

*Lo Ch'ing*

罗青

M I C H A E L  
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## *Lo Ch'ing: Scholar and Gentleman*



LO CH'ING - painter, poet, calligrapher, literary essayist, art-critic and charismatic lecturer, is perhaps the most eloquent living intermediary between Chinese classical culture and the revolutionary aesthetic models of expression today.

While internationally recognised primarily as a painter and calligrapher, his 12 published volumes of poetry and deep knowledge of Chinese classical literature, allied to his long study of - and numerous publications on - western post-modernism and literary theory, define him as a persuasive contemporary descendant of the scholar-gentleman.

Both in his poetry and his painting, which are emphatically contemporary in form and intention, he remains linked to the cultural values of the Chinese literati. The purpose of civilised man, according to this elite of scholars, was to become part of the dynamic rhythm of creation and to contribute to the coherent ordering of society. And it was through the practise of painting and poetry and calligraphy that the scholar also realised his own humanity by cultivating and developing the inner life. It has been Lo Ch'ing's purpose and achievement to carry forward this tradition via works which contain subtle references both in their titles and in their subject matter to the great narratives and myths of Chinese history, while at the same time expressing his sympathy for and grasp of international high modernism.

In this exhibition, the latest in a long series, Lo Ch'ing has succeeded in combining, into a homogenous aesthetic, his profound enquiry into how to express his understanding of the modern age. He describes it as the Long March towards a Chinese Ink painting renaissance, from the Opium Wars of the 1840s to today and he

*Lo Ch'ing: a Contemporary Chinese Ink Painter*

LO CH'ING HAS BEEN one of the most innovative ink painters active in Taiwan for the past thirty years and he has also been actively engaged with the art-world from his second studio in Shanghai. Born in Qingdao, Shandong Province, just before his parents fled with him to Taiwan where he was educated, his education included both traditional Chinese humanities and arts as well as western literature. He later received his Master of Arts in literature from the University of Washington in Seattle and taught English literature at the Fu Jen Catholic University and the National Taiwan Normal University until he retired in order to devote himself to painting. His life and art, represented in this selection, embody the drastic political, social, economic, and cultural changes in the Greater China.

If one wants to classify Lo Ch'ing among contemporary ink painters active both in the Greater China and the Chinese diaspora, one can call him a Neo-Traditionalist or a Neo-Classical artist. By these terms, I am referring to those artists who still rely on brushwork and ink washes or colour for expression. Artists in this category include, in alphabetical order of their family names, Cai Guangbin, Fang Jun, Gao Xingjian, Ho Huai-shuo, Jia Youfu, Li Huayi, Li Jin, Li Xiaoxuan, Li Xubai, Liu Dan, Liu Qinghe, Lo Ch'ing, Tong Yang-tze, Wu Yi, Xu Lei, Yang Yanping, Yu Peng, Yuan Jai, Zeng Shanqing, Zeng Xiaojun, Zhu Daoping and others.\*

With regard to his style, his training and commitment to traditional Chinese painting technique is evident. You see it in his assured and eye-catching brushwork, flat planes without a single vantage point and floating clouds and mountains. However, these works also express his exposure to, and interest in, western

wishes his works to represent a lyrical paean to *A Brave New World* on the one hand and a lamentation of a vanishing pastoral one on the other.

Lo Ch'ing's brave new world is the restless, culturally fragmented world since the end of the Cold War. It is this postmodernist disrupted world that he tries to capture in the jarring juxtapositions in the paintings in this exhibition. His elegant, often humorous compositions set up arresting aesthetic conflicts, East and West, urban and bucolic, industrial and pastoral, traditional and contemporary, transparent and opaque, and birds-eye and linear. The pictorial success of these works is anchored in their compositional coherence and their ability to both express the cultural tensions of contemporary life while retaining the Chinese calm acceptance of the world's endless imperfections.

It is perhaps not surprising for an artist who has written poetry for children with titles like *The Song of the Ancient Boatman* (see page 22) and *A Maple Tree's Magnificent Autumn* (see page 20 & 21) that he deploys such a flexible range of subject-matter. He is only too aware of China's growing relevance to the mainstream of world culture, but his wide culture has given him the freedom to be audacious and playful in both his unorthodox compositional structures and radical perspectives as well as in his choice of subject. These range from his own native imagery of Taiwan's palm-trees and pastoral landscapes to Californian junipers and highways, balloons and pandas, flying-saucers and colourful still-lives.

It is this combination of Lo Ch'ing's reservoir of cultural references and his amused view of the telling contemporary detail... ancient and modern East and West... that constitutes his significance for the world of culture today.

MICHAEL GOEDHUIS

\* See Jason C. Kuo, *Chinese Ink Painting Now* (New York: Distributed Art Publishers; Hong Kong: Timezone 8, 2011).

aesthetics and René Magritte and other surrealists in particular, although Lo Ch'ing of course injects his own uniquely personal interpretation of time and space. In many of his landscapes, like in *Autumn Mist Bridge* (see page 9) and *Spring Moon and the Sea* (page 34) the thick black lines that divide his vertical mountains and horizontal rivers into cell-like structures, section off space and time into heavily bounded, juxtaposed 'scenes'. The repetitive nature of these scenes within cells allow the borders to become permeable and re-connected to the greater compositional whole of the canvas. Lo Ch'ing paints idealized landscapes in order to give us a metaphysical perspective akin to seeing the big blue ball of Earth from space. The mountains, water, geometrically assembled villages, primary colours, bold lines, polyhedron forms – all of this, so it appears, sustains the 'real' world of the individual, who is seldom seen on Lo Ch'ing's paintings, but is always actively present in the viewing, in the story, in the plotline.

