

The Story of Hands

31 March—21 June, 2005

Asia Gallery A

Introduction

People use their hands for different purposes, or we often move our hands first when we perform any action. In some languages, including Japanese, there are a number of phrases and verbal images that refer to hands. In Japanese, the word can indicate the subjective body of a certain action or the direction at a certain location, for example. Of the phrases derived from words for body parts, the ones that mention hands are most varied.

The special role of hands is not limited to language. Many artworks have hands as a motif that implies or encodes a particular message. This exhibition will explore different aspects of hands, such as the implication and intention of artists.

Hands as Love

A hand with the word “LOVE” is laid on a naked body where it is supported by another hand. This photograph is one of a series made by Amanda Heng while on bad terms with her mother. She sought a way to reconstruct her relation with her mother by making this piece. The body is that of the daughter’ s and the hand with “LOVE” is the mother’ s. It has been long believed that a touch of hands can heal a body. Or at least, we feel the warmth of others and relaxed by being touched by or holding hands with other people. In the case of parent and child in particular, it is one of the most affectionate gestures.

Amanda Heng Singapore
Another Woman No.5 1997
photograph



Hands as Power

During and after the Vietnamese War (1970-79), a large number of propaganda posters were produced to agitate anti-American hostility and to boost morale among the northern Vietnamese. Among the original paintings of these posters are ones with prominently feature hands. In “Clique of International Reactionaries Black Plots”, the ominous dark hand with its long nails represents the ugliness of America. The other two works show a hand crashing a US war plane and a hand grasping a gun, both of which symbolise the northern Vietnamese consolidation against America.

Le Thanh
Clique of International
Reactionaries Black Plots.
unknown

Nguyen Dinh Lan
U.S. Power 1972

Pham An Hai
Vietnam Has Won a Glorious
Victory.
Unknown
watercolour on paper



Hands as Desire

When one has something that one wants in front, one tries to reach it and acquire it using one’ s hands. The two works by Bangladeshi artists show hands that symbolise desires and wishes. They may implicitly refer to a Bengali phrase employing the word “hands” which means “acquire” .

In the painting by Kamal Ahmed, people are pulling one thing from four directions. Their hands are pulling so strongly that they look almost dismembered. It reflects contemporary society and uncovers people’ s desire. Kalidas Karmakar painted a hand that is trying to reach butterflies that symbolise freedom and nature. However in this work, the butterflies are tied down and deprived of their freedom. The hand that is trying to reach them may be that of a worker and represents the grief of a person who is deprived of their freedom because of their commitment to their family.

Kalidas Karmakar Bangladesh
Image-II 1985
colored etching on paper

Kamal Ahmed Bangladesh
Social Face 1996
oil on canvas