

Wei Ligang

魏立刚

Private View: 15 March 2014
Exhibition: 15–22 March 2014
Mallett, 929 Madison Avenue at 74th
New York, NY 10021

M I C H A E L
GOEDHUIS



Foreword

A VISITOR TO WEI LIGANG'S studio on the outskirts of Beijing today would find it hard to discern its link with the shaded garden pavilions where his literati predecessors gathered to compose poetry, practice painting and calligraphy, drink wine, inhale the delights of nature and refine the art of convivial conversation. His motorcycle leaning against the wall, the contemporary background music and the spacious modern interior design have more in common with the taste of his avant-garde artist peers than with the austere aesthetic values of the gentleman-scholar of the past.

But Wei sees himself not only as a grateful beneficiary of the cultural legacy bestowed on him from China's long and illustrious past but also as a calligrapher whose mission is to extend that rich tradition in ways which are relevant to, and meaningful for, the world of today. He has been at the forefront of contemporary ink painting's development since the 1990s and not only was one of the organisers of *The Chengdu Retrospective of Chinese Modern Calligraphy* in 1999, but also one of the participants in the pioneering *Modern Calligraphy* exhibition at the British Museum in 2002 organised by Gordon Barrass.

It was 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 civilisation. As Simon Leys has written, 'It is the most elite of all arts . . . practised by emperors, aesthetes, monks and poets throughout history' but also ostentatiously alive today in advertisements, cinema posters, restaurants, tea-houses, railway stations, temples and on rough village doors and walls. For the Chinese, calligraphy has been the most revered of all the arts from the late Han period (3rd century AD) onwards.

In the recent past, as the cultural world of China has broken free of the stifling constraints on creative thinking of the last 100 years or more, many different stylistic avenues have been explored by the successors of the gentleman-scholars of the past . . . the ink artists. But all are deeply aware of the classical canon and its aesthetic and moral imperatives and have diligently studied the old masters. And just as Picasso and Cézanne studied Raphael, Poussin, Velazquez and others in order to create their revolutionary pictorial language, so new literati are studying the Chinese masters in order to formulate their own revolution. More subtle than the contemporary oil painters with their abrasive handling of overtly political themes, the ink painters thus embody their message in works that are not afraid to take account of the past in order to make sense of the present.

Wei Ligang was trained as a precocious and brilliant young mathematician and it was while he was studying at the prestigious Nankai University in Tianjin that he became deeply interested in calligraphy. Within two years he had become president of the Calligraphy Society, which enabled him to connect with leading calligraphers all over the country. This exposure, both to the contemporary masters and to the study of the great calligraphers of the past, provided him with the intellectual and aesthetic hinterland . . . aided perhaps by the added perspective brought about via his mathematical talent . . . to create the ground-breaking paintings that have evolved over the past 15 years.

The initial breakthrough was for him to turn away from reproducing characters in their standard form towards a style that attempted to express the underlying poetic sense of the text or poem they represented. This opened up the route to abstraction in both his painting and calligraphy and he has since emerged as one of the most versatile artists of his generation. His work, though extremely experimental and varied, can be viewed as fitting into two broad stylistic themes. On the one hand is his experimentation with the full range of modernistic effects produced by deploying simple traditional brush and ink techniques [e.g. *Shan Lao Shi Ji Shou*, Huang Jian Jing Lu Ben, page 13], in particular in the gold-ground paintings and on the other, his use and distortion of his 'Wei' squares (e.g. *Peacock: Jade Green*, page 20) which are based on the square format in which characters have traditionally been positioned in classical calligraphy.



Wei’s goal in generating such a rich blend of diverse visual effects is directed at stimulating the viewer to marvel at his artistic transformation of an unbending tradition that goes back 3500 years. And it has indeed been largely due to him and the small group of pioneers who share his vision that Chinese calligraphy, while still anchored in Chinese civilisation, has shaken free of millennia of controlling convention and has now been catapulted onto the world stage.

