The background of the entire page is a traditional Chinese ink wash painting. It depicts a dense, layered landscape with mountains, trees, and architectural elements. A prominent feature is a large, stylized red dragon-like form on the left side, which appears to be a calligraphic or symbolic element. The overall style is expressive and dynamic, characteristic of traditional Chinese ink art.

墨

THE INK
ART OF
CHINA

*The Ink Art
of China*

水墨中國

M I C H A E L
GOEDHUIS

The Ink Art of China

CHINESE INK ARTISTS are profoundly relevant to contemporary Chinese society but until recently have been largely neglected by curators and critics alike, with prices therefore also undervalued.

They are important as representing the link between China's great past and the galloping pace towards her future. Their work incorporates a deep understanding of classical Chinese culture, which they believe to be essential in their quest to create a new pictorial language that expresses the fundamentals of today's world. It is therefore probable that the new generation of collectors in China and the diaspora will look at this area of the art-market as the most significant contemporary manifestation of Chinese civilization.

China is the oldest surviving civilization on earth and Chinese contemporary ink works, from calligraphy and painting to photography and video, express the continuation of this vast past in ways which are meaningful for society today, both in China and the West.

CALLIGRAPHY is the sublime and central achievement of China but it has been almost impossible until recently for westerners to grasp the significance of calligraphy for the Chinese. It has been the foundation-stone of their society since the dawn of civilization. As Simon Leys has written 'it is the most elite of all arts . . . practiced by emperors, aesthetes, monks and poets' throughout history but also ostentatiously alive today in advertisements, cinema posters, restaurants, teahouses, railway stations, temples and on rough peasant village doors and walls.

The original purpose of Chinese script, which goes back c. 3,700 years and appears on tortoise shells and shoulder-blades of oxen, was to forecast all major decisions of state: harvest and hunting, war and peace. Gradually, however, from the latter part of the Han period (3rd century AD), its original purpose was eclipsed by a growing interest in its aesthetic character and in its role as a conduit for the calligrapher's individual creativity. And from then on it became the most important of all the arts, with painting as its intimate but subservient partner.

Calligraphy is executed in ink on silk or paper, with a brush. In order to master this brush on the absorbent paper, which tolerates no error or correction, the artist has to

achieve a high degree of concentration, balance and control. It is these qualities, allied to intuition and intelligence, that make this art, like the other three major arts of China, painting, poetry and music (of the *Qin* or zither) one of interpretation. In this respect the calligrapher can be compared to the pianist who interprets the composer but whose every touch, like every brush-stroke by a great calligrapher, becomes an extension of the interpreter's mind.

Although calligraphy became the pre-eminent and elite art of China, with its masters, critics, connoisseurs and collectors, it has also been practiced for hundreds of years by literally millions of Chinese for whom it is a method for achieving the harmonious integration of mind and body, the key to supreme enlightenment.

But as its high status evolved, it was its indissoluble association with the scholar-gentleman and his mastery of the art that established it as manifesting the core concept of Chinese civilization - harmony - whether it pertains to the structure of society or to the individual's alignment with the universal rhythms of the universe. And so it became the purpose of civilized man, of the gentleman, to become part of the dynamic rhythm of creation and to contribute to the coherent ordering of society. So this elite of scholars became perhaps the most cultivated elite the world has known... intent on practicing the arts of calligraphy, painting, poetry and music in order to realize their own humanity by cultivating and developing the inner life. The rich intellectual and spiritual life of these literati has been captured in many enchanting paintings depicting their gatherings in shaded garden pavilions, drinking wine, composing poetry, practicing and enjoying calligraphy and painting, as well as refining the art of convivial conversation.

PAINTING, together with calligraphy, poetry and music, constitutes one of the four key traditional arts of China and is an extension of the art of calligraphy. It is therefore, like calligraphy, linked to the sacred prestige of the written word. One's first encounter with a Chinese painting will immediately betray its literary nature. Unlike a western painting that hangs on a wall, the Chinese work is mounted in the form of a scroll, which by its nature is related to the world of books. It belongs to the realm of the written word.

A further distinction that has made it difficult for western art lovers to fully appreciate Chinese painting is that the Chinese are simply not interested in transcribing or depicting reality. His objective is rather to 'write the meaning of things'... to express the idea. Thus the role of the painting is to incorporate the minimum visual codes or clues to inspire its full and invisible fruition in the viewer's imagination.

Again, the Chinese aesthetic is very different to that of the West. The prime purpose for the scholar is the cultivation of an inner life, the ultimate aim of which is to perfect one's character in order to attain the moral stature befitting one's status as a gentleman. Thus

the notion of beauty as such is irrelevant, indeed is often considered to be a superficial distraction from the purpose of nourishing the energy of the gentleman in capturing the spirit or essence of nature. In fact the ultimate 'beauty' of a work does not depend on its beauty. It is the result of its inner 'truth' and it is this moral concept that is at the heart of all Chinese aesthetics.

