

山水

SHANSHUI

Du Chunhui and the Imaginative Shan Shui hua

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Du Chunhui and the Imaginative

Shanshui Hua (Mountain and Water Painting)

By: Aurora Vivenzio

One of the distinctive potentials of *Shanshui hua* (landscape painting) is its ability to be both figurative and abstract simultaneously. In the works of Du Chunhui 杜春辉, another very important aspect emerges, that is, the imaginative potential inherent in traditional Chinese painting. However, in his brushstrokes, there is a new stylistic language carried, which shows us how the traditional Chinese concept of innovating tradition can be realized with another meaning. Although a strong abstract sense can be detected in his works, we can neither define his works as completely abstract paintings nor consider them entirely figurative. His process of staticizing the phenomenal landscape plays with forms and languages that are not entirely conventional. Through a few elements in the scene, which alternate between realistic painting and large areas of white space and colors, it visually evokes both the poetics of *Shanshui hua* and, at the same time, recaptures the way of color fusion at a certain distance used by the Impressionists. In fact, we can find elements of the traditional painting of the Northern Song Dynasty in his works. But at the same time, we seem to

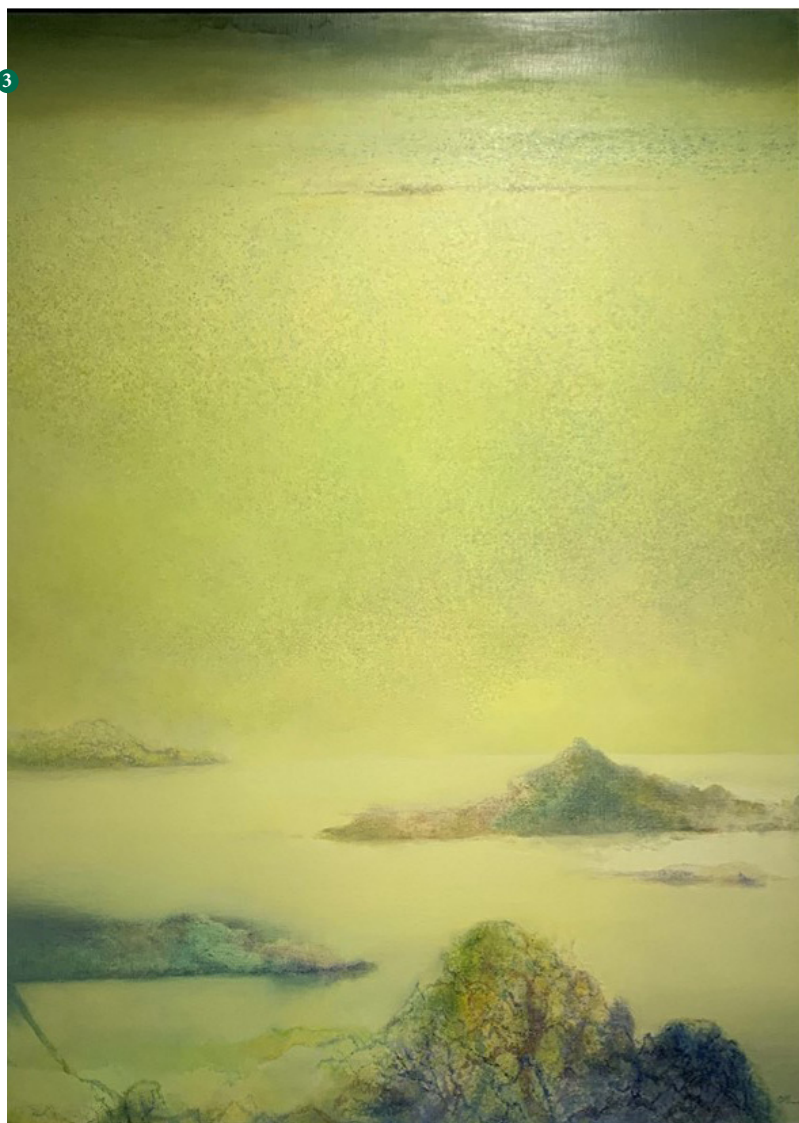
be immersed in a vast expanse of indefinite color, which takes shape and is molded according to different configurations and assumes meaning based on the distance and perception of the viewer. We can define his works as interactive ones because they touch different strings of perception, not only visual but, more importantly, tactile and auditory. In all his works, Chunhui does not focus on a phenomenal depiction of the landscape but rather elevates the concept of harmony with nature and the Dao to a higher level, as well as the act of synthesizing everything perceived or felt in that place. This synthesis is manifested through an inner, intuitive world that is not entirely personal but can communicate with everyone, placing great emphasis and attention on the texture of details rather than strictly adhering to visual reality. His poetic way of creation reflects the practice of traditional Chinese painters who were dedicated to capturing and reinterpreting the elements of the landscape that remained impressed in the painter's soul. Therefore, this is defined as an emotional quality rather than trying to represent the physical and visual forms of objects. Precisely for this rea-





