



■ Clockwise from far left, bottom: *Three Steeds*; Chow Kung-lei's self-portrait; *Roses*; *Chickens*; *Pigeons*; *Pigeons and Chinese Wisteria*; *Flying Eagle*; and *Condor*.

Joyce Ye

Hong Kong painter Chow Kung-lei is known for his unique style of combining Chinese and Western painting techniques.

His nearly 100 works can be viewed in the exhibition *Duet of Flowers and Birds: Paintings by Chow Kung Lei*, with flower and bird paintings, landscape paintings, watercolor paintings and figure sketches.

All artworks are collected by Leung Kai-wing, Chow's 90-year-old student.

Leung recalled: "I first met Teacher Chow in 1953, when he rented my mother's ground-floor one-bedroom flat. That was the beginning of our lifelong relationship."

At first glance, the exhibits appear to be traditional ink paintings. But in fact, Chow's paintings combine the discipline of Chinese line drawing with the use of alternate dark and light colors in Western painting.

Having studied Western painting in Guangzhou and Shanghai, Chow used free-flowing brushwork that improved traditional Chinese painting. One such example is *Tiger*.

Said Leung: "Unlike the method of outlining lines, Chow painted it using vigorous brushstrokes to present the tiger's

Tribute to a master

vivid spirit."

As Chow's student, Leung appreciates his talent in art. "I once asked him to paint on a large fan leaf, and the branches and leaves he drew were remarkable: two stems were oblique and another vertical; the leaves turned and extended in space. He then added a horizontal line between the three stems to create contrast."

Chow was known as "the King of Roses" as he loved to use red roses in his works.

Yeung Chun-tong, director of Sun Museum, said: "Chow favored red roses because they bloom in all seasons and have auspicious meanings.

"His most innovative idea is delineating the petals with white pigment. This creates a stronger contrast and makes the roses more vivid."

In addition to roses, Chow's works also covered other auspicious subjects, from pigeons and bountiful peonies to donkeys.

It is interesting that the main characters are put in the background of Chow's paintings. In *Pigeons*, Chow uses huge rocks as the picture's foreground, and birds stand behind the rocks. Yeung explained that this method enriches the content and layers of the painting.

Chow was passionate about drawing and paid attention to education.

Said Leung: "Teacher's skillfulness allowed him to create excellent paintings. He also educated us to draw bravely, and the brushwork should be free, not pretentious. One of

the most memorable moments was when he saw my painting after getting home late.



■ *Paradise Flycatcher*.

He disregarded his tiredness to demonstrate portrait sketching for me with a pencil."

The exhibition also displays Chow's teaching materials.

Rose Sketch is intuitive to feel the process of teaching. "The painting shows the steps of drawing roses. Chow encouraged me to form my style after imitating his works," Leung said.

Chow showed his remarkable talent for ink, watercolor, sketching, oil painting and sculpture. While he was an all-round genius painter, his name is unfamiliar to the public.

Yeung said: "Chow's works blend the old and the new, the East and the West. His contribution to art education should also be remembered. Sadly, he is still not well-known."

The exhibition aims to let more visitors learn about this outstanding Hong Kong master.

"In Teacher Chow's later years, he could not take care of himself and had no savings, yet he continued to devote himself wholeheartedly to teaching and creating art," said Leung.

Duet of Flowers and Birds: Paintings by Chow Kung Lei is on show at Sun Museum until April 6.