It is important to understand that art for the Chinese is part and parcel of their concept of morality and of how to live one's life and how to order society. And it is the written word (the word in ink) that is the binding agent constituting the continuity of the revered civilization and essential for understanding Chinese society, past and present.

The successors of the GENTLEMAN-SCHOLARS described above are today's ink artists. They are deeply aware of the classical canon and its aesthetic and moral imperatives and have carefully studied the old masters. However, just as Picasso and Cézanne studied Raphael, Poussin, Velázquez and others in order to create their revolutionary pictorial language, so the new literati are doing the same in order to formulate their own revolution for their work to be relevant to, and meaningful for, the world of today. And revolutionary and culturally subversive it is. More subtle than the contemporary oil painters with their abrasive handling of overtly political themes, the ink painters embody their revolutionary message in works that are not afraid to take account of the past in order to make sense of the present.

Very many different stylistic approaches have therefore evolved over the past 30 years. Works now range from those that at first sight look quite traditional but in fact embody powerful fresh aesthetic initiatives by artists like Liu Dan, Li Xubai, Li Huayi, Yang Yanping and Wang Dongling, via those poised delicately in an intermediate style, such as Lo Ch'ing, Qiu Deshu, Liu Qinghe and Li Jin to those that are unambiguously avant-garde seen in the works of Yang Jiechang, Qiu Anxiong, Qiu Zhijie, Gu Wenda, Wei Ligang and others. But all of the best contemporary practitioners have a common purpose... to create works that do not jettison the great cultural legacy of the past in formulating a language that addresses the intellectual cultural and social issues of today.

It is our view therefore that these few (only 50 or so of international stature) artists are poised to assume a historic relevance as the cultural conduit between China's great past and her future. And as such they are likely to shortly become the target of the new generation of collectors and museums in China and the diaspora who, in their new-found national pride and following the global fashion that only contemporary is cool, will be hungry for contemporary manifestations of their country's enduring civilization.

麥克 格豪士

水墨藝術

中國水墨藝術

中國水墨藝術家在當代中國社會裡地位舉足輕重，然時至今日，他們的成就仍未受到藝術策展人與評論家的充分重視，市場價格也因此偏低。

水墨藝術家之所以重要，是因為他們銜接了中國輝煌的過去與猛進的未來。他們的作品鑄了對古典中國文化的深刻涵養，並確知必須如此，才能創造出深切表現當代核心議題的全新繪畫語言。因此，新世代中國本土與海外收藏家們應將水墨畫壇，視為中華文明最重要的當代藝術表現。

中國是綿延至今最古老的文明，中國當代水墨創作，無論透過書法或繪畫，攝影或錄像形式，均試圖以當今中國與西方社會能夠領會的方式，呈現其與悠久中國文化之間的血脈關係。

書法是中國文化的結晶，地位最為崇高，直至晚近，西方人仍無法掌握書法對中國人的深刻意義。自文明肇造之時，書法便為中國社會的基石。正如李克曼 (Simon Leys) 所言，「此乃百藝之精...歷代君王、士族、僧侶與詩人，無不勤習，」直至今日，書法仍奔騰活躍於廣告、電影海報、餐廳、茶館、鐵路車站、寺廟，甚至鄉野農家的門牆之上。

漢字最早出現於三千七百多年前的龜殼與牛肩胛骨上，用來占卜各項國家大事：從收割到狩獵、戰爭到和平。但從東漢（西元三世紀）開始，在實用之外，中國文字的美感，開始受到重視，成了書法家抒發個人創意的渠道。從此，書法成為百藝之首，而繪畫則為其近親附庸。

書法藝術是以筆濡墨，書於紙絹之上。想要在吸水性高的紙上隨心所欲、毫無差池地揮毫，書家必須練就高度的專注力、平衡感與控制力。除了這三項特質之外，還需要其發揮個人獨特的直覺與正覺，正因如此，書道和詩藝、畫藝與樂道（「琴」，亦即古箏）這三大中國藝術完全相通，都可說是一門詮釋的藝術。我們可以說，書法家就像鋼琴家一樣，後者詮釋作曲家創作的樂譜，但他的指法，正如優秀書法家的筆法，都延伸自詮釋者的慧心領會。

儘管書法因歷代書法大師、書論家、鑑賞家和收藏家的推崇而成為中國主要的精英藝術，但千百年來，也一直是千萬中國平民習以為常的普遍技藝，因為大家始終相信書法可以修身養性，啟發性靈。

然而，書法與文人學者間，始終有著密不可分的關係，而他們傑出的書藝成就，讓書法得以體現中國文化的核心價值...和諧...包括社會結構，或人與天地韻律之間的和諧關係。也因此，文人、士子的終極目標是能參與動態的創作環境，並協助推動整體社會秩序。這樣一位精英學者的形象可能超越其他文化

裡的文明之士...中國的文士專注地磨練書法、繪畫、詩詞與音律藝術，修煉內在涵養以展現獨特人品。在許多優美的中國畫當中，常可見到文人相聚於林蔭小亭中，飲酒賦詩，揮毫作畫，同時磨練言談機鋒，由此可窺知這些文人豐富的知識與精神面貌。

