

Li Chevalier

诗蓝

M I C H A E L
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AT THE AGE OF 15, towards the end of the Cultural Revolution in China, Li Chevalier was recruited by the elite Chinese Army Operatic Orchestra on account of her precocious musical gifts and her beautiful voice. Life had been tough and unpredictable until then and the orchestra represented both a sanctuary and a platform for personal growth that led to her meeting and then marrying a French diplomat a few years later. However, even in the more relaxed political environment of the 1980s, marrying a foreigner was a hazardous decision and the couple left China for Paris in 1984.

Li, once in Europe, who had always grappled with the moral and ethical uncertainties embodied in any political system, led her to study at the prestigious Institut d'Etudes Politiques (Sciences Po) and subsequently Western philosophy at the Sorbonne, where her attempts to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of both Western and Chinese world views were finally tested.

She used her subsequent travels in Italy also to seek answers in art history to her profound scepticism about any perfect ethical resolution to the demands of the complex societies of today. And her experiencing living in a monastery for some time with the Dominican Order confirmed her growing conviction that it was not just the Red Guards in China who wished to suppress the freedom of the individual, but that such oppression also existed in the heart of spiritual life in the West.

It was this cluster of contradicting experiences in East and West that led her to accept the central tenet of her national heritage, namely the Chinese belief in the poetic ambiguity in life: that faced with the mystery of existence there are no final solutions, that each solution is only a precursor to a new set of questions.

Her philosophical and art historical researches in France and Italy, and later at Central Saint Martins in London, served only to deepen this metaphysical tension which was shortly to become evident in her paintings. Unlike some of her contemporaries who, for all their intelligence, are insufficiently impressed by the mysteries of life, she has become only too aware of Rilke's desperate cry against "the immense loneliness that inhabits man".

It is claimed by many critics that as an ink artist Li is a persuasive interlocutor between China's vast past and her dynamic present. Like many of the best living ink artists she has a firm belief that she is free to consult and use Chinese cultural tradition without irony. Indeed, she is committed to study the old masters precisely in order to create the new pictorial language that she believes has to emerge in order to be meaningful to society today.

It is important to realise that art for the Chinese is part and parcel of their concept of morality, of how to live one's life and how to order society. For the ink artists of the past, the gentleman scholars, the purpose of art was the cultivation of an inner life. Today's ink artists are the contemporary exponents of this literati ethos and therefore also deeply aware of the classical canon and its aesthetic and moral imperatives.

Li's paintings and installations incorporate the themes inherent to the hierarchies of her traditional culture by choosing ink as her prime mode of expression. Ink's elusive fluidity, with its refutation of permanence, suits her purpose with its emphasis on poetic ambiguity (please see *Quantum Dream*, p. 26). But Li has chosen, uniquely, to work on canvas and not on paper. This radical departure from traditional practice makes the task of retaining ink's particular characteristics very challenging but it is Li's purpose to do precisely this, while at the same time generating a gravity, a textural density to the image to express the tension between the evocative association of ink and the concreteness of canvas.

Despite her long study of Western art, she refuses to abandon the intuitive lyricism of ink which embodies much of the fundamentals of Chinese thought with its emphasis on the 'virtue of doubt'. At the same time, while sceptical of Western rationalism,

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she wants to include a tougher and more 'realistic' component into her images by using not only ink but sand and collage and pigments onto canvas (please see *Anti-history*, p. 25).

In her art's originality and its aesthetic literacy, her work cannot be 'faked.' It is totally original, rooted in this rich soil of East and West, rationalism and doubt, reverie and realism.

For me, it is hard to think of a living artist whose erudition is more exactly placed at the disposal of feeling. Her solitary bench, like her landscapes and oceans, mountains, stones, ghosts or figures, accumulate reserves of feeling, reflections and the life of the mind. Each brooding image hints at a darkness which alludes to Li's existential anguish. Shafts of light, however, bring occasional flashes of solace, illustrating the constant tension between hope and despair; between the West's quest for certainty and China's calm acceptance of the world's endless imperfections. It is through these pictorial oscillations that Li creates the spell in which the secrets of human nature mysteriously make themselves known.

As one of the few Chinese artists who has completely immersed herself in Western culture as well as in Eastern, she has been given major institutional exhibitions both in China and the West. An important show in 2010 at the National Art Museum of China in Beijing was followed by a retrospective at the China Art Museum in Shanghai. Since then, amongst numerous exhibitions in European provincial museums, she exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Rome (MACRO) in 2017 and created a multimedia installation in Santa Maria della Scala in Siena in 2018. In brief, she has been widely recognised by institutions in both China and the West, with important collections in both worlds.

