

WEI LIGANG

魏立刚

M I C H A E L
GOEDHUIS



WEI LIGANG WITH BRICE MARDEN

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. *Thatched Cottage*, page 16-17], in particular in the gold-ground paintings and on the other, his use and distortion of his 'Wei' squares (e.g. *Emerald Peacock*, page 9) 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 3,500 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, 2018



*Chinese Poem-Bronze
Script, 2010*

Ink and acrylic on paper
70¼ × 37¾ in (180 × 96 cm)



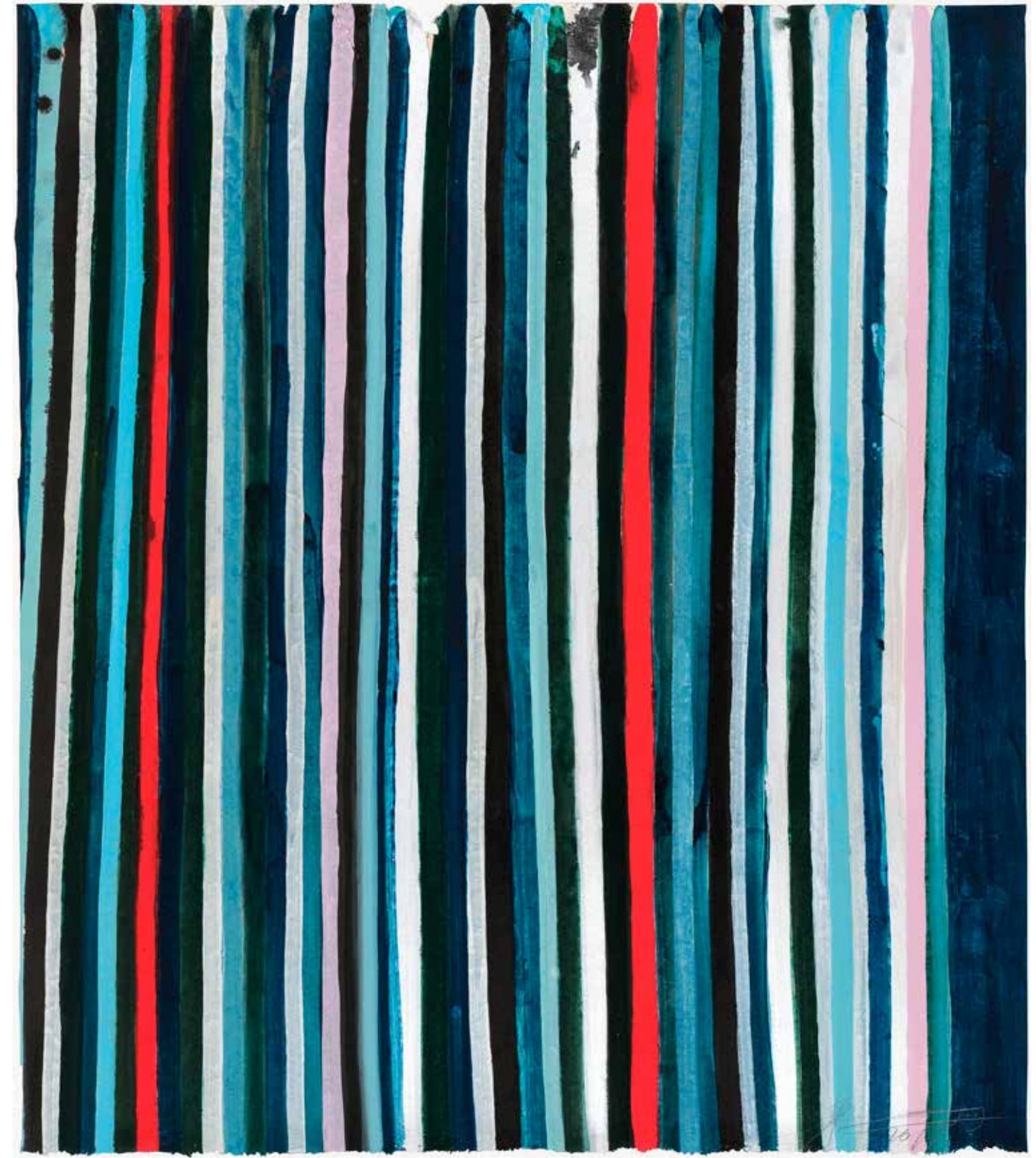
The Mountain Residency Seizing the Origin of the River, 2015
Ink and acrylic on paper
37¼ × 35½ in (96 × 90cm)