詩、書、畫、樂並稱中國四大傳統藝術，畫乃書之餘。書畫同樣脈生於神聖的文字傳統。初識中國畫者，定會立即察覺畫中的文學特質。和掛在牆上的西方繪畫不同，中國畫裝裱在捲軸上，本質與書籍相似。脫離不了文書的範疇。

西方藝術愛好者無法充分欣賞中國繪畫之美的另一層原因在於，中國人不愛記錄或描摹現實。他們是以「寫意」...來表達思想。因此，繪畫的功能是匯集最簡約的視覺記號或線索，來啟發觀看者廣袤無形的想像世界。

除此之外，中國美學與西方美學甚為迥異。中國學者的主要任務是陶冶性靈，其終極目標是克己修身，達到符合君子之名的道德高度。因此，審美與否，當屬次要，他們甚至認為對美的虛浮追求，會使文人士子分心，妨礙他們追求自然的精神或真諦。事實上，真正的創作之「美」不在外表。而是其內在「真理」的展現，這也是深植於所有中國美學之中的基本道德觀。

因此，我們應該體認到，對中國人而言，藝術無法與道德或立身處世之道相互切割。而文字（筆墨）正是傳續悠久中華文明、了解中國古今社會的關鍵要素。

當代水墨藝術家繼承了上述文人學者的精神。他們不僅深諳經典古籍與其美學、道德原則，更精心鑽研古代大師創作。然而，就像畢卡索和塞尚要研究拉斐爾、普桑、委拉斯奎茲等大師作品，以便開創自己革命性的繪畫語言，新一代的文人也以相同方式來形塑自己的藝術革命，企圖與當今世界對話、展露自身意義。這無疑充滿革命與文化層面的顛覆力量。與常用直率手法表達政治思想的當代油畫家相比，當代水墨畫家表達革命思想的方式更加微妙，因為他們不畏師古以開今。

正因如此，過去三十多年來湧現如此多元豐富的水墨繪畫風格。包括從作品乍看承襲傳統技法、其實隱含強大美學新活力的創作者如劉丹、李虛白、李華弋、楊燕屏、王冬齡，到悠遊於傳統與現代之間的創作者如羅青、仇德樹、劉慶和、李津，到絕對前衛的楊詰蒼、徐黯雄、邱志杰、谷文達、魏立剛等。但是所有傑出的當代藝術創作者都懷抱一個共同目標...就是在不揚棄珍貴文化傳統的前提下，創造出足以回應現代知識、文化與社會議題的新藝術語彙。

有鑑於此，我們認為這批為數不多的（達到國際高度者僅五十位左右）水墨藝術家已經蓄勢待發，他們將承擔起貫通中國珍貴傳統與未來文化的重要角色，發揮歷史影響力。如此一來，他們很可能迅速成為新世代中國與海外收藏家及博物館的收藏目標，這些重新找到對中國文化的自信，並依循全球潮流，相信只有當代藝術才是王道的收藏家，絕對不應忽略這些凝聚其本國永恆文明精髓的當代藝術結晶。

WEI LIGANG

b. 1964, Datong, Shanxi

魏
立
刚

Wei Ligang has been at the forefront of contemporary ink painting's development from its beginning, and he was one of the organizers of the June 1999 'Bashu Parade' exhibition. Wei studied mathematics at the Nankai University in Tianjin and he became the president of the calligraphy society at the university. After graduating in 1985, Wei was assigned to teach mathematics at the Teachers' Training School in the industrial city of Taiyuan, but he succeeded in persuading the school to allow him to teach calligraphy in 1988. His training in mathematics has contributed to his abstract form of calligraphy. Wei Ligang constantly deconstructs and re-forms the characters in his paintings while hinting at traditional script-forms (such as formal, running, or 'grass' script), thus declaring his deep roots in Chinese culture. His works were included in the pioneering exhibition organized by Gordon Barrass at the British Museum in 2002.



Bell Chanting Covering the Shu Pavilion, 2015

Ink and acrylic on paper
96 × 90 cm (38 × 35½ in)

GU WENDA

b. 1955, Shanghai

谷
文
达

Gu Wenda moved to New York in 1987, and has become one of the highest-profile members of the Chinese diaspora. Although studying traditional Chinese painting, Gu became one of the leading figures in the New Wave art movement of the mid-1980s, when he utilized the technical skills he acquired in school for his iconoclastic painting and calligraphy projects. *Calligraphy 1* (1985) exemplifies Gu's revolt against the tyranny of the traditional aesthetics of brush and ink (*bimo*) by subverting it. The unconventional composition of the painting has created a spiritual and surreal world, which reflects the mentality of the Chinese society and idealist art of the 1980s, when huge social changes took place. By combining different character components, Gu has invented unreadable characters to investigate the power of the written word. In most of these works, he places these powerfully symbolic pseudo-characters in vast surreal spaces.