诗蓝十五岁时正值中国文化大革命的尾声，她因早成的音乐天份和美好的嗓音而受到中国人民解放军歌剧团的征招。在此之前生活艰困且充满不安定，而加入歌剧团带来了生活的庇护以及个人成长的舞台，也因此促成了她与法籍外交人员夫婿的相识，并在几年后共结连理。纵然八零年代的政治环境已相对轻松，然而与外籍人士结婚仍是个具风险的决定。婚后二人于1984年离开了中国移居巴黎。

诗蓝来到了欧洲，由于一直以来对政治体制中道德与伦理上的不确定性特别有感，促使她进入知名的巴黎政治科学院就读，之后又考入巴黎索邦大学就读西方哲学，在此，她企图想要评估西方和中国世界观中优缺点的愿望终于被实践了。

她利用随后至意大利的旅行也试图在艺术史中找寻答案；对于任何声称可解决今日复杂社会需求的完美解决方案她都抱持着深深怀疑的态度。她在修道院中跟随着「道明会」(Dominican Order)生活了一段时间的经验让她更加确信，不只是中国的红卫兵企图抑制个人的自由，这样的抑制在西方精神生活的核心也存在。

正是这一连串的中西经验对比让诗蓝逐步接受了她国家文化传承的核心信条，可称之为中国思想中对于生命的诗意歧义：面对生存的奥秘不存在着最终的答案，因每个答案都将引导出另一番新的问题。

她在法国和意大利的哲学和艺术史研究，以及之后求学于伦敦圣马丁艺术学院，皆加深了诗蓝形而上学的思考张力，而这不久后便在她的绘画中展现出来。与她同期的一些其他创作者，虽具理解力但对于生命的神秘却不太敏感，诗蓝则是过度意识到里尔克的绝望呐喊，执着地想对抗根植于人类内心中无垠的孤寂。

多位评论家都声称，诗蓝作为一位水墨艺术家，在中国丰饶的过去和她充满动能的现在之间，开启深具说服力的对话。如同许多当代杰出的水墨艺术家，诗蓝深信她不需借由讽刺，可以坦率、自由的谘询、运用中国传统文化。而她也的确致力于中国古典大师的学习，并从中创造出她认为在当今社会中为了传达意涵而必须出现的新绘画语言。

很重要的一项认知，艺术之于中国人是道德规范中的一环，是如何看待生命和如何建构社会秩序的原则。传统的水墨画家，那些文人雅士，对他们来说艺术的目的是陶冶内在修养。而现今的水墨艺术家是这些文人雅士风范的当代演绎，因此他们也深切认知到传统的准则、它的美学以及道德需求。

诗蓝的绘画和雕塑选择以水墨作为表达的主要形式，体现了中国传统文化中阶级固有的定调。水墨难以掌握的流动性、对于永久性的反驳，如此特性正符合诗蓝强调诗意歧义的目的（见第24页《Quantum Dream》）。然而很特别的是，她选择使用画布而非宣纸来作画，如此根本地背离传统习性使得要保留水墨的特性愈发困

