

CELESTIAL PHENOMENA

INK PAINTINGS  
BY TAI XIANGZHOU

泰 祥洲

M I C H A E L  
GOEDHUIS

## Tai Xiangzhou

**T**AI XIANGZHOU IS ONE OF THE MOST EXCITING and innovative Chinese contemporary artists making an international reputation today. He is an emphatic example of what the American scholar Britta Erickson means when she says that ink painters are the most idealistic and intellectually daring of any artists working in China.

He was born in 1968 into a scholarly family in present-day Ningxia in Northwest China.... an arid desert region watered by the upper reaches of the Yellow River and with the Great Wall of China on its North Eastern boundary. Tai's first ten years coincided with the Cultural Revolution but his most enduring memories are of how he would accompany his grandfather to collect water from a spring, where he was enchanted by the sparkling variations of its flow as the seasons changed.

His artist's journey is rooted in the ethos of the gentleman-scholars of old - the Literati and against the grain of the rampant anti-intellectualism engendered by the Cultural Revolution, he was encouraged to practise calligraphy and understand it as the foundation stone of Chinese society since the dawn of civilisation. He continued to study calligraphy as well as the classics before working for five years in the Conservation Department of the Palace Museum in Beijing. His next step in 1999, study at the Department of Digital Media at the Media Design School in New Zealand, was an important one for the enrichment of his aesthetic development. It led him to embrace science and technology and enabled him to incorporate them into what became a completely, original and adventurous pictorial style.

His last period of study - a doctorate at the prestigious Painting Academy at Tsinghua University - refreshed his awareness of the relevance for him of the cultural imperatives of the classical canon and in particular those of the Song period in the 11th to the 13th centuries.

So, he has become a pivotal international figure in the dialectic emanating from cultural life in China for a century or more. In essence, the story is one in which artists and intellectuals grapple with how to revitalize Chinese culture. Are they to jettison the rich but burdensome legacy of China's glorious past and adopt western ideas? Or should they dig into the fertile sub-soil of their own culture for guidance and meaning? Or even better, incorporate some of the invigorating currents from the assertive West and link them into their own vision - conditioned as it is by a sophisticated orthodoxy on the one hand and an intelligent awareness of their changing world on the other.

These implacable issues are still in doubt although the battle lines have been more clearly delineated. Broadly speaking there are four main tendencies in Chinese art today. First is the conservative backlash adhering ever more tenaciously to the classical traditions. Then, there is the vast factory of artists trained in Western Realist oil painting. Thirdly, there is an avant-garde movement which has annexed much of the more provocative work of the western cutting-edge, without often having truly assimilated the conditions in which it is being produced. Then there is the small group, a minority of artists, of whom Tai is one of the most successful, who see themselves as re-animating those elements of Chinese classical painting that, together with a multiplicity of other influences, can now best convey contemporary reality in all its accelerating and confusing complexity.

But what has mattered most to Tai are the ideals of high visual quality and the artistic autonomy that has allowed him to embrace modernism without flouting the lessons of his art-historical past.

So, what is this past? It is the glorious flowering of art, culture, scientific inquiry and technological advance in the Song dynasty – the most civilised society on earth in that time. And one of the intellectual themes much studied in this period was that connected with the philosophical implications of cosmology and astronomy – just the very subjects that form part of Tai’s interests today. In the Song period these tended to be the source of esoteric and mythological speculation whereas in Tai’s case, he perceives them as a means to not only understand the nature of the universe, but its chronology, its origins, its dynamics, its beauty, its meaning and its ultimate fate.

It was precisely this union of modern scientific inquiry with his mastery of brushwork and compositional models that were so splendidly in evidence in his major exhibition last year at the Art Institute of Chicago.

In that show, as in the small group we are exhibiting, is embodied his rejuvenation of Song traditional idealism on the one hand and his radical restructuring of it on the other. His command of the fluid rhythms of ink on silk and paper bathed in ethereal light combine, in his depiction of his floating rocks, to create a sublime vision of the universe in all its mystery and majesty.

And it is these aesthetic conjunctions that has enabled him to make the beautiful paintings in this exhibition that take account of the past in order to make sense of the present.

