UTSA’s East Asia Institute (EAI) had the pleasure of hosting the public performance of the Assembly Dance Theatre from Taiwan on April 2nd, 2014 at UTSA’s downtown campus. The program was made available with generous support from Taiwan’s Ministry of Culture, Cultural Affairs Office of San Antonio, Houston’s Taiwan Academy, Taiwanese Association of America in San Antonio, and Vice Provost Office of UTSA’s downtown campus.

The event began at 6:00 p.m. with opening remarks given by EAI’s associate director Mimi Yu, followed by Julius Gribou, Executive Vice Provost and Senior International Officer at UTSA along with Frank Villani, Manager of the Cultural Affairs Office of San Antonio, one of whose many missions is to promote art through the universal language of dance.

The performance was attended by over 150 people. Among the guests were Director Curtis Liang of Houston’s Taiwan Academy (HTA), Michael Lin, Senior Cultural Officer of HTA and Euroya Lauzon, President of the Taiwanese Association of America in San Antonio. In addition, many city representatives attended. Furthermore, UTSA administrators also were present to support the performance.

The Assembly Dance Theatre was founded by the artistic director Kuei-Chuan Yang in 1993. The group’s style is a mix of old and new. Thus the ADT is characterized by a cornerstone composed of indigenous cultural philosophy and its idea to assemble outstanding choreographers to create the worldwide dance language.

Yang devoted herself to making dances utilizing Chinese calligraphy as the main source of inspiration. Since its founding, Yang’s Assembly Dance Theatre has developed a reputation for quirky pieces that combine a minimalist Eastern aesthetic with contemporary modern dance, thanks to Yang’s training at the University of California, Los Angeles.

“This is our first visit to San Antonio and I am very excited to present our dance
performance in front of the San Antonio’s audience,” said Yang. Tzu-Wei Cheng, Stage Manager added “We would like to show the audience what fusion of traditional Taiwanese and modern dance can do. In addition, we would like to promote Taiwanese culture and arts in San Antonio.”

The program entitled “An Adventure of Dancing in Ink” was inspired by Chinese calligraphy images. The hour-long dance program was divided into two parts Kids and Dancing in Ink. Kids choreographed by Dominique Feng-Shi Yen and performed by Hsiu-Ju Yang and Wan-Chen Chang was a combination of dance and lighting movements which created a fantastical atmosphere. The stage was pitch black with two dancers dressed in white and light beige. One held a flashlight, used to project the other’s silhouette on a blank white wall. With the use of hand gestures and the accompaniment of music, the audience was indulged in the world of dance and transcended through time and space. “I was so drawn into the dance and music,” said Luis Nunez, one of the performance goers. “The theatre just stood so still that I could almost hear everyone’s heartbeat.”

The second part of the program was Dancing in Ink choreographed by Kuei-Chuan Yang and performed by Hsiu-J Yang, Wan-Chen Chang, I-Hsiang Wang, Tzu-Chua Lin, Szu-Ching Lei and Shu-Chuan Hsu. Drum and live music using traditional Chinese musical instruments were performed by Mei-Hua Tsai and Tzu-Hsuan Tsai. Chinese calligraphy’s movement were translated to the dance performance. The performers combined traditional dance movements with modern techniques, in an east-meets-west style. The discharging contrast of the black and white costumes also created an inspiring spectacle for the audience to enjoy.

After the performance, light refreshment was served outside of the theatre where the audience enjoyed interacting with the performers for cultural and language exchange. The event was well received by the audience with positive comments and feedback. The EAI was pleased Taiwanese art and cultural were savored by many in the Alamo City through performing arts.

The UTSA East Asia Institute’s mission is to promote appreciation and understanding of East Asian societies and cultures both on campus and in the community through research, outreach, networking, education, student/faculty exchange, and business development and cooperation.