难，但这正是诗蓝的目的，同时也在画面上创造一种引力、一种浓厚质地来唤起水墨特性与画布的具体性之间的张力。

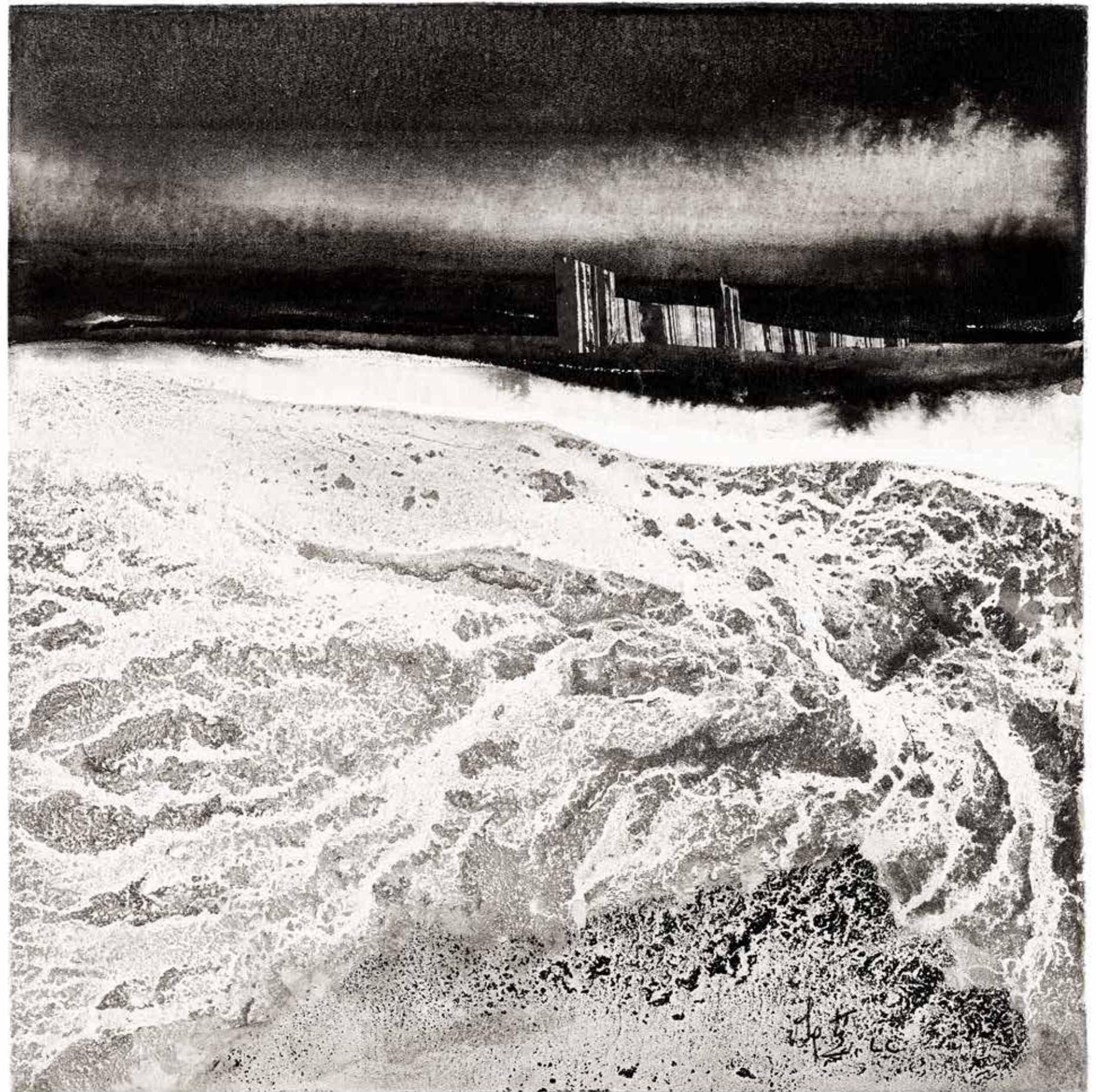
尽管长时间研习西方艺术，诗蓝拒绝抛弃根植中国文化思想的水墨以及其特有的抒情性，并强调其中“怀疑的美德”。同时，她也对西方理性主义持怀疑的态度。她因此在创作中不只使用水墨，也在画布上运用砂石、拼贴、颜料等素材，希望能在画面中呈现更坚韧、“写实”的元素（请见第23页《Anti-history》）。

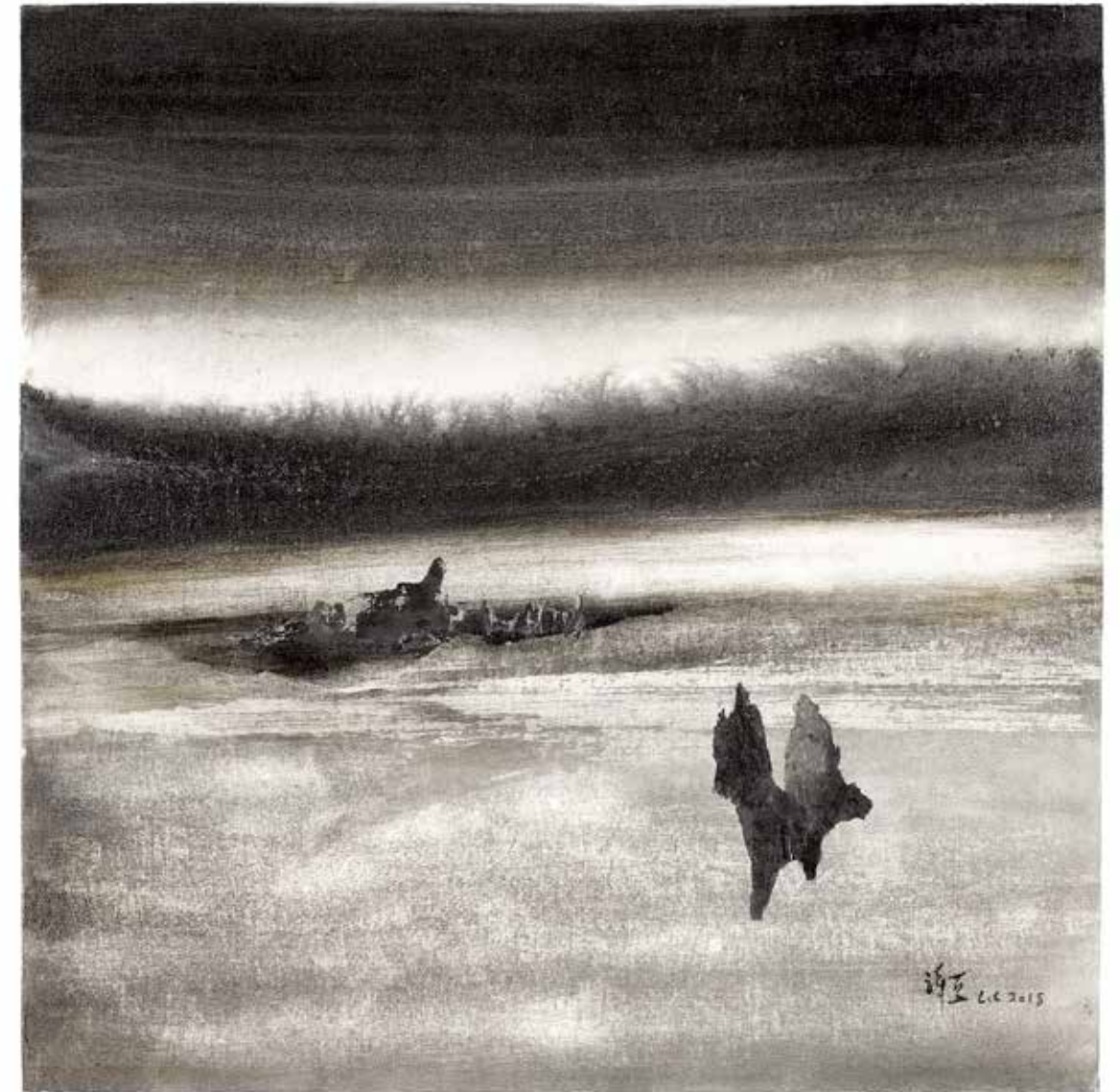
以她艺术的原创性和美学素养来看，她的作品不可能是“假的”，而是从东方与西方肥沃的土壤、理性主义与怀疑、幻想与现实中扎实生长而出、完全原创的艺术。

