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SHAN SHUI

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The Shanshui Magazine editorial and advisory board is composed of artists, scholars, and curators who share a deep commitment to fostering cultural dialogue between China and the world.

Their combined expertise supports the magazine's mission to rethink the role of landscape, ecology, and aesthetics in the contemporary artistic context.

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Together, the board works to ensure that Shanshui Magazine remains an open platform for dialogue — where traditional wisdom, artistic practice, and contemporary thought meet to explore new forms of cultural and aesthetic sustainability.

Art is one of the deepest expressions of human thought — a way to communicate ideas, emotions, and visions of the world. Every artist, rooted in their own culture, reflects not only personal experience but also the intellectual and spiritual traditions of their society.

At Shanshui Magazine, we believe that art is a powerful tool for intercultural dialogue. By exploring the encounter between Chinese and Western artistic traditions, we aim to build bridges between two great civilizations and encourage a renewed understanding of art and nature.

Chinese shanshui (mountain and water) painting — with its 1,500 years of history — offers an alternative vision of the world, where harmony between humans and nature is central. This philosophy contrasts yet beautifully complements Western aesthetics, opening new ways of seeing and creating.

Our magazine presents contemporary Chinese and international artists, research on painting theory, and reflections on environmental aesthetics. We wish to make these ideas accessible not only to academics but to anyone curious about the living dialogue between art, ecology, and culture.

Through this magazine, we hope to promote a form of artistic expression that helps us rethink our relationship with reality, with nature, and with each other — beyond cultural boundaries.

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OUR APPROACH

FROM THE FIGURE OF THE CHINESE INTELLECTUAL ARTIST (*WENREN HUA*) TO CONTEMPORANEITY.

DURING THE EIGHTH CENTURY CHINA, A NEW FIGURE OF AN INTELLECTUAL ARTIST WAS BORN: THIS FIGURE WOULD BECOME TOPICAL IN THE CHINESE CULTURAL PANORAMA AND MAKE ITS WAY TO THE PRESENT DAY.

WENREN HUA 文人画, IS ONE WHO FOLLOWS THE HUMANISTIC VALUES AND TEACHINGS OF THE TRADITION, UPDATES AND APPLIES THEM TO THE ARTISTIC-INTELLECTUAL NEEDS OF HIS TIME. THIS PROCESS HAS NEVER STOPPED, AND STILL PERSISTS IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD.

THE *WENREN HUA* ENCOMPASSES THE POET, THE PAINTER, THE CALLIGRAPHER, THE THEORIST, THE SCHOLAR AND THE INTELLECTUAL IN A SINGLE FIGURE, AND SEES THE CULTIVATION OF THE SPIRIT AND MIND AS ONE OF THE MAIN PURPOSES OF HIS/HER WORK.

IN THIS WAY, A CLOSE LINK IS ESTABLISHED BETWEEN PRACTICE AND ARTISTIC THEORY; AT THE SAME TIME THERE IS NO SEPARATION BETWEEN THE ARTS, AND THERE IS A COMMON THREAD BETWEEN INTELLECTUAL PRACTICE AND MATERIAL APPLICATION.

OF COURSE THIS FIGURE IS CLOSELY LINKED TO CHINESE CULTURAL HERITAGE, BUT THIS DOES NOT MAKE IT LESS COMPATIBLE WITH THE ARTISTIC-CULTURAL NEEDS OF WESTERNIZED CONTEMPORANEITY.

IT ALSO FITS NATURALLY INTO THE TREND OF ENVIRONMENTAL AESTHETICS, WHICH IS AN EXPRESSIVE CHANNEL OF CONTEMPORARY ART AND OF FUNDAMENTAL IMPORTANCE, GIVEN THAT THE BIGGEST PROBLEMS THAT AFFLICT OUR SOCIETIES ARE OFTEN LINKED TO THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE DESTRUCTIVE APPROACH THAT CONTEMPORARY MEN HAVE TOWARDS IT.

RESPECT FOR NATURE AND THE NEED TO PRESERVE IT BY LIVING WITH IT IN HARMONY ARE INTRINSIC ELEMENTS OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE THOUGHT AND THAT OF THE *WENREN HUA*, WHICH SEE MAN AND NATURE AS TWO ELEMENTS THAT ARE PART OF THE SAME SYSTEM: IN THESE TERMS, IN ORDER TO PRESERVE HUMAN LIFE, NATURAL EXISTENCE MUST ALSO BE PROTECTED, OR ELSE WE WOULD GO TOWARDS THE DECAY OF BOTH.

MANIFESTO

We find ourselves living in the era of globalization. Thanks to the infosphere we live in, with just one click we can be in Togo, with two clicks you can be studying Sanskrit, with three you're already updated on what's going on in Bhutan, and with four more clicks you're listening to a piece played with the duduk, and immediately after we could be looking at two whirling dervishes. In half a day we become experts in Armenian music, Sufi spirituality, Himalayan geopolitics and in any other aspect of world culture.

Fantastic. Finally, a world without cultural barriers, devoted to the exchange and access of mutual knowledge. In this global village without borders, we dance to the beat of superficiality, sloppy culture and of cultural arrogance, where ignorance is adorned with two-dimensional images, where the concept of "knowing that you do not know" has been abolished, although without knowing.

It's important to note that, in this Village the chief is western, the customs and habits are also mostly western, and so is the linguistic and material means of communication along with most of the intellectual expressions and world views of its inhabitants. The inhabitants tend to ignore what is found outside the Village, not by choice, but by condition, not out of lack of curiosity, but because of limited means. The Village is truly global on a physical level, it truly embraces the entire earth's surface, but in fact it remains

on the surface, it does not deepen, and if it deepens it does it in its own way, as it would in the centre from which it developed. In fact, the Village is ancient and full of History and histories, it has always had multiculturalism, always in expansion and translation, but only recently has it reached global status.

The Village is now global, so everyone is welcome but the rules to follow are those of the Village head. Everyone can bring something to the table, but it will still have to be adapted to the matrix of the Village.

With these premises, it is possible to face and analyse infinite issues concerning the actual state of the alleged globalization. For instance, how it believes to know different cultures, but in reality this knowledge is based only on a store of empty images which are then filled with the world view of the aforementioned head of the Village. The same goes for that mercantile capitalism that has arrived at every corner of the globe, but gives the best of itself only if we follow the needs of the Village. We stand against a single world view, when in fact there are many. The ones that does not support diversity, but translates them, one that does not make them participate in the debate with their own voices, but accepts them only after a trial of metamorphosis. We are against the imperialism of tastes and customs, of judgment, of means of expression, and of what to express, a situation which

inevitably leads to a cultural flattening, against this self-proclaimed global Village. It does not have the ability to see neighbouring villages, since it believes that all possible villages are within itself.

We as Sino-artists (some of non-Chinese origin, devoted to the study and practice of Chinese painting), will focus on the areas concerning our cultural sphere, precisely that of Chinese art. Especially those related to painting, with a particular eye for landscape painting, which from now on we will call according to the Chinese denomination, Mountain and Water painting.

"shanshui hua 山水画"

The main will is to communicate with the Village through our art and our words, to present one of the many shaded areas with which it is scattered. Our task is to find a language that is intelligible to the Village as well as faithful to the original meaning. Without smoothing its diversity, without avoiding clashes, without sweetening the pill. In this way it will be the Village that will make the effort to understand, and only in this way will the communication be successful. In fact, we trust in the Village's ability to understand languages not forged by itself.

The reasons that drive us in this campaign are varied and erudition is not one of those. At best it can be a side effect.

One of the biggest problems of the Village is that it believes that movements of progress and evolutions only exists inside itself, that it has reached the status of "modern", and those who are not indigenous come from a static culture, backward and anchored to the past; without the use of the means forged by

the Village and without its revolutionary spirit no one can participate in the dialogue of contemporaneity. Therefore, to finally get into the subject, in the Village, Chinese painting is traditional, therefore linked to the past, unable to evolve, something good just for the art history books and museums, worthy of respect, but with the same respect that is given to archaeological finds.

There is no conception of a modern or contemporary Chinese painting, also because when the term Chinese painting is pronounced, for some reason it is always accompanied by the adjective "traditional", which clearly denies the concept of modernity. Chinese art can only be defined as modern if expressed through the means and processes of modern western art.

Revelation! There is modern and contemporary Chinese art; mountain and water painting has been evolving for at least 1500 years, and continues to evolve, and other painting expressions are even older. As obvious as it seems, China is extremely large, therefore there are many centres of cultural irradiation, and for this reason there are various schools within China that follow different pictorial expressions. Consequently there is not just one movement of contemporary Chinese painting.

Our main objective follows:

To spread the knowledge of contemporary Chinese painting outside of China, and to give voice to the great artists of the last century as well as to the new young artists.

Why is it important you may ask? For starters, in order to make sense of the term globalization. But above all, to enrich the Village and to redefine its ideas of intellectual absolutism.

Chinese art, together with all the other intellectual expressions of China, refers to a system of values that has come down to the present day from ancient times. This great apparatus of knowledge and ideas has influenced and is still influencing the world view of Chinese people and of course also their artistic expressions. The same discourse can be re-proposed in a general way also to the evolution of the western mind, a process that probably was less coherent than the Chinese one, which however led to the formation of various expressions of thought rooted in the conception of the world that the Village forged during its evolution. And this is exactly the key point of our reasoning, once the world interpretation system is established, it is almost impossible to get out of it, as it is invisible, and its boundaries unrecognizable. Because it being the only view you know, you believe that it is the only view that exists. It's like those unfortunate people who were chained in the platonic cave. It wasn't until someone came in from the outside, did they realize the condition they were in.

This was also the case for China until the mid-nineteenth century. China behaved like the Village, just another Village that did not see those who were outside of it, except of course through its own modalities. And even though external cultural influences were accepted, it was always retranslated in Chinese terms, just like the Village does. As a consequence, there was a sense of cultural superiority compared to that which was not Chinese. Until one terrible day, when the barbarians arrived with cannons and rifles and destroyed the armies of the great empire. On that day, besides the fall of many lives, many certainties also fell in terms of value. Their system had not protected them from catastrophe, as it once did since the dawn of Chinese culture. This was not the first time that China fell into the hands of foreigners, and every time the foreigners were sinicized. Thus, their cultural continuity persisted. However, the value system was still slowly collapsing to the point where it almost disappeared. Since then it has rebuilt itself, but the system of the other foreign villages took a hold as well, strong of its modernity.

Accordingly, in contemporary China it can be said that there are two systems, the original and the imported one. The same could be said for the world of art, but art can be applied at will on any area. This has created a unique situation where the two worlds communicate with each other, sometimes one taking over the other, creating conflicts but also at the same time a fertile ground for creativity.

It is exactly for this reason that we want to make this new system of thought known to the Village, only then will it be able to see its own boundaries, so that it will be able to ask new questions and give itself new answers.

Let's take a concrete example. The ancient western visual arts and the Renaissance up to modernity, basically acted in the field of mimesis. In painting, all the techniques to represent the visual aspect of the surrounding world comes together. Now coming back to the Village, to top it all, there was this terrifying yoke called Albertan's perspective. The Village gave a great deal of value to the sight, making it almost the only tool for perceiving reality. Establishing invisible perceptual borders because they were all-encompassing. However, at a certain point artists and intellectuals got tired of this conception, and thus historical avant-garde was born. Unfortunately, not knowing any other way of perceiving the world other than the anthropocentric one of the gaze, they found themselves in a rather uncomfortable position, so much so that the path ended with destruction of the form and that of the painting itself, and having to resort to new media to be able to express themselves. It is precisely for these reasons that in contemporary era we refer to paintings as an "old lady" who keeps up with new artistic expressions with great difficulty.

So where is all this getting at? In China, the influence of western art came between the late 1800s and early 1900's. The first to arrive was via Japan, the realistic techniques of the Barbizon school. And what were the most shocking innovations for the Chinese? Mimesis, focal perspective, chiaroscuro, and all those techniques which at the time in the West were considered regressed, representatives of a system that in those years the avant-gardes despised because of its anti-contemporary expressions. Why was this seen in China as revolutionary and innovative? Because traditional pictorial theories disgusted the view and representation of form as perceived

by our eyes, therefore it was an almost completely unexplored area.

China has had the good fortune of meeting and accepting a different way of interpreting the world, so why should the Village be deprived of it?

Just how much could a new way of understanding reality help the old painting of the Village? A whole world would open up, which should not mimic the Chinese one, but be inspired by it. So, we also take sides against the supremacism of sight and consequently against anthropocentrism. Our desire is to introduce these new visions, these new conceptions, and these new values. Not that the Village is completely unaware of it, but this knowledge is hidden in academic publications, accessible only to those interested in the subject, but very far from the world of contemporary art or anyone else.

To conclude, we will introduce one of these intrinsic aspects of Chinese art which can be of great help and source of inspiration for our beloved Village. Why is mountain and water painting of great value in the contemporary world and why should the Village re-evaluate it? In the great pictorial experience of the Village, landscape painting as an independent genre born late, and died early. The fact that in China it is already the higher form of painting and has a millennium and a half of history should make us ask questions about how it has probably been underestimated. Well, in reality it has not been underestimated, in fact there is no right and wrong in art, it has been evaluated according to the means of the Village head, according to its conceptions and ideas. And it is precisely for this

reason, we must open the doors to new value systems.