Despite Wei’s interest in western art and intellectual exchange with many western artists, in particular Brice Marden, he is primarily a Chinese artist addressing specifically Chinese cultural challenges. Indeed it is as much his desire to resist the overwhelming influence of western art as his need to break free of the remorseless logic of Chinese tradition that have led these beautiful, relaxed structures of line and form to establish their status in the new pictorial language of China.

Michael Goedhuis, 2014

参访今日魏立刚位于北京市郊的工作室，您将难以将其与文人前辈们相聚赋诗、习字、作画，饮酒共享自然之美、飨宴中陶然对答的花园凉亭相连结。他的摩托车倚靠在墙边，宽阔的现代室内设计搭配背景中播放着当代的乐曲，相比于过去文人雅士严谨的美学价值，不如说其与同为前卫艺术家的同侪们来得更有共识。

然而，魏立刚不仅只是视自己为中国长远、卓越的文化资产的受惠者，做为一位书法家，他更是将如何让这富裕的传统与现代社会连结、对现代生活产生意义视为己任。自九〇年代当代水墨绘画发展以来，魏立刚便是站在最前线的开创者，不但身为1999年成都《二十世纪末中国现代书法回顾展》的主要负责人之一，更参与了2002年由白若思（Gordon Barrass）先生在大英博物馆策画、深具首创性的《现代中国书法》大展。

一直到近期，西方人才开始对书法之于中国人的重要性有些许的了解。书法是中华文明发展以来社会的奠基，正如李克曼（笔名：西蒙·莱斯）所言，“它是最为菁英的艺术形式…在长远的历史中，为君王、美学家、僧侣及诗人所青睐”。而在今日，书法仍十分活跃、随处可见于广告、电影、海报、餐厅、茶馆、车站、寺庙，甚至是小村落中的门板和墙面上。对于中国人来说，书法是自汉朝后期（公元三世纪）以来最受崇敬的艺术形式。