Calligraphy 1, 1985

Ink on paper

82.6 × 76.2 cm (32½ × 30 in)

QIU DESHU

b. 1948, Shanghai

仇
德
树

Qiu Deshu, one of the few Chinese artists to have received international recognition since the 1980s, studied traditional ink painting and seal carving when he was a child. However, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution interrupted his career in art, and he was sent to work at a plastics factory. In the late 1970s, Qiu picked up ink painting again and co-founded the Grass Painting Society (*Caocao huashe*), one of China's first experimental art groups of the post-Mao period. In the early 1980s, he developed his signature style of works called 'fissuring' (*liebian*). This is a metaphor for the artist's life and artistic career, both of which have experienced dramatic disruptions and setbacks. In these works, he applies vivid colours to *xuan* paper, which he tears up; Qiu mounts the fragments to a base layer, often leaving space between, to create a pictorial field with the 'cracks' that he feels are symbolic of life's journey.



Fissuring – Vastly Clear, 2013
Ink and acrylic on paper and canvas
178 × 81 cm (70 × 32 in)

LI JIN

b. 1958, Tianjin

李津

Li Jin is one of the best-known and most unorthodox artists in the so-called New Literati group of ink painters. Before his study in the Painting Department at the Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts, where he now teaches, Li studied dyeing and weaving at the Tianjin Academy of Arts and Crafts, which partly explains his mastery of pattern and colour. Li Jin gradually formed his uniquely playful style in the early 1990s, and is now famous for his seductive depictions of the good life. In contrast to the formality and stereotyped subjects of historical literati painting - often derived from famous texts, pictures by earlier masters, or both - food and wine and the simple things in today's life are Li's subject matter. The Falstaffian figure that appears repeatedly in his work is modelled on himself, and the flirtatious, enticing young women are the artist's ideal of female beauty.



Li's Little Brother, 2012

Ink and colour on paper
42 × 42 cm (16½ × 16½ in)

ZENG XIAOJUN

b. 1954, Beijing

曾
小
俊

Zeng Xiaojun graduated from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 1981. He moved to the United States in 1983 and lived for the next fourteen years in Boston, where he exhibited and taught until 1997. Drawing inspiration from the literati landscape painting tradition, especially works by Shen Zhou (1427-1509) and Wen Zhengming (1470-1559) of the Ming period, Zeng extracts rocks and trees from the context of landscape and depicts them as isolated objects. Employing a delicate balance between dry and wet, lines and dots, his meticulously executed paintings remind us of the Chinese intellectuals' fascination with these subjects as embodiments of their own spiritual perseverance in times of difficulty and turbulence. Together the work of Liu Dan, Zeng Xiaojun's ink paintings are a powerful example of how the high culture of traditional China can be reinvigorated for contemporary society.



*Beijing Jietai Temple:
Ancient Pine Tree, 2006*

Ink and colour on paper
171 x 224 cm (67¼ x 88¾ in)

LO CH'ING

b. 1948, Qingdao, Shandong

罗青

Lo Ch'ing is a poet, painter, and calligrapher. He moved to Taiwan in 1949. At an early age, Lo learned classical ink painting of the court tradition. Subsequently, he studied in the English Department of Fu Jen University, and received an MA degree in Comparative Literature from the University of Washington, Seattle, in 1974. He has been both a professor of literature and a professor of fine arts in universities in Taiwan, the United States, the United Kingdom, Prague, and mainland China. His poems have been published and translated into many languages, and Lo Ch'ing is regarded as one of the pioneers of post-modern poetry in Taiwan. He has also been a major innovator in ink painting, for which he has created a new visual vocabulary that deconstructs the classical forms of Chinese landscape by introducing into his compositions abstract and geometric elements, as well as unexpected contemporary motifs.



The Smoggy Chinese Dream, 2014

Ink and colour on paper
179 × 96 cm (70½ × 38 in)