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son, his painting is different from Impressionism. At the same time, it seems to almost touch on the lyrical abstraction of Kandinsky, although the colors in his works have physical and optical qualities that the brushstrokes of the painters of the Blue Reiter had not yet truly achieved.

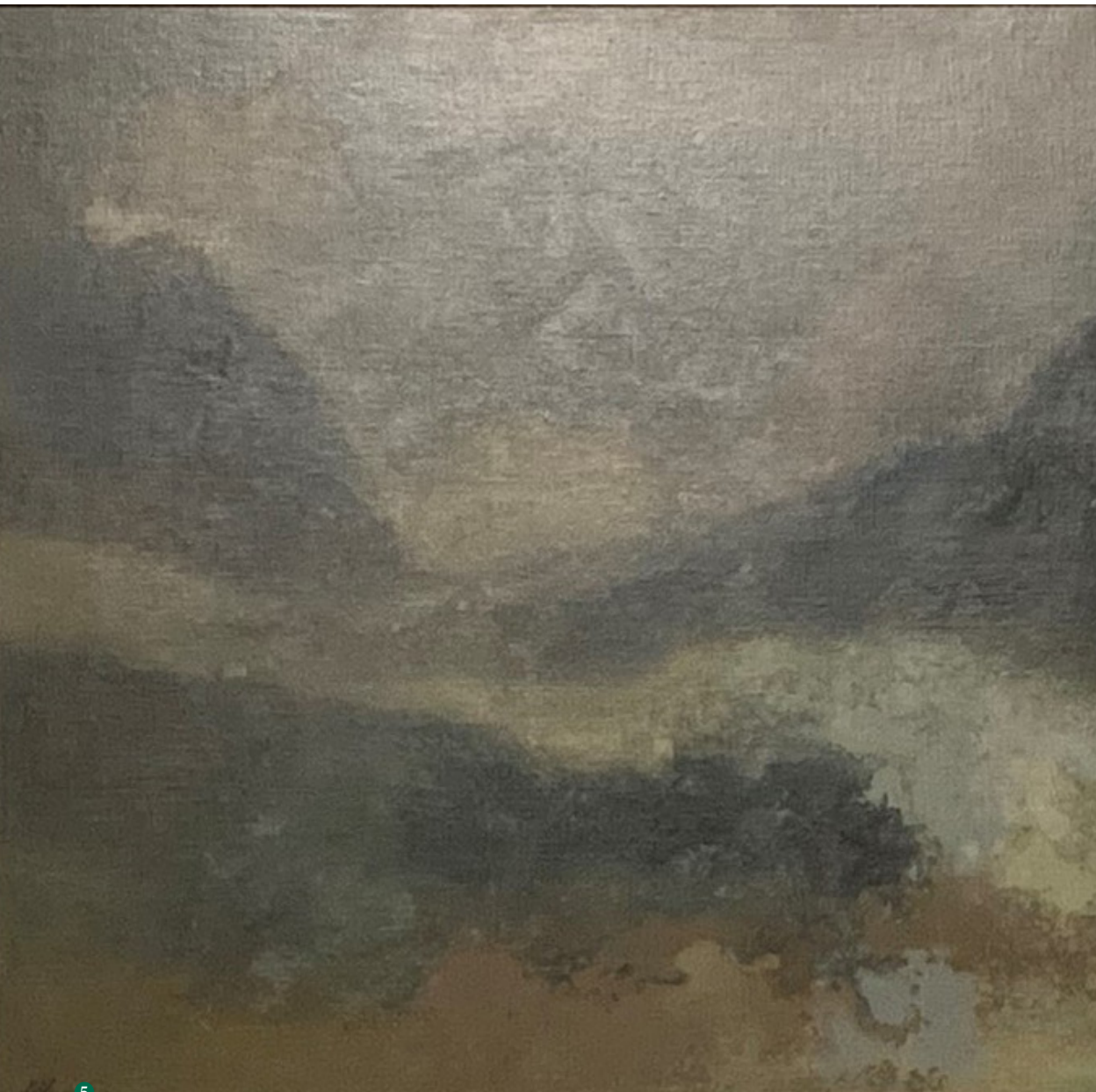
In the work *Jia Guang* 《嘉光》 (fig.3), Chunhui, unlike the Impressionist painters who emphasized visual sensations and captured the light imprinted on the retina, focuses on all the sensory stimuli coming from every part of his body. His