对我而言，很难再想到另一位比诗蓝的学养历程更明确在处理感受的当代艺术家。她作品中孤独的长凳，有如她的风景和海洋、山脉、石头、鬼影或人像，积累着压抑的情感、回响和深思历程。每一个徘徊不去的画面皆暗示着诗蓝心中与存在相关的黑暗与苦痛。然而，一束束的光线带来偶然短暂的安慰，描绘着希望与绝望之间持续的拉锯，来走于西方对于必然性的追寻和中国对于世界无限不完美的沉着接纳之间。透过如此绘画性的摆荡，诗蓝施了魔法让人性的秘密现形。

诗蓝作为少数全然将自己沉浸于西方以及东方文化的艺术家，在中国和西方国家的重要艺术机构皆举办过不少她的大型展览。2010年，北京的中国美术馆举办了她的重要大展，上海的中华艺术宫接着也办了她的回顾展。自此之后，许多欧洲省级的美术馆陆续有她的展出，其中包括2017年于罗马当代艺术馆的展览，以及2018年她为意大利锡耶纳的圣玛丽亚德拉斯卡拉美术馆所创作的多媒体装置作品。简而言之，诗蓝在中国及西方的艺术机构都享有很高的声望，在中西世界也都被纳入重要的收藏。

History, 2019
Ink and mixed media on canvas
104.5 × 104.5 cm (41½ × 41½ in)





Rescapés Éphémères, 2015
Ink and mixed media on canvas
154 × 154 cm (60½ × 60½ in)



Prehistory, 2019
Ink and mixed media on canvas
100 × 100 cm (39½ × 39½ in)



Home Animal, 2019
Ink and mixed media on canvas
154.5 × 74.5 cm (61 × 29¼ in)