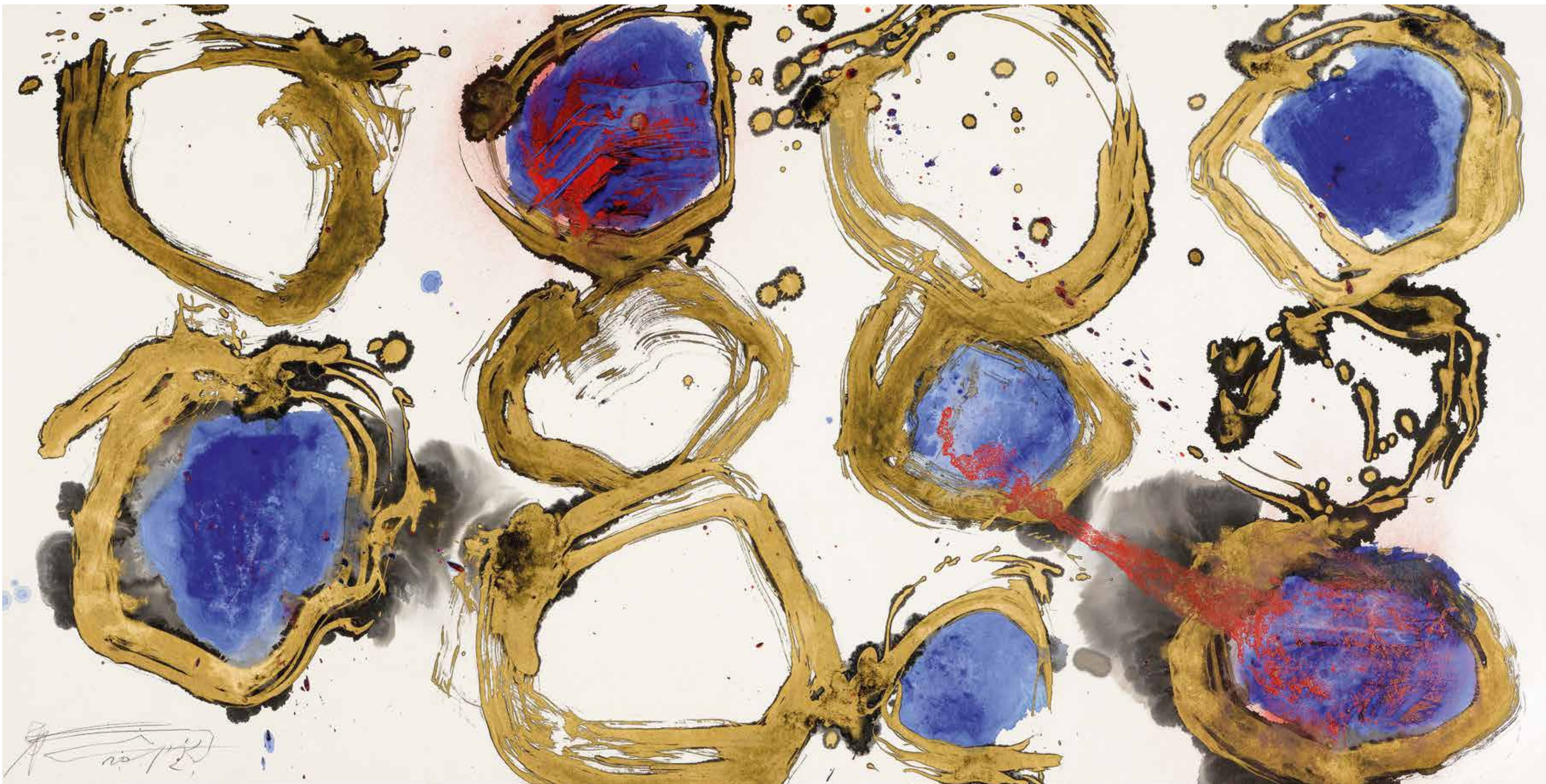
近期，中国在文化面向上，在历经了百余年对于创意思考的抑制之后松绑，许多当代水墨艺术家—作为过去文人雅士的后起之輩—开始探索多种不同的风格路径。然而，他们对于传统经典及其蕴含的美学理念、道德观念认识深刻，并且致力不懈地学习先贤大师之作。正如毕加索、塞尚研习拉斐尔、普桑、维拉斯凯兹等大师的画作，为创造属于他们的革命性绘画语言一般，作为“新文人”的当代水墨艺术家亦全心地研习古人画作从而进行属于他们的革命性创作。相较于当代油彩画家不断地琢磨政治议题，水墨艺术家更为细腻、且不畏惧地以古有之法，传达他们对于当下的讯息。

魏立刚曾在天津深具声望的南开大学习修数学专业，是为一位年轻聪颖的数学家，然而就是在这时期，他开启了对书法的喜爱。在学期间，他在两年内便成为了书法社社长，这使得他有机会与全国各地优秀的书法家相互切磋。这般与当代大师的接触学习，同时研习传统大师的经典古作，使其拥有一身兼具知性与美学的涵养。再或许加上他数学专业上的资质，使其创作出开创性的绘画，在过去十五年间不断演化、展开。