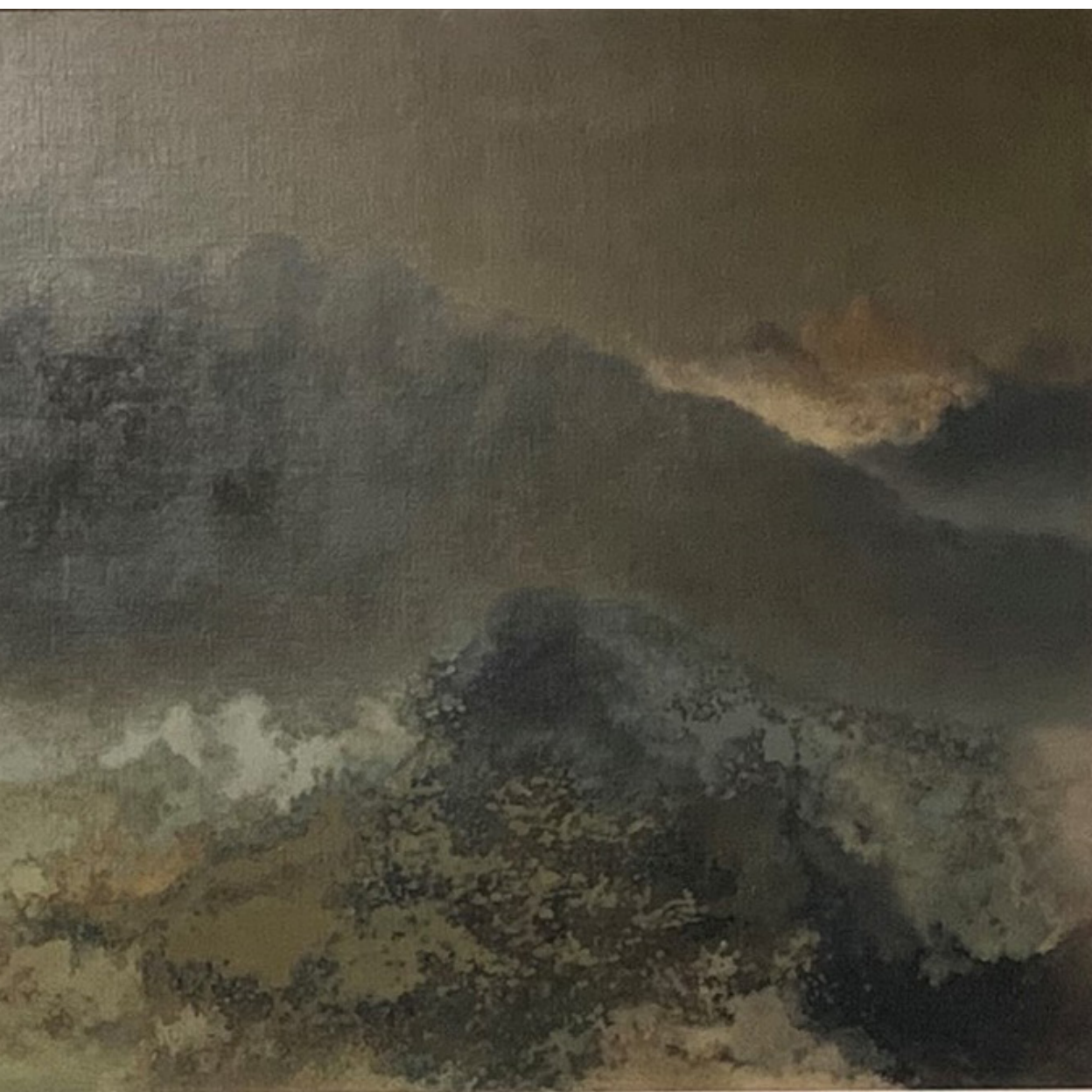
painting seems to have not only visual qualities but also auditory and tactile ones. This effect is accentuated by the format of his works, which often reach up to 4 meters in size. From the strong perspective impact and stage illusion effect, they completely immerse the viewer in his painterly vision, to the extent that these works seem to change according to different perspectives or changes in light, just like in the homonymous painting *Light* 《光》. Also, the choice of all his other work titles helps to evoke kinesthetic and atmospheric perceptions, such as in *After the Rain* 《雨后》, *Cool Summer* 《清凉夏日》 (fig.4), *Clouds and Smoke* 《云与烟》 (fig.2), and *Silent Winter* 《寂静冬日》 (fig.1). Again, in the painting *Light*, although it does not particularly depict a bright scene, it successfully fuses all the different perceptions that come from the emission of physical light at the same time. Through delicate and fluid brushstrokes, it gives shape and substance to material lines, creating that intangible sense of the atmosphere of the seasons. In *Spring* 《春天》, what is shown is not a specific scene at a certain moment or place but generally reflects the various feelings and the related visual symbolism that we culturally usually associate with when talking about a season. By drawing on Monet's way of working, the same landscape is reprocessed according to the topography of flora and fauna,