YANG YANPING

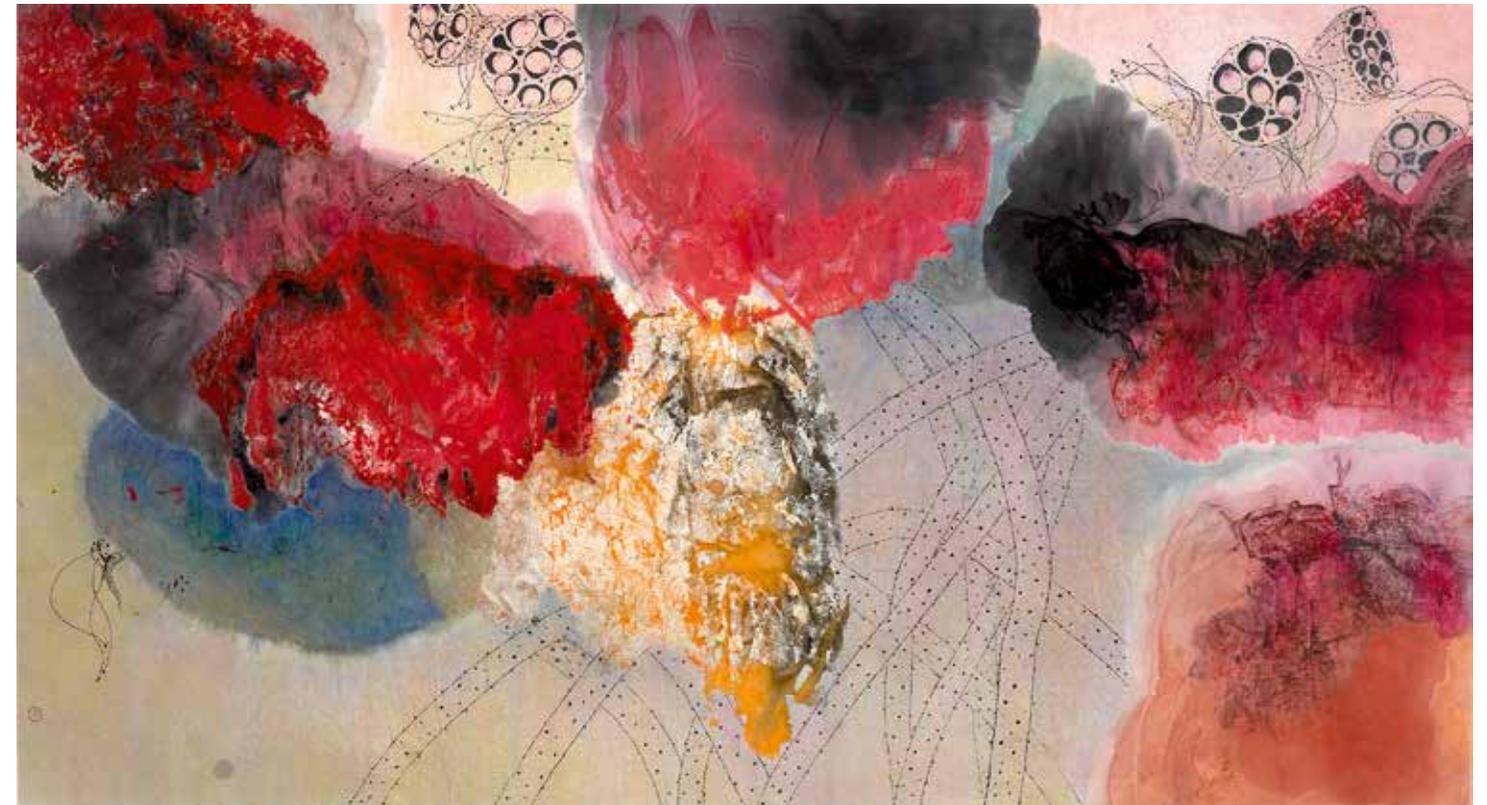
b. 1934, Nanjing, Jiangsu

杨
燕
屏

Yang Yanping is one of the most distinguished contemporary ink painters from China. She studied architecture at Tsinghua University, where she married one of her painting teachers, Zeng Shanqing. After she graduated in 1958, and a brief spell of teaching factory design, Yang decided to study art at the Oil Painting Department of the Beijing Art Academy. At the same time she studied traditional Chinese painting on her own. In 1986, both Yang and her husband were awarded fellowships from the State University of New York at Stony Brook, and they have remained in America ever since. Yang is well versed in many traditional styles but has excelled in depicting the lotus flower, a symbol of purity, transience, the fragility of nature, and the potential for regeneration. Yang's ideals of high visual quality and an artistic autonomy allows her to embrace modernism without jettisoning the lessons from the classical Chinese world of high culture. Her recent exhibitions include a major retrospective at The Art Museum of Beijing Fine Art Academy in 2013.

The Fragrance After A Thunderstorm, 2009

Ink and colour on paper
69 × 96 cm (27¼ × 37½ in)



Autumn Red, 2001

Ink and colour on paper
83 × 151.5 cm (32¼ × 59¼ in)

QIN FENG

b. 1961, Xinjiang Uyghur, Autonomous Region

秦
风

Qin Feng is an iconoclastic artist who is actively involved in China's avant-garde art movement. He studied mural painting at the Shandong University of Art and was one of the only two people in Shandong Province who radically experimented with imported styles of contemporary art during that period. From 1996 to 1999, Qin Feng taught at the Berlin University of Art while further exploring the possibilities of synthesizing modernism and the ink-painting tradition. In 1999, he moved to Boston where he currently resides. Before brushing ink on numerous layers of *xuan* paper, Qin often dyes it with tea and coffee as a metaphorical gesture of two cultures blending together. His fluid ink and dynamic brush technique has developed into a style that is related to Abstract Expressionism in its openness to chance and emphasis on gesture. His works are a persuasive manifestation of the vitality of the calligraphic tradition.