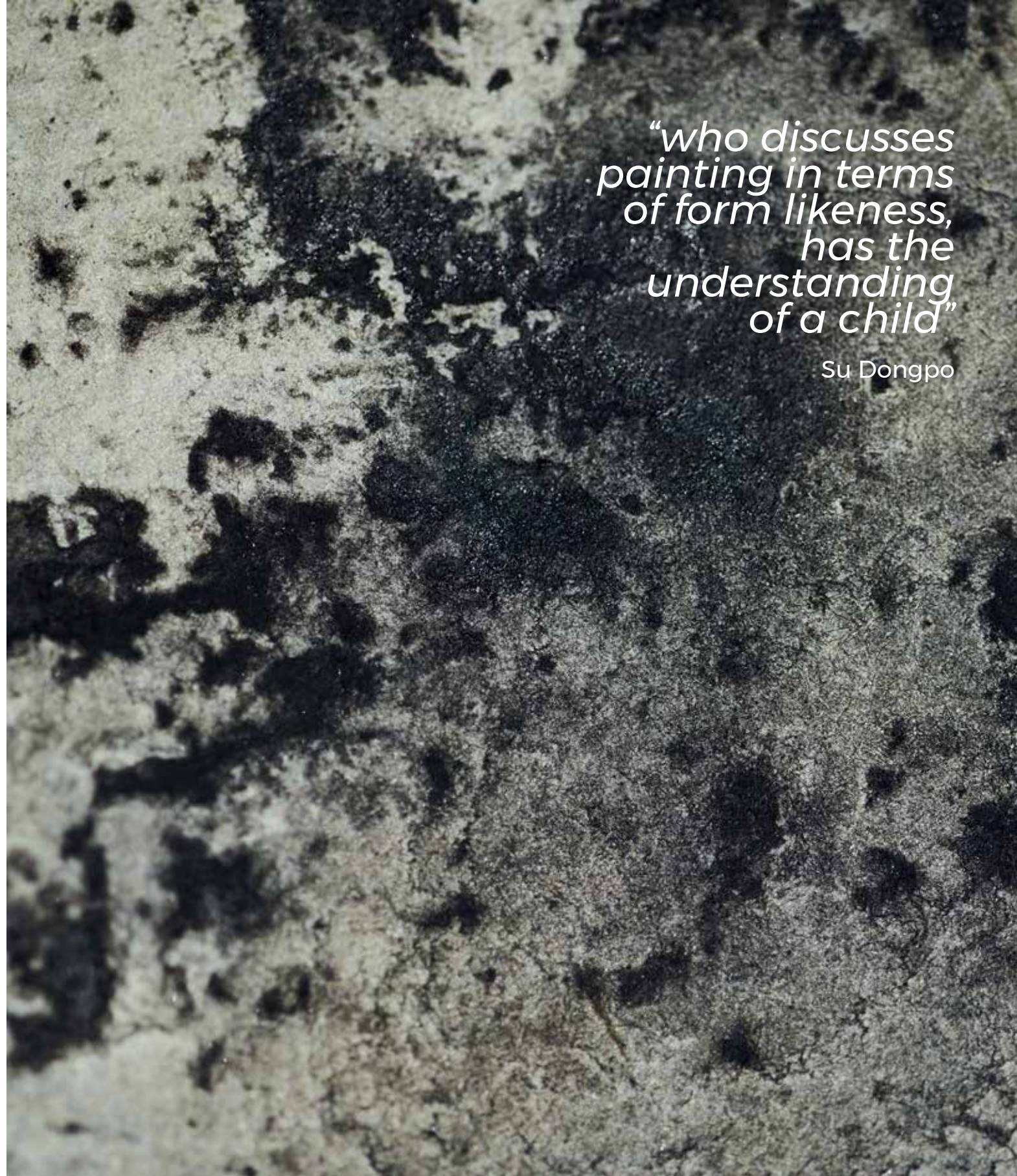
Art cannot be alienated from the reality in which it is produced, and one of the most important themes for us is that of ecology, in fact this hyper capitalist Village has massacred the world we live and does not seem to want to take steps back. Many have already set in motion to counter this destructive madness, but there is no contest. In the Village there has recently been talk of environmental aesthetics that lashes out against anthropocentrism to concert on environmental beauties, therefore going against one, the axioms of western aesthetics since ancient Greece, against that conception that sees man as the superior creature and dominant in the ecumene. This new point of view, at least for the Village, is one of the basic aspects of Chinese ethics. Philosophy and aesthetics are found in the texts at the base of Chinese culture, at the basis of Confucian philosophy and Daoist thought and continues to be repeated till modern times. A conception that does not just appreciate environmental beauties, but its holistic conception of the universe puts man on the same level as any other creation of nature. In *Yi Zhuan* 易传 (5th century BCE), a commentary on *Yi Jing* 易经, wrote that "the greatest virtue of heaven and earth is life" (天地之大德曰生), this is to say that the greatest virtue is to create an environment where all life forms and natural elements can coexist in harmony.

For this reason, too, the category of still life does not exist in Chinese painting, in fact for the Chinese artist it would be absurd to paint lifeless subjects.

For these and other reasons, the Village and the artists that reside in it will benefit from learning Chinese art. Mountain and water painting will inspire them, the beauty of nature will awaken the minds and set the minds in motion. The boundaries of the Village will begin to appear and we can finally begin to break them down.

"who discusses
painting in terms
of form likeness,
has the
understanding
of a child"

Su Dongpo



Discussion on the Importance of Brush and Ink Language in Heavy-color Mountain and Water Painting

By: Tao Anping

Translated by: Zhao Tong and Ning Lizheng

The development history of traditional Chinese painting reveals that brush and ink has been an important formal language since ancient times, and it is the painting symbol and modeling means that constitute the aesthetic features of traditional Chinese painting. It is an indisputable fact that the form of brush and ink is at the core of ink painting. However, for heavy-color mountain and water painting, brush and ink is in a relatively complex situation. The non-brush and ink factors such as color composition in heavy-color mountain and water painting and the form of brush and ink language presents a contradictory and harmonious, complicated and subtle relationship. There are deep reasons for this complex of brush and ink in heavy-color mountain and water painting, and I will discuss it from two aspects of development history and cultural symbols to explain the importance of brush and ink to heavy-color mountain and water painting.

1. The Evolution of Brush and Ink Language in the Development History of Heavy-color Mountain and Water Painting

The origin of Chinese heavy-color mountain and water painting appears as the form of linear definition and color filling. From the earliest preserved heavy-color mountain and water painting, the *Early Spring* (《早春图》) painted by Guoxi 郭熙, we can see that modeling methods featuring rocks and trees are linear in definition

and color filling with small amount of rendering. There was no series of brush and ink language like texturing methods (*cunfa* 皴法, Chinese ink-painting techniques), and the use of lines also lack changes in *Tie Xian Miao* (铁线描 the wire-like line drawing). Painting styles with decorative interests peaked in the Tang dynasty, in the description of Li Sixun 李思训 and his son Li Zhaodao 李昭道, mountain and water painting became more reasonable than that in the earlier period in the application of colors and modeling. The brushwork became more particular when depicting the frames. The lines changed abruptly, and then the painting technique of “small axe” *Cun* brushstroke 小斧劈皴法 appeared. The emergence of *Cun* brushstroke indicates that brush and ink, as an art language, became the modeling method and an aesthetic standard of heavy-color mountain and water painting. From the whole development history of the mountain and water painting during this period, heavy color paintings relied on brush and ink to a limited extent. Brush and ink was subjected to color while bright and heavy rock colors dominated the picture.

This kind of decorative color painting style didn't play the main role in traditional Chinese painting in later years, and the Chinese ink painting popular in the Tang dynasty was soon received by literati painters. Jing Hao 荆浩 says in his *Bifa ji* 《笔法记》: “There have been people skilled in the method of color according to the objects. And ink painting didn't appear until Tang dynasty. Trees and rocks in Zhang Zao's 张璪 paintings were all excellent in artis-

Guo Xi 郭熙, *Early Spring* 《早春图》, ink and colors on silk, 158x108cm, 1072





Li Zhao dao 李昭道 (attributed), 《曲江图》, 171.2x111.3 (1896-1994)

tic conception. The brush and ink was very subtle from macro to micro. His idea was vivid and unique, not much importance was attached to colors. There has never been such a brilliant painter since ancient times.”¹ In *Record of Mountain and Water Painting*, Jing Hao comments on Li Sixun: “General Li’s theory is profound, his conception is thorough and his brushwork is excellent, though clever, but too ornate and lacking in ink.”² Wang Youcheng 王右丞 (Wang Wei 王维) even directly put forward the idea of “The supremacy of ink painting” (水墨为上). With the establishment of the aesthetic mainstream of ink painting language and the continuous improvement of ink painting techniques, the development of heavy-color painting was greatly influenced by ink painting. So people had to make a choice between ink painting and color. As a result, after the middle Tang dynasty, heavy color painting had a deeper ink element. The change in the form of heavy-color painting actually represented the change in the proportion of ink composition. Brush and ink became an important aesthetic standard of heavy-color painting, and the color factor as a formal characteristic of heavy-color painting had even been suppressed to the subordinate position. In northern Song dynasty, color still played a leading role in heavy-color mountain and water painting. However, in the period of Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties, the status of color declined. In Shen Hao 沈颢’s book *Painting Dust* 《画尘》 in Ming dynasty, there is a description of

the creation process of the heavy-color mountain and water painting: “Painters can’t think of coloring at first during the creation process of painting, but if the charm of ink (墨韵) is adequate at the end, coloring is allowed.”³ In his *Random Writing In the Rain* 《雨窗漫笔》 in Qing dynasty, Wang Yuanqi 王原祁 says, “The application of colors is the usage of brush and the conception of ink (墨意) to make up for the deficiency of brush and ink and reveal the brilliance.”⁴ It can be seen that color is even subordinate to brush and ink. In Tang Dai’s 唐岱 *The Story Of Painting In Details* 《绘事发微》 in Qing dynasty, it is said that “The key point to the application of color is the light color, not dazzling, so as to result in the spirit. The green is inherently heavy, and if it is used excessively, the effect of brush and ink would be damaged.”⁵ The sumptuous heavy-color mountain and water painting in Sui and Tang dynasties was out of fashion in Ming and Qing dynasties, and ink became the main modeling method and aesthetic standard.

In the 1980s, with the opening of the painting system, some painters developed a strong interest in Japanese painting. In the Chinese painting world, where color was almost blank, painters were eager to add new vitality into the stagnant traditional Chinese painting with the help of the colors from foreign paintings. This is the return of Chi-

1 俞剑华. 中国古代画论类编. 人民美术出版社, 1998. 第607页.

Yu Jianhua. *Chinese ancient art theory*. People’s Fine Arts Publishing House, 1998. P 607.

2 俞剑华. 中国古代画论类编. 人民美术出版社, 1998. 第608页.

Yu Jianhua. *Chinese ancient art theory*. People’s Fine Arts Publishing House, 1998. P 608.

3 周积寅. 中国画论辑要. 江苏美术出版社, 1985.

第516页. Zhou Jiyin. *Summary of Chinese Art Theory*. Jiangsu Fine Arts Publishing House, 1985. P 516

4 周积寅. 中国画论辑要. 江苏美术出版社, 1985.

第521页. Zhou Jiyin. *Summary of Chinese Art Theory*. Jiangsu Fine Arts Publishing House, 1985. P 521

5 周积寅. 中国画论辑要. 江苏美术出版社, 1985.

第521页. Zhou Jiyin. *Summary of Chinese Art Theory*. Jiangsu Fine Arts Publishing House, 1985. P 522



nese heavy-color mountain and water painting. Painters strengthened color factor in the painting while weakening or even canceling the ink language. Meanwhile, most of the painters who were keen on rock painting began to reflect and even return after a while. The production of rock color and the emphasis on the beauty of the material also weakened the painting and performance of the brush and ink, which seemed to be in conflict with the traditional Chinese aesthetic perception. The focus of the debate at this stage was whether the traditional art language of brush and ink could be replaced by material, color, and composition form, which had to face the

concept replacement of the definition of the traditional aesthetic characteristics of Chinese painting, which may eventually lead to the virtual demise of Chinese painting. The final result of this debate is that most painters keep the brush and ink as the bottom line of Chinese painting. Zhuo Hejun 卓鹤君, Xu Jun 许俊, Fang Xiang 方向, Xue Liang 薛亮, Yang Xianshun 阳先顺, Qi Enjin 祁恩进, and other contemporary heavy-color mountain and water painters pay attention to the harmony between color and brush and ink in their works and regard brush and ink as the necessary language form. We can see that the successful models of today's heavy-color painting all take brush and ink as

a significant modeling means and expression of lyricism.

2. The Cultural Features of Brush and Ink Language in Heavy-color Mountain and Water Painting.

Brush and ink has always been one of the core problems of ink painting, and heavy-color painting seems to have little to do with it. But with the continuous extension of the connotation of the word "brush and ink", it has been regarded as a product of Chinese cultural spirit and philosophical concept and the pronoun of the aesthetic standard of Chinese painting. It is the most fundamental and main painting

language of Chinese painting. It is not the patent of the ink painting anymore but becomes a kind of aesthetic standard and cultural symbol to reflect the accumulation of national traditional culture spirit in heavy-color painting.