Though Lo Ch'ing's works can speak for themselves to a western audience, he actively portrays a 'Taiwanese Consciousness.' The increasing relaxation of political control and the end of martial law in the late 1980s has given rise to a more politically and socially conscious painting and a more open attitude toward efforts to study the past of Taiwan, including its art history. In many ways, then, Lo Ch'ing's art is rooted in the tradition of literati painting that was transmitted to Taiwan by the large number of painters who fled mainland China to Taiwan in the late 1940s. Those painters tend to paint in a conservative manner, but Lo Ch'ing – despite his biographical similarity to that generation – paints with a quite different character, for he often uses traditional subject matter either from art history or from his personal experience as discrete signs to be reconstructed or 'de-constructed,' as the artist sees it.

In more topical ways too does Lo Ch'ing display this (and his) consciousness, by way of his insertion of palm trees in his paintings. Taiwan sits below the Tropic of Cancer and the palm tree depicted frequently in his landscapes is not an exotic plant inserted surrealistically into a Chinese landscape in place of bamboo as with *Crossing the Bar of The Soul* (see page 24) but is a plant native to his country. He uses the palm tree to symbolize his Taiwan experience

and to replace the more traditional and trite symbols of pine tree, bamboo, orchid, and chrysanthemum. As he himself has put it, 'Together with the asphalt roads and the skyscrapers, the palm tree has a beauty that is totally modern; it also has a primitive tropical flower flavour [unique to Taiwan].

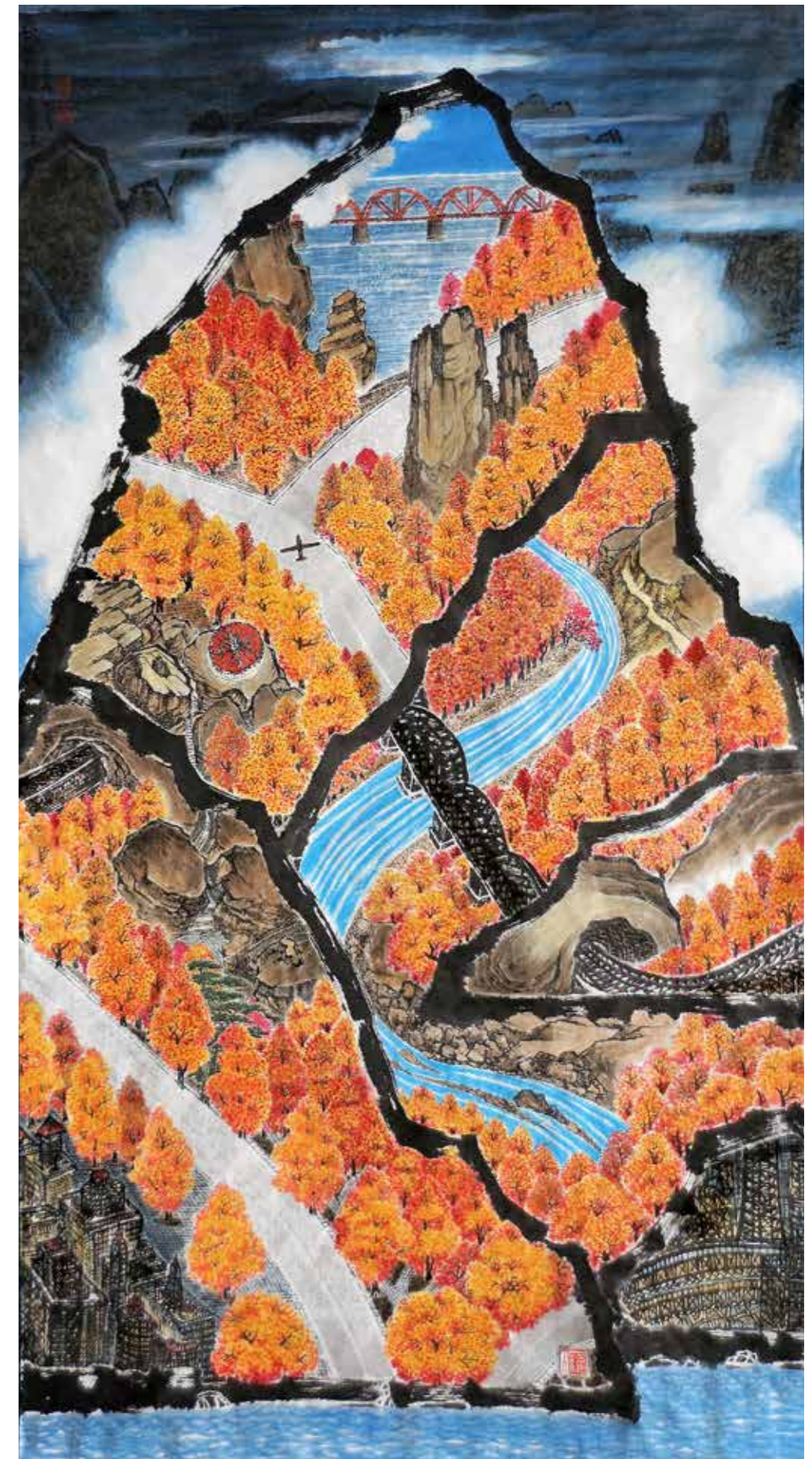
Lo Ch'ing embraces the custodial act of painting within the Chinese ink painting tradition and confidently updates that tradition. He works with compositional techniques that are a thousand years old – the insignificance of the individual in relation to nature, the relationship of solids and void and attention to brushwork and at the same time he inserts a range of contemporary pictorial flourishes, for example the incorporation of a conflicting lake and horizon *within* a mountain. Harnessing the legacy of traditional Chinese painters, Lo Ch'ing often alludes to the work of past masters by copying or painting 'new versions' of a famous scene and titling it 'in the style of...' or 'meeting with...' that shows the artist is in a conversation with a long-dead mentor, *Do Go Gentle into that Good Evening (an Echo to a Poem by Dylan Thomas* (see page 10) perfectly displays this interplay between old-new, East-West. It is these often comical juxtaposition of concepts (conservative tradition vs 'declaring' a new future) that reassures the viewer that Lo Ch'ing is painting a world that can find harmony and proceed to the future with confidence.