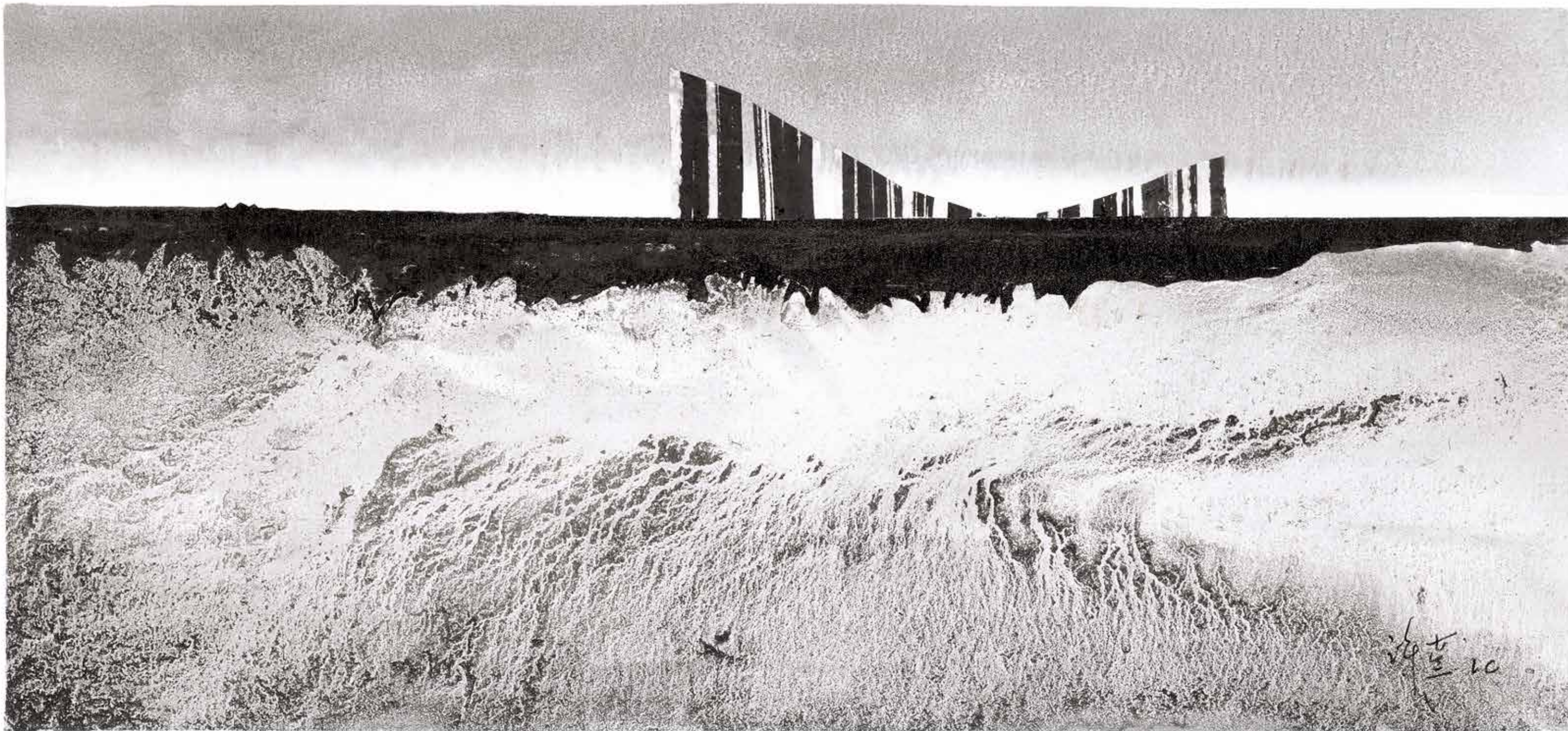
Philosophe du Bonheur, 2016
Ink and mixed media on canvas
90 × 40 cm (35½ × 16 in)



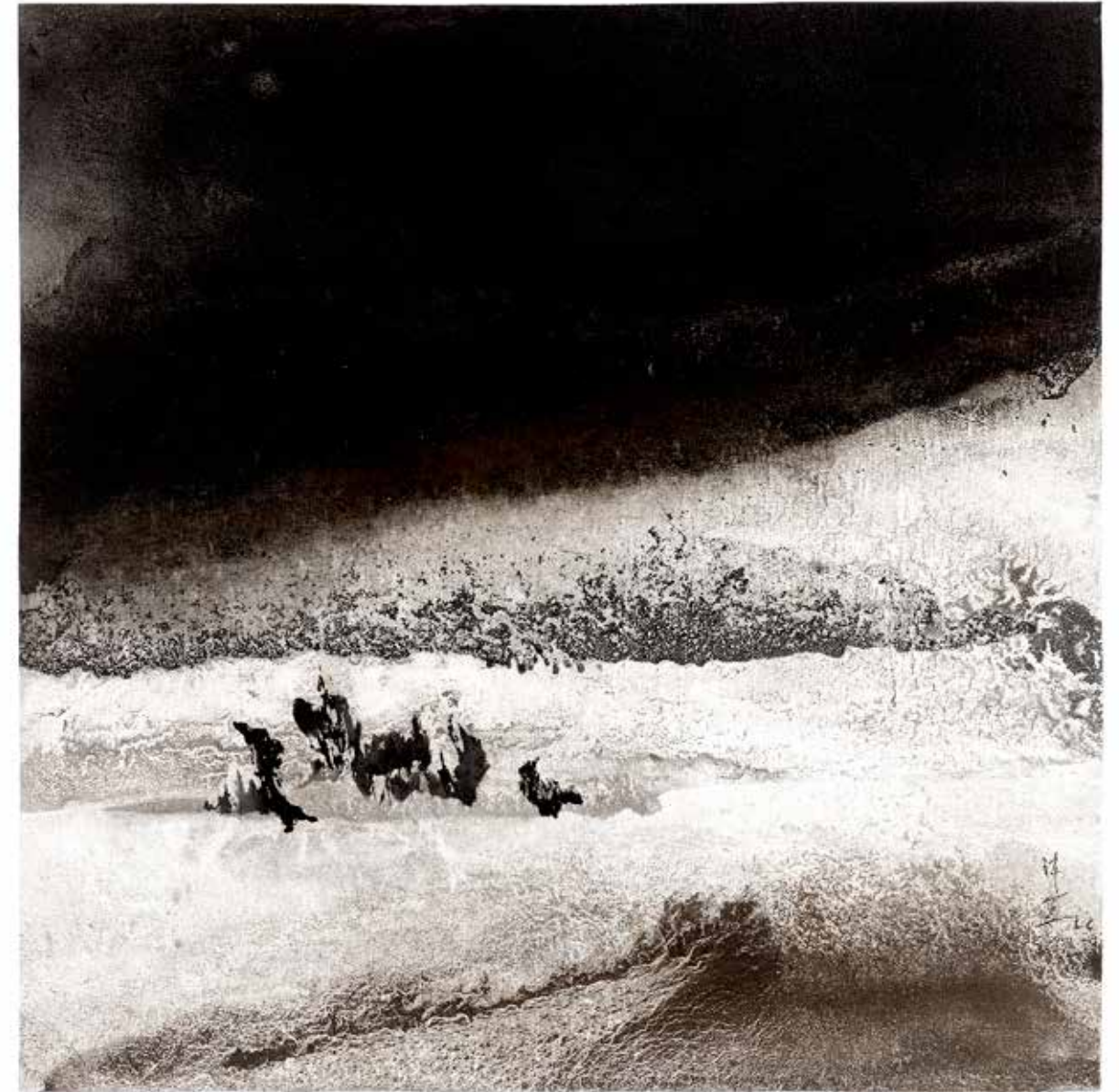
Interstellar, 2016
Ink and mixed media on canvas
104.5 × 104.5 cm (41½ × 41½ in)