"All phenomena," says Cassirer, "that in one form or another can be revealed, meaning perceptions are symbols, especially when perception is the representative of some objects or the embodiment and the revelation of meaning."⁶ That is to say, symbols not

6 蒋孔阳, 朱立元. 西方美学通史. 上海文艺出版社, 1999. 第589页.

Jiang Kongyang & Zhu Liyuan. *A History of Western Aesthetics*. Shanghai



only have the function of perception but also embody some deep meaning. And brush and ink is exactly the artistic symbol with this feature. The formation and development of brush and ink language in Chinese painting are deeply nourished by traditional philosophical and aesthetic thoughts. Laozi's 老子 "Five colors dazzle the eyes", and "The greatest music is silence, a true image is nearly invisible". All these are the most original cultural supports of Chinese art, which enable Chinese people to form a unique aesthetic orientation. The simple black-and-white world presented by brush and ink on the color is in line with the simple and profound philosophy of Laozi and Zhuangzi 老庄哲学. When talking about brush and ink, Zong Baihua 宗白华 says: "All kinds of *Cun* brushstrokes, including dots and lines, are used to paint objects of the nature to a perfect result with the poetic mind, where poetry is the atmosphere in a painting scene, which has become the second feature of Chinese painting. With the grains of brush hooks and the light and dark ink, Chinese painting directly expresses the mood of life, depicts the spirit of the objects in the spirit of a simple, light, in a subtle way."⁷ This paragraph summarizes the unique artistic and aesthetic characteristics of Chinese painting contained in brush and ink. And it emphasizes the function of brush and ink to express the painter's subjective feelings and inner emotions. It implies different aspects such as the characteristics of the times, the aesthetic orientation, the integration of individual emotions, and carries the overall national cultural characteristics endowed by the times.

Literature And Art Publishing House, 1999. P 589

⁷ 宗白华. 美学散步. 上海人民出版社, 1981. 第123页.

Zong Baihua. *Strolling in Aesthetics*. Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1981. P 123.



Fang Xiang 方向, *Hidden depth* 《深潜》, 248 x 129cm, 2017

Yang Xianshun 阳先顺, *Three mountains and waters* 《山水三条屏》



Langer further elaborates on the art symbol: "If a created symbol (a piece of art works) is to inspire people's sense of beauty, it must be shown in the form of feeling. That is to say, it must present itself as a projection or symbol of the vital movement and must make itself a logical form similar to the basic forms of life."⁸ As a logical form reflecting the life form of Chinese painting art, brush and ink has gone beyond the function of form with the symbolic nature of metaphorical features. It has national features and universality and implies the accumulation of the national culture, philosophy, and aesthetic spirit. Therefore, it has not only become the formal language of freehand brushwork but also played a significant role in heavy-color painting. Zhang Yanyuan 张彦远 describes the artistic effects of ink and wash: "no lead powder was used for drawing clouds and snow, no green was used for drawing mountains and no five colors of nature were used for drawing phoenix. But only the use of ink can create five colors."⁹ He gives brush and ink the function of omnipotent and even transcendent color. Sheng Dashi 盛大士 of Qing dynasty, in his *Record of Mental Journey in Xishan Mountain*, 《溪山卧游录》 says "Painting should be dominated by brush and ink and supplemented by color. And color can't replace the importance of ink. So in great painters' brushwork, the more vivid cyan and green are, the more they set off the ink."¹⁰ It can reveal

8 蒋孔阳, 朱立元. 西方美学通史. 上海文艺出版社, 1999. 第633页.

Jiang Kongyang & Zhu Liyuan. A History of Western Aesthetics. Shanghai Literature And Art Publishing House, 1999. P 633

9 周积寅. 中国画论辑要. 江苏美术出版社, 1985. 第522页.

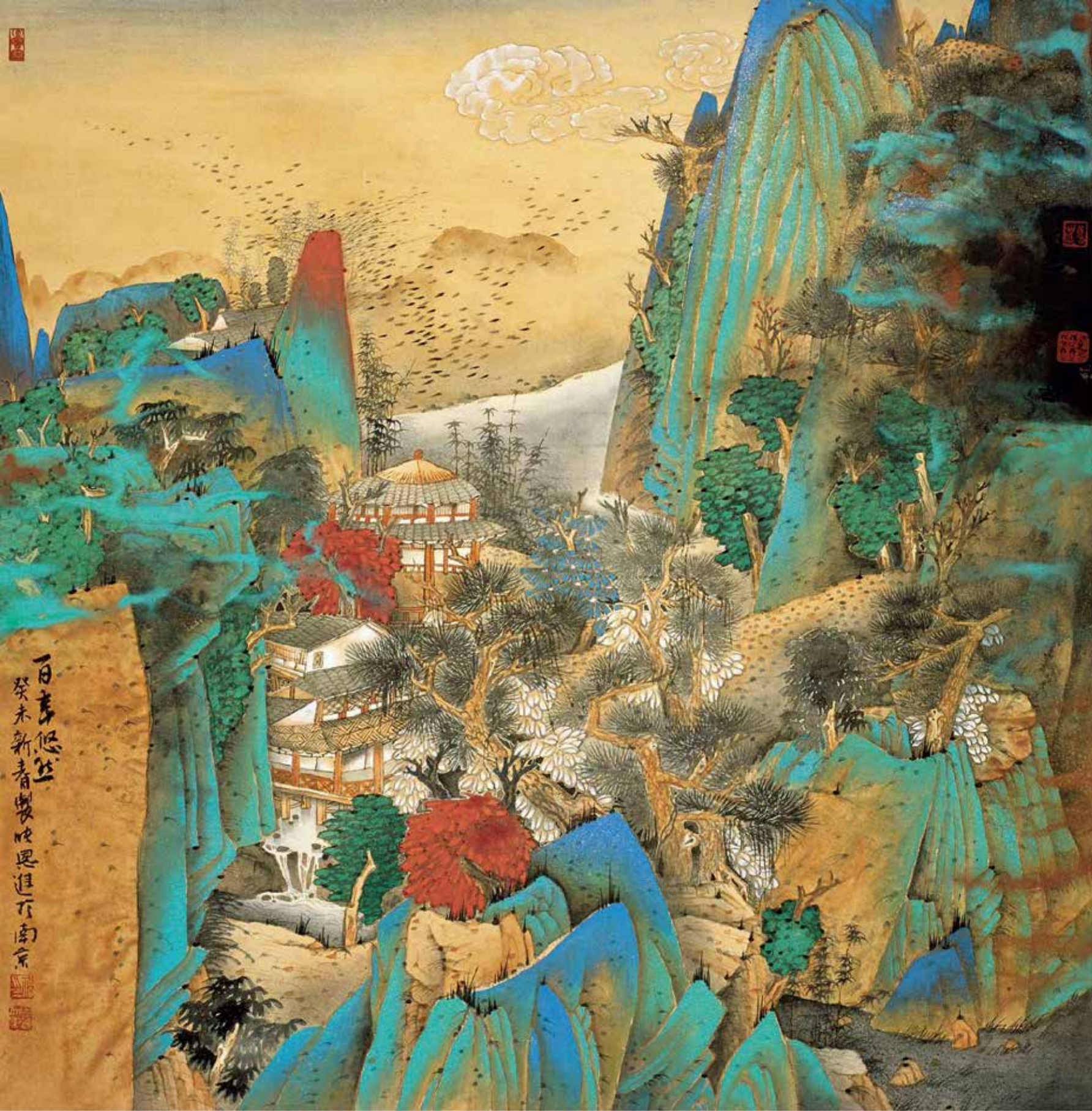
Zhou Jiyin. *Summary of Chinese Art Theory*. Jiangsu Fine Arts Publishing House, 1985. P 522

10 周积寅. 中国画论辑要. 江苏美术出版社, 1985. 第533页.

Zhou Jiyin. *Summary of Chinese Art Theo-*



Xue Liang, *Boundless autumn waters* 《秋水无涯》



Qi Enjin 祁恩进, *Hundred years of carefree and leisurely* 《百年悠然》, 66x65cm, 2003

the supremacy of brush and ink. Even in heavy-color mountain and water painting, brush and ink has been elevated to a leading position and become a significant artistic symbol in Chinese painting.

Ernst Cassirer believes, "The world of human beings does not exist as a ready-made thing, it needs to be constructed." Any kind of symbols is the embodiment of human creativity, and people use symbols not only passively to "react in fact to the world, but also actively to grasp the world in thought."¹¹ The painting symbol of brush and ink is the painter's refinement of nature and life. It comes from life and goes beyond it. For contemporary heavy-color mountain and water painting, brush and ink painting carries a profound cultural connotation under the historical accumulation. It has become a language form with independent aesthetic value and a synonym for the artistic characteristics, performance characteristics, and formal characteristics of Chinese painting. So, if we give up the artistic language of brush and ink, it means that heavy-color mountain and water painting is facing the crisis of lacking the height and depth of spirit. Chinese painters' reliance on brush and ink in heavy-color mountain and water painting creation can be regarded as a lingering complex related to cultural inheritance. Therefore, in heavy-color mountain and water paintings of the past dynasties, brush and ink and color have always played a big role—competed with each other, never leaving or forsaking.

Epilogue

ry. Jiangsu Fine Arts Publishing House, 1985. P 533

11 蒋孔阳, 朱立元. 西方美学通史. 上海文艺出版社, 1999. 第592页.

Jiang Kongyang & Zhu Liyuan. *A History of Western Aesthetics*. Shanghai Literature And Art Publishing House, 1999. P 592.

The development of Chinese heavy-color mountain and water painting is a process of finding the best balance between color and brush and ink. It is impossible to completely abandon brush and ink like Japanese rock-dye-stuff painting. The profound traditional cultural accumulation of brush and ink has contributed to the complexity of brush and ink in Chinese heavy-color mountain and water painting. When it comes to the creation of heavy-color painting, in Heavy-color Painting and Its Language, Xue Yongnian 薛永年 believes: "Attention should be paid to the center of the brush and color of the heavy-color painting, and at the same time do not forget the accumulation of brush and ink in color, and what's more, use this skill consciously."¹² The history of Chinese art reveals that brilliant painting works are always the perfect combination of color and brush and ink. The painter will not paint with color completely, but works with a complete combination of hooking, *Cun* brushstrokes, dotting and dyeing. These brush and ink techniques are applied to the creations as the soul of Chinese painting. Many such painters have also emerged at present times, some of them even add the element of construction so that the shaping effect produced by brush and ink can be constituted into the picture in a more decorative and free way. Therefore, the significance of brush and ink in heavy-color mountain and water painting is no longer confined to the category of form, but also reflects the self-cultural identity of the painter. The effect of brush and ink on xuan paper can not be replaced in other ways and its cultural accumulation has achieved the profound complex of brush and ink

12 薛永年. 重彩画及其语言. 美术观察, 1998(7).

Xue Yongnian. *Heavy-color mountain and water painting and its Language*. Art Observation, 1998

in Chinese heavy-color mountain and water painting.

Tao Anping 陶安萍

Born in 1971, Master of Fine Arts in Sichuan University, associate professor, mentor for postgraduate students, member of the China Artists Association, director of the Sichuan Province Meticulous Painting Society, director of Chengdu Contemporary Meticulous Painting Society, and deputy director of the Landscape Painting Art Committee of the Chengdu Artists Association.

