I have in the painting.

*Sarabande* is the third movement of *Partita no. 1*, which is a slower Spanish dance. This piece is less structured and more expressive, like a butterfly flying around the flowers. The images of *Sarabande* make up the atmosphere of the exhibition together with the painted piano.

The last piece I selected is a very famous Taiwanese folk song, *Looking for Spring Breeze*\(^9\). It was composed by Teng Yu-hsien\(^10\) and published in 1933. The song is a narrative love song of a girl seeing a boy and wanting to know him, but she is very shy and doesn’t connect with him in the end. It was composed in a traditional Asian music method by using only five notes: C D E G A (Western music uses seven notes: C D E F G A B ). Additionally, the song is not written in Chinese but in Taiwanese Hokkien\(^11\). The composer was Hakka but wrote the song in Taiwanese Hokkien. The song for me was not just music that represents Taiwan; it was also a combination of subcultures. There are many editions of this song reproduced for different instruments, and the one I selected to perform was the transformed edition for piano solo, which was originally played by pianist Lang Lang\(^12\).

---

\(^9\)*望春風*

\(^10\) Or “Deng Yu-Xian” according to Hanyu Pinyin system, which is a system used to spell Chinese in China.

\(^11\) There are two other spoken languages are used in Taiwan. One is Taiwanese Hakkien and the other is Hakka Chinese. They refer to two different ethnicities.

Section III: The Exhibition

A. Hanging the Show and Rehearsal

Moving the Piano

Many people asked me how I moved the piano out of my studio. The answer is quite easy: I let the professionals do it. They have proper tools to take down the legs and know the procedures for each step.

They took down the left leg by lifting up the pedal, and then leaned the left side of the piano on the pad. Under the pad was the dray with carpet. Relocating the piano sounds easy, but actually the process involves a great amount of preparation. I am glad I did not have to do it in a less-professional manner, as I had many details to focus on for the installation of my thesis exhibition, scheduled in the Bevier Gallery from April 2-18, 2012.
Planning the Exhibit Space

Concerning the auditory quality of the performance, space was an important topic. The space at the Bevier Gallery would naturally produce a large echo. Consulting with piano teacher Siu Yan, she suggested constructing at least three walls to concentrate the sound in a high-ceiling, open-space gallery.

Rather than building a U shape and placing the piano in the center, I created a plan that utilized two perpendicular walls to resemble a chamber environment. I was able to hang my major Taiwanese Pattern Series on the larger of the perpendicular walls. The piano was displayed at the corner of the larger perpendicular wall and the main wall of the gallery. The Taiwanese pattern paintings had similar colors to the piano, which created an atmosphere of a colorful floral garden. A smaller free-standing, perpendicular wall was built to concentrate the piano sound. Considering the movement of the audience within the exhibition, the two perpendicular walls blocked the full view of the exhibition, attracting people to walk into the exhibition area.
Although I made a diagram for the exhibit space, the plan was modified during the installation. Prints were repositioned to fit in the best possible locations. The miniature piano models made for design ideas were not intended to be part of the original plan, but they were added to the display in Plexiglas boxes. The miniature pianos presented the process of the piano project and suggested possibilities for future plans.

Setting up the thesis exhibition in Bevier Gallery was challenging and a valuable experience. I had a tight timeline for installation: the piano needed to be tuned, the Taiwanese Pattern Series needed hours to grid and to compose the square units, and the distances between artworks on the wall space needed to be determined and calculated. I learned a great deal about professional standards from the installation in RIT’s Bevier Gallery.

**Invitation cards**

One of the most interesting preparations for the exhibition was making invitation cards. I took a photo from the top of the piano and designed the image of the top lid into postcards.
Performance Rehearsal

I started rehearsing in the Bevier Gallery one week before the opening reception. The sound of the piano was different from place to place. The Bevier Gallery made the sound even more open and rounded. The Bevier Gallery was designed to suggest a patio design. The gallery was located right next to the entrance of the building on the second floor, and People could look down at the gallery from the third floor.

Whenever I played the piano, I found that people paused their walking and listened. Sometimes people leaned on the handrail above on the third floor, and some people hid behind walls to listen. I feel the exhibition had already started before the opening reception. The performance, as part of the exhibition, was about the daily life of the artist.
B. Opening Reception Night
C. The Future

The thesis exhibition was remarkably successful. The painted piano captured people’s attention and made them aware of the cultural patterns. The perfect combination of the Taiwanese floral patterns and the piano demonstrated the influences of Western culture and other external cultures which provide for my generation, blending together and forming current Taiwanese culture.

My future plan is to improve on the idea of using Taiwanese floral patterns in my artwork. Based on the experiences with the piano, I wish to paint more pianos in the future and bring them to national and international venues.

Many thanks to everyone who helped me become a better person. Thanks to my parents for bringing me here to the U.S. Thanks to my committee professors, Luvon Sheppard, Tom Lightfoot, and Zerbe Sodervick, who gave me enormous support throughout the process. Thanks to my piano teacher Siu Yan Luk, who taught me to play the piano better than ever. Thanks to my friend Chein-Ju Peng, who helped me create the invitation card, and Will Jan, who was my camera person for the opening reception. Last, thanks to all my friends and peers and everyone who came to my exhibition. They made my exhibition a wonderful experience.

I prepared the exhibition as if it was a once in a lifetime event, and I did my best in the performance too. This thesis exhibition is an unforgettable memory, and I will always smile whenever I think of it.
References

吳清桂, (2010), 台灣花布：收藏台灣最美麗的情感與記憶, Taiwan: Locus Publishing Company.

吳清桂, (2008), 台灣的設計寶庫：傳統花布圖樣 150, Taiwan: 如何出版社.

李秀雲, (2008), 中國名花工筆線描繪譜· 菊花, China: 安徽美術出版社.

張素惠, (2011), Sign Consumption and Ethnic Identification of Hakka Floral Fabric, (master’s dissertation), National Central University, Taoyuan, Taiwan.