There is much to experience in his body of work represented here where ancient threads are subtly inserted in the fabric of the contemporary world, by inserting an @ as the source of the framed landscape as in *The Song of the Ancient Boatman* (page 22), for instance.

Lo Ch'ing is at times metaphysical, at times comical and surreal, often poetic and intimate. As one explores his unpredictable vistas, his juxtaposed titles and his quiet 'encounter' paintings, one will be lead to a sense of the unknown where it would be wise to expect the unexpected, but not the sinister. Lo Ch'ing's paintings, seen together like this, describe his effort to find a path of grace between the strong currents of his own short past, the millennia-old past of the Chinese empire, and the demands of today's post-industrial, consumer driven and individualist global citizen.



*Autumn Mist Bridge*, 2017  
Ink and colour on paper  
180 × 96 cm (70¼ × 37¾ in)

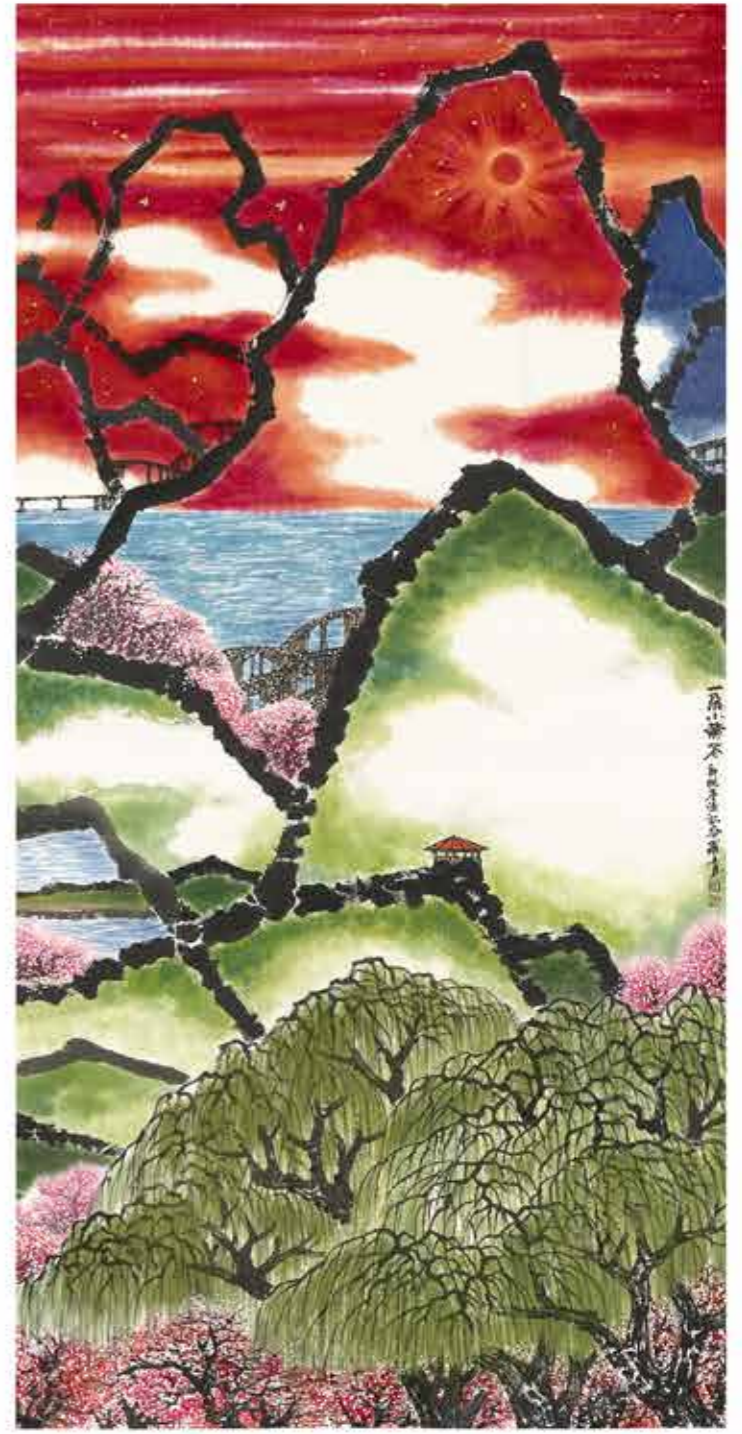
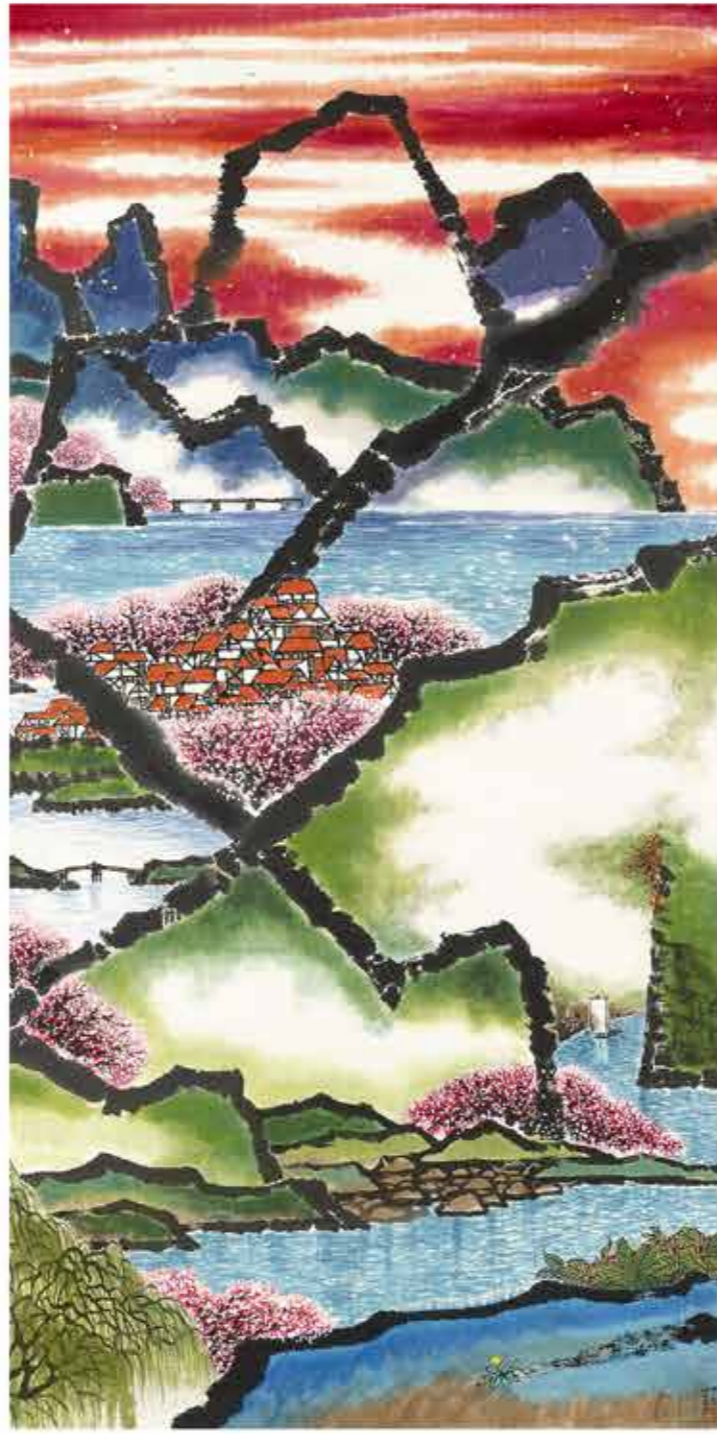




*Do Go Gentle into that Good Evening*  
(an Echo to a Poem by Dylan Thomas), 2018  
Ink and colour on paper  
137 × 68 cm (54 × 26¾ in)



*Ten Thousand Peaks of Red Leaves*, 1996  
Ink and color on paper  
212 × 90.5 cm (83½ × 35½ in)



*The Sun, the Moon and the Little Yellow Flower:  
Peach Blossom Spring Revisited No. 7, 2014*  
Ink and colour on paper  
Each panel: 137 × 70 cm (54 × 27½ in)



*The Speed of Autumn Colour, 2017*

Ink and colour on paper  
137 × 69 cm (54 × 27 in)