which evokes the passage of time, and its colors are often not only related to the category of warm or cold tones. This is why we almost feel as if we are in the works of the Northern Song Dynasty. And Du Chunhui revisits the themes that were often included in the works of painters of that time, such as Huang Quan(黄筌) and Gao Wenjin(高文进), Dong Yuan(董源) and Xu Chongsi(徐崇嗣), including scenes of travel, meetings with friends, philosophical contemplation, and mountain life. In his winter landscape depictions, he seems to be inspired by Li Cheng(李成) and Fan Kuan(范宽), who were specialized in representing winter forests, snowy landscapes, and also like Guo Xi(郭熙), he shows the variations in distance, depth, seasons, morning and evening, rain and shine.

The Travel Impressions 《散游系列二十八》 (fig.5) series gives emotional qualities to the objects or themes in an indefinite cloud of color. This is why his works touch us more deeply than those hyper-realistic paintings with exquisite details. In his works, those actual journeys, like travel notes, the foreign lands he has traversed take on two forms: they are both memories and, at the same time, a schematic representation of his emotions in those foreign lands. Each single frame of this journey seems to allude to certain fragments of Wang Ximeng's (王希孟) work *A Panorama of Rivers and Moun-*







tains(千里江山图), for example, in the aforementioned depiction of the seasons. Different from Wang Ximeng's works where the mountains emerge and disappear among the mist and the waters of the river, in his works, the composition develops from the center where trees and rocks appear clearly in contrast to the background, which gradually fades and merges into the mist and clouds. On the one hand, the vastness and distance of the river are emphasized. On the other hand, the viewer's gaze is projected outward, and through the limited landscape, more emotions are carried, showing a new aesthetic aspect of freshness and elegance in the landscape painting of the Song Dynasty. This effect is achieved by combining traditional oil painting techniques with those of the court painting of the Northern Song Dynasty and the literati painting.

When Richard Barnhart talked about Wang Shen's work *The Relief of the River of Mist and the Overlapping Mountains* (烟江叠嶂图) from the Song Dynasty, he found some features in Du Chunhui's works that Du seems to have transformed from a contemporary perspective. Regarding Wang Shen's work, Du Chunhui borrows the ability to depict

a place that seemingly appears ordinary, but in reality, when we approach or move away from this place, it seems to be constantly changing, undergoing a profound internal transformation, which is finally completed through the internal resonance it evokes in the viewer.

In addition, in each of his works, it seems that oneiric and dreamy landscape is presented to us, just like Dali's dreams, with the realistic and hazy char-



acteristics like the impressionist photos of Gerard Richter. It reminds people of the trees and vegetation in Perugia painted by Raphael Sanzio and Perugino. But at the same time, in its essence, it exudes the poetry of the Northern Song Dynasty, that is, the nostalgia for the hometown and the feeling of exile. These concepts are in strong contradiction with Du Chunhui's creation because he tries to show in his rich works a kind of analysis of details, al-

most similar to the approach of the painters of the Tang Dynasty, which was to clearly analyze, describe, and recombine the various elements of nature. Therefore, his works present a true synthesis of different periods and the feelings of different eras. And the theme of travel and the traversal of physical space as a space of memory remains the main thread that runs through centuries of painting and culture.