Peacock- Pearl and Jade, 2015
 Ink, acrylic and lacquer on paper
 70¾ × 37¾ in (180 × 96cm)



Emerald Peacock, 2018
 Ink and acrylic on paper
 70¾ × 37¾ in (180 × 96cm)



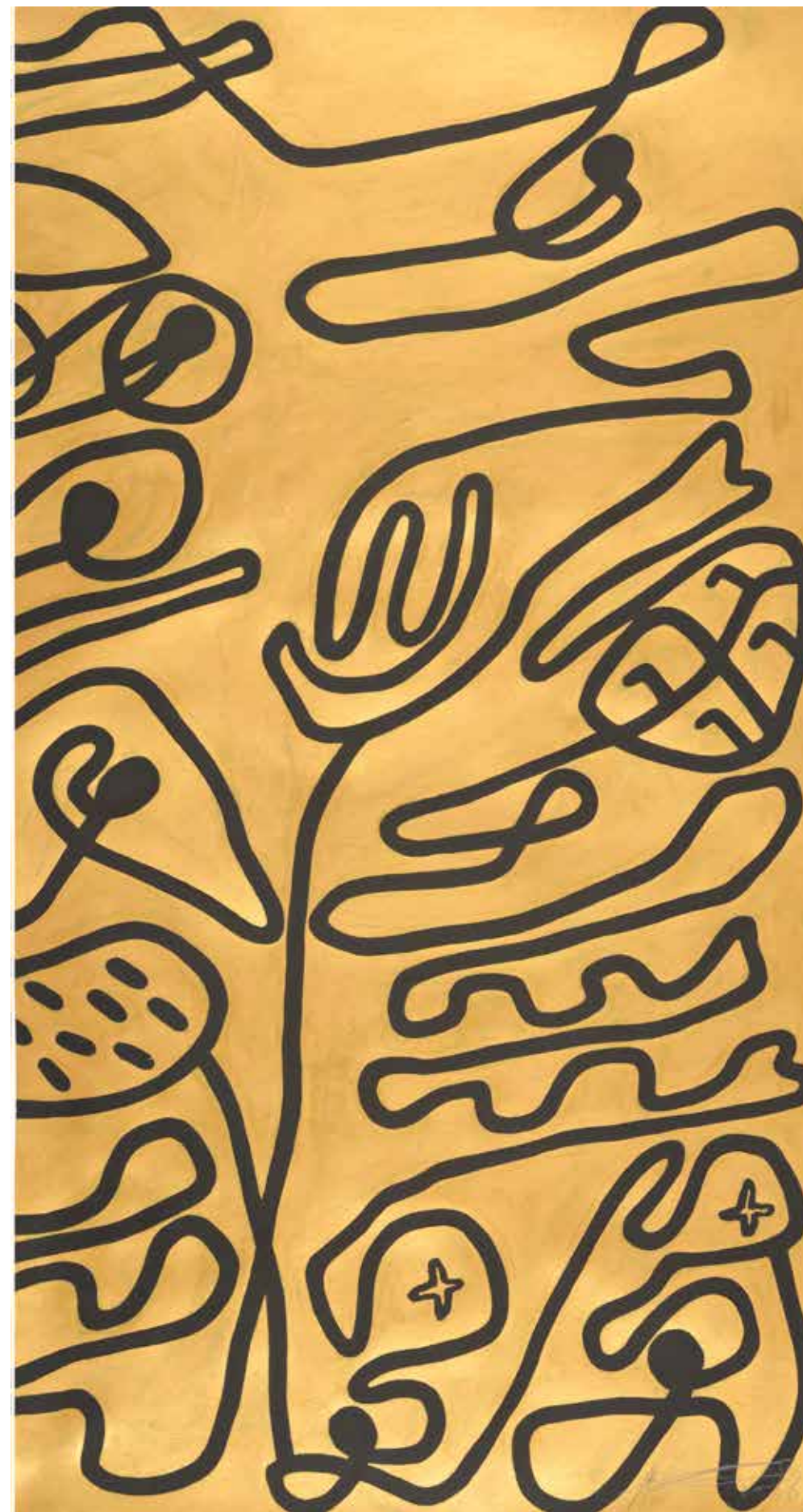
Han Brocade, 2018
Ink and acrylic on paper
45¼ × 39¼ in (115 × 101 cm)