*A Tale of Two Bridges – Wooden Bridge, 2008*

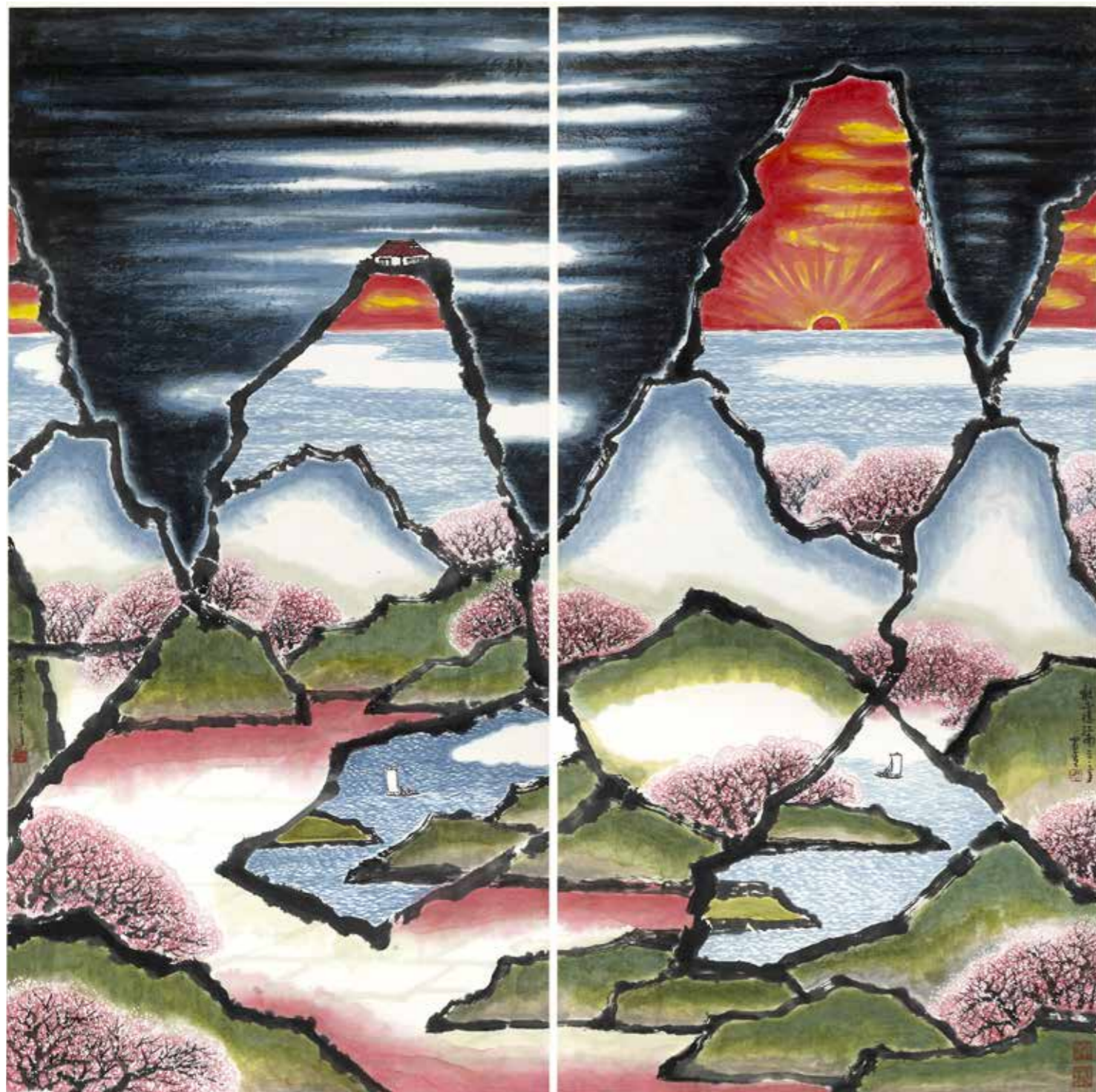
Ink and colour on paper  
213 × 62.5 cm (84 × 24½ in)



*The Sun Also Rises*, 2016  
Ink and colour on paper  
180 × 96 cm (70¾ × 37¾ in)



*Nature Imitating Art*, 2017  
Ink and colour on paper  
96 × 189 cm (37¾ × 74½ in)



*Memories of the Southern Spring Morning, 2013*

Ink and colour on paper  
Each panel: 136 × 68 cm (53½ × 27 in)