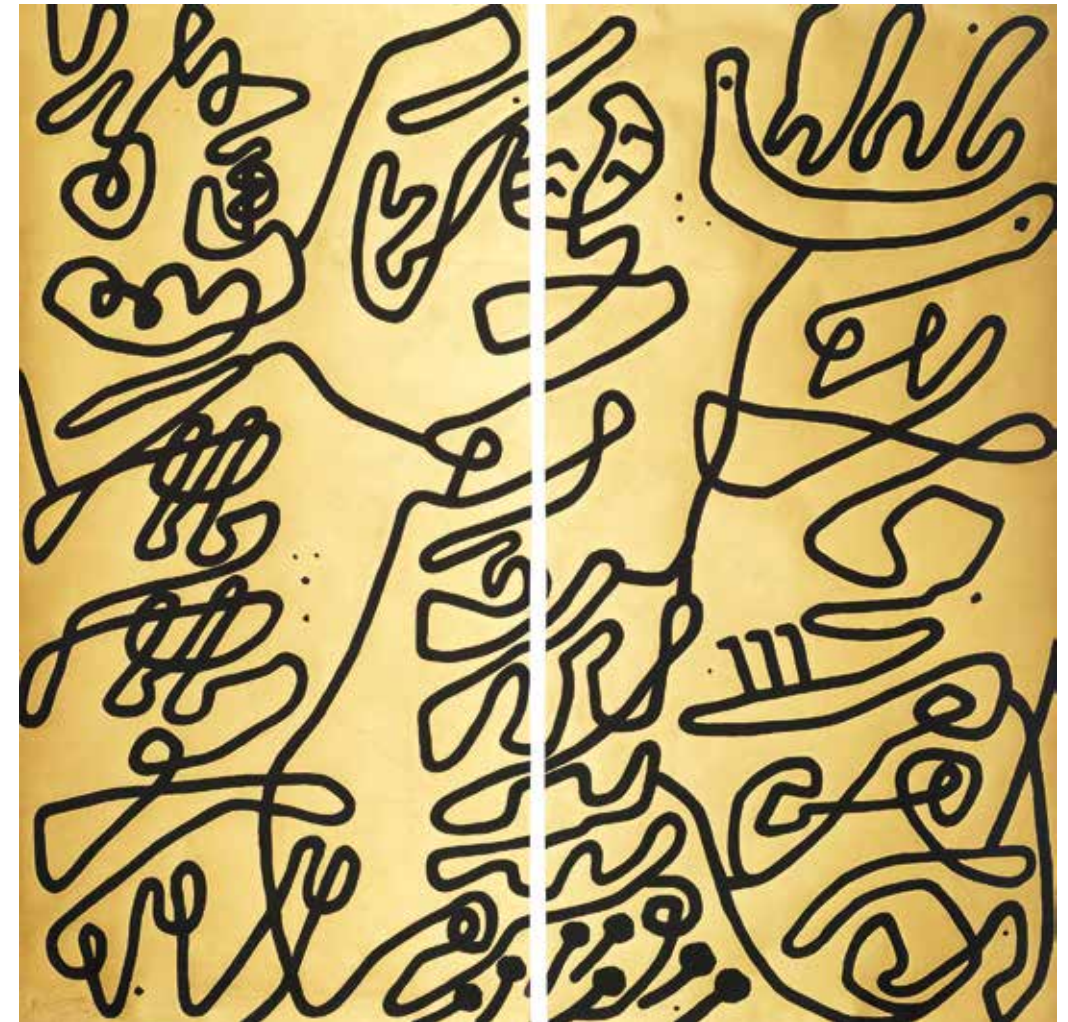
对于魏立刚来说，其最初的突破便是不再将文字局限在标准的形式中，而是试图去呈现文句或是诗词中蕴含的诗意。此一风格形式开启了其绘画及书法皆走向抽象美学的路径，他亦自此发展为其同辈艺术家中创作最多样化的一位。魏立刚的作品，尽管极其实验性与多变，可以将其归纳成两大风格主题：其一为单纯使用传统笔墨的技巧，去试验各种现代主义的概念和效果（例如：《山老石脊瘦，荒溪惊鹿奔》，13頁），此风格以其金底色的绘画系列最具有代表性；其二则是以根据传统书法书写时所使用的方块版式，将其加以变化所发展出来的「魏式方块」（例如：《孔雀·翡翠》，20頁）。