MICHAEL GOEDHUIS

## 泰 祥洲

泰祥洲是当今最富有创新精神和激动人心的中国艺术家之一，享誉国际。美国艺术史学者林 似竹 (Britta Erickson) 曾提及道，水墨画家是中国艺术家中极具理想主义与思想深度的 群体，而泰祥洲便是其中的经典个案。

泰祥洲出生于西北宁夏的一个书香门第 ——该地区位于黄河上游的沙漠地区 其东北边境与 长城接壤。他的孩提时代恰逢文化大革命 但最难忘却的记忆却是与祖父于泉中打水的时光 ——随季节变化波光粼粼的水面深深吸引着 他 ……

他的艺术生涯植根于传统的文人精神。为对抗 由文化大革命引发的猖獗的反智主义，泰祥洲自幼便研习书法。他深知其作为中华文明与社会的基石的重要性，并同时苦攻古典文学。于北京故宫博物院文保部工作之后 他在1999年迈出了下一步 ——远赴新西兰 在一所设计学院学习数字媒体。这段经历对泰祥洲之后的艺术发展起了至关重要的作用。他拥抱了科学和技术，将其融入创作之中，最终形成了一种完整、原创、充满冒险精神的绘画风格。。

在回国之后，泰祥洲在久负盛名的清华大学美术学院攻读博士学位。在此期间，他重新意识 到古典范式的重要性，尤其是宋代的传统（十一世纪 到古典范式的重要性，尤其是宋代的传统（十一世纪-十三世纪）对他影响颇深。十三世纪）对他影响颇深。

这几段经历使泰祥洲成为了举足轻重的国际艺术家，他是一个多世纪以来由植根中国文化的 辩证法中产生的知识分子的一个缩影。从本质上看，他的故事是艺术家和文化精英为了重新 激发中国传统生命力的上下求索。这些人是要 抛弃中国光辉历史中丰富 却繁重的 遗产，而 拥 抱西方思想吗？ 还是说他们应该 挖掘 自身 文化的肥沃土壤来寻求指导和意义？ 抑或是将 一些 来自西方的振奋人心的潮流融入他们的 文化愿景中 ——在复杂的文化正统和对社会的敏锐洞 察之间找到平衡。

尽管不同的艺术战线在今日已经更清晰地划定，但有些不可调和的矛盾仍然是充满疑问和争议的。总体而言，当今

中国艺术有四种主要趋势。首先是更加顽固地坚持古典传统的文化保守派的反弹；其次，中国存在着大批由艺术家工厂训练出来的西方现实主义油画画家；再次，

尽管 不同的艺术战线在今日 已经更清晰地划定，但 有些 不可调和的 矛盾 仍然是充满疑问和争 议的。总体而言，当今中国艺术有四种主要趋势。首先是更加顽固地坚持古典传统的文化保 守派的反弹；其次，中国存在着大批由艺术家工厂训练出来的西方现实主义油画画家；再 次， 中国前卫运动的艺术家挪用了大量西方先锋艺术的元素和理念，但往往并未真正吸收其背后 的社会、文化因素；最 后是由少数派艺术家组成的群体，他们认为自己重新激活了中国古典 绘画的元素，并加以来自其他文化的影响，以更好的反映当代现实的包罗万象、变幻万千的 复杂性 ——。

但对于泰祥洲而言最重要的是取得理想的视觉质量和艺术自主性 ——这使他能够拥抱现代主 义却不忽视从古代艺术史中获得的教训。 义却不忽视从古代艺术史中获得的教训。

那么对他而言，什么是过去呢？作为当时世界上最文明的社会，宋代中国在艺术、文化、科 学和技术各领域繁荣昌盛 而其中关于宇宙学和天文学的哲学意涵的探索 ——这也是当时的 主流思想议题，构成了泰祥洲今日的兴趣之一。在宋朝这些哲学思想往往是深奥的神话学猜 想的来源，而对于泰祥洲而言，它们不仅是理解宇宙本质的一种手段，而且还能够探索其年 表、起源、变化、美学、内涵及最终命运。 这种 结合了 现代科学探究与对 传统笔墨 和构图的 精通的艺术理念在去年 芝加哥艺术学院的大 展中 展现的淋漓尽致。

那场 展览，正如我们 今次展出的作品一样 同时体现了泰祥洲对宋代传统理想主义的美妙复 兴和彻底重构。于沐浴在空灵光芒中的丝绸和宣纸上，他驾驭了画面中的流畅韵律。加之以 其对漂浮的石块精妙刻画，他创造了一种崇高的视觉效果，包含了宇宙以及其所有的神秘和壮丽 。正是这种美学的结合使他能够创作出此次展出的精美画作 ——思考着过去 以试图理解现在。