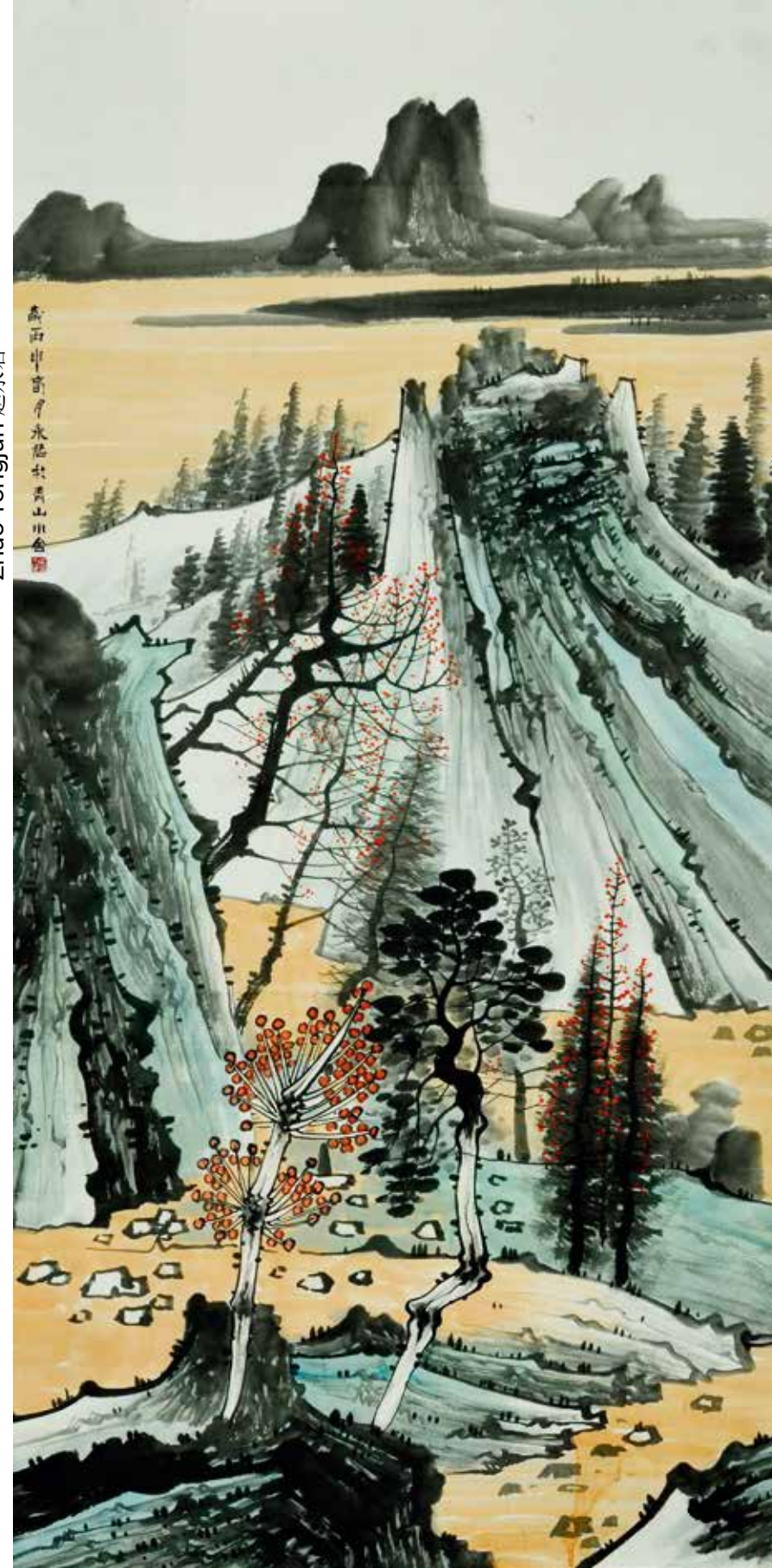
Zhao Tong 赵桐

Born in 1998, in Songyuan, Jilin Province, now a postgraduate student of Art Literature Translation in Guangxi Arts University, graduated from South-Central University for Nationalities with a bachelor's degree in economics in 2021, majoring in finance.

Ning Lizheng 宁立正

Born in Guangxi, China, in 1965. Professor of Guangxi Arts University Standing Director of Guangxi Translators Association Mentor for post-graduate students Member of English Teaching Steering Committee for Undergraduate Institutions of Guangxi Member of Teaching Steering Committee of Guangxi Arts University His publications include: 100 years of Chinese Oil Painting, Son of the Mountains--A Study of Art on the Yao Painter Zheng Junli's Painting, A Survey of the Masters and Masterpieces of the Lijiang Painting School.

Zhao Yongjun 赵永君



A Fantasy of Mount Bo 博山志

Ma Jun paintings

By: Fu Xiaodong

I. Self-consciousness

Ma Jun 马骏 grew up with a passion for traditional Chinese figure painting, from immortals and strongmen to the scenes of ordinary life. With early talent and intelligence, he is able to follow with his eyes and hands, and he claims it is due to his natural disposition. He received a rigorous education in figure painting from the Tang and Song dynasties when he entered the Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts, and learned the use of brushwork, the expressions of colors, and the techniques of line drawing. He understood that seemingly strict and meticulous paintings are all about writing and brushwork, and the more he works, the better he gets. He deeply enjoyed the pleasure of using lines and brushstrokes, and his lines were full of charm and quality. However, he was not limited to this. He often delved into the library to study various materials from ancient and modern times, both domestic and foreign, and was unable to stop himself from doing so, thus acquiring a personal trajectory that was not limited by the various fashions of the day.

II. Collection

We use our paintings to provide for our collection, and use our collection to nurture our paintings. Using a lively and energetic line as a criterion for the eyes, capturing the subtle nuances and curvature of the line, extracting the spirit of the times and embodying aesthetic concepts, taking the Northern Dynasties, which were a mixture of various ethnic groups, as the basis for ancient study and the aesthetic

conception in the Sui Dynasty as the main vein, tracing back to its origins, and exploring its evolution, for over 20 years, Ma Jun's collection has covered the simplicity of the Qin and Han dynasties, the charm of the Wei and Jin dynasties, the elegance of the Sui and Tang dynasties, and the ancient styles of different regions of Europe and Asia, including sculptures, ceramics, objects, textiles, and accessories. Tracing its branches up and down and back to its origins, using physical objects from different eras as samples, he experiences the spiritual core of aesthetic perception across different time and space, and then delves into the linear conceptions of different schools of modeling. The depth and breadth of the accumulation is astonishing. Ma Jun's collection is not only about objects, but also about its essence. Living with it, he can understand its intention and imbue its spirit in his work. In addition to playing with the classics, there are also places where folk art can be transformed. Its simplicity, rusticity, and liveliness embody the intuitive conceptions of primitive art as a whole world. Its aesthetic object is maximally expanded on its main vein, that is, it conveys the true meaning of tradition and breaks through the barriers of stereotypes.

III. Simplicity

The point of simplicity lies in refinement. All of Ma Jun's works spill out in one breath, surging like a fountain, encompassing all phenomena: the large and the small, the refined and the coarse, the near and the far, each with its own measure of appropriate-



《博山》 Boshan, Ink and color on paper, 47.5x38 cm, 2023



《忘象》 Blitterative Forgetting, Ink and color on paper, 33x24.5 cm 2023

ness, without a unclear stroke impeding the fresh and lucid spirit, without a stroke of doubt, nor can a single stroke be removed from the system. The overlap of lines and ink is used to seize and cut between the various elements, and also to bloom and expand within the whole mixed unity. The abstract, functional, and concrete aspects of the lines are perfectly integrated. They are deleted again and again, reduced again and again, until the false is removed and the true is retained, until the impurities are removed and the purity is obtained. Like a pot of broth with various ingredients, though mild, it does not diminish its aromaticity; the simple strokes do not diminish the meaning, but rather achieve the unity of the mind and hands. The difficulty of portraying figures lies in the fluency of the strokes, and that implies a deep and subtle meaning that cannot be shifted in the slightest. It can be said that the strokes are soaring on the wind, yet also lofty and stable. Their weightiness, abruptness, and nimbleness penetrate to the minutest details, exerting the power of a dragonfly landing on the water, and this is a rare achievement of ancient and modern times, known only to those who have made great efforts.

IV. Pattern and raw substance

Ma Jun takes a straightforward, simple style, clear and light, like phoenixes flying together among the mountains, suddenly meeting a wild deer in the woods, with a rising spirit. Instead of chasing after the intense visual stimulation of the spectacle of the consumer era and the dense and massive stacking of information, he absorbs the literati tradition of the simple in its simplicity, the majestic in its introspection, and the power of reason and feeling behind it, naturally rather than pretentiously. Ma Jun distills the true purity of vitality and the dripping expression of it in the folk traditions of the ancient world, using the

《山林意》 Mountain and Forest Scenery, Ink and color on paper, 14.5x35 cm, 2023



《夙素》 Fine Gauze, Ink and color on paper, 39x49.5cm, 2023





《山林意》 *Mountain and Forest Scenery*, Ink and color on paper, 76x145 cm, 2020



《游·隐》 Hidden Swimming Ink and color on paper, 49x76 cm, 2023



harmony of pattern and raw substance to control the recalcitrant wildness. The brushwork is smooth and spontaneous, the style is pretty and easy, the ink is splashed and wielded, and there is a core of the excellence both in form and quality that mixed in a stylist way.

V. Style

Ma Jun's unique style has been developed through a long process of assimilating historical clues and continually experimenting and iterating. Based on accidental triggers, inner compliance, and accurate perception, he has repeatedly refined and condensed the basic aesthetic elements to create a clear, stable, and unique personal structure that reflects the historical cultural context. The relationships and qualities between the points, lines, colors, and surfaces that are woven together, as well as the increasingly purified language, construct a complete inner spiritual world. With a modernist

aesthetic perspective, Ma Jun finds a spiritual affinity with ancient art across civilizations, absorbing the forms and structures of folk art and creatively experimenting with form and style.

VI. Mount Bo

The conception of nature in the Han Dynasty is "The Dao is without effort, allowing things to follow their own nature. Thus, we release fish into the river and set beasts free on the mountains, following their desires and nature. Why not force fish to swim uphill or drive beasts into deep waters? This would violate their nature and disrupt their dispositions." (*Of Nature, Discourses in the Balance* 《论衡·自然篇》) "I speak of having the world because I possess myself. When I possess myself, the world also possesses me. I am in harmony with the world, and when I possess myself, I am in accord with the Dao. To possess oneself is to preserve one's body, and by doing so, one be-

comes one with the Dao." (*Searching Out the Dao, Huainanzi* 《淮南子·原道训》). During the Han Dynasty, people believed that all things were manifestations of the supreme god. The image of Mount Bo was both derived from the "primordial energy" of all things and manifested from the chaos of nature. Everything was interconnected, with water turning into mountains, mountains becoming spirit beasts and immortals, and ultimately returning to the primordial energy, completing the cycle of all things. By lightly sketching out the most primitive elements of things, everything could be transformed, allowing nature to take its course. Ma Jun's outlook is reached through his exploration and pursuit of language, form, and the spiritual world. In the natural ink, his strokes naturally change and follow the method of the unity of Yin and Yang to obtain their Qi and take their momentum. From the chaos, the strokes jump out of vivid images and swallow the universe, born in nature, grown in nature, not

violating nature, simply natural. Since the Han Dynasty, Mount Bo has been a description and imitation of the ideal world of mankind, a microcosmic model of the universe. Ma Jun's works unconsciously refer to everything on Mount Bo, where clouds and smoke generate fragrant grass and feathered people, mythical creatures and auspicious trees; the figures in the paintings forget the distinction between oneself and the outside world; humans and animals are subjectively intertwined in one space; the divine and immortals blend seamlessly in ink, and all things integrate into a whole.

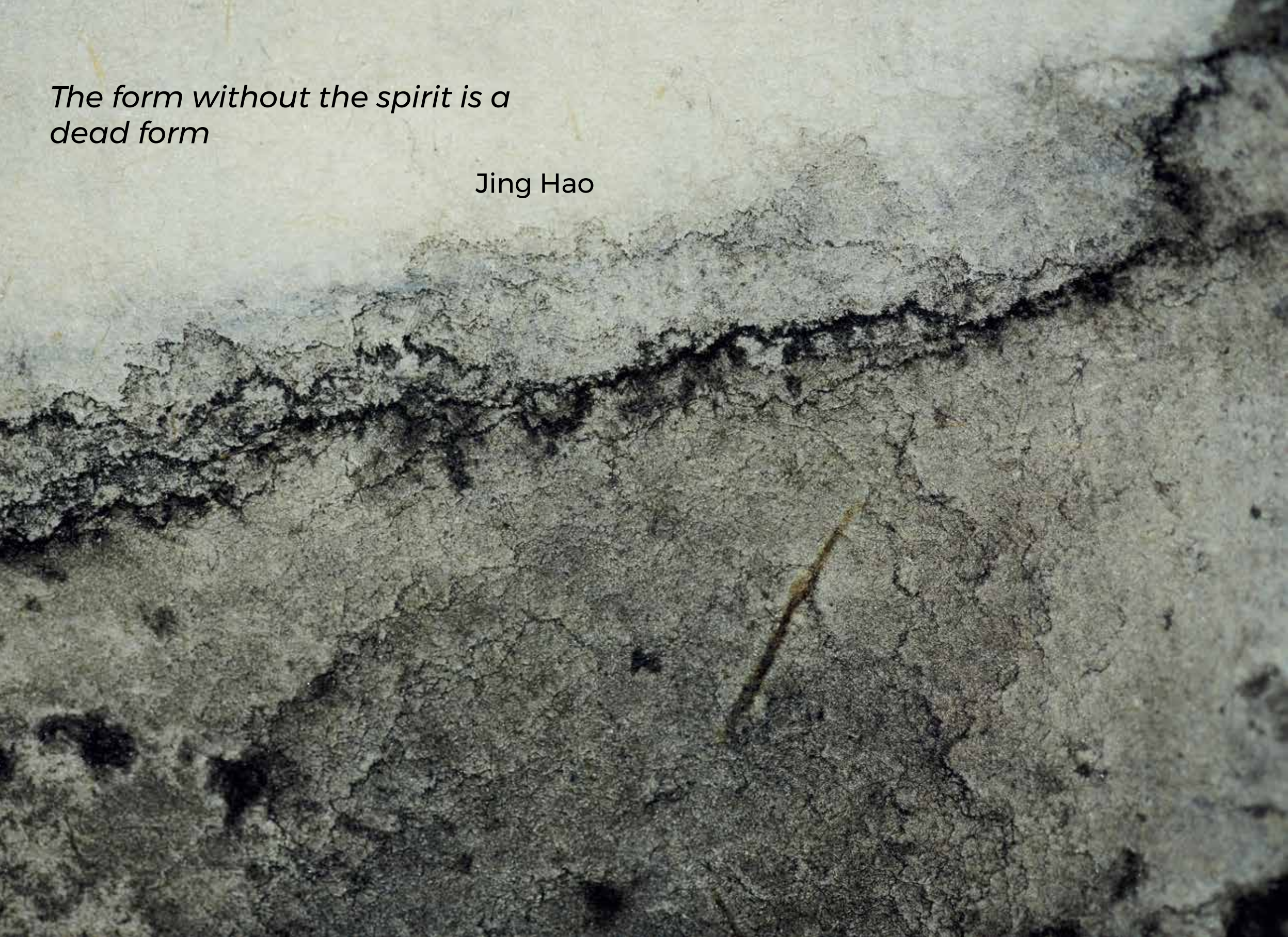
Ma Jun 马骏

Born in Tianjin in 1975, graduated from the Department of Chinese Painting of Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts in 1998. He is currently teaching at the School of Chinese Painting of Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts.