对于创作出如此富饶、多样的视觉性阐述，魏立刚的目的在于以其深厚的艺术涵养，去转化3500年以来不朽的传统，让现今的观众可以去体会、赞叹；而的确很大一部分也是因为他及一小群先驱艺术家对于创作有这样的共识，使得根植中华文明的书法艺术，得以挣脱数千年传统规范的束缚，一跃登上今日的世界舞台。尽管魏立刚对于西方艺术深感兴趣，亦与像是马登（Brice Marden）等多位西方艺术家时有交流，但作为一位中国艺术家，他仍主要致力于呈现今日中华文化中的挑战。正是由于他同时必须抵抗西方艺术过度强势的影响，以及试图突破中国传统绘画逻辑的束缚，因而使其创作出的这些美好、自在的线条及结构，在中国的新绘画语言中确立其地位。

麦克·鬲豪士，2014



Peacock: Rose Red, 2013
Ink, acrylic and lacquer on paper
68 × 135cm (27 × 53 in)



Shan Lao Shi Ji Shou, Huang Jian Jing Lu Ben
(Along the Vivid Outlines of the Aged Ridge, a Wild
Stream Splashes and the Deer Flee in Shock), 2011
 Ink and acrylic on paper
 Each panel 245 × 123cm (96½ × 48½ in)



Yi Guan, 2014
Ink, acrylic and lacquer on paper
96 × 180cm (37 × 71 in)



Green Flowers, 2013
Ink and acrylic on paper
110 × 123cm (43 × 48½ in)