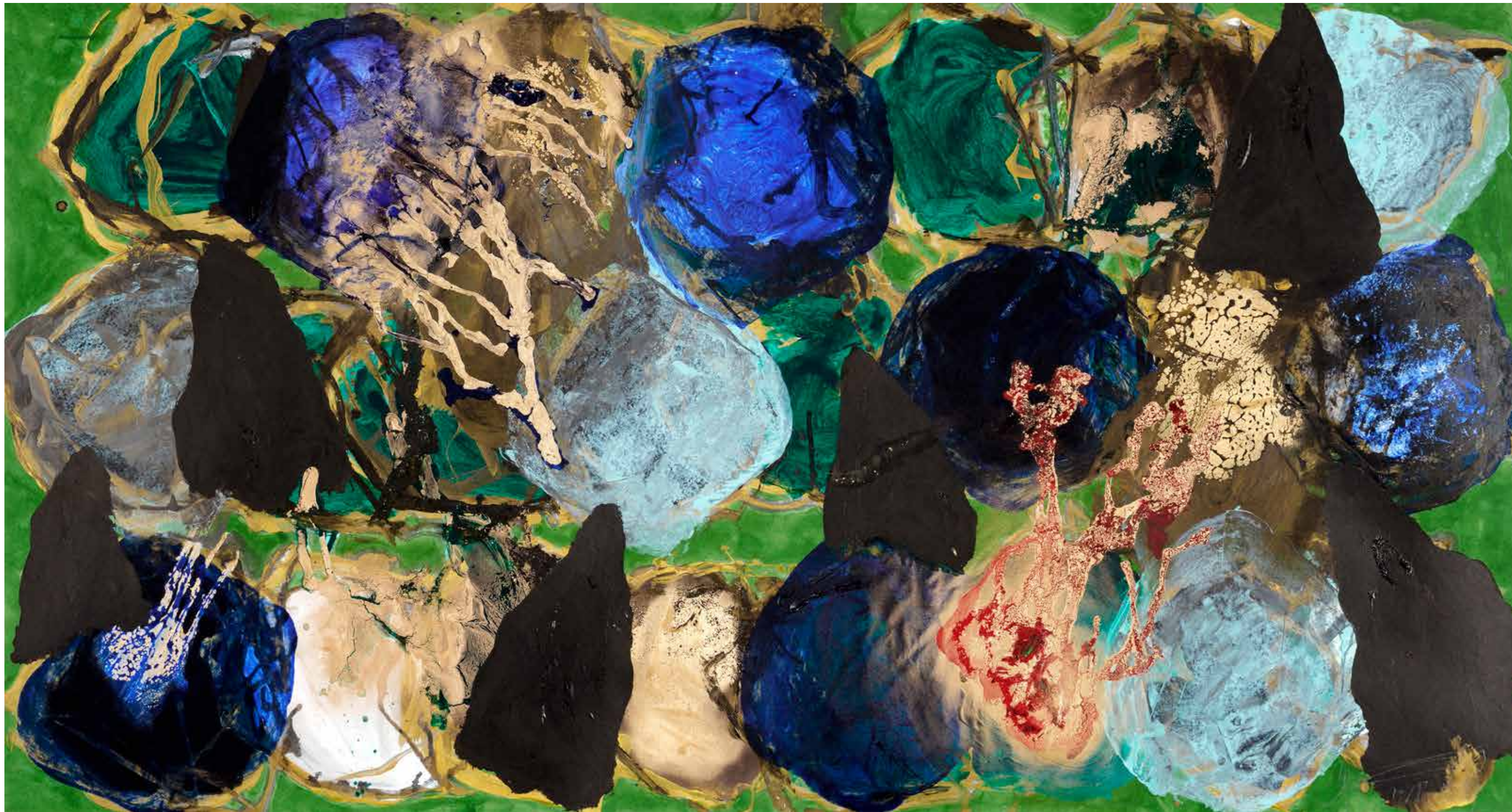
Turtle Caves Stretch Out Through Many Swamps, 2017
Ink and acrylic on paper
37¾ × 35½ in (96 × 90 cm)