《博山》 Mount Bo, Ink and color on paper, 48x145 cm, 2021

*The form without the spirit is a
dead form*

Jing Hao



Paintings of Lin Xueming 林学明

—The abstract Cubist Painting: *Seeking the Way , Seeking the Essence*

By: Aurora Vivenzio

The paintings of Lin Xueming in Sihui, Guangdong, are very much in the style of the European 1912 Section d'Or cubist-abstraction. The characteristic feature is the essence of the object that can be extracted by breaking down the pictogram, as in the Wetland Series 《湿地系列》 (fig.1).

Like the last Cubist artists, their aim was to achieve the essence of the object by breaking down the form and recombining it from different angles, highlighting the use of colour.

After the '85 New Wave of Art, a new wave of creation was formed, and the trend of consciously using local traditional cultural resources to create contemporary art since the new century has also manifested itself in the creation of abstract art. So this concept of written abstraction allows Mr. Lin's paintings to realise those elements common to Western Section d'Or: that is, to reach the extreme form of the object, but without falling into pure abstraction. If anything, it captures the deepest essence of the object, and thus the Tao as well.

Interestingly, Mr. Lin's paintings grasp the essence of the Tao, not from the cold, geometric and rational abstraction claimed by the 'Kinko's' artists, such as Kandinsky in *Composition IV* (1911) (fig. 3) or Piet Mondrian (1872-1944) in *Composition No. VIII* (fig.4) , the art of Robert Delaunay and Sonia Delaunay, but he always does so through the use of free, discontinuous brushstrokes. A





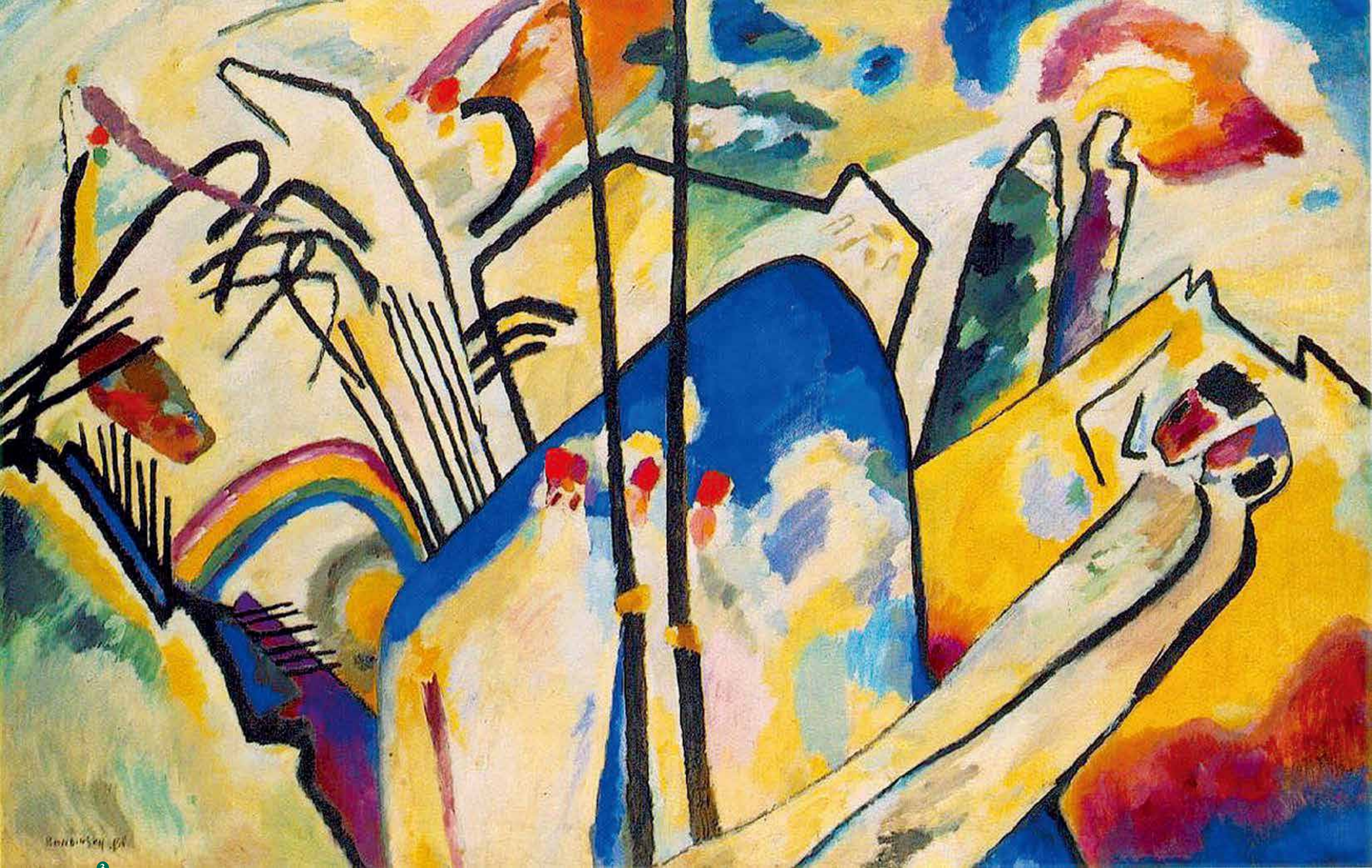
Wetland Series, 22-11, Paper, Mixed media, 93,6×86,7 cm, 2022

2

brushstroke that does not create a precise form, interrupts the composition at a certain point and leaves a blank section of the canvas where the tract is embodied. The 'potentiality' of matter is expressed, leaving room for the imagination and all that is 'potential'. It is in the fragmentation of form that Lin Xueming first depicts the invisible and allows it to become visible.

Perhaps this is one of the main differences between Mr. Lin Xueming and the earlier abstractionists. Whereas European artists believed that the essence of things was inscribed in a perfect code (the so-called golden mean), for Chinese artists the essence is embodied in the void, untouched by any rational scheme. Although some of the ways of thinking and even language of traditional Chinese art are already evident in the drip painting of Jackson Pollock and the writing strokes of Mark Tobey, the art of Pollock and Mark Tobey, for example, still places artistic thinking from the East mainly within the framework of Western preconceptions, and does not leave the concept of rationality, the concept of reason. Mr. Lin's paintings themselves become the embodiment of a higher figuration of harmony and harmony, of ethereal emptiness.

However, there are some similarities between Lin's views and those of Mark Tobey. For both of them, abstract painting reveals the true nature of things beneath the surface, a means of creating new worlds, and as such it must be the result of an individualistic way of looking at the world. For abstract painting, any imitation or repetition is a meaningless affair. For this reason, Mark Tobey continued to create acrylic paintings, while Lin Xueming had used ink as his main medium for a period of time in order to distance himself from all the Western masters of abstract painting; but unlike artists who generally experiment with ink, he did



W. Kandinsky, *Composition IV*, oil on canvas, 159.5x250.5, 1911

not limit himself to the ink medium, perhaps touched by his inner feelings and needs. Around 2008, he introduced acrylic into the creation of abstract ink and after 2012, his direction became clearer and clearer, as he completely abandoned the traditional literati way of writing and ink, and instead united the rational, clear and hard style of acrylic paint with the sensuality, randomness and softness of the ink medium in a chic, fresh and forceful abstract composition by writing in rows. In fact, Lin's art is not only about the rational and clear style of acrylic paints, but also the sensual, random and soft look of the medium.

In fact, Lin's art acts as a medium not only on a technical level in the West and East, but also on a conceptual level. He explores the potential for artistic expression arising from the combination of two heterogeneous media, acrylic and ink, rather he seeks to realise a dialogue between the cultural spirits of East and West through the tension between the two mediums.

The combined use of artificial materials (acrylic) and natural materials (ink and wash) makes it possible to recreate that real and vivid relationship between human and natural experience through the 'artificial'. And this concept emerges in his *Touching Mountains* series 《触山》, a re-abstractation that combines a narrative of a time based on the writing series of '08. «In 2005 Lin had a life-and-death experience in Tibet, which changed his view of life and the world, including his sensitivity to the microcosm and his perception of the "cycle of time"». In terms of visual expression and spiritual construction, a basic framework for the abstract expression of the human figure is slowly formed. The "form" of this framework appears as the face of the form, so that the original form of the "form" no longer exists, but is able to express and resonate with people, and the purpose of abstraction is thus achieved.

—The union of Chinese and Western - the fusion of ancient and modern

By: Giacomo Bruni

Lin Xueming's 林学明 paintings, at a superficial glance, immediately recall the category of Western abstract painting. A pictorial movement that rebelled against the form and representation of the world around us. It changes the artist's plan of action, abstracting him from reality by transporting him into a world that at first was fascinated by basic geometric forms, such as the line, point, square and the circle. It returns colours to their primordial condition, to the elements that express the invisible balances of the world. This type of expression is enriched by the artist's personal emotions and feelings, becoming an inner language aimed at expressing the intimacy of the

Piet Mondrian (1872-1944) *Tableau No. 4 / Composition No. VIII*, oil on canvas, 1913



painter, moving the observer according to his will. In less favourable circumstances, this type of painting has been limited to the pure representation of shapes and colours, which could delight the eye, but without being able to communicate any message or feeling, becoming an empty commercial object, which, following the modalities of capitalist consumerism, exists only to satisfy the market, becoming a commodity and probably the most decadent aspect of contemporary culture. The birth of abstract painting in the West sees, among other reasons, a reaction to the traditional modes, at least from the Renaissance onwards, of traditional Western painting, which after Leon Battista Alberti's perspective revolution, closely linked to the anthropocentric vision that arose after the medieval period, inevitably dragging painting into the realm of the visible, making the painter's point of view the only channel of access to reality, and thus, limiting the pictorial expressiveness for centuries, which finally led to its self-destruction at the beginning of the 20th century. On the contrary, in the Chinese art scene, sight has never been a preponderant element, and the representation of the world, of reality, has never been lowered to the representation of the visible, as Su Dongpo says: "He who discusses painting in terms of the similarity of form has a vision that approaches that of a child." (论画以形似，见与儿童邻。). This, also thanks to the brush techniques common to calligraphy, a purely abstract art, has given Chinese painting a degree of abstractionism that has enlarged the artist's spectrum of action, enabling the possibility of expressing images and feelings, emotions and concepts without having to abandon and permanently destroy the form, and creating a language in continuous evolution, without drastic ruptures or

rejection of the past.

Lin Xueming, who was born and raised in China, got to know Western aesthetic expressions and thought and managed to create a unique and personal artistic language that combines the key elements of these two cultural expressions. He created an abstract art that evokes form and thus the world in which we live while at the same time communicating the artist's interiority on an abstract level, without being a slave to either tradition. This technical/expressive realm achieved by Lin Xueming is a possible response to what the goal of the Lingnan School was (岭南画派), the first school to create a universal pictorial language that would unite the East and West. It was "the union of Chinese and Western and the fusion of ancient and modern" (折衷中西，融汇古今). Lin Xueming unites and makes contemporary different traditions on different planes, starting from the material ones, such as the pictorial materials typical of China like ink and paper, and those coming from the western world, such as acrylic colours, bringing them into dialogue and succeeding in harmonising their expressive peculiarities such as the fluidity of ink, its tonal spectrum and its ability to relate to water and paper, and at the same time the strength and stability of acrylic that almost ignores the pictorial support on which it is applied, but which does not obscure the expressiveness of the ink, managing to enter into harmony with it, almost assimilating its characteristics, creating a dualism that does not conflict, but follows the modalities of the relationship between yin and yang, the universal archetypes that do not enter into antagonism, but thanks to the relationship between one and the other reach the highest level of expression. The same is true for painting techniques, in Lin Xueming's works the brush is multi-form and multicultural, it is central, it is



Chushan 《触山》 47, 2015



Chushan 《触山》 35, 2015

flat, it is dry, it is wet, it is fluid, it is monolithic, it is round, it is square, it has calligraphic and pictorial characteristics, it flows like water and imposes itself like slate, succeeding in expressing a fundamental element of Chinese art, that is the concept of variation (*bianhua* 变化) that is, as Shi Tao says: "the continuous process of the force of creation, the flow and propagation of the life energy of yin and yang." (古今造物之陶冶也, 阴阳气度之流行也). The same can be said for the composition, the two-dimensionality of Western abstract painting is projected into the depth of the white of Chinese abstract

painting, as white relates to emptiness, defeating the Aristotelian fear of horror vacui, namely that "nature abhors emptiness", an all-Western conception that only considers the physical and material nature of things, which differs from the Chinese one that sees emptiness as the medium where *qi* can flow and generate "a sense of spiritual resonance and vitality" (气韵生动), the first of Xie He's painting principals. In these terms, Lin Xueming succeeds in creating a universal contemporary painting, with solid foundations in both traditions, managing to give voice to both without lapsing into anachronism, but

rather updating and enriching them with his own vision, following the typical modalities of Chinese thought, that is looking at the past without being a slave to it in order to grasp the teachings and visions best suited to our time and interiority, as Tobey says: "To redis-

Chushan 《触山》 109, 2015

cover the past is to move forward. There is no surcease when we constantly destroy what we have built. The future is carved with the implements we created before it was upon us. The past offers the art student different roads, all converging towards his present."





