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Foo Hong Tatt painter, U.S.A.



Foo Hong Tatt in front of a painting.

Interview by [Annick Elziere](#), U.S.A.

Hong: I was born in Malaysia. After my high school, I received a scholarship from the Institute of International Education to study art education in the USA in 1960. After obtaining a bachelor's degree in Fine Arts with high honors, I returned to Malaysia and taught art to secondary students in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and exhibited extensively throughout Malaysia and Singapore. In 1966, I was awarded a Teaching Assistantship and a Fellowship by the University of Illinois to do my MA in Art Education. After graduation, I started my teaching career at Commack High School in Long Island, NY. I am a semi-abstract imagery landscape painter, using mostly acrylic paints on canvas and paper. I love colors and I use them to express my feelings and emotions.

My main aim in art is to bring happiness and serenity to every viewer... to elevate their hearts and souls to the spiritual plane. I find that there is too much emphasis on the sufferings of the human soul in Western art. I try to stay away from this negative feeling. I want to counteract it with joy and the happiness that is often found in nature.

God has shown us so much beauty through His creation. The mountains, the valleys, the lakes, the seas, waterfalls, rivers, etc., are so awe inspiring and colorful. I often try in my very small and ineffectual way to imitate the wonder of nature. My compositions are often placeless and timeless. They may give a hint of some places or seasons but they are all from my imagination...created in an instant with consideration given to color, composition, design, and harmony.



Yellowstone National Park, painting by Foo Hong Tatt.



Laughing Beaches, painting by Foo Hong Tatt.

Annick: How long you have been a Bahá'í and how has this has affected your art?

Hong: I became a Bahá'í about 35 years ago in Malaysia.

When I first came to America in 1960, I was determined to find out which is the true religion of God.



Enchanting Solitude, painting by Foo Hong Tatt.

I was born a Taoist, a Buddhist, and a Confucianist. I was sent to a Catholic Mission school at age 12 and I studied Christianity.

Also, I lived in Malaysia which is an Islamic country. I was indeed very confused by the teachings of these religions as each one professes to be the one and only true religion. Then I found the Bahá'í Faith which teaches that all these religions come from the same source. Thus, the Baha'i Faith puts everything in perspective for me. I consider myself a world citizen; I look at every fellow human being as my brother or sister. This feeling has influenced my style of painting which is a combination of the styles of the East and West. Some may call it an international style.

Syed Ahmad Jamal, the then director of the National Art Gallery of Malaysia, wrote, " His paintings...are blends of the western and oriental aesthetics which at times transcend into the spiritual realm...They propose a sense of inner bliss reflecting a state of peace with the elements."

I wrote the following statement for the book "Penang Artists 1920-1999". "I combined the Eastern philosophy, the Bahá'í teachings and the oriental and



western aesthetics and techniques to bring about a harmony of the elements...glorifying peace, love, joy and contentment through painting the landscape of my mind."

Valley of enchantment, painting by Foo Hong Tatt.

Annick: Can you please tell us a little more about your paintings, "Touched by an Angel", "Massai Girl" and "Valley of Joy and Delights"?

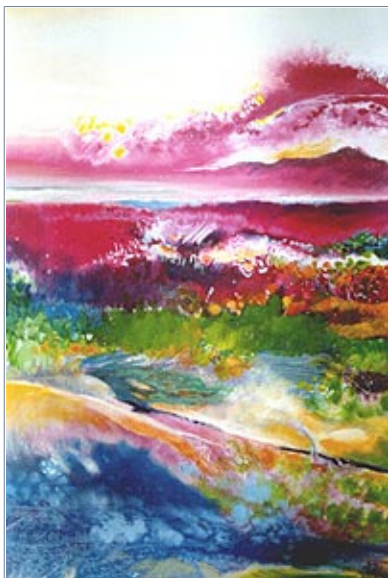
Hong: "Touched by an Angel" was named by an admirer who was very touched by the painting. She felt the presence of the spirit in this painting.

"Massai Girl" was done in Africa shortly after I arrived in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania. I was reading a book about the country and there was this picture of a Massai girl. It attracted me so much that I decided to try my skill at painting her realistically. I have not done a realistic painting for quite some time. This painting was sold to the High Commissioner from South Africa during my solo show at the German Cultural Center, Goethe Institut, in Dar-es Salaam.

"Valley of Joy and Delights" was intended for display in my living room in our new home in New Jersey. I started mixing the colors I wanted and poured them over the canvas. The combination of colors and the natural flow of the paints created such a perfect composition. With just some finishing touches, the painting emerged naturally. I was exhilarated and pleased with the result.



Under the Sea, painting by Foo Hong Tatt.



Mix Colors, painting by Foo Hong Tatt.

Annick: How and where do you get your inspiration for your paintings?

Hong: I let my subconscious do the painting. I usually do not have a pre-conceived idea of what I am going to paint. I empty my mind and meditate before I approach my blank canvas. I let my artistic instinct be my guide. I believe that a successful painting must have good composition, color harmony, and visual and emotional interests. The theme or subjectmatter is of secondary importance. I strive to capture the spirit with simplicity and spontaneity.

In a review, Bro. Joseph McNally, wrote: " Hong Tatt is a Poet's painter. His work is pure poetry. He is a "romantic" poet in a sense that his visual images of Nature are not directly recorded but assimilated, transformed, elevated and reorganized into a new universe which the canvas has become...A few calligraphic strokes begin to set up a dynamism which explodes in his psyche. His sub-conscious artistic instincts have taken over. Images long forgotten come to the surface; rocks, flowers trees, sunshine, snow-all the phenomena of nature...abstract ideas are not shunned; ...he handles all with superb technical skill and craftsmanship, such as enables him to lay bare his emotions."

Annick: What advice would you give to young artists all over the world to encourage them to continue to paint despite difficulties and hardships?

Hong: Art is the reflection of our civilization and the food for our spirit. Without art, life itself is bleak and joyless. As true artists, we must be true to ourselves. Work hard to develop this

God-given talent. We must independently seek the truth and not be influenced by this very materialistic and often hypocritical and unjust world. Seek happiness in the arts and spread this joy whenever you can. Help others to see the physical and spiritual beauty in all of us and appreciate the beauty in nature. Be happy always.

See more of his work: www.foogallery.com

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- **Artist Profile:** Arts Dialogue, [February 2002](#)

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