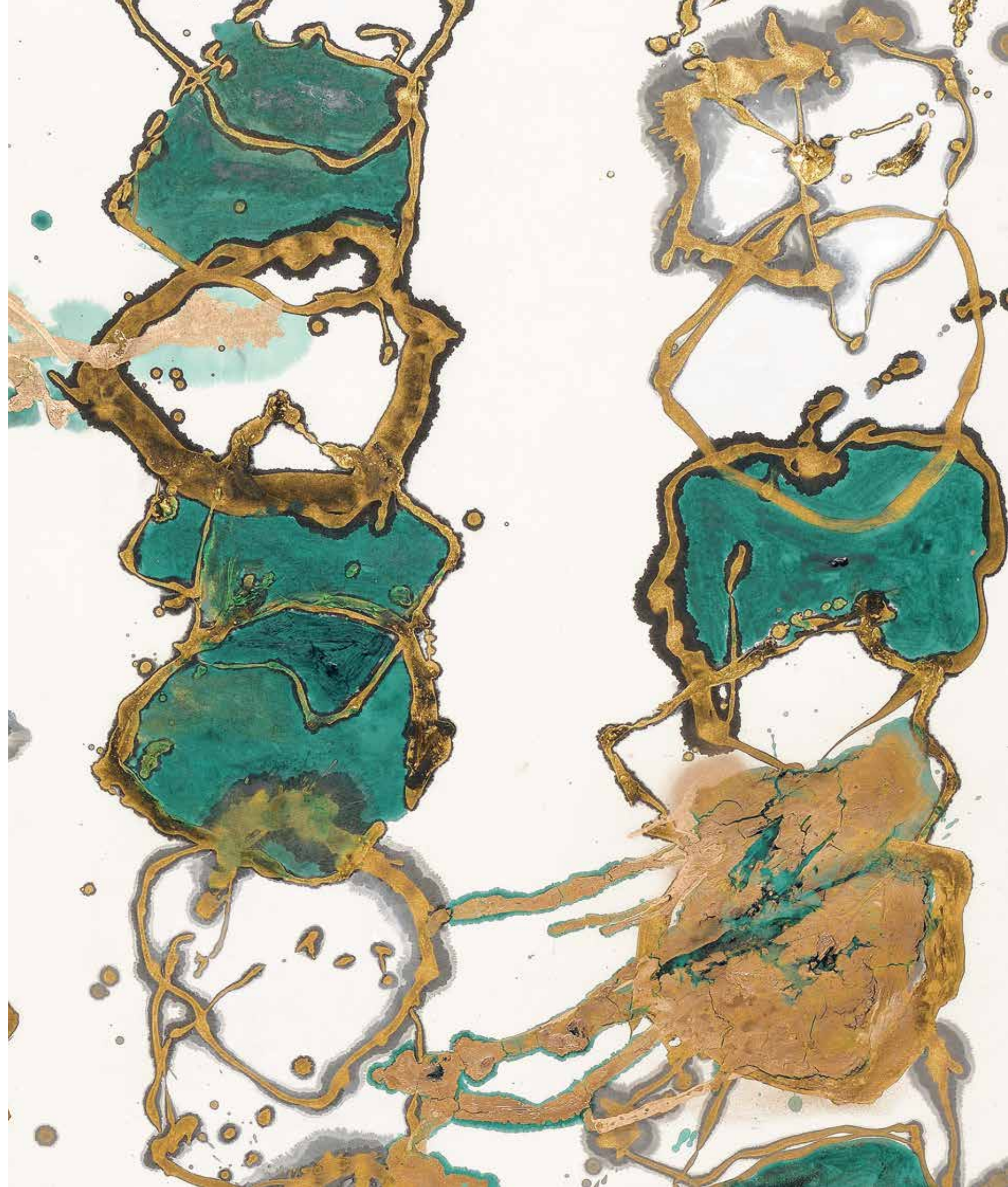


Green Plants, 2013

Ink and acrylic on paper
110 × 123cm (43 × 48½ in)



Peacock: Jade Green, 2014
 Ink, acrylic and lacquer on paper
 245 × 123cm (96½ × 48½ in)



Plum Blossoms: Pink, 2012
Ink, acrylic and lacquer on paper
68 × 135cm (27 × 53 in)



*Hidden Dragon in
the Pond: White*, 2014
Ink, acrylic and lacquer on paper
68 × 135cm (27 × 53 in)





Plum Blossoms: Green, 2013
Ink, acrylic and lacquer on paper
68 × 135cm (27 × 53 in)



Zhu Ma Ting (Stop the Horse and Listen), 2010
 Ink and acrylic on paper
 180 × 96cm (71 × 38 in)





Han Brocade: Pink, 2013

Ink and acrylic on paper
123 × 123cm (48½ × 48½in)



Hunting in the Southern Mountains, 2010

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



Han Brocade: Gray, 2013

Ink and acrylic on paper
123 × 123cm (48½ × 48½ in)



Peacock: Rose Red, 2013
 Ink, acrylic and lacquer on paper
 180 × 96cm (71 × 38 in)





Autumn Pond, 2006
Ink and acrylic on paper
68 × 135cm (27 × 53 in)



Magnificent Palace, 2011

Ink and acrylic on paper
245 × 123cm (96½ × 48½ in)