*I hear the water dreaming
To Takemitsu*, 2019
Ink and mixed media on canvas
150 × 70 cm (59 × 27½ in)



Mirage, 2019
 Ink and mixed media on canvas
 74.5 × 154 cm (29¼ × 60½ in)



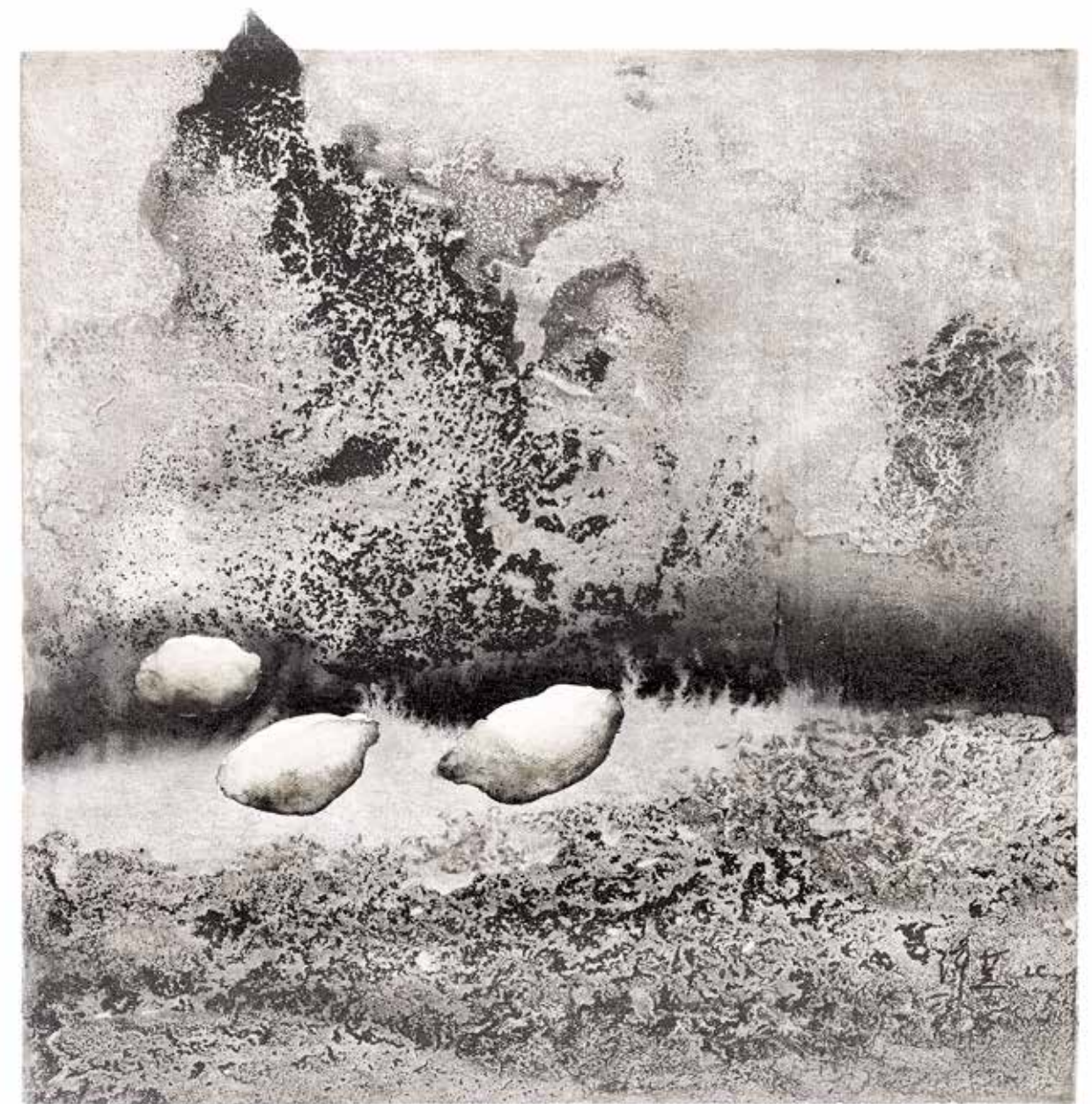
Flame Noir II, 2016
Ink and mixed media on canvas
154 × 154 cm (60½ × 60½ in)



