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# **In the Footsteps of Literati with a Digital Brush**

Wiesław Borkowski

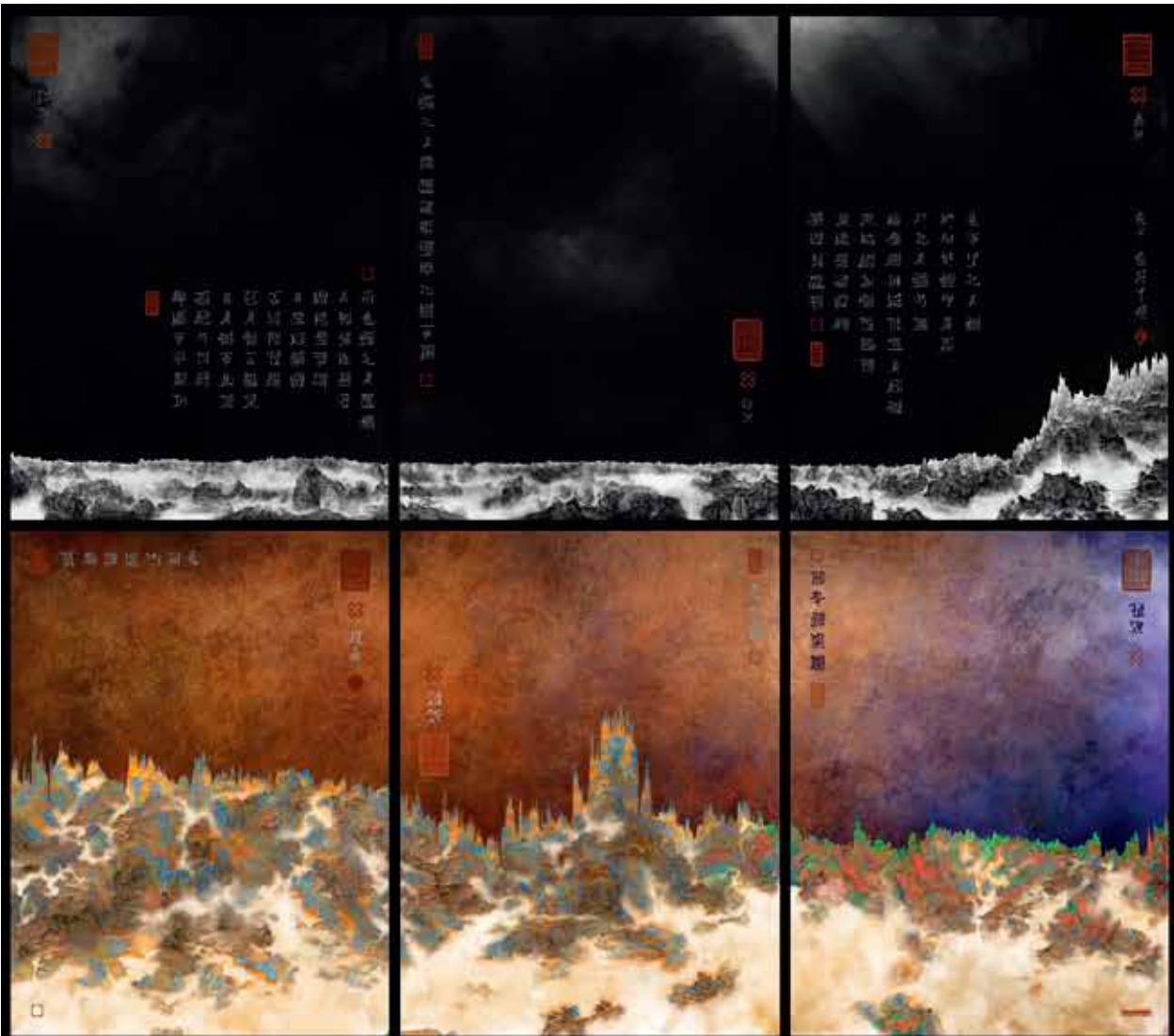


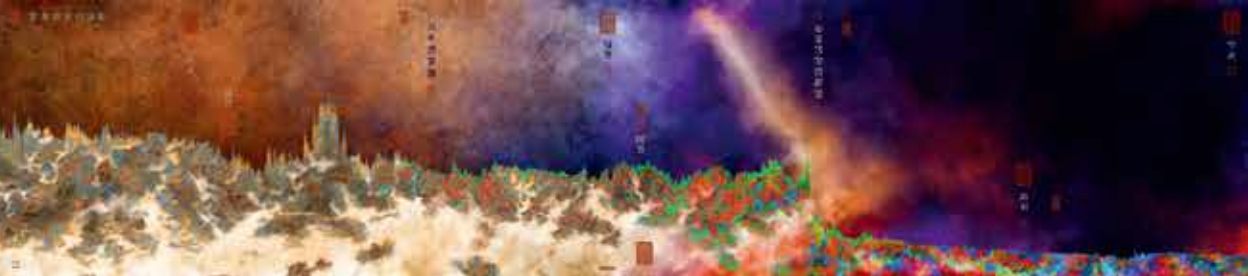
# In the Footsteps of Literati with a Digital Brush