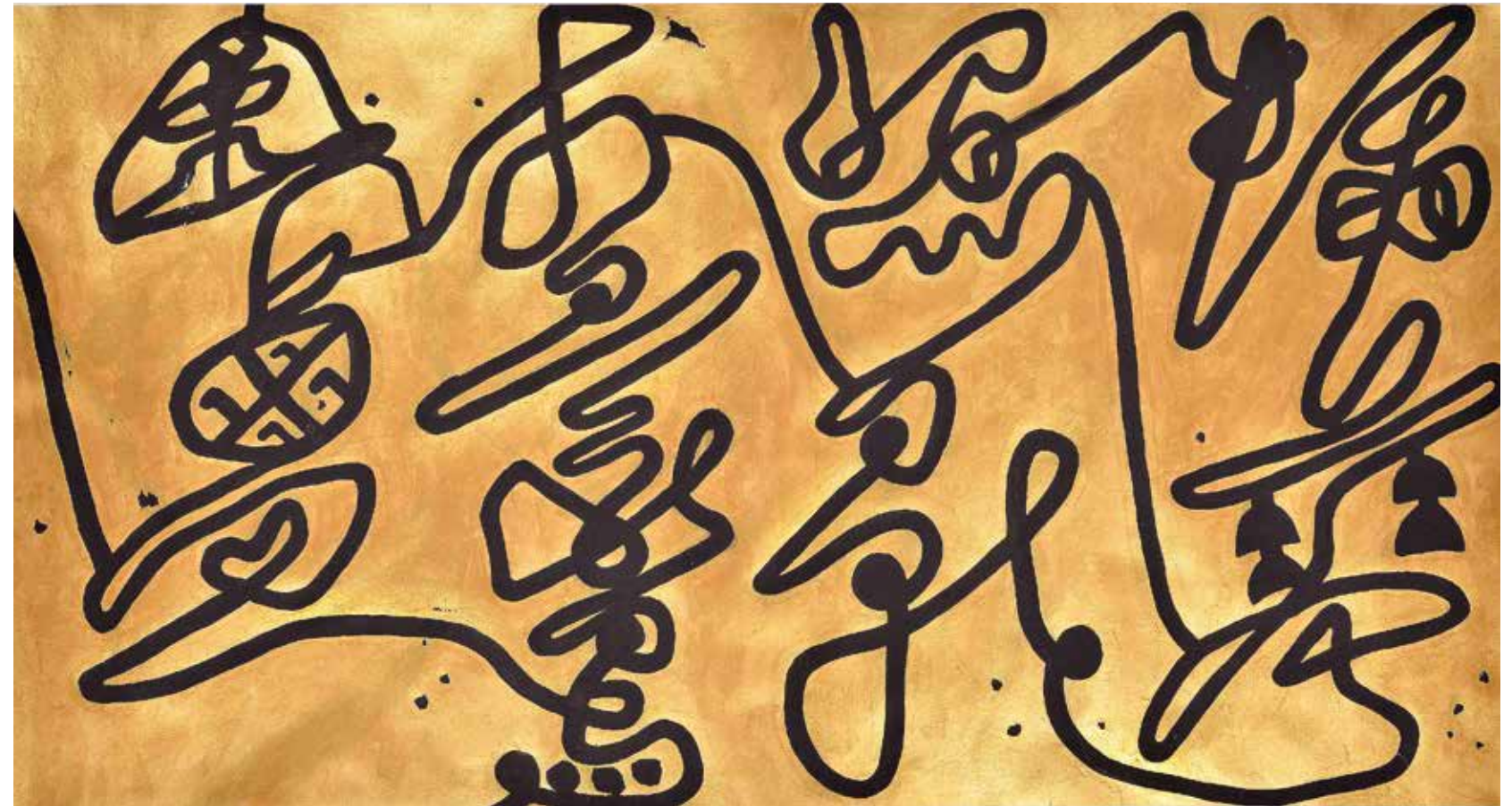
Flower Banquet, 2011
Ink and acrylic on paper
87 × 180cm (34½ × 71 in)



Cao Shu I, 2006
Ink on paper
180 × 96cm (71 × 38 in)



Peacock: Jade Green, 2014
Ink, acrylic and lacquer on paper
245 × 123cm (96½ × 48½ in)



*Flower Arrangement Reflected
in Bird-shaped Mirror, 2014*
Ink and acrylic on paper
96 × 180cm (38 × 71 in)



*Dragon Wine Container
among the Clouds, 2013*
Ink and acrylic on paper
68 × 135cm (27 × 53 in)