Porte de la Paix Céleste II, 2019
Ink and mixed media on canvas
150 × 70 cm (59 × 27½ in)



On The Ridge, 2018
Ink and mixed media on canvas
104.5 × 104.5 cm (41½ × 41½ in)



Anti-history, 2019
 Ink and mixed media on canvas
 104.5 × 104.5 cm (41½ × 41½ in)



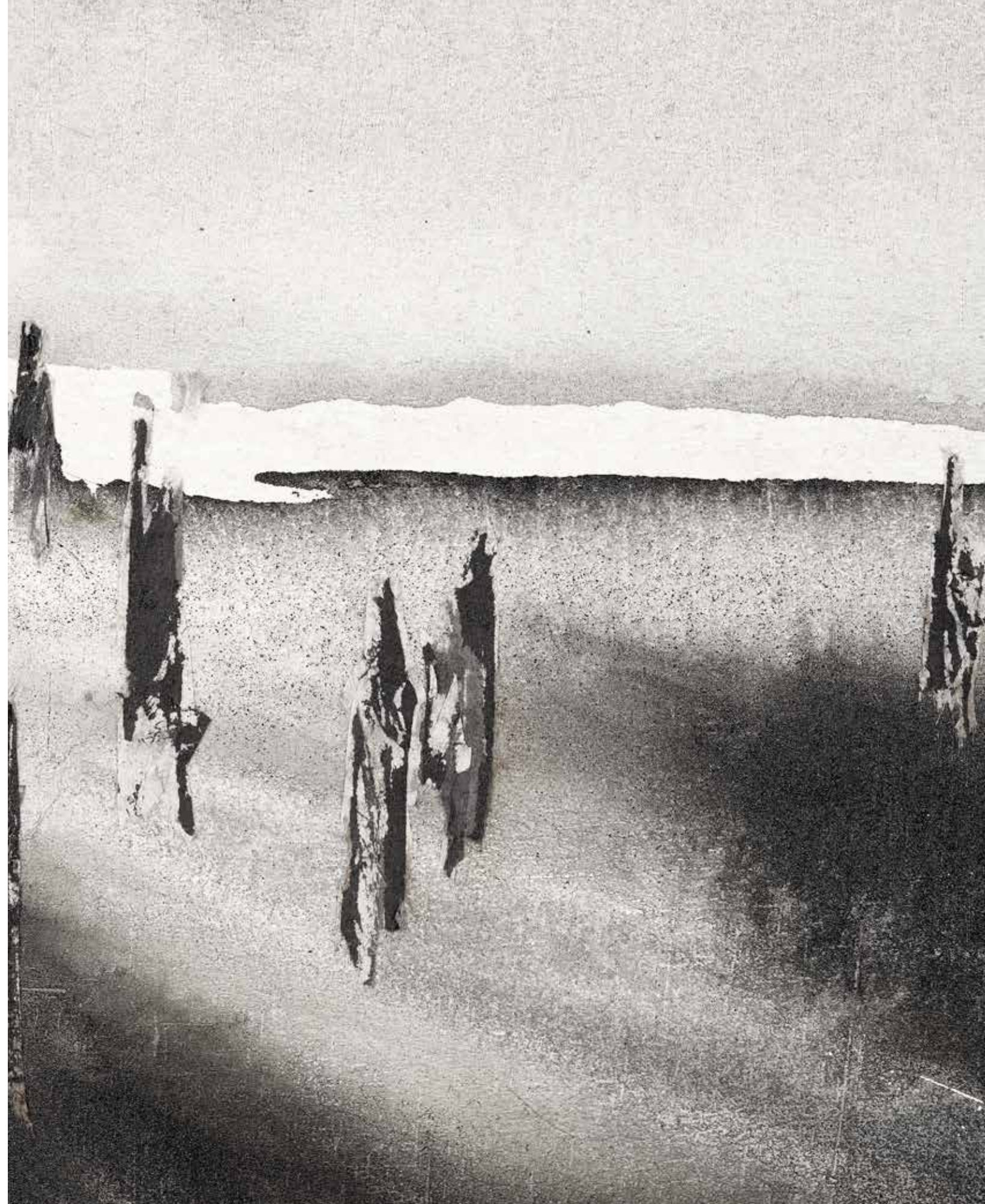
Quantum Dream, 2019
 Ink and mixed media on canvas
 150 × 150 cm (59 × 59 in)