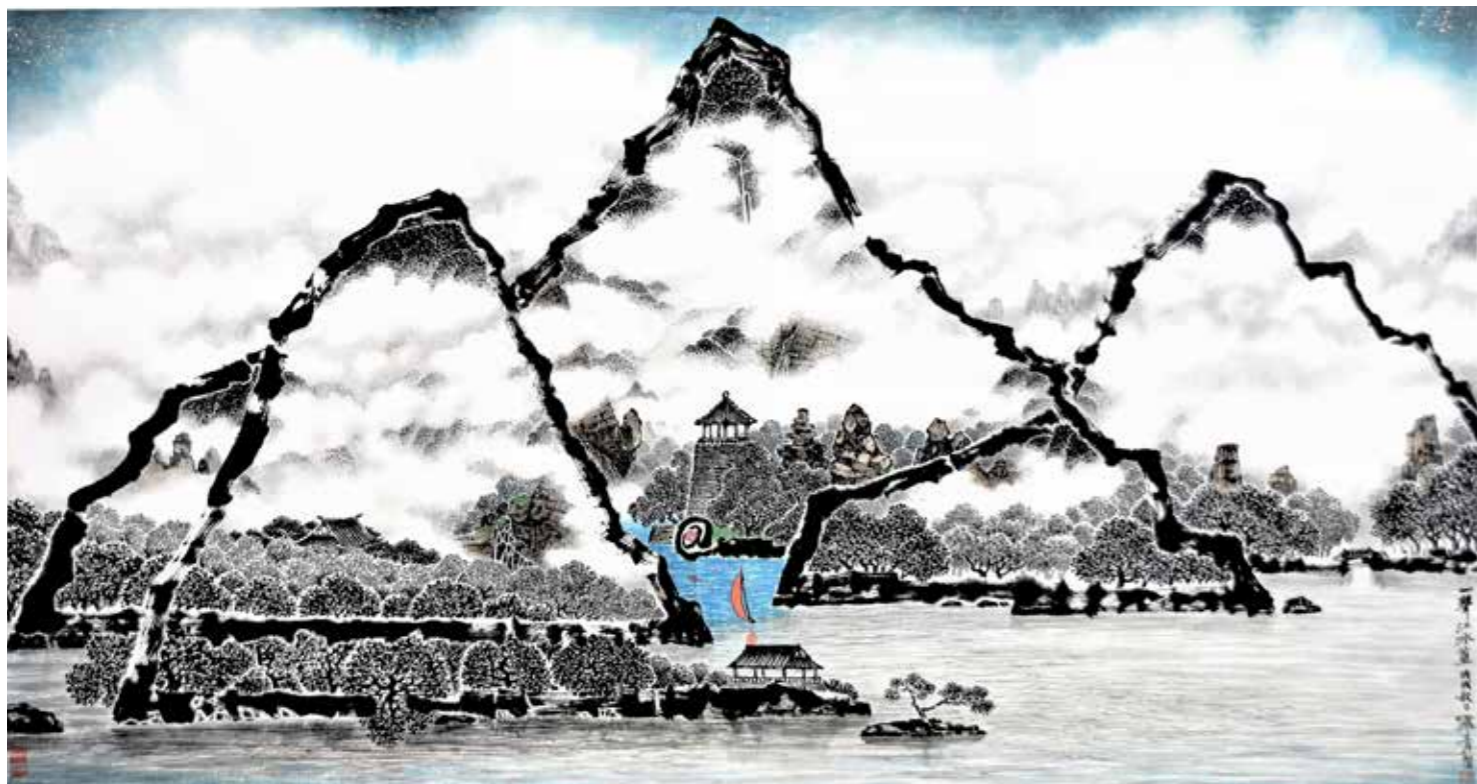
*Dreaming of Visiting Peach Blossom Spring, 2008*

Ink and colour on paper  
137 × 69 cm (54 × 27¼ in)



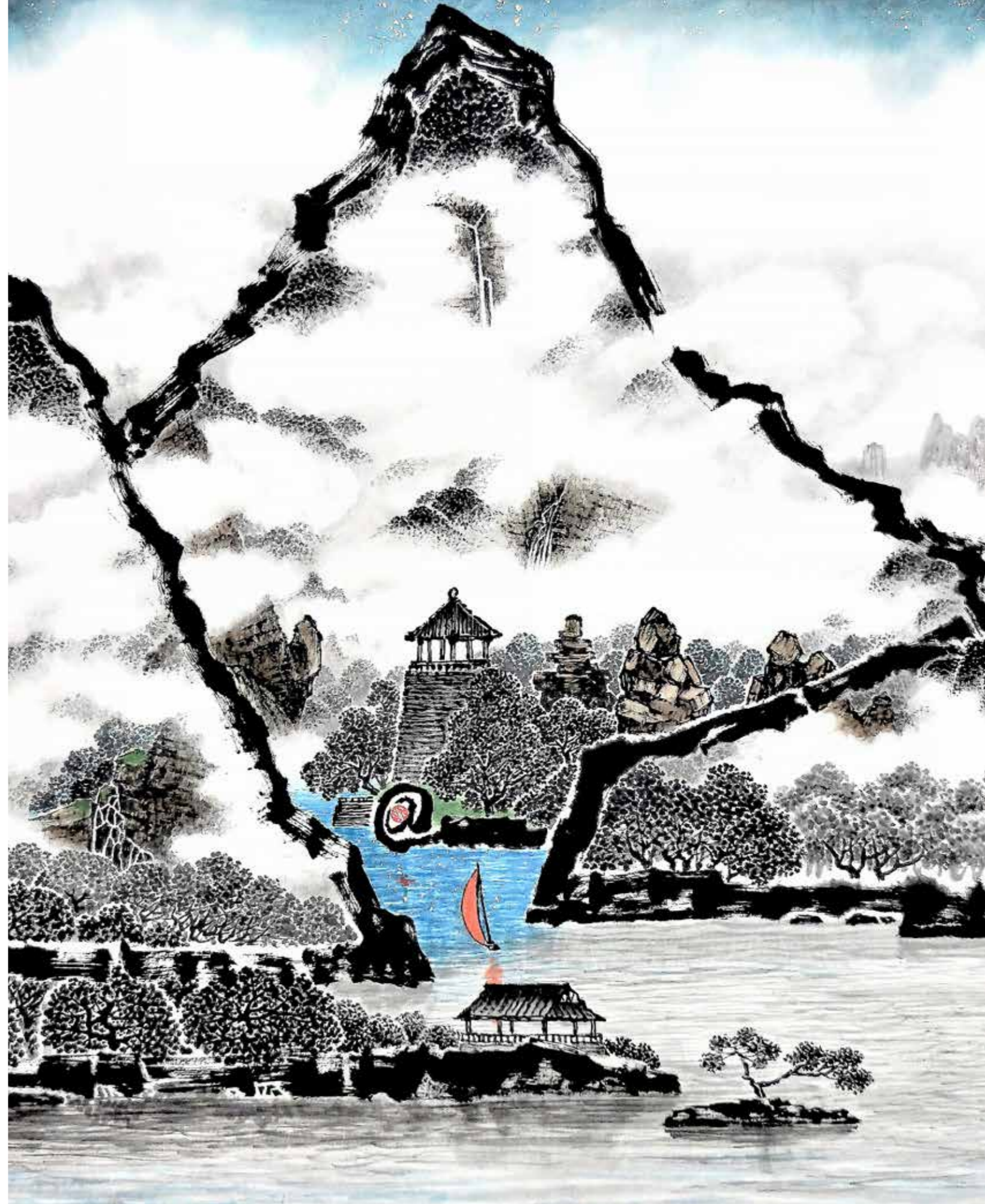
*A Maple Tree's Magnificent Autumn, 2018*

