



An address given by Dr Ju Ming, DArt (Hon)

My greetings to Mr Chancellor, Chairman of the Council, the Vice-Chancellor, graduates, parents and distinguished guests. First and foremost, I would like to thank The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) for conferring this Honorary Doctorate in recognition of my accomplishments over the years in art. As I recall, I had held a solo exhibition some thirty years ago at the Hong Kong Arts Centre, where it enjoyed an ebullient reception and response. Today I am very honoured to be here again, standing amongst the elites of different domains who are fellow recipients of the CUHK's doctorate, sharing for them about my art and life experiences. The truth is: I had merely dared to set goals at different stages of life, and worked towards them in a focused and resolute manner. Only because of this have I, once a destitute shepherd boy in the countryside of Miaoli, Tunghsiao, been able to receive your recognition today.

Art is Spiritual Practice

If someone were to ask me what art is, I would reply: 'Art is spiritual practice.'

The foremost thing to do in the process of spiritual practice is to relinquish what you have learnt and to generate yourself continuously. When I put it this way, it may sound overly arcane and surreal. You might be thinking, 'So artists are such metaphysical folks.'

But actually, the 'spiritual practice' I speak of is something very down-to-earth. Here's a concrete example. My mentor Yuyu Yang used to say that my carving skills were too good, and that I had to cast them away or I would become too much of a craftsman. One does not 'cast away' something like that as easily as it sounds. It was incredibly painful. The things I had acquired through learning could not be dug out of me so easily, not even with a knife. I had to work hard for several years at grinding away the Ju Ming of the past. The influences of Master Lee Chin-chuan had to go, followed by the traces of Yuyu Yang himself. Then I had to shape the Ju Ming of the present and the future. While learning is very important, art does not come about through learning alone. There has to be original creation.

My spiritual practice unfolded through self-relinquishment and artistic fruition. I cast away, among other things, a life of affluence I could have enjoyed as a top-notch woodcarver with an impressive income. I cast away the masterpieces that had already brought me fame – works from the Nativist Series including Buffalo and Kuan Kung. The discarding continues throughout the way. That is something I have realised in a very personal way in my artistic career.

Creating a 12-hectare Art Museum

The Juming Museum has been in existence for 12 years. It went from a barren piece of land to (currently) the largest private art museum of outdoor sculptures in Taiwan. It not only counts as the largest piece of artwork in my life, but also represents my greatest wish.



Why did I want to build an art museum? It was because I hoped to provide a perfect, permanent home for my works. In addition, I was motivated by the wish to give back to society. As a child, I lived in a poor family, such that I had to start working for money at an early age. I owe what little achievements I have today to the help of many people, which is why I always bear a grateful attitude. To me, that works from the various stages of my life are being displayed in the Museum is a tribute and a repayment to those who have helped me.

In the Museum compound, I have designated a dedicated exhibit area for displaying the works of Lee Chin-chuan and Yuyu Yang, the two most important teachers in my life. If not for them, I would not be what I am today.

I am, of course, also very grateful to my mother. One of my most deeply etched memories is that of her weaving a straw mat late at night in tallowy lamplight. I remember waking up with sleepy eyes and telling my still labouring mother, 'Mama, go to bed already!' She looked up, squinted her tired but unmistakably kindly eyes, and responded, 'Oh silly child. What shall the family eat tomorrow if I were to sleep now?' And so, in the same compound, I have set up a sculpture of a loving mother, a stele dedicated to the same motif, and a Love Bridge named after her.

My wife Madam Chen Fu-mei, who is always by my side, is yet another major supporting force. If not for her support and encouragement over so many years, if not for her taking care of our family and thus freeing me from distracting worries, I could not possibly have achieved what I have today and fulfilled my dream of developing the Museum's outdoor areas. 'Girl Playing with Sand', a wooden sculpture installed in the compound, is a token of my deep love for her.

All in all, the establishment of the Juming Museum encapsulates my deepest gratitude to society, my friends, teachers and family. I hope that seeds of art can be planted in this garden, so that more people will receive the subtle and positive influence of beauty. Hence, I insist that you visit this Museum if you ever go to Taiwan.

In closing, I thank The Chinese University of Hong Kong for honouring me. Your encouragement energises me copiously. It enables me to keep on creating excellent opuses, and – in return – to present the fruits of my labour to you. I thank you all.