

山水

SHANSHUI

**The Art of Hu Jiang: Profoundness and
Elegance – Hu Jiang's Chinese Landscape
Paintings**

Luo Yiping 罗一平

The Art of Hu Jiang 胡江: Essays and Appreciations

Profoundness and Elegance – Hu Jiang's Chinese Landscape Paintings

By; Luo Yiping 罗一平

Translated by; Giacomo Bruni

Hu Jiang 胡江 is an old friend of mine, who has achieved remarkable success in ceramic art, calligraphy, and public sculpture. Over the past decade, he has devoted himself to Mountain and Water painting. His works feature vast mountain peaks, surging clouds, rhythmically musical compositions, and the distinctive charm of the Lingnan School (岭南画派) – all of which never fail to impress me deeply.

Hu Jiang's landscape paintings absorb the artistic spirit of Lingnan School masters Guan Shanyue 关山月 and Li Xiongcai 黎雄才, who emphasized real-life experience and on-site sketching. Building on the elegant and fresh style of his teacher Chen Jinzhang 陈金章, he has also integrated the vigorous, profound brushwork of northern landscape masters such as Li Keran 李可染 and the solid, powerful manner of his teacher Li Baolin 李宝林. Gradually, he has developed his own distinctive style: elegant, refined, grand, and majestic.

"Southern grace and northern robustness" 南秀北厚 – a traditional distinction in Chinese Mountain and Water painting – has become increasingly blurred in contemporary art. To unify profound vigour, moist richness, restraint and quiet elegance in one style is a key aesthetic feature of Hu Jiang's landscapes.

Profound Vigour and Moist Richness: The Grandeur of Mountains

Hu Jiang's landscapes are traditional ink paintings infused with modern aesthetic awareness. Their composition and brush-and-ink techniques express a vast, expansive, magnificent and unified atmosphere. His works often appear in a grand, imposing manner, achieving an immediate, striking artistic effect.

He excels especially at painting clouds and water. The great mountains, expansive waters, and unforgettable lofty clouds in his works are the outward expression of his abstract artistic sensibility.

The essential elements in Hu Jiang's paintings are the same as those used by all landscape painters: mountains, rivers, trees, rocks and clouds. Yet his grandeur lies in the layered structure formed by surging mist and clouds, within which mountains, trees, rocks and earth appear either solid and distinct, or ethereal and illusory, or heavy and substantial.

At the same time, he places these elements within a rich Jiangnan 江南 ink atmosphere, and through the ink techniques of accumulating, splashing, texturing and dotting – alternating dry, wet, dark and light tones – he deliberately cultivates the bold spirit of northern painting. For this reason, the larger his works, the better: greater size better reveals their powerful momentum.

His representative work *Warm Spring in the Apricot Grove* 《杏林春暖》 is a monumental piece, 6 meters high and 13 meters wide, fully expressing the advancing rhythm of the mountains and the surging movement of the clouds.

Beyond grandeur, Hu Jiang's landscapes possess dynamic force. This momentum comes from the arrangement of the mountains, which follow the energetic movement of the "dragon vein" 龙脉 to emphasize their unfolding and surging power.

Hu Jiang is skilled in calligraphy, mastering both model calligraphy and stone inscriptions. Thus in his landscapes, he applies the grace of model-book calligraphy: the mountain composition unfolds like calligraphic brushwork, rich within simplicity, profound within elegance. He also employs the sculptural quality of stone inscriptions, blending in his own expertise in sculpture, pursuing a chiselled, carved brush manner that gives his mountains a wild, sculptural energy.

The grandeur and momentum in Hu Jiang's works are therefore closely linked to his early experience in sculpture.

A key reason for this achievement is the perfect harmony between his brush-and-ink language and the subjects he depicts. Rooted in tradition, his brushwork pursues the poetic vitality of Mountain and Water painting, especially evident in his changing ink tones.

In his works, thickness and moistness complement each other. When painting mountains, he uses dense ink blocks to contain outward-pointing brushstrokes, making his technique reserved and substantial. Within these ink blocks, lines run in various directions and styles, creating clear structure and distinct layers.

For rocks, mountains and trees, he applies repeated texturing, rubbing and washing to achieve a heavy, solid texture. For clouds and mist, he leaves no obvious brush traces, yet the spirit of the brush

Dragon Pool in Midsummer 《龙潭盛夏》 136x68 cm



Clear Waters and Green Hills: A Wealth Beyond Gold 《绿水青山就是金山银山》 180x97 cm



is present everywhere.