Desire Scenery Series 0013, 2012

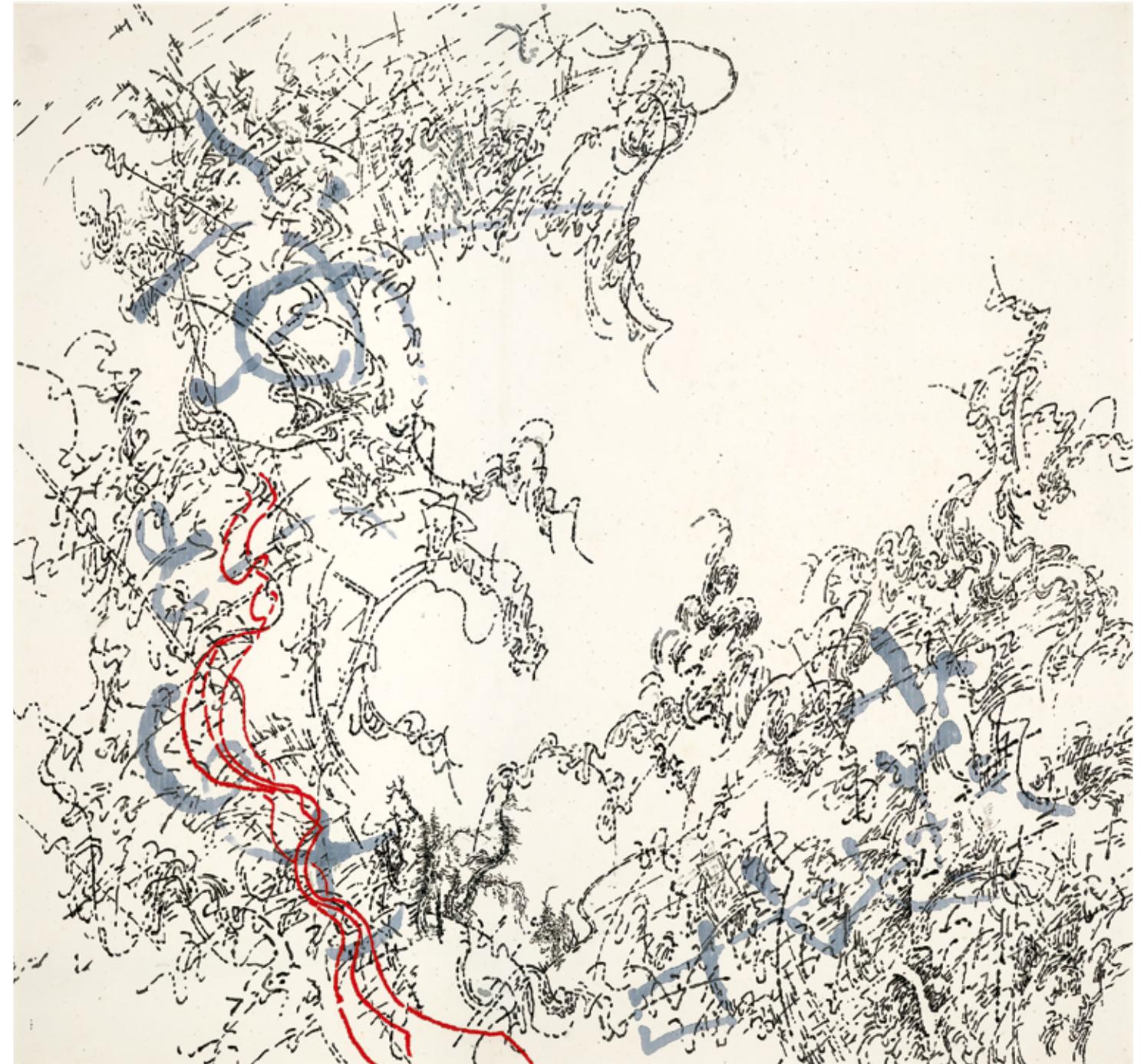
Ink and tea on paper
125 × 200 cm (49 × 79 in)

LEUNG KUI TING

b. 1945, Guangzhou, Guangdong

梁
巨
廷

Leung Kui Ting moved to Hong Kong in 1948 and has held various teaching positions. In the 1990s he exhibited on the mainland and traveled widely there. A figure in Hong Kong's New Ink Painting movement that grew up around Lui Shou-kwan, Leung has experimented with many different styles that synthesize classical ink painting with modern art. However, the rocks, trees, and mountains that have been the subject of the literati painters over the past 600 years have remained his principal interest. In his series of paintings entitled *Zan Zak Zen*, he portrays the fantastically shaped Chinese scholar's rocks as if they were cliffs and mountains. In another series entitled *Words from Stones*, magically floating mountains, again evoking scholar's rocks, are juxtaposed with finely drawn diagrams and graphs, thus creating a world of tension, as well as resolution, between old and new.



