Merging art and science: how curiosity promotes innovation

By Michael Gibb

Imagine visiting the home of a wealthy merchant or aristocrat in Renaissance Europe and accepting an invitation to view the host’s special parlour or office set aside for housing his idiosyncratic collection of wondrous objets d’art, his polished stones from faraway lands, stuffed exotic birds, unusual rocks and never-before-seen items of jewellery.

In the days before mass tourism, global communication and instant connectivity, collections of artefacts and precious objects were of great interest. The wealthy, in particular, the aristocracy, would set aside space in their homes to display curiosities bought, bartered for, plundered or received as gifts during months-long travels, or those simply found locally such as antique coins found buried in the garden or a rare butterfly captured in the garden.
Cabinets of curiosities
A visit to such a collection, known as a cabinet of curiosity, would have incited unimaginable wonder to Europeans during the 16th and 17th centuries, and it is this sense of wonder that the CityU Exhibition Gallery wishes to acknowledge in a forthcoming project provisionally planned for mid-2018.

“Cabinets of curiosities were the forerunners to public museums and exhibition spaces, displaying items that viewers would not have seen anywhere else,” explains Dr Isabelle Frank, Director of the Exhibition Gallery since March 2017.

“These collections were curated by amateurs interested in cultural heritage, and in those days the arts and sciences were not differentiated. They were housed together in rooms full of curious objects. Classification and categorisation came later, and the arts and sciences eventually became separated in the 19th century, with the creation of different disciplines of study,” continues Dr Frank, an art historian with a PhD from Harvard and a specialisation in renaissance studies, decorative arts and the history of the museum.

“CityU wants to bridge technology with art through this highly creative exhibition space.”
Iconic roofs and powerful pens

The idea behind featuring the cabinets of curiosities at the Exhibition Gallery, which is located at the 18/F Lau Ming Wai Academic Building, is that CityU has taken great strides in locating the arts and sciences within similar frames of references, merging technology and artistic expression to find new vents for innovation.

“CityU wants to bridge technology with art through this highly creative exhibition space. Art doesn’t stand alone. Nothing stands alone. At CityU, we want to continue to seek ways to integrate art with technology,” said Professor Way Kuo, CityU President, who has given great encouragement to projects that find new ways to present cultural heritage.

Two recent displays at the Exhibition Gallery illustrate this trajectory towards finding ways for art and science to merge. The more than 100 objects at “The Roofs of Paris” exhibition used historical 3D architectural models, oil paintings, prints, photographs, drawings, and postcards, as well as new media installations developed by CityU’s School of Creative Media (SCM), to transport viewers back through the ages, from the present to the 18th century, highlighting the history, styles and cultural meanings of the iconic Parisian roofs, a possible candidate for the UNESCO world heritage list. The event was also a chance to collaborate with the long-running local arts project Le French May, a boost to CityU’s drive to internationalise campus. CityU’s contribution to the Painting Your City installation allowed visitors to paint their own postcards with a digital paintbrush, and then send them out by email.

Similarly, CityU home-grown ideas augmented an exhibition featuring the private thoughts of some of the greatest Chinese scholars of the twentieth century. The exhibition was called “Sincerely Yours: Personal Letters of Tsinghua Scholars” and featured interactive artwork such as Get Inspired by Tsinghua Scholars developed by SCM whereby visitors could create their own letters using the hand-written words of the scholars; while users viewed immersive close-ups of the dynamic creation of Chinese characters through a tiny video camera attached to a brush. The installation was called New Media and the Art of Chinese Calligraphy.

A new kung fu exhibition features similarly innovative in-house technological advances. The first kung fu exhibition in October 2016...
showcased ways to preserve intangible cultural heritage using cutting-edge digital technology to celebrate traditional Hakka kung fu at an exhibition titled “300 Years of Hakka Kung Fu – Digital vision of its legacy and future” jointly organised by CityU and the International Guoshu Association (IGA). In December 2017, the exhibition “Lingnan Hung Kuen Across the Century: Kung Fu Narratives in Cinema and Community” examined kung fu’s dual aspects as intangible cultural heritage and inspiration for media and film.

“With the help of interactive technologies developed by CityU, the exhibition focuses on Hung Kuen and traces how kung fu and cinema influenced each other’s development through the Golden Age of Kung Fu in the 1970s and 1980s,” said Mr Kevin Lam Ka-ming, the manager of the Exhibition Gallery.

Another notable exhibition was the “Giuseppe Castiglione – Lang Shining New Media Art Exhibition”, which, in collaboration with the National Palace Museum, Taipei, re-created exquisite works by Giuseppe Castiglione (1688–1766) using digital technology to pay special tribute to the missionary who had such a profound impact on Chinese painting.

Preserving cultural heritage
Dr Frank brings a broad range of skills in academic research and hands-on administrative experience to the Exhibition Gallery. The daughter of the noted Dostoyevsky literary scholar Professor Joseph Frank and Professor Marguerite Frank, a pioneering mathematician, Dr Frank was Dean of the Fordham School of Professional and Continuing Studies and Associate Dean of the New School, home to a world-renowned design school, liberal arts college, performing arts college and renowned graduate programmes that encourage cross-disciplinary collaboration to effect positive change in the world.

While a certain amount of prestige and status might come with hosting major international art shows on campus, the Exhibition Gallery plays a more specific role within CityU’s portfolio of goals in Hong Kong and further afield.