These techniques beautifully capture the lush, moist, bright and far-reaching character of Lingnan mountains. The great scale, grandeur and momentum of his works are permeated with a deep, wild mountain atmosphere, expressing both the grace and elegance of Lingnan peaks and their strangeness and force, revealing the artistic style of a southern artist painting in a northern manner.

Restraint and Quiet Elegance: Mountains in the Gesture of Clouds, Clouds in the Gesture of Mountains

Restraint and quiet elegance are another defining feature of Hu Jiang's landscapes. This quality is expressed through clouds generating momentum, so that in his works: mountains take the gesture of clouds, and clouds take the gesture of mountains.

Clouds play an essential role in forming the character of the mountains. Mountains alone are not enough; their height and greatness are enhanced by the embrace of clouds. When clouds envelop the mountains, they become illusory and ethereal, highlighting a wonderful sense of height and distance.

Hu Jiang's clouds drift naturally among layered peaks according to his aesthetic intention: sometimes simple and clear, sometimes dense and overlapping, sometimes surging like waves, sometimes flowing like a silent undercurrent.

In his painting, mountains give spirit to clouds and water; clouds give vitality to mountains. His works are filled with restrained elegance and a rich musical rhythm. These clouds not only shape the direction and momentum of the mountains, but also create a pure grace that cleanses the work of worldly vulgarity, guiding the viewer into a realm of swirling clouds and seas of mist – the transcendent world of Laozi and Zhuangzi.

Hu Jiang excels at using water to dye clouds. The fusion of ink and water on Xuan paper produces endlessly varied textures and ink effects. He paints clouds and mist with unrestrained mastery of water, uniting mountains, water, clouds and rocks in a living, moist movement, especially in his semi-abstract depictions of “cloud seas” 云涛云海.

Looking closely at the clouds and waters in his landscapes, one easily senses the artist's direct dialogue with nature. Especially in large-scale works, the organic unity of mountains, clouds, water, trees and forms is both imposing and vibrant, demonstrating his superb command of brush and ink. Without such skill, his works could not be so animated, lively and expressive.

Hu Jiang works earnestly and sincerely with tradition, absorbing nourishment from calligraphy and

classical painting, understanding structure, volume and rhythm through sculpture, and grasping the breath of nature through sketching, infusing his mountains with philosophical reflections on life.

Through his rendering of mountains and clouds, he creates a striking contrast between the firm resonance of mountains and the surging movement of clouds: one still, one moving; one firm, one gentle.

His landscape world evokes the Song painting ideal of scenery worth observing, travelling, wandering and inhabiting 可观、可行、可游、可居. As I enter his composition, wandering and observing step by step, I am unconsciously cleansed of worldly dust by the pure air among the peaks, entering a state of clarity and tranquillity. When I step back into the secular world, my heart remains peaceful and quiet.

Thus, the solid, heavy mountains in his works embody Confucian culture; the surging clouds express the transcendence of Daoist philosophy. Their organic integration is what makes his art so deeply moving.

I have noticed that in Hu Jiang's cloud-shrouded mountains, he rarely paints houses or human figures, nor even traces of human presence. Instead, he invites the viewer into a primal natural environment, where streams, peaks and morning dew convey a genuine sense of transcendence beyond the ordinary. This is the essence of his restraint and quiet elegance.

Poetic Vitality: Transforming Substance into Spirituality

The artistic realm of Hu Jiang's landscapes is full of profound vigour, moist richness, restraint, grace, dynamism, stillness, firmness, softness and poetic vitality.

These qualities derive both from his objective observation of nature during sketching, and from his research into traditional landscape principles such as “dragon vein”, “vital energy” 生气 and “opening and closing” 开合. This allows him to re-create and re-arrange the countless landscapes stored in his mind.

His art is not mechanical realism, but the creation of typical, beautiful imagery. His landscapes are therefore never garden-like, but primal, natural mountains, imbued with authentic natural charm.

His works allow us to surrender our spirit to nature's mountains and rivers. Amid the peaks and clouds, we feel the flowing poetry of the mountain air, as if hearing birds singing and apes calling. The layered mountains, shadowed trees and faintly flowing rivers recall the calligrapher's brush: light and heavy, fast and slow, strong and weak, abrupt and sustained. We perceive the rhythmic beauty of mu-