Chushan 《触山》40, 2015

Lin Xueming succeeds in this process, without succumbing to sterile copying, but generating a fresh and rich fruit, pleasing to both East and West, bringing them into harmony, perhaps getting close to the goal Huang Bing-hong hoped for, namely that 'in this way it will be possible to avoid wars and massacres. That is why I say that art is the best way to preserve life. Not only does it make our nation grow, but it can also elevate the happiness and

longevity of all human beings." (以此可以免去战争，不必残杀了。所以说，艺术是最高养生方法。不但足以养我中华民族，且能养成全人类的福祉寿考也。)



Chushan 《触山》20, 2015

The background is a dark, almost black, textured surface. On the left side, there is a large, irregular, light-colored (off-white or light grey) shape that resembles a splash or a torn piece of paper. The texture of the dark area is grainy and uneven.

*The highest and deepest level
[of creation] is reached when one acts
halfway between intention and
non-intention.*

Shen Zongqian

China: an Open Concept of Art

By: Matthias Drescher

Taking a walk is for contemplation and reflection, and it may at best offer a friendly surprise. I don't have to know every single footstep, but I want to trust the path, even if it leads far away. In fact, we can even go for a pleasure walk in China - even non-Chinese like me, if we develop the necessary trust.

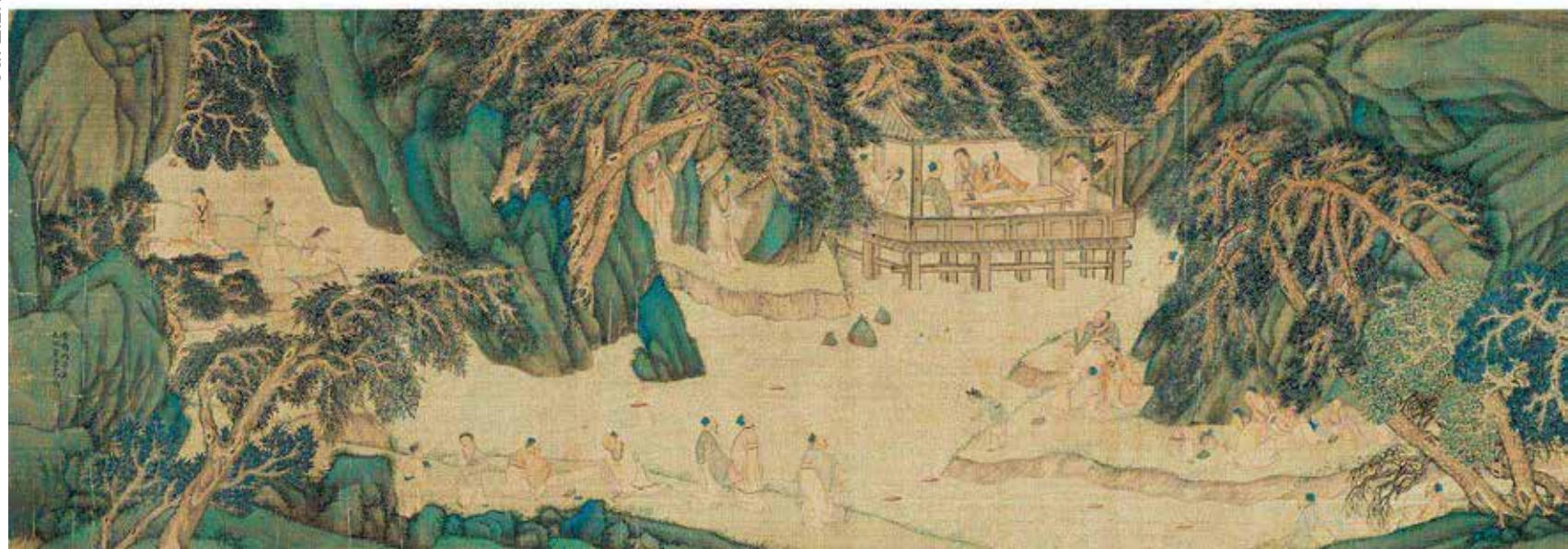
Mine came about quite abruptly: in the description of Tang-era civil service careers, in "The Chinese World", by Jacques Gernet. High officials were selected in nationwide examinations and appointed throughout the empire. They had to master the classical scriptures and be able to write ad hoc poetry. Many became friends with each other, corresponded for life and sent each other their poems and paintings. A man of letters spent his retirement in a rural idyll to pursue music, calligraphy, poetry and painting. What he created was intended only for connoisseurs and it was shown off or given away with care. Today it is the epitome of ancient Chinese art.¹

Even if the practice was more differentiated - it was the basic pattern that fascinated and captured me for the culture as a whole: Educated Chinese made their own art. Painting, poetry and music were not the privilege of specialised "artists", but they were important means of expression and essential for exchanges with friends. Even for his career in real life, an official had to be able to write poetry.

Ancient China showed that art can be practiced in a different way than we are used to. Lay people, too, are able to express themselves artistically. They need not remain mute, and those who start early enough can articulate subtly.

¹ One of the best examples is even pre-Tang: the "Gathering at the Orchid Pavilion" for the Spring Festival in 353. Invited by the calligrapher Wang Xizhi, learned guests camped on the bank of a stream, floated little boats on it, drank wine, and improvised poems whenever a boat landed by them. Wang Xizhi published these poems with a preface that wistfully evokes the springtime mood and is still famous today as calligraphy 《兰亭序》.

Cui Zizhong 崔子忠, *Xiuxi at the Orchid Pavilion* 《兰亭修契图》 30x259cm





Wen Zhengming 文徵明, *Xixi at the Orchid Pavilion* 《兰亭修禊图》 24.260.1cm

Moreover, they will better understand the works of others.

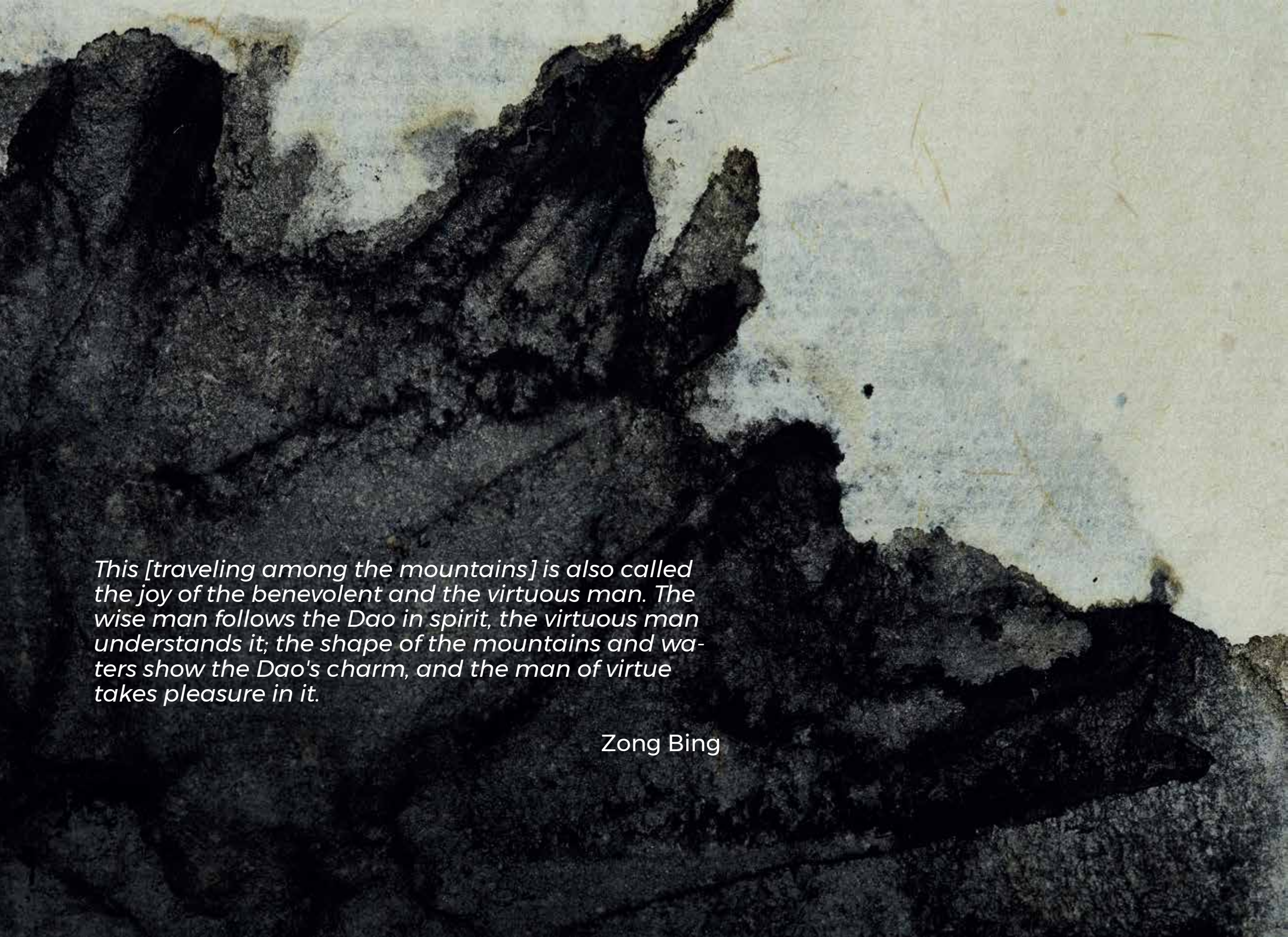
Certainly, the literary ideal is only one aspect of Chinese culture and it was based on complex traditions. But that is precisely why it helps to grasp those traditions. And although Eastern and Western art have different roots, and although creativity is so important in the West - the self-understanding with which a Chinese official painted or wrote poetry remains captivating. It can inspire our own lives and at the same time it will foster the confidence which we so urgently need when dealing with China.

Matthias Drescher

An essayistic writer, focussing on cultural history and on intercultural perception ("alterity"). Of German parents, he was born in Switzerland in 1959, but spent much of life in Italy and in Berlin, Germany. He also lived in Spain, France and UK. He studied at Munich University in Philosophy and History, and in German literature at the University of Zurich and graduated in business administration at European Business School. He studied Violoncello with Marco Scano, the first cellist of Scala Orchestra, Milan. He published two books: *Die Zukunft unserer Moral* (The future of our Morality) in 2019, and *Bilder, die ins Vergessen führen* (Images that Lead to Oblivion) in 2022

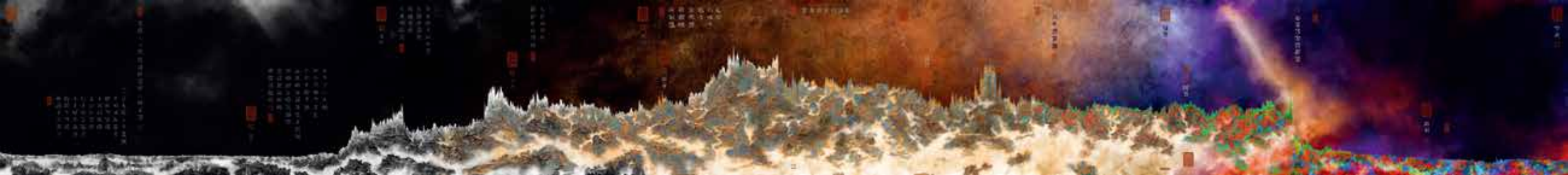


Fu Baoshi 傅抱石, *Xixi at the Orchid Pavilion* 《兰亭修禊图》



This [traveling among the mountains] is also called the joy of the benevolent and the virtuous man. The wise man follows the Dao in spirit, the virtuous man understands it; the shape of the mountains and waters show the Dao's charm, and the man of virtue takes pleasure in it.