“We see the Exhibition Gallery as a platform to highlight the extent to which universities can find fresh ways to bring together art and technology and to preserve and present cultural heritage,” she says.
藝術融合科學：奇珍異寶也可推動創新
文：鄭智友

不妨想像一下，你獲邀參觀文藝復興時期一位歐洲富商或貴族的宅邸，步入主人特設的雅室或辦公室，欣賞按其喜好收藏的奇珍異寶，其中有來自異國的精美寶石、異域珍禽標本、罕見的石塊、前所未見的珠寶。

在大眾旅遊、全球通訊與即時互聯還未出現前，很多人對收藏外國手工藝品及貴重物品極感興趣。豪富之家（其中又以貴族為甚）喜歡在其府邸裏特闢一處，展示家藏的珍寶；這些寶物，也許是買來的、交換來的，或是巧取豪奪來的，有些則可能是在長達數月的旅途中收到的禮物；又或只是在當地發現的，例如在花園中挖出的古錢幣或捕獲的罕見蝴蝶。

珍奇屋
在16和17世紀，觀賞「珍奇屋」的藏品，會教歐洲人歎為觀止；而城大展覽館暫定於2018年中舉辦的下一個展覽，正是要令參觀者體會這種感覺。

自2017年3月起出任城大展覽館總監的范懿莎博士說：「珍奇屋是公立博物館和私家展覽室的雛形，其中的展品是觀眾在其他地方無法看到的。這些藏品由對文化傳統感興趣的業餘人士組織展出。當時，藝術與科學沒有鮮明的界限，藏品被安置在擺滿珍奇物品的房間裏。後來物品開始分門別類排放。在19世紀，藝術與科學最終分道揚鑣，出現了不同的學科。」范懿莎博士是藝術史學者，擁有哈佛博士學位，研究領域包括文藝復興研究、裝飾藝術及博物館史。

巴黎屋頂與數碼畫筆
在位於劉鳴煒學術樓18樓的城大展覽館舉辦的珍奇屋展覽，意念源於城大以前舉辦的、成功融合藝術與科學的類似展覽。大學找出藝術與科學的互通之處，為創新另闢蹊徑。

城大校長郭位教授一直大力支持運用新方法展示文化遺產的各項計劃。他表示：「城大希望透過充滿創意的展覽，將科技與藝術連接起來。藝術不是獨立的；任何東西都不是獨立的。我們將繼續積極尋找方法把科技與藝術融合起來。」

城大展覽館近期舉辦的兩場展覽都是沿着這條道路邁進，即尋找各種方法融合藝術與科學。例如「在巴黎屋頂的邊緣」展覽展出逾百件展品，包括饒具歷史意義的立體建築模型、油畫、印畫、照片、繪圖和明信片等，以及由城大創意媒體學院設計的新媒體裝置，讓觀眾可以穿越時空，細細品味18世紀至今巴黎屋頂的發展歷史、建築風格和文化意義。巴黎的屋頂有望獲聯合國教科文組織列入世界文化遺產名錄。這個展覽是由城大與組成已久的本地藝術計劃「法國五月」合作舉辦的，有助城大推動校園國際化。展覽中有一個名為《為城市增添色彩》的裝置，是城大新媒體藝術作品的佳例，觀眾可用數碼畫筆繪畫明信片，再以電郵寄出。

城大亦以其原創意念，舉辦了「尺素情懷：清華學人手札展」，呈現多位20世紀中國傑
出学者的思想與情懷。通過創意媒體學院研製的互動裝置《清華學者賦予的靈感》，觀眾能以學者的親筆字體撰寫信札；而透過另一裝置《新媒體與中國書法藝術》，觀眾則可利用裝設在筆尖的微型鏡頭，近距離欣賞書法家揮灑雄健的筆法。

一場新穎的功夫展覽亦展示了城大的創新技術發展。2016年10月，城大與中華國術總會合辦「客家功夫三百年：數碼時代中的文化傳承」展覽，透過尖端數碼技術，展示傳承非物質文化遺產的嶄新方法。2017年12月，城大舉辦了題為「電影·社群·百年欽南洪拳」的展覽，展示了中國功夫的兩種特質：既非物質文化遺產，又是多媒體及電影的創作泉源。

另一次值得注意的展覽是城大與臺北的國立故宮博物院合辦的「藝域漫遊─郎世寧新媒體藝術展」，以創新的數碼科技再現郎世寧（1688-1766）經典作品，向這位對中國繪畫影響深遠的傳教士致敬。

保存文化遺產
范懿莎博士在學術研究與行政管理方面均

有豐富經驗，她的加入增強了城大在這兩方面
的實力。她父親Joseph Frank教授是研究俄國作家陀思妥耶夫斯基的著名學者，母親Marguerite Frank教授則是知名數學家。范懿莎博士曾任美國福坦莫大學專業及持續教育學院院長，並曾在美國新學院副院長。

該校擁有享譽全球的設計學院、人文學院、表演藝術學院及研究生課程，鼓勵跨學科合作以為世界帶來積極變化。

在校內舉辦重要國際藝術展固然有助提升校譽與地位，展覽館在為大學實現其訂立的各項目標方面，不論是在本地或全球，將發揮更具體的作用。

范懿莎博士說：「我們視城大展覽館為一個平

台，顯示大學在尋找融合藝術與科技的新方法、保存與展出文化遺產等方面，能夠做到甚麼程度。」