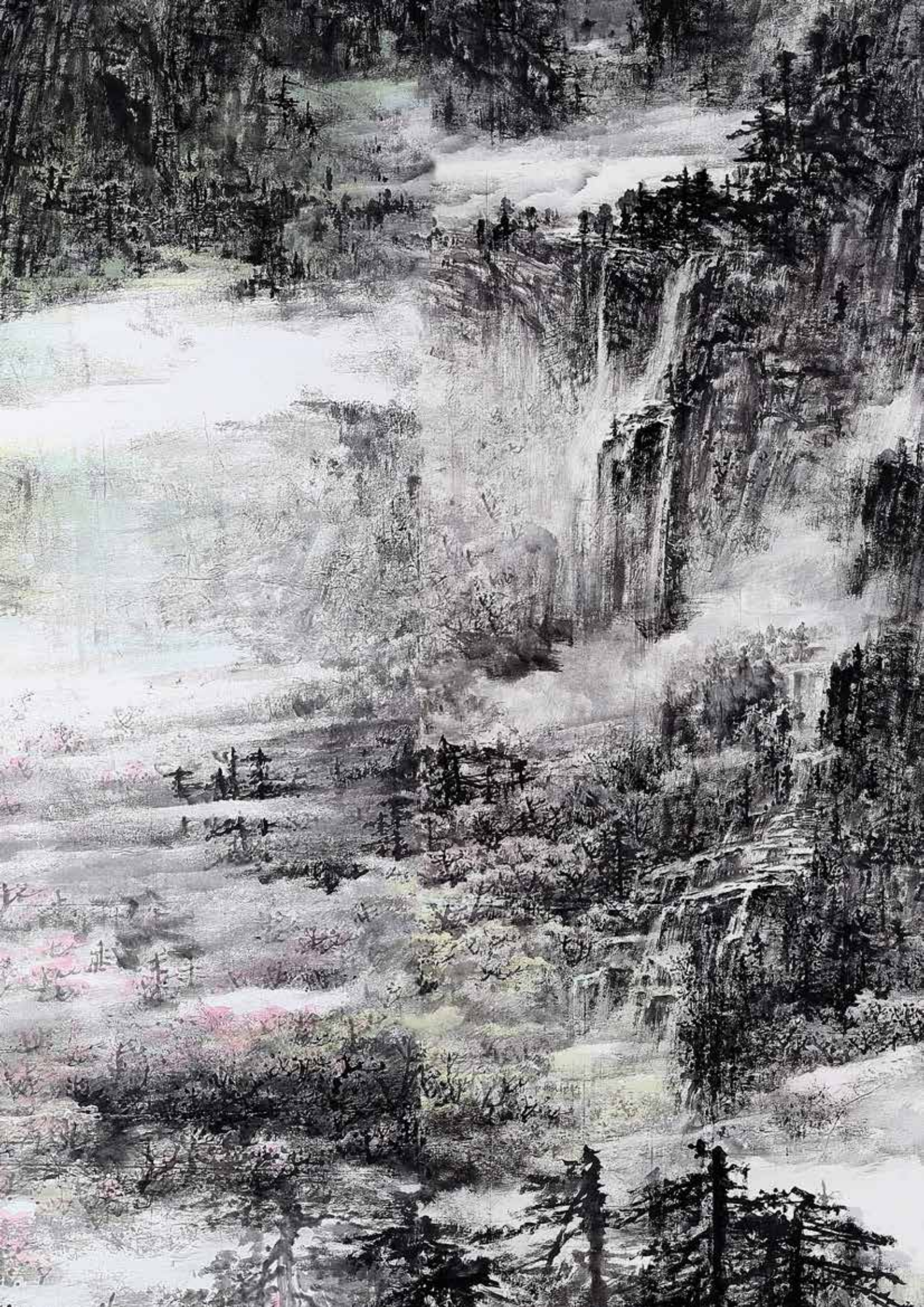


Warm Spring in the Apricot Grove 《杏林春暖》 600x1300 cm

(The following pages display sections of the painting)















sic and the linear grace of dance, brimming with abundant life force.

Hu Jiang's landscapes show continuous, lush mountains; shimmering water; steaming clouds and glowing mist; and fresh green breeze. Beyond momentum and charm, above all they possess mountain emotion.

His mountains are a living whole; his clouds are alive; his trees are alive. Every element is a vivid individual. Under his aesthetic vision, these distinct beings are reborn as affectionate, living forms that speak to us of poetry and feeling, which then become the poetry and feeling in our own hearts.

In this mutual resonance, we slip into a state where self and object dissolve. The landscape in the painting becomes the landscape of our emotions, stirring the vibrant energy within us. In dialogue with his mountain forms, my emotions merge with his clouds, his brush and his ink, forming a unique aesthetic image, a shared aesthetic feeling, and a recurring rhythm of life.

Golden Mountain, Auspicious Clouds 《金山祥雲》 68x68 cm





金山祥雲
壬寅年
江