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,



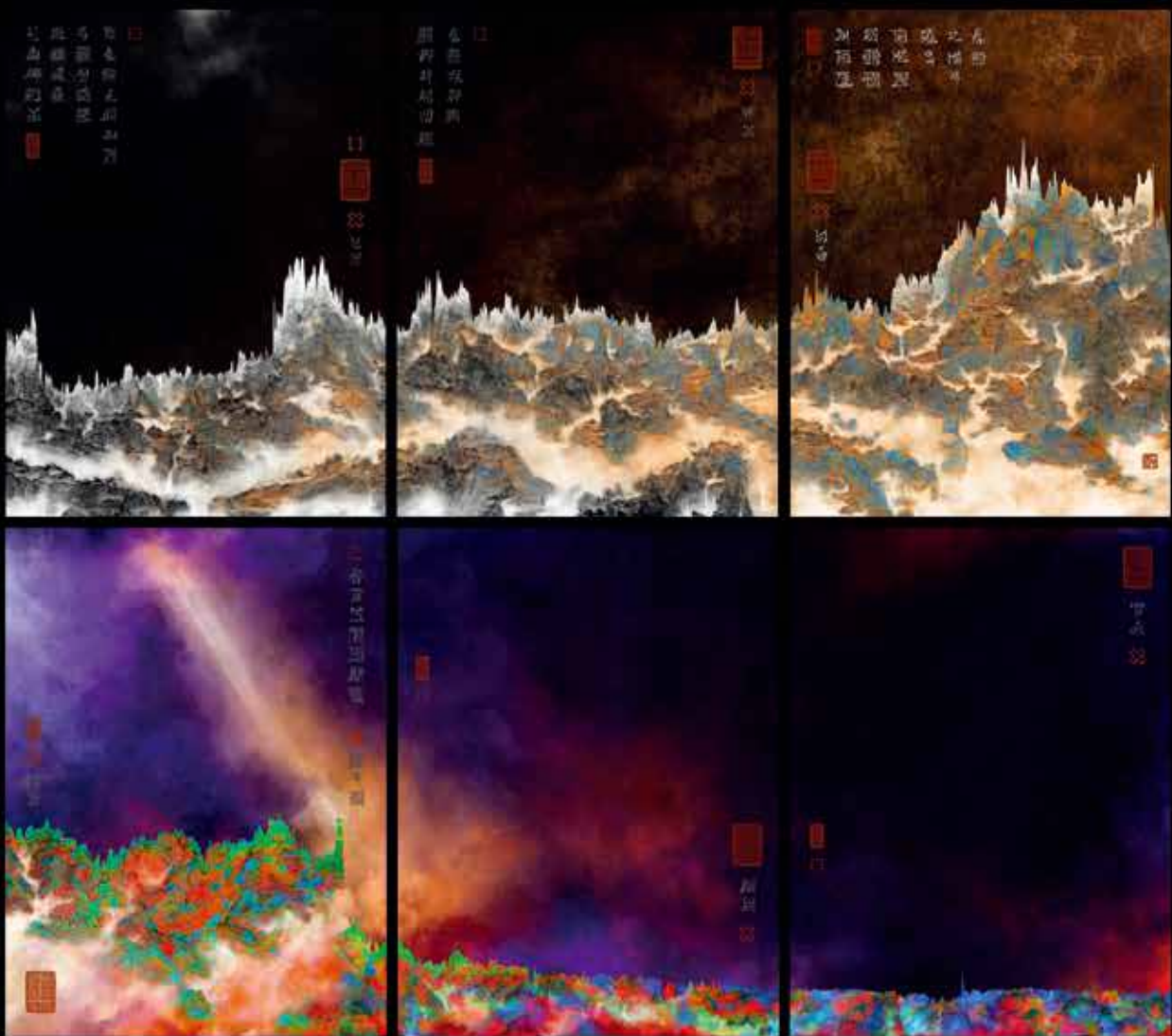


tools and materials. With each piece, Baiwei invites us into a conversation - a dialogue between the old and new, East and West, human and AI, that underpins his artistic vision.