Ink and colour on paper  
68 × 137 cm (26¾ × 54 in)



*The Song of the Ancient Boatman, 2018*

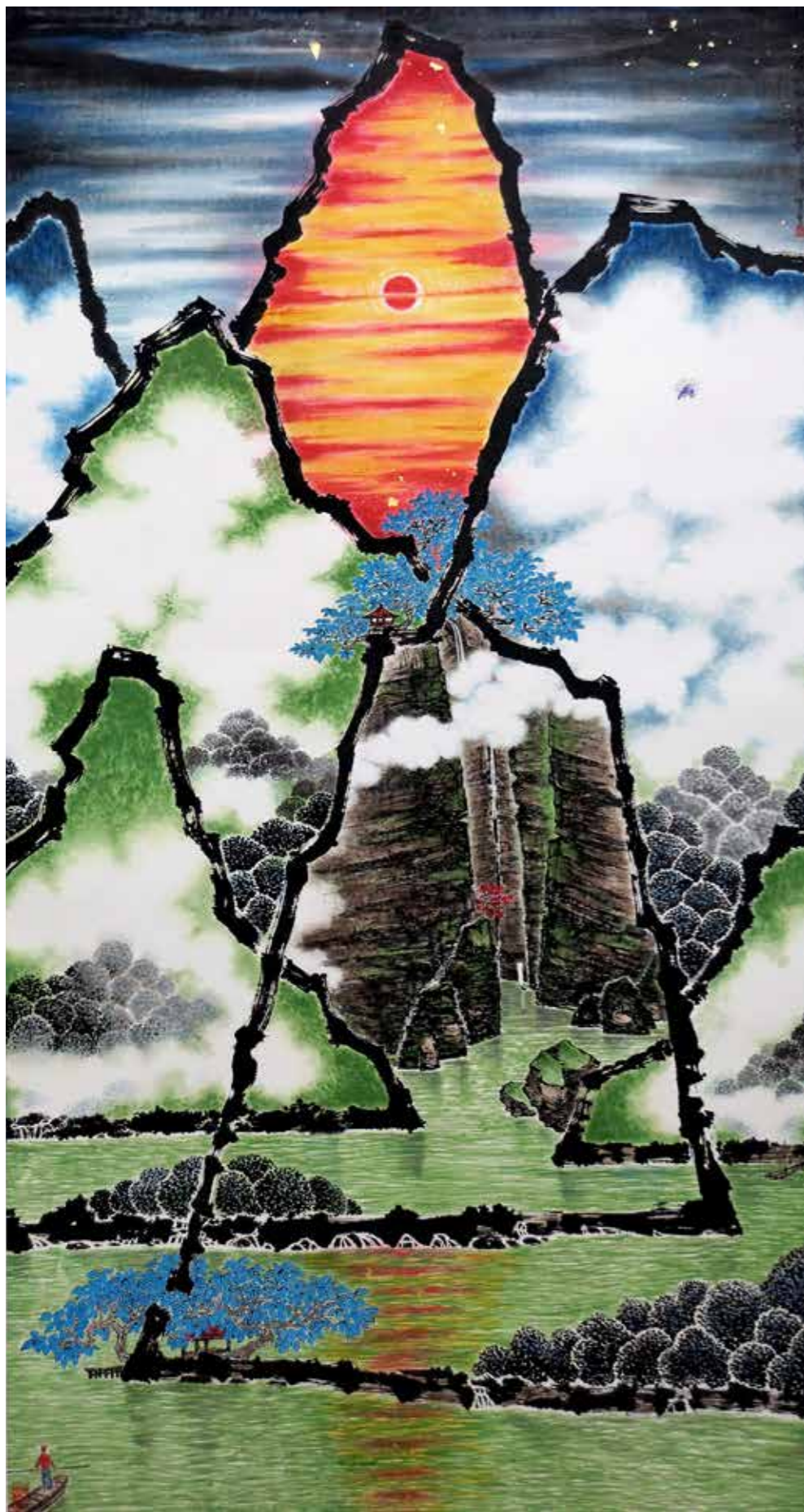
Ink and colour on paper  
96 × 179 cm (37¼ × 70½ in)





