

山水

SHANSHUI

**A Fantasy of Mount Bo: Ma Jun
paintings**

Fu Xiaodong

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



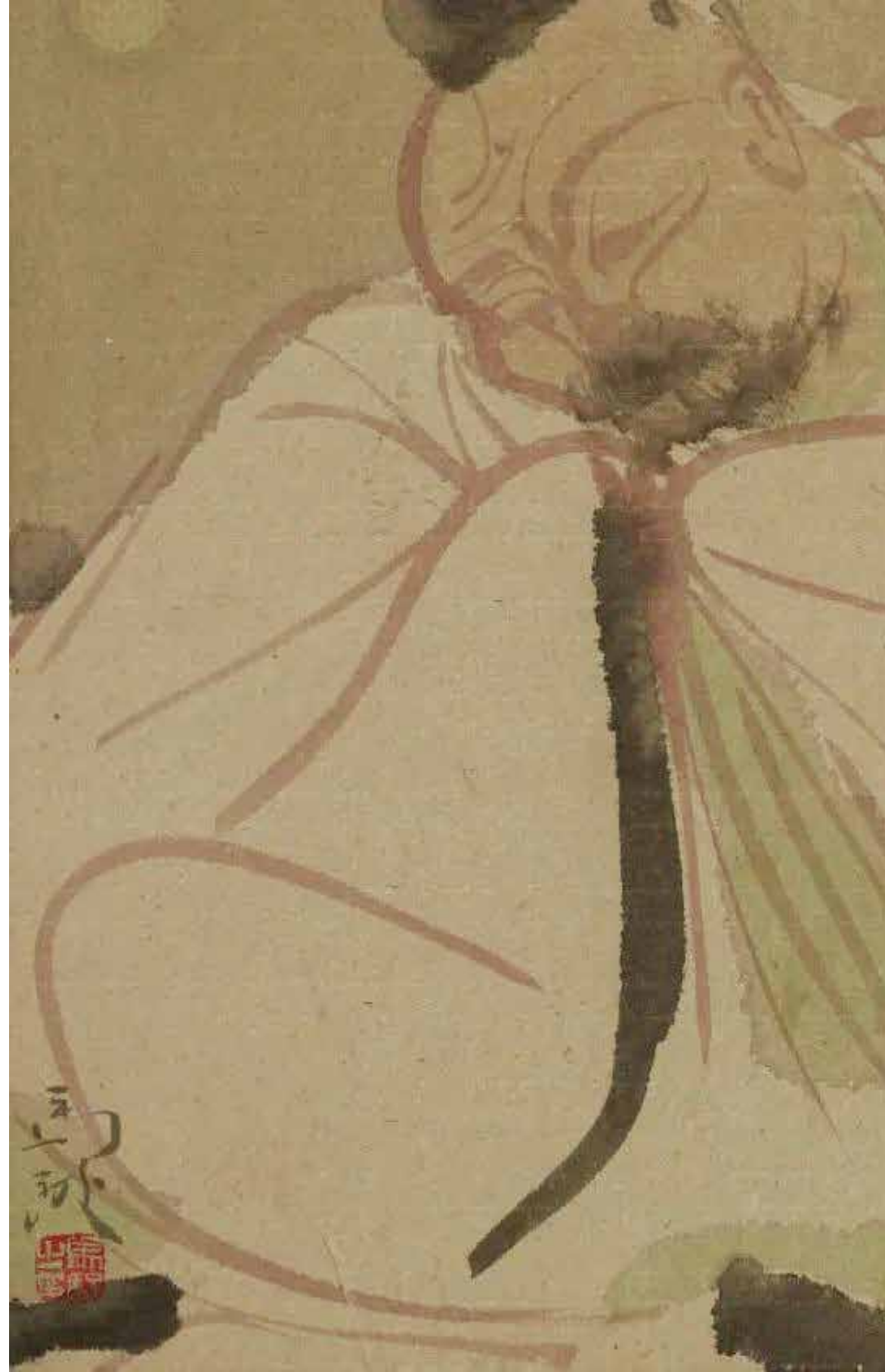
ness, without a unclear stroke impeding the fresh and lucid spirit, without a stroke of doubt, nor can a single stroke be removed from the system. The overlap of lines and ink is used to seize and cut between the various elements, and also to bloom and expand within the whole mixed unity. The abstract, 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





《纨素》 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-



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

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.

*The form without the spirit is a
dead form*

Jing Hao