Transmutation 05-13, 2008

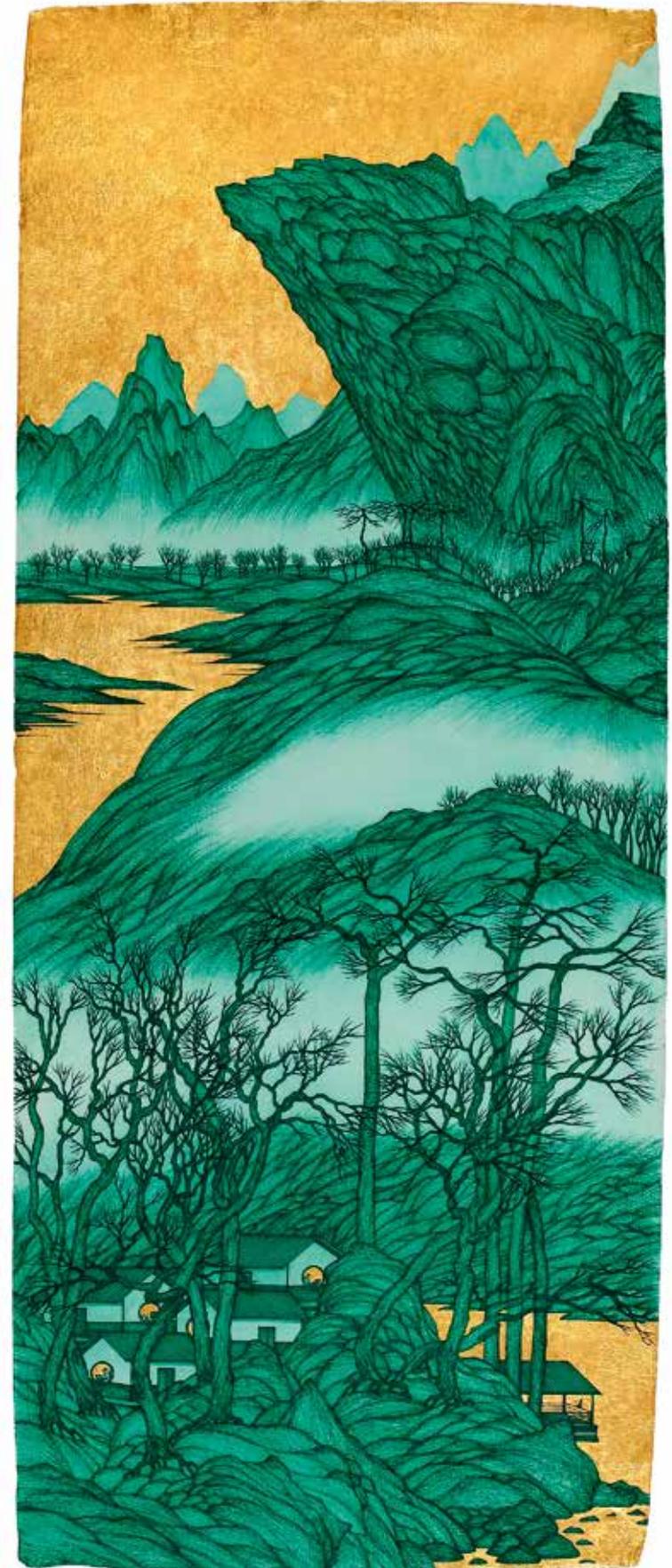
Ink and colour on paper
101 × 105.5 cm (39¾ × 41½ in)

YAO JUI-CHUNG

b. 1969, Taipei, Taiwan

姚
瑞
中

Yao Jui-chung is now recognised as one of the most innovative Chinese artists of his generation. His work runs against the current of much of the mainstream avant-garde in its unabashed delight in producing a visual experience for the viewer that is beautiful as well as intellectually provocative. He is well-known for his works on paper, as well as his versatile experiments in photography, installation, performance, video and sculpture. He is also a curator, art critic and art historian and has been dedicated to evaluating and promoting Taiwanese contemporary art both in Taiwan and internationally. He graduated from Taipei National University of the Arts and continues to teach at the University. He also represented Taiwan at the Venice Biennale in 1997.