*Crossing the Bar of the Soul, 2017*

In and colour on paper  
96 × 189 cm (37¾ × 74½ in)



*Summer Gorge Cloud, 2017*  
 Ink and colour on paper  
 180 × 96 cm (70¾ × 37¾ in)





*The Glow of Inner Lights, 2018*

Ink and colour on paper  
26¾ × 54 in (68 × 137 cm)



*The DNA of Chinese Painting Series  
Landscape: Conversation with Mountain  
Huang Series, The Crystallized Mountain  
Huangin Snowy Dusk, 2002*

Ink and colour on xuan paper  
137 × 69 cm (54 × 27¼ in)



*The Mirrored Landscape (1), 2017*

Ink and colour on paper  
96 × 178 cm (37¼ × 70 in)



*Ten-thousand-year Starry Sky with a  
Lonely Soaring Rock, 2018*

Ink and colour on paper  
68 × 137 cm (26¾ × 54 in)



*Spring Moon and the Sea, 2017*  
 Ink and colour on paper  
 180 × 96 cm (70¾ × 37¾ in)



*Departure, Arrival and Departure Again, 2018*  
 Ink and colour on paper  
 96 × 189 cm (37¾ × 74½ in)



*The Palm Garden of a Nostalgia Heart*, 2008

Ink and colour on paper  
 Each panel: 54½ × 27¼ in (138 × 69cm)



Meeting the Lyrical Sun of the  
Tang Poet Wang Wei, 1997

Ink and colour on paper  
137 × 70 cm (54 × 27½ in)

LO CH’ING

1948	Born Qingdao City, China
1970	Graduated from the English Department at Fu Jen University, China
1974	Graduated from the University of Washington, Seattle, WA, USA
1981 – 2003	Professor of the English Department, Art Department and the Graduate Institute of Translation and Interpretation, National Taiwan Normal University, Taiwan
1991 – current	Editor in Chief, Tsang Hai Art and Aesthetic Series Tung Ta and San Ming Book Store, Taipei, Taiwan
1996 – 2002	Director, Center of Chinese Language and Culture Studies, National Taiwan Normal University, Taiwan
1998 – 2003	Professor of English, the English Department, National Taiwan Normal University, Taiwan
1999 – 2003	Professor of Chinese Art, the Art Department, National Taiwan Normal University, Taiwan
2003	Professor of Chinese Art Connoisseurship (Henry Luce Foundation), University of Maryland, USA
2000 – 2006	Visiting professor, University of Sussex, United Kingdom; Charles University, Prague; Reed College, USA; San Diego Museum of Art, USA; Shanghai University, China
2007 – current	Professor of English and Chinese, Director of Art Center, Ming Dao University, China

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2018	<i>Lo Ch’ing: a Retrospective (1968 - 2018)</i> , National Dr. Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall, Taipei, Taiwan <i>The Poet’s Brush: Chinese Ink Paintings by Lo Ch’ing</i> , Center for Art, Design and Visual Culture at the University of Maryland, Baltimore, USA
2015	<i>Lo Ch’ing: Windows Landscape</i> , 99’ Art Center, Taipei, Taiwan
2014	<i>Lo Ch’ing: In Conversation with the Masters</i> , Michael Goedhuis Gallery, London, UK
2010	<i>The Art of Lo Ch’ing</i> , 99’ Art Center, Taipei, Taiwan
2008	<i>Lo Ch’ing</i> , Goedhuis Contemporary, New York, USA <i>Lo Ch’ing Retrospective</i> , Artist House, Daxi, Taiwan
2007	<i>Aesthetic of Urban Landscape</i> , Sunbow Art Gallery, Shanghai, China
2006	<i>Lo Ch’ing: Painting and Calligraphy</i> , Sunbow Art Gallery, Shanghai, China
2005	<i>Lo Ch’ing: Separated yet not Separated</i> , LMAN Art Gallery, Los Angeles, USA
2004	<i>The Traveling Stones</i> , 4th Milan X’po: St. Maria delle Grazie, Milan, Italy
2003	<i>Lo Ch’ing’s Painting and Calligraphy</i> , La Fabbrica (Franco Beltrametti Foundation), Losone, Switzerland <i>Hommage a la Poese des dynasties Tang et Sung</i> , Gallerie Encre de Chine, Paris, France
2002	<i>Lo Ch’ing Poetry, Painting and Calligraphy</i> , DAI, Heidelberg, Germany
2001	<i>Lo Ch’ing, Past and Present</i> , NTNU Art Gallery, Art Department of National Taiwan Normal University, Taiwan
1999	<i>Postmodern Ink-color in Taiwan</i> , Shih Chung Culture Center, Seoul, Korea

Selected Collections

Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art, England  
British Museum, England  
Royal Ontario Museum, Canada  
The Saint Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, USA  
Museum für Ostasiatische Kunst, Berlin, Germany  
Taipei Fine Art Museum, Taiwan  
Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, England  
Hong Kong Min Chio Group, Hong Kong  
Asia Society, New York, USA  
National Taiwan Museum, Taiwan  
Origo Family Foundation, Switzerland  
Center for Art, Design and Visual Culture at the University of Maryland, Baltimore, USA

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