WEI LIGANG 魏立刚

1964	Born in Datong City, Shanxi Province, China
1981	Graduated from Nankai University (majored in mathematics), Tianjin, China
1981	Student of Tianjin famous calligraphers Li Henian, Wang Xuezhong and Sun Boxiang
1985	Taught mathematics in Taiyuan City, China
1995	Settled in Beijing, China
1999	Organized Bashu Parade-99 Chengdu Retrospective of Chinese Modern Calligraphy at the End of 20th Century with PuLieping
2004	Opened the Senior Modern Calligraphic Workshop at Artist Commune, Hong Kong
2005	Fellowship grantee of the Asian Cultural Council Hong Kong
2005	Professor at Beijing Normal University, Zhuhai Campus, China
Present	Vice-President of Modern Calligraphy Art Association of China Member of Beijing Art Committee of China Democratic League Lives and works in Beijing, China

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2014	Wei Ligang: Chinese Palaces, Michael Goedhuis, Mallett, New York, USA
2012	Zao Jian Wei’s Shi Xiang, Being 3 Gallery, Beijing, China
2011	Banquet of Magnificence-Shu Xiang: Wei Ligang, Being 3 Gallery, Beijing, China
2010	Gold. Unicon-2010 Graphimage by Wei Ligang, Contrasts Gallery, Shanghai, China New Ink Painting by Wei Ligang, Michael Goedhuis, London
2008	Wei Ligang: The New Ink Painting, Goedhuis Contemporary, New York, USA
2008	Performance Calligraphy, Panties Castle, France
2007	Oriental Totem: Wei Ligang Ink & Wash Exhibition, National Art Museum of China, Beijing, China
2006	New Works by Wei Ligang, Alisan Fine Arts, Hong Kong China in Ink & Wash: Exhibition of Wei Ligang’s Works, Shanghai Art Museum, Shanghai, China
1999	Diary in Rongcheng, Taiyuan, China

Selected Collections

Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, USA
Bank of Switzerland
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Seattle, USA
Chengdu International Convention and Exhibition Center
China National Museum, Beijing, China
Credit Suisse
He Xiangning Art Museum, Shenzhen, China
Lucy Billingsley, Crow Collection of Asian Art
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, USA
National Art Museum of China, Beijing, China
Origo Family Foundation, Switzerland
Red Cross Society of China, Beijing, China
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, USA
The British Museum, England
The International Education Fund
The Swiss Chamber of Commerce in China
Today Art Museum, Beijing, China



WEI LIGANG 魏立刚

1964	生于中国山西省大同市
1985	毕业于天津南开大学数学专业
1981	师承天津书法大师李鹤年、王学仲及孙伯翔
1985	至太原任教
1995	移居北京，为自由艺术家
1999	与濮列平等策划《巴蜀点兵—二十世纪末中国现代书法回顾展 》
2004	于香港艺术公社开办高级现代书法工作坊
2005	获得洛克菲勒基金会—ACC艺术大奖
2005	于北京师范大学珠海分校任教
现任	中国现代书法艺术学会副会长 国际书象学社社长 于北京生活、创作

主要个展

2014	《魏立刚：中国宫廷》， 鬲豪士画廊，纽约
2012	《藻鉴》个展，在三画廊，北京
2011	《华宴@魏立刚》书象展，在三画廊，北京
2010	《金·麒：2010魏立刚制造》， 对比窗画廊， 上海 《新水墨》魏立刚个展， 鬲豪士画廊，伦敦
2008	《魏立刚：新水墨》个展， 鬲豪士画廊, 纽约 《行为书法》， 潘蒂斯古堡，法国
2007	《植龕：魏立刚书象艺术大展》， 中国美术馆，北京
2006	《魏立刚新作展》， 香港艺倡画廊，香港 《水墨中国：魏立刚作品展》， 上海美术馆，上海
1999	《蓉城日记》个人画展，太原，中国

重要收藏记录

旧金山亚洲艺术博物馆
瑞士信贷银行
美国比尔盖茨基金会
中国国家博物馆
何香凝美术馆
美国德州露丝私人美术馆
美国波士顿美术馆
中国美术馆
中国红十字会
瑞士奥瑞格基金会
旧金山现代艺术博物馆
大英博物馆
国际教育基金会
中国瑞士商会
中国北京今日美术馆

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