Peacock - Autumn Pond, 2018
Ink and acrylic on paper
38¼ × 71¾ in (97 × 182 cm)



Thatched Cottage Beside the Water
Lined with Phoenix-Tail Fern
Moistened in the Mist, 2016
Ink and acrylic on paper
Each panel: 70¾ × 37¾ in (180 × 96 cm)



Green Peacock, 2018
Ink, acrylic and paint on paper
37¼ × 70¼ in (96 × 180 cm)

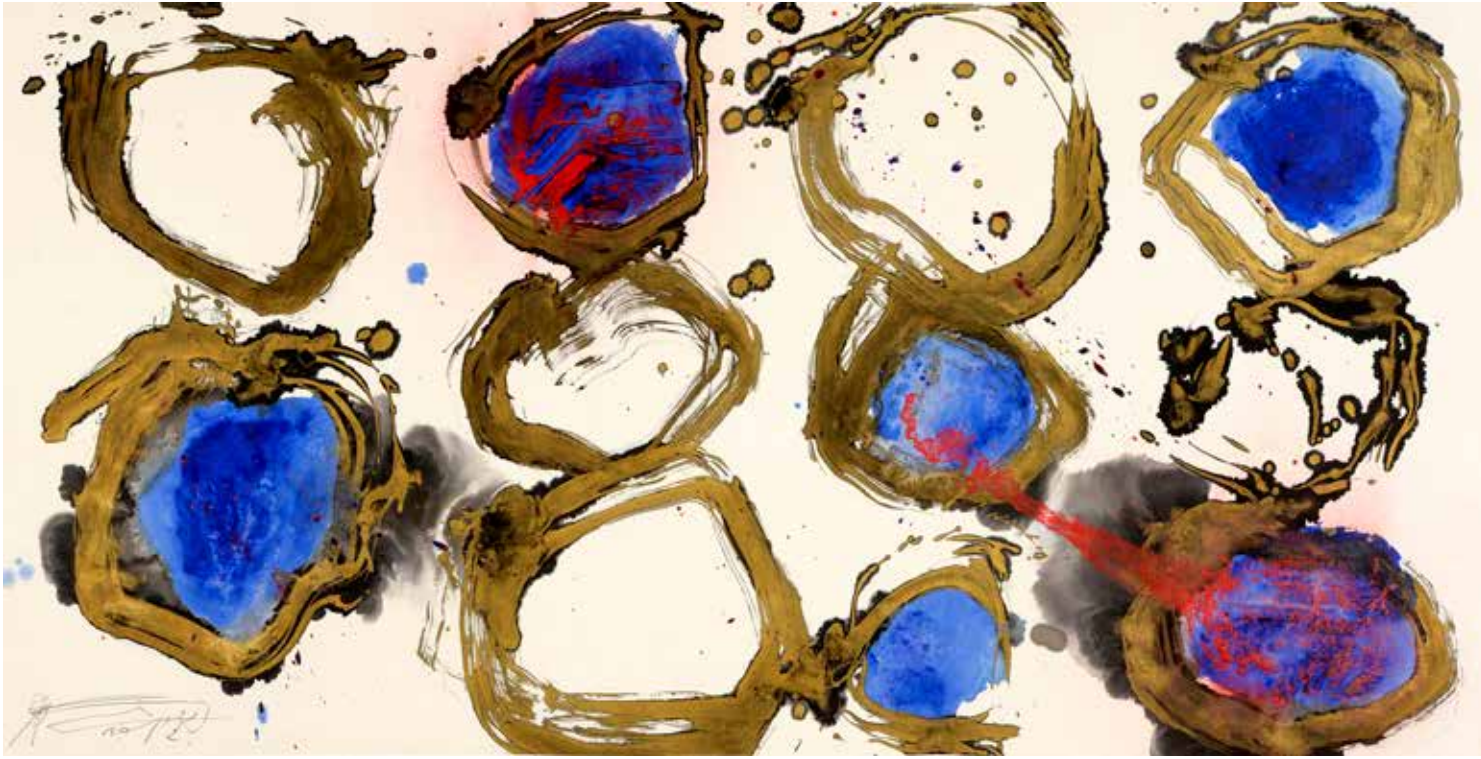


*Gathered Incense Burners, Grasshopper
Crawling by (Dragon), 2018*
Ink and acrylic on paper
Diptych: 71¼ × 38¼ in (181 × 97 cm) each



Peacock – Peach Garden, 2018

Ink and acrylic on paper
27¼ × 55 in (69.5 × 139.5 cm)



Peacock: Pearl, 2012
 Ink and acrylic on paper
 27 × 53 in (68 × 135 cm)



Plum Blossoms: Green, 2013
 Ink, acrylic and lacquer on paper
 26 3/4 × 53 in (68 × 135 cm)

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

2018	<i>Wei Ligang: Luminous Birds</i> , Gajah Gallery, Singapore
2016	<i>Wei Ligang: Songs of the Phoenix Mirror</i> , Ink Studio, Beijing, China <i>New Ink Painting by Wei Ligang</i> , Michael Goedhuis, London, UK <i>Universal Things Examine</i> , Being 3 Gallery, Beijing, China