Good Times: Internet Seclusion, 2015

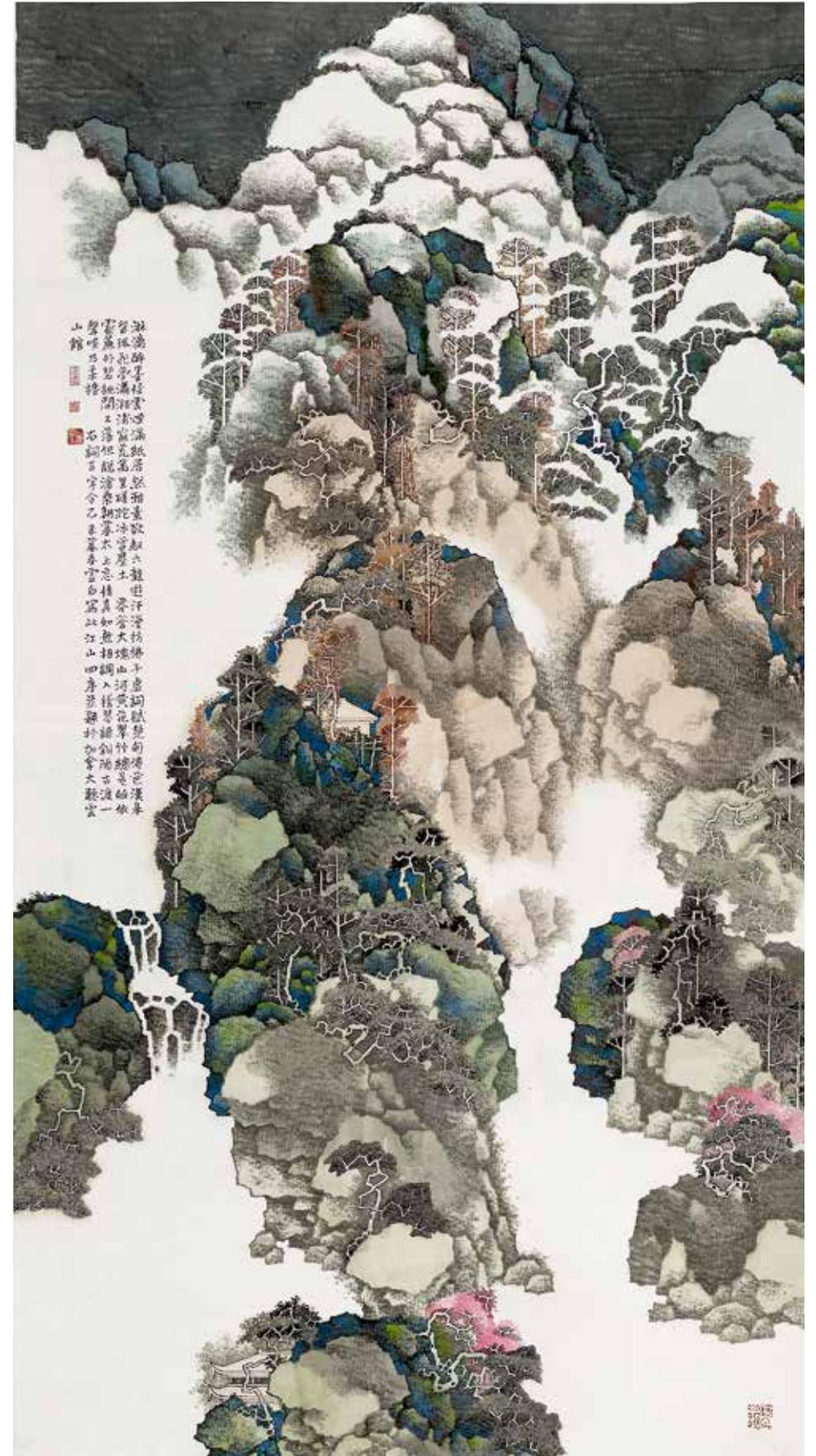
Ink and gold leaf on handmade paper
200 × 80 cm (78¼ × 31½ in)

LI XUBAI

b. 1940, Fuzhou, Fujian

李
虚
白

Li moved to Hong Kong in 1979, where he has been the editor for art magazines such as *The World of Collectors* and *Dragon Roots Art Magazine* and went to Canada in 1996, where he now lives. Although he first taught himself western-derived painting, Li began to study Chinese classical literature, poetry, and landscape painting in the 1960s. His paintings are constructions of landscape elements without a specific relationship to any one geographical site. Li Xubai maintains his connection with the contemporary world by creating a seemingly flat pictorial space and a pixilated effect reminiscent of digital media. By choosing to paint in a classically derived style, Li Xubai asserts his cultural identity while working in a foreign land. The poems he inscribes on his paintings in traditional literatus fashion usually mention his foreign residence, echoing numerous inscriptions by painterly predecessors who wistfully invoked their own political exile.



*A Six Feet Scroll of Four
Sequences of Fatherland, 2015*
Ink and colour on paper
178 x 97 cm (70 x 38 1/4 in)

WANG DONGLING

b. 1945, Jiangsu Province

王冬龄

Wang Dongling is one of the most successful and gifted of the modernist calligraphers in China and one of the few who has for many years enjoyed an international reputation. At 17, he was admitted into the Department of Fine Arts at Nanjing Normal University and studied calligraphy. During the Cultural Revolution, Wang survived by writing big-character posters, a job that ironically provided him with an artistic freedom not available at the university. After the Cultural Revolution he attended the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts in Hangzhou, where he is currently vice-chair of the Calligraphy Department. Wang began developing a new form of composition that synthesizes traditional Chinese aesthetics with modernist art. Usually there are no decipherable Chinese characters in his works, which have become closer to abstract painting than to calligraphy. Wang Dongling has been enormously influential on the whole development of contemporary calligraphy and ink painting.



Untitled, 2006

Ink on paper

140 × 310 cm (55½ × 122 in)

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