Zong Bing



In the Footsteps of Literati with a Digital Brush

By: Wieslaw Borkowski

Under the steady rhythm of a laptop keyboard and the gentle glide of a stylus across the screen, a new panorama comes to life. On the digital canvas, horizon line shifts, mountains pierce the clouds formed of empty space, and rivers chart their courses - each

digital brushstroke a testament to the fusion of cryptoart and Chinese mountain and water painting. The person behind the screen is Baiwei, an artist whose work resides at the crossroads of tradition and technology. There's an inherent spontaneity in his creative process, a luxury afforded by the digital art realm, where creativity isn't dependent as much on a physical studio,

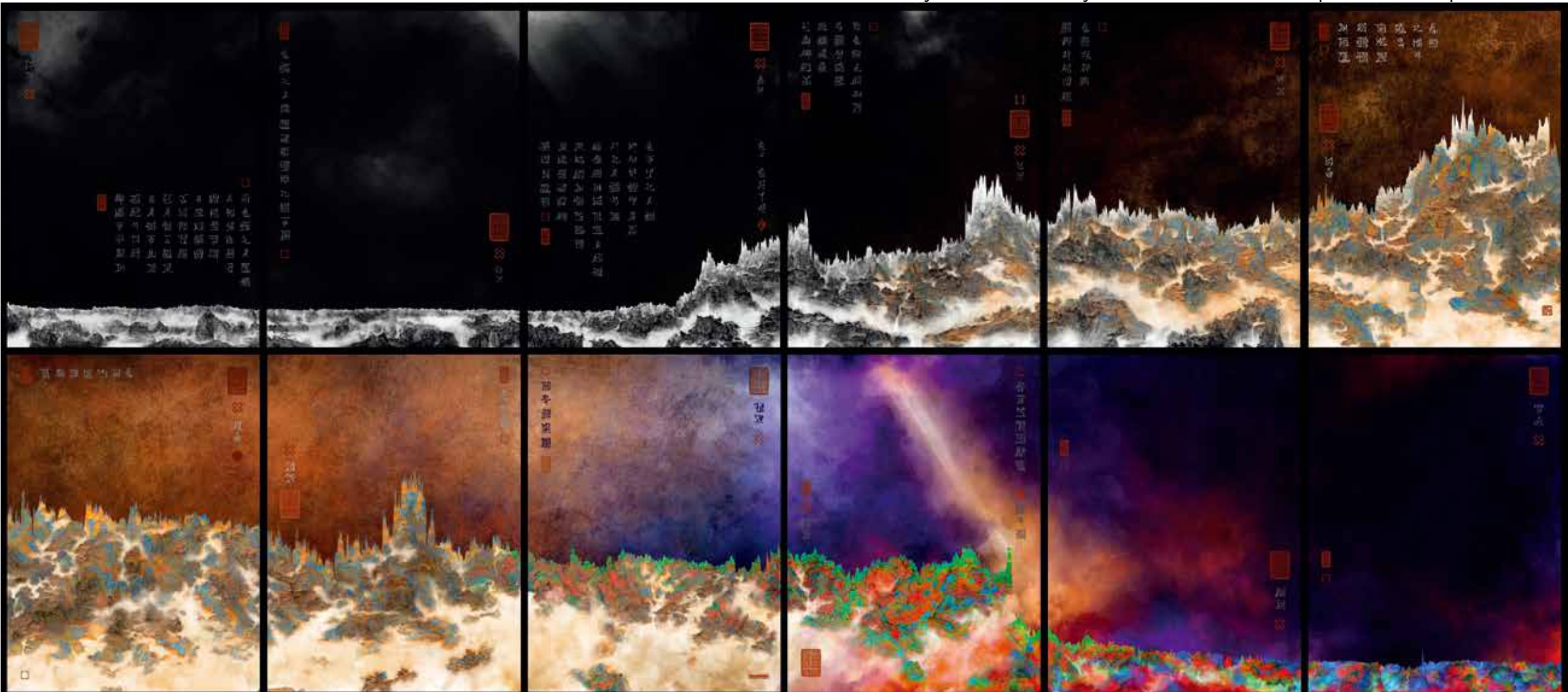
tools and materials. With each piece, Baiwei invites us into a conversation - a dialogue between the old and new, East and West, human and AI, that underpins his artistic vision.

In the realm of digital landscape artistry, the process of creation begins long before the digital brush touches the surface of a screen. For Baiwei, it commences with the gathering of raw data - numerical fluctuations from the cryptocurrency market. He usually extracts

these data points from global cryptocurrency platforms. Then he elegantly weaves them into the initial fabric of his artworks by transposing the data trends onto the canvas. They serve as a scaffold for each landscape's horizon line, influencing artwork's structure and composition.

The data not only provide a solid foundation for the artist's work, but they can also serendipitously contribute to the creative process in unexpected

CHRONCLASH





ways. Baiwei recounts a memorable instance when a trending pattern of a cryptocurrency \$ASH mimicked exactly a symbol related to a famous project based on it. Upon noticing this curious coincidence, the artist swiftly created an artwork featuring a Song style snowy landscape, capturing the essence of the data's tale. The piece was promptly published and soon collected by a renowned Chinese crypto collector.

Construction of the base landscape structure is always done by hand. It relies on an equal contribution of the artist's imagination and converted trending data. For Baiwei however, the most challenging aspect is not the initial creation of the structure and composition; it is the identification and projecting of a style that could best serve the canvas and enhance the narrative woven by the data.

Amidst the challenges lies the joy of creation. For Baiwei, the thrill comes in the work with processed outputs, especially overpainting raw landscape with waters and mists - shanshui's soul. The artistry required in shaping these elements lends a distinct character to each artwork, breathing spirit into the digital panorama. The landscapes are not merely data representations; they are living, dynamic ecosystems, a testament to the artist's passion for synthesizing diverse ideas.

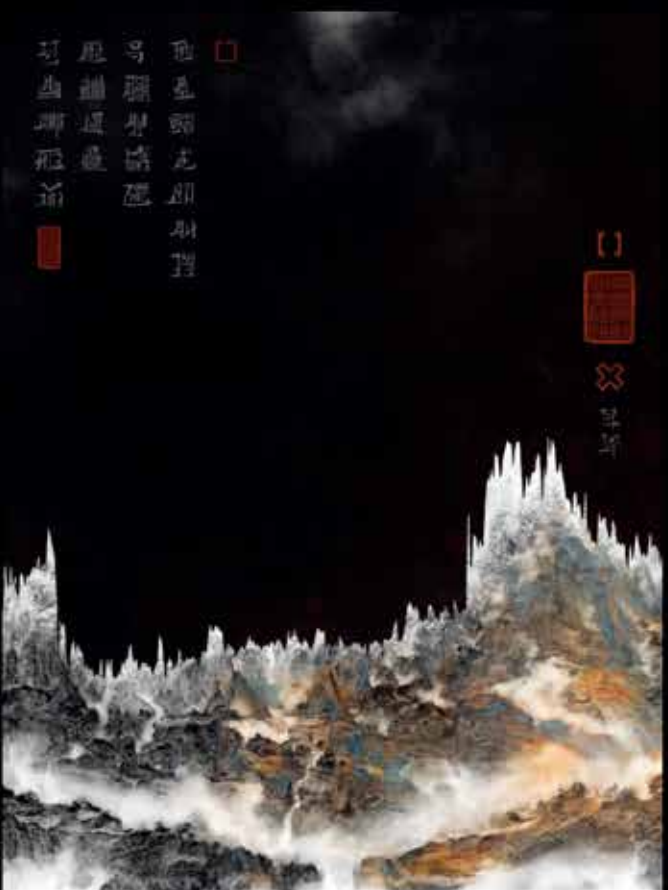
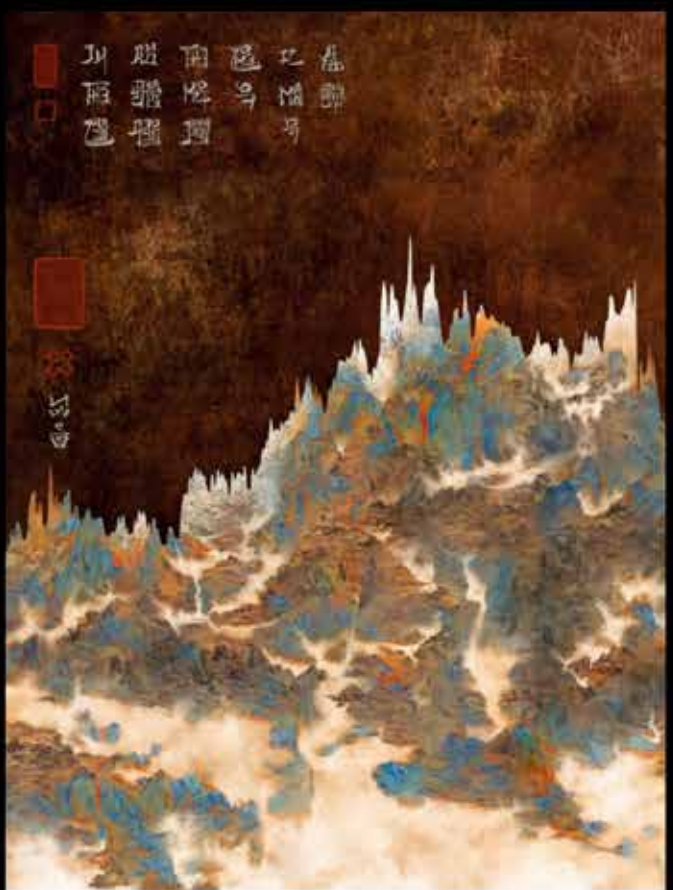
The most recent example of a complex AI-collaborative project is "Memoirs of Bull". It marries Ethereum data and history with the power of AI to birth a poetic cryptoart chronicle of the bull market year of 2021. The collection is not only steeped in the aesthetics of Asian art but also carrying its profound heritage. The collection comprises of 12 paintings, each echoing the month-specific ETH/USDT

trending data. In each artwork's description is an acrostic poem encrypting the history and key events that occurred in the month it depicts. Imprinted on the landscape are "classical" seal signatures: a peculiar collection imprint, artist's name seal and Ethereum chop. One will also notice short calligraphic colophon written in Baiwei's original cryptic English writing, which he humorously calls 白体 (*baiti* - "Bai script"). These few "characters" describe the currencies (ETH to USDT) and the month of trending.

Not only visual elements echo the collection's rich legacy of Chinese mountain and water painting; to emphasize the collaborative nature of this artistic dialogue, the artist enables collectors to add their signature seal and a new colophon directly onto the painting. This operation is possible thanks to a dynamic blockchain contract, while the inspiration originates from Baiwei's deep-rooted admiration for engaged nature of the literati culture and the provenance of ancient Asian art.

The idea for "Memoirs of Bull" emerged from Baiwei's exploration of the cryptoart terrain and the nostalgia for the prosperous bull market of 2021. Although experienced with data-based projects, the artist hasn't yet tried the newest tools recently developed in AI domain. Exploring a new potential of human-machine collaboration became the driving force for this experimental collection.

Chat GPT-4 played the first violin in this creative process, conceptually establishing human-AI dialogue as the project's foundation. Seemingly a simple chatbot function offered unlimited brainstorming powers and kept surprising with unexpected





ed inspirations. It had an influence on almost all aspects of “Memoirs”. Aside of the conceptual work in the collection’s background, GPT-4 was directly responsible for composing encrypted acrostic poems. That process was not without challenges. Initially, AI’s poems lacked finesse and diversity, however, when Baiwei began to refine the data and discuss with AI about structural and stylistic changes, the results improved significantly. To ensure the poetic quality, with each set of improvements, a poem was blind-checked through a new chat and asked for constructive criticism. Here’s an example of a piece written for March:

Majestic peaks of code and blocks arise

Amazed punks in awe, Nifty’s dazzling heights

Revered Beeple’s sweet 6-9, Kovan’s prize

Casting shadow on the bullish terrain

Hod!! Here comes a decentralized domain

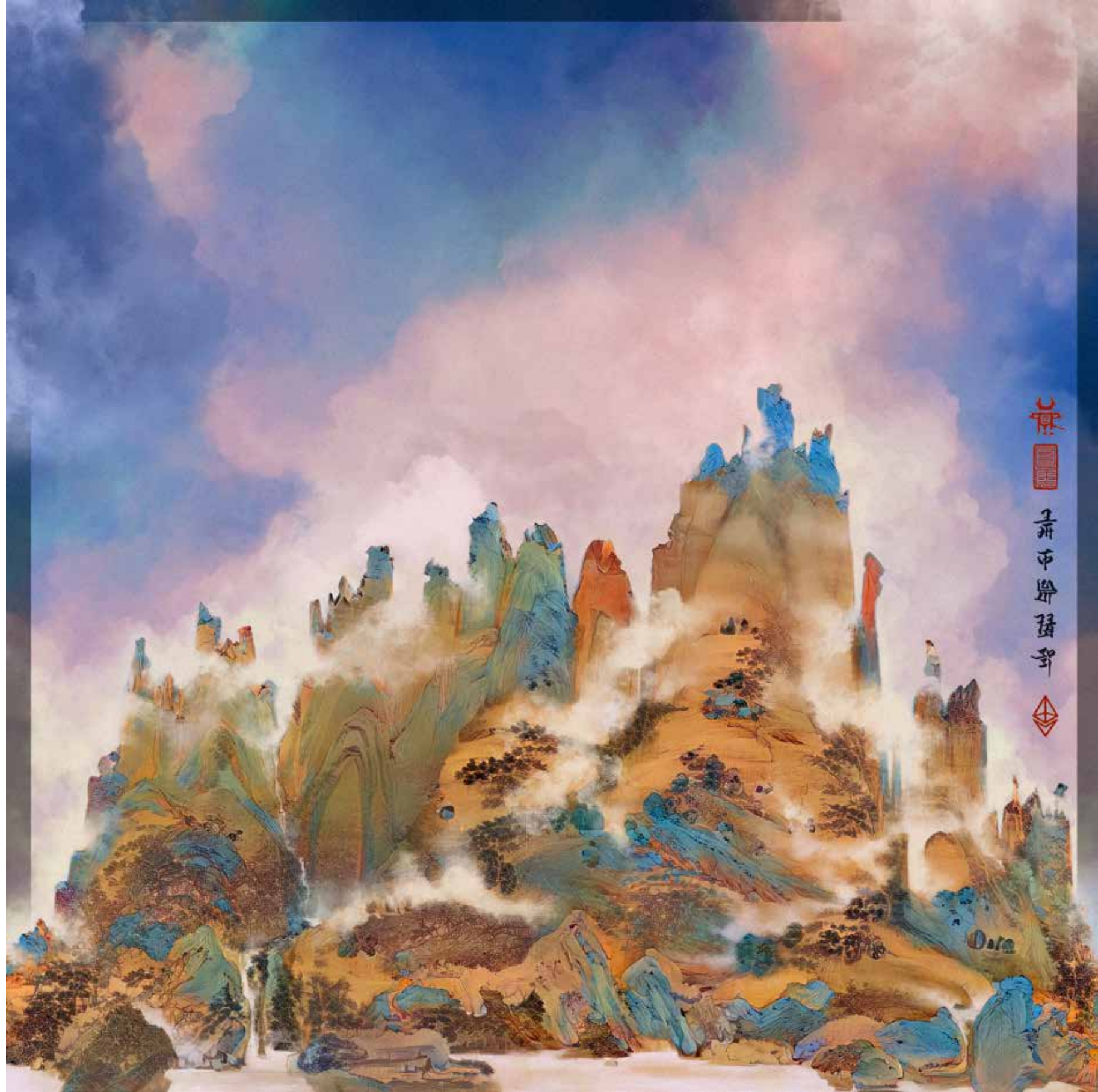
As for the visual side of AI palette, the crucial element was DeepDream, an old but trustworthy tool available since 2015. While it sometimes present technical challenges and issues with outputs, this algorithm seamlessly melded selected Chinese painting styles onto prepared landscape structures, prepared by the artist in advance. In order to maximize the quality, panoramas were processed in multiple separate fragments. Selecting the right Chinese painting style to superimpose on the painting is a challenging task and there are several factors the artist would usually consider: purpose of the artwork, driving inspirations of the moment, context of used data, desired aesthetic effect, whether the work is a standalone piece or part of a larger collection. Working on “Memoirs”, decisive were the artist’s recent inspirations of appreciating Ming dynas-

ty's Qiu Ying (仇英) mountain and water paintings.

Next in Baiwei's tool palette were various upscaling and filtering algorithms, utilized to adjust and further refine the visual allure of the paintings. These unexciting tools provide simple utilities which never surprise nor fail. Worth mentioning is the fact that generated effects are always far from satisfactory for the artist, and after this step comes the manual perfecting in a graphic software. For the "Memoirs" it took several weeks.

After polishing the paintings, it's time for the controversial text-to-image AI generators. Creating a signature seal with such tool was always unacceptable for Baiwei. However, the specific nature of "Memoirs of Bull" deserved an attempt. The artist started from describing the collection to GPT-4, asking for a seal's shape and content suggestions. Surprisingly, chatbot proposed to base it on ritual tripod cauldron (*ding* 鼎), a quite unusual design which also felt like a perfect fit! Then, text prompts were put through the tools such as Midjourney, StableDiffusion and Dalle to generate various seal imprints. From all the outputs a few images were combined and processed in graphic software. Using a fine brush and an eraser, Baiwei made sure that lines realistically imitate marks of knife carving. The last step was ensuring the Collection Seal is correctly scaled, looking natural and balanced on the canvas. With this final touch and exporting file as .png, the collection "Memoirs of Bull" was ready for release.

Baiwei's original approach results from his diverse background in the fine arts and the tech industry, where he co-founded a VR startup, FXG. That's why a fusion of traditional Chinese painting and cutting-edge technology sits at the heart of his work. It's a dualistic confluence of old and new, bridging gaps between centuries-old artistic practices and the futuristic potential



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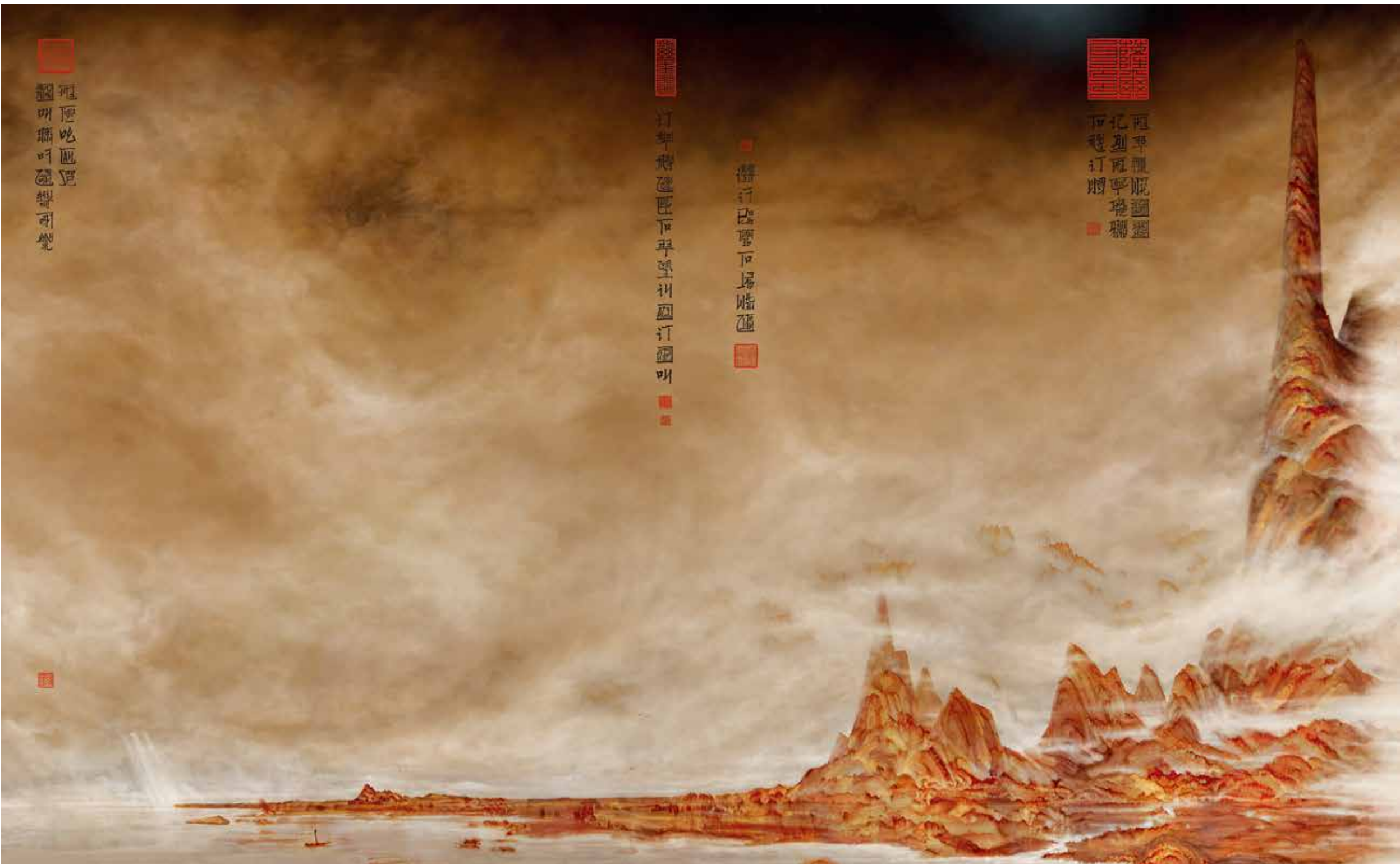
of the digital age.

His active engagement with technology affords him the ability to exploit the latest tools and innovations in service of his artistic vision. This dynamic relationship also fosters an environment of unexpected inspiration, encouraging the synthesis of ideas from disparate fields. The incorporation of artificial intelligence into his creative process marks the latest evolution in this exciting journey. Through “dialogues” with AI, Baiwei has unearthed new creative methodologies and spontaneous inspirations. The acceptance and trust he places in the AI's contributions form a crucial component of his artistic process.

Concurrently, Baiwei embraces the transformative power of blockchain technology, a vital player in the digital art scene. The blockchain's immutable and transparent nature allows his data landscapes to be permanently stored on-chain, maintaining an authenticated record of their creation and all subsequent transactions. The robust provenance provided by blockchain echoes the traditions of Asian art history, once again drawing a striking parallel between the old and new.

Another interesting example inspired by Chinese mountain and water painting is the “CHRoNCL:ASH” collection. It consists of 12 separate artworks representing 12 months of \$ASH cryptocurrency trending, seamlessly fitting together into a continuous morphing long scroll (*chang juan* 长卷). Functioning as a cryptoart chronicle stored on blockchain, this project immortalizes community voices inscribing them into English colophons, one on each painting. Moreover, future collectors are allowed to imprint a new signature and literary description. “CHRoNCL:ASH” blends a few different Chinese painting styles which symbolizes significant changes in that cryptocurrency's situation across one year.





Dialogues From Bitcoin Mountains

These cryptocurrency landscape's connection to tradition extends beyond the mere visual and aesthetical aspects. In a subtle, conceptually profound way, Baiwei links it to the values of the ancient literati culture. Beside intrinsic digital provenance, the plasticity of the blockchain's contract allows a variety of interesting "mechanics" to be applied to digital art. This creates seemingly endless opportunities for new forms of expression, art appreciation and engaged collecting. One of the technical possibilities with so called dynamic contracts is editing of its metadata, effectively the ability to update a digital artwork. Drawing inspiration from the antiquity, Baiwei enables the collector to imprint new signature seal and add calligraphic colophon onto the original artwork, the process repeated each time the artwork changes ownership. For those uninitiated in the classical arcana or lacking the required skills, the artist makes the writing and crates a custom signature chop. Such engaged art collecting not only revives ancient traditions, but also produces a meaningful chronicle surrounding rapidly changing market trends and community of people who came in the artwork's possession.

The synthesis of traditional art forms and modern technology, as exemplified by Baiwei's work, presents a fascinating frontier in the realm of creative expression. This convergence marks a significant evolution in the art world, setting the stage for limitless exploration and innovation.

Traditional Chinese landscape painting, steeped in history and symbolism, finds a dynamic platform in the fluid and ever-changing landscape of digital technology. This provides artists an opportunity to navigate and express the interplay between form, structure,

and narrative in unprecedented ways.

In this context, AI emerges as more than just a tool—it becomes a creative partner. The co-creation process fostered by AI allows for an exploration of new artistic methodologies and inspirations. This partnership does not seek to replace the human hand but to extend its capabilities and horizons, adding another layer of complexity and intrigue to the creative process.

Similarly, the advent of blockchain technology is revolutionizing the art world by providing new ways to authenticate, store, and transact digital art. More interestingly, it adds another dimension to the art piece itself. It becomes a dynamic canvas that can carry the narratives of its creators, owners, and even the market trends of the times, much like the ancient scrolls carrying the colophons and seals of literati painters and collectors. This strengthens the bond between the art, its creator, and its audience in a unique and engaging way.

The incorporation of cryptocurrency data into the very fabric of art brings a unique dynamism to the creative process. It serves as a metaphor for the fluctuating realities of the digital age, offering an innovative avenue for the interpretation and representation of value and change.

As we delve deeper into this exciting terrain, the fusion of the old and new, the East and West, the physical and digital, continues to spark dialogues, stir inspirations, and redefine art. The blending of tradition and technology does not merely signify the evolution of art; it stands as a testament to human creativity, resilience, and the ceaseless pursuit of self-expression.



Memoirs of Bull Seal

Wieslaw Borkowski / Baiwei (白尾) is a Polish artist reveling in creative dialogue of East and West, tradition and technology. Mastered in Sinology at Warsaw University and in Traditional Chinese Painting at China Academy of Art, was the first foreign student in Department's history to receive the Grand Prix for the best graduate artwork. In 2017 cofounded "FXG", a VR company with creative vision elevating the standard of art in tech industry.



*Giving a voice to the great masters of the past
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SINGLE WORLD VIEW,
WHEN IN FACT THERE ARE
MANY.
THE ONE THAT DOES NOT
SUPPORT DIVERSITY, BUT
TRANSLATES THEM.
ONE THAT DOES NOT MAKE
THEM PARTICIPATE IN THE
DEBATE WITH THEIR OWN
VOICES, BUT ACCEPTS
THEM ONLY AFTER A TRIAL
OF METAMORPHOSIS.
WE ARE AGAINST THE
IMPERIALISM OF TASTES
AND CUSTOMS, OF
JUDGMENT, OF MEANS OF
EXPRESSION, AND OF WHAT
TO EXPRESS,
A SITUATION WHICH
INEVITABLY LEADS TO A
CULTURAL FLATTENING.