2015	<i>Wei Ligang: Imperial Gold</i> , Michael Goedhuis, London, UK <i>Wei Ligang Solo Exhibition</i> , Francoise Livinec, Paris, France
2014	<i>Wei Ligang: Chinese Palaces</i> , Michael Goedhuis, Mallett, New York, USA
2012	<i>Zao Jian Wei's Shi Xiang</i> , Being 3 Gallery, Beijing, China
2011	<i>Banquet of Magnificence-Shu Xiang: Wei Ligang</i> , Being 3 Gallery, Beijing, China
2010	<i>Gold</i> . Unicon-2010 Graphimage by Wei Ligang, Contrasts Gallery, Shanghai, China <i>New Ink Painting</i> by Wei Ligang, Michael Goedhuis, London, UK
2008	<i>Wei Ligang: The New Ink Painting</i> , Goedhuis Contemporary, New York, USA
2008	<i>Performance Calligraphy</i> , Panties Castle, France
2007	<i>Oriental Totem: Wei Ligang Ink & Wash Exhibition</i> , National Art Museum of China, Beijing, China
2006	<i>New Works by Wei Ligang</i> , Alisan Fine Arts, Hong Kong <i>China in Ink & Wash: Exhibition of Wei Ligang's Works</i> , Shanghai Art Museum, Shanghai, China
1999	<i>Diary in Rongcheng</i> , Taiyuan, China

Selected Collections

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



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