*Celestial Phenomenon – Stands Unchanging, 2022 (DETAIL)*





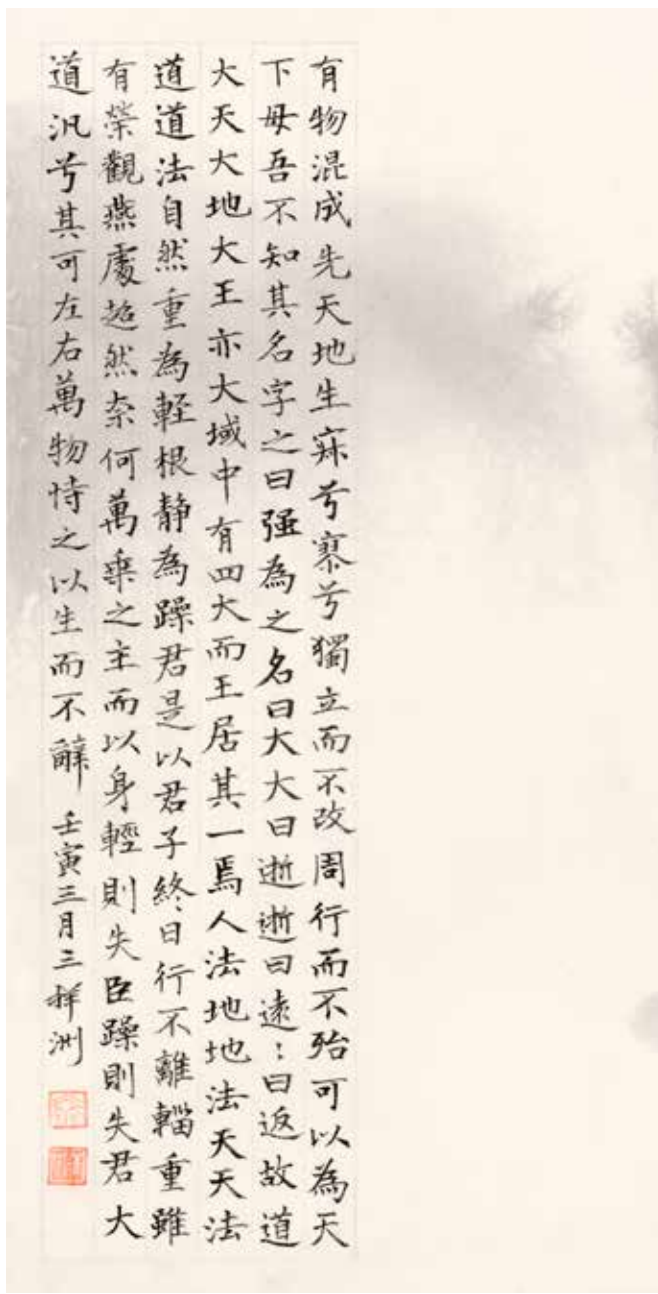
1

## Celestial Phenomenon – Stands Unchanging

跋文 INSCRIPTION  
*Before the universe was born there was something in the chaos of the heavens. It stands alone and empty, solitary and unchanging. It is ever present and secure. It may be regarded as the Mother of the universe. Because I do not know it's name, I call it the Tao. If forced to give it a name, I would call it 'Great'. Because it is Great means it is everywhere. Being everywhere means it is eternal. Being eternal means everything returns to it. Tao is great. Heaven is great. Earth is great. Humanity is great. Within the universe, these are the four great things. Humanity follows the earth. Earth follows Heaven. Heaven follows the Tao. The Tao follows only itself. Heaviness is the basis of lightness. Stillness is the standard of activity. Thus the Master travels all day without ever leaving her wagon. Even though she has much to see, is she at peace in her indifference. Why should the lord of a thousand chariots be amused at the foolishness of the world? If you abandon yourself to foolishness, you lose touch with your beginnings. If you let yourself become distracted, you will lose the basis of your power. The great Tao flows unobstructed in every direction. All things rely on it to conceive and be born, and it does not deny even the smallest of creation.*

落款 Signature: '3rd March, 2022. Xiangzhou'  
 铃印 Seal: 'Tai Xiangzhou'

形式 Ink on silk  
 尺寸 37 × 202cm (14½ × 79½ in.)



**2**  
*Celestial Phenomenon*  
*Wandering around the Sky, 2022*

形式 Ink on silk, 尺寸  
92 × 60cm (36¼ × 23½ in.)

落款 *Signature:* 'Xiangzhou'  
铃印 *Seal:* 'Xiangzhou'





Stands Unchanging, 2022

跋文 INSCRIPTION

*Before the universe was born there was something in the chaos of the heavens. It stands alone and empty, solitary and unchanging. It is ever present and secure. It may be regarded as the Mother of the universe. Because I do not know it's name, I call it the Tao. If forced to give it a name, I would call it 'Great'. Because it is Great means it is everywhere. Being everywhere means it is eternal. Being eternal means everything returns to it. Tao is great. Heaven is great. Earth is great. Humanity is great. Within the universe, these are the four great things. Humanity follows the earth. Earth follows Heaven. Heaven follows the Tao. The Tao follows only itself. Heaviness is the basis of lightness. Stillness is the standard of activity. Thus the Master travels all day without ever leaving his wagon. Even though she has much to see, is he at peace in his indifference.*

落款 *Signature: 'Xiangzhou on 3rd April, the Shangsi festival'*  
铃印 *Seal: 'Xiangzhou'*

形式 Ink on paper  
尺寸 60 × 60cm (23½ × 23½ in.)

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