Indicible, 2019
 Ink and mixed media on canvas
 90 × 40 cm (35½ × 16 in)



Andante, 2018
 Ink and mixed media on canvas
 104.5 × 104.5 cm (41½ × 41½ in)





Porte de la Paix Céleste I, 2019
Ink and mixed media on canvas
150 × 150 cm (59 × 59 in)

LI CHEVALIER

Born: Beijing, China

Education

- 1987 L'Institut d'Études Politiques de Paris, France
- 1991 Sorbonne University, MA Philosophy, Paris, France
- 2007 Central St Martins College of Art and Design London Fine Arts (Dali Studio 2003)

Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 2019 *Obscure clarté*, Santa Maria della Scala, Siena, Italy
- 2017 *Trajectory of Desire*, Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Roma (MACRO), Rome, Italy
- 2016 *Art pour la paix*, UNESCO, Paris, France
- 2013 *Visual Symphony*, National Opera of China, Beijing, China
- 2012 *The Stele of Light*, National Library of China, Beijing, China
- 2011 *Li Chevalier Retrospective*, The Museum of Fine Arts, Shanghai, China
- 2011 *Contemplating the Orient*, Today Art Museum, Beijing, China
- 2010 *The Poetic Orient*, National Museum of Fine Arts, China

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2017 *If I disappear*, IFA Gallery, Brussels, Belgium
- 2015 *Summer Exhibition*, Royal Academy of Art, London, United Kingdom
- 2015 *New Face of the East*, Art Museum of the University of Saint Petersburg, Saint Petersburg, Russia
- 2013 *New Oriental Spirit*, Peking University, Beijing, China
- 2012 *Ink Structured*, Museum of Modern Art, Beijing, touring to Museum Fine Art Dolande, Shanghai, China
- 2009 *The Expression on Paper*, University of Missouri, Columbia, United States
- 2007 *Summer Exhibition*, Royal Academy of Art, London, United Kingdom

Collections

National Art Museum of China, Beijing
The Art Museum of the State Opera of China, Beijing
French Embassy of China, Beijing
The Santa Maria della Scala Museum Complex, Siena, Italy
Hauntie Times Art Space, Beijing, China
Bernard Magrez Cultural Institute, Bordeaux, France





诗蓝

生于中国北京

学历

- 1987 巴黎政治科学院, 法国巴黎
- 1991 索邦大学, 哲学硕士, 法国巴黎
- 2007 中央圣马丁美术与设计学院, 英国伦敦

精选个展

- 2019 《黑与光》, 圣玛丽亚德拉斯卡拉美术馆, 意大利锡耶纳
- 2017 《欲望之旅》, 罗马当代艺术馆, 意大利罗马
- 2016 《艺术于和平》, 联合国教科文总部, 法国巴黎
- 2013 《视觉交响曲》, 国家大剧院, 中国北京
- 2012 《光影碑》, 中国国家图书馆, 中国北京
- 2011 《诗蓝作品展》, 上海美术馆, 中国上海
- 2011 《凝视东方》, 今日美术馆, 中国北京
- 2010 《诗意东方》, 中国美术馆, 中国北京

精选群展

- 2017 《如果我消失》, 艺法画廊, 比利时布鲁塞尔
- 2015 英国皇家艺术馆夏季联展, 英国伦敦
- 2015 《中国当代艺术展—国风》, 圣彼得堡大学美术馆, 俄罗斯圣彼得堡
- 2013 《新东方精神》, 北京大学, 中国北京
- 2012 《解构水墨》, 北京当代美术馆, 中国北京。巡展至多伦美术馆, 中国上海。
- 2009 《纸上的表现》, 密苏里大学, 美国哥伦比亚
- 2007 英国皇家艺术馆夏季联展, 英国伦敦

收藏纪录

- 中国美术馆, 中国北京
- 中国国家大剧院, 中国北京
- 法国驻华大使馆, 中国北京
- 圣玛丽亚德拉斯卡拉美术馆, 意大利锡耶纳
- 环铁时代美术馆, 中国北京
- 贝玛格雷文化中心, 法国波尔多

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