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





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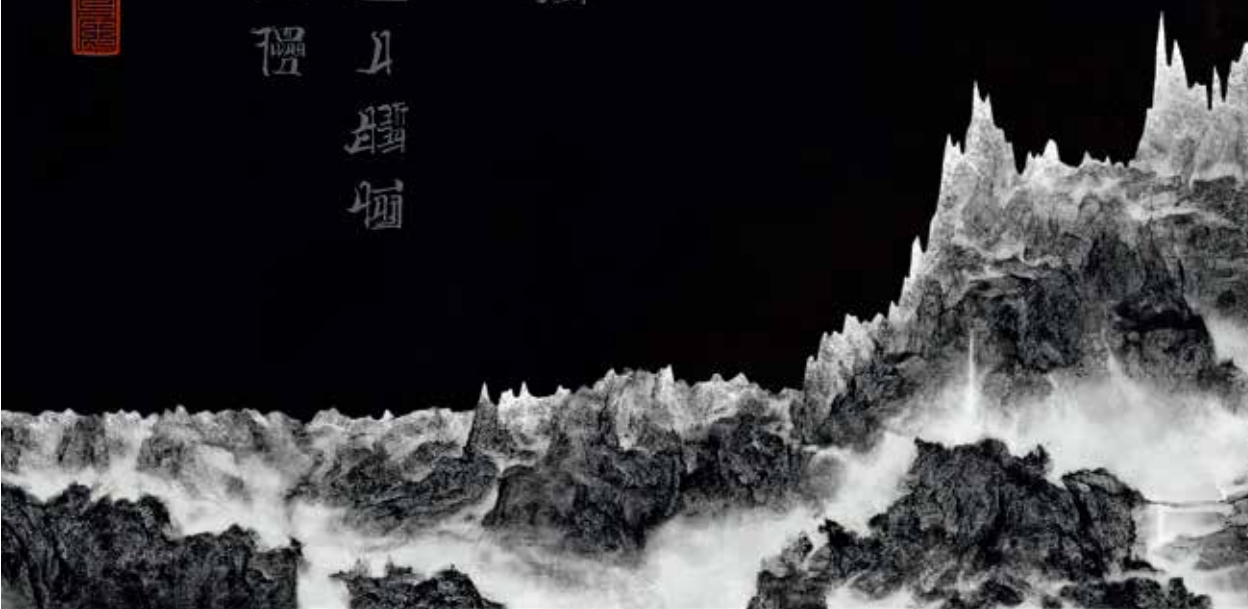
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ways. Baiwei recounts a memorable instance when a trending pattern of a cryptocurrency \$ASH mimicked exactly a symbol related to a famous project based on it. Upon noticing this curious coincidence, the artist swiftly created an artwork featuring 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.

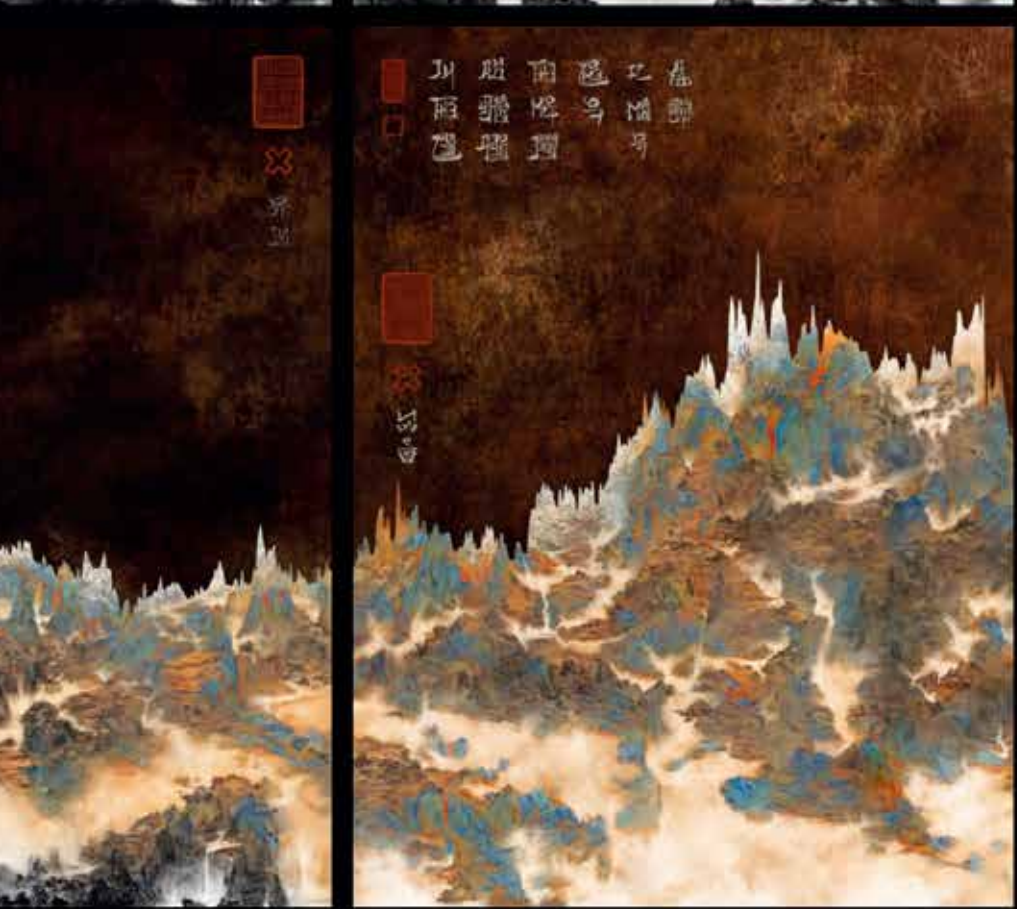
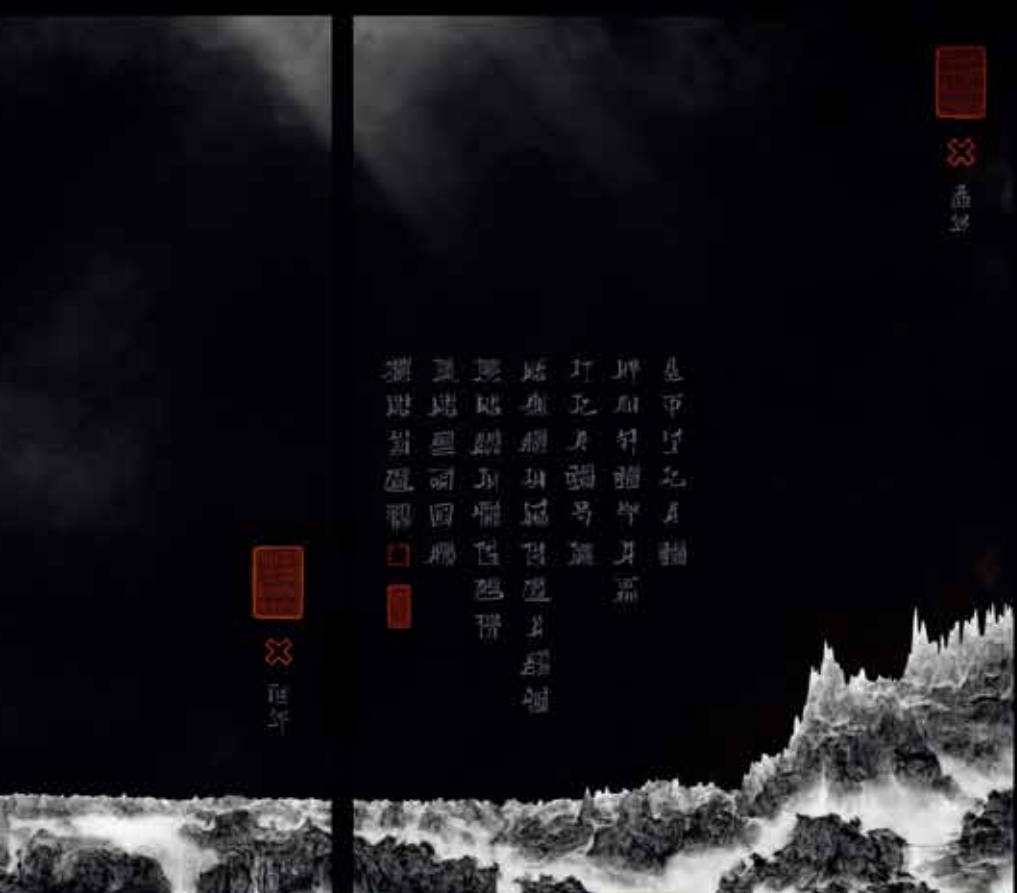
The idea for "Memoirs of Bull" emerged from Baiwei's exploration of the cryptoart terrain and the nostalgia for the prosperous bull market of 2021. Although experienced with data-based projects, the artist hasn't yet tried the newest tools recently developed in AI domain. Exploring a new potential of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

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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-

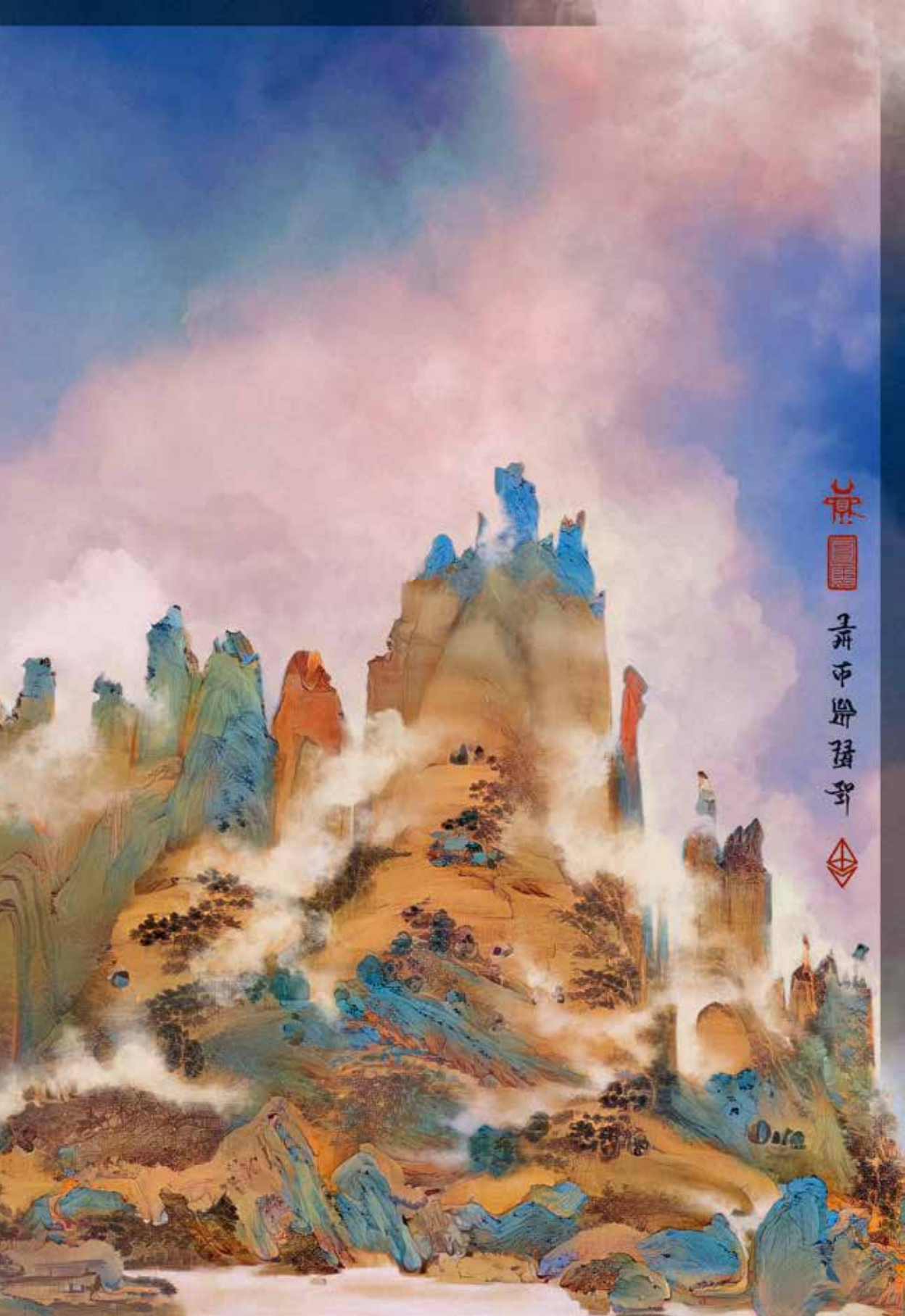
ty's Qiu Ying (仇英) mountain and water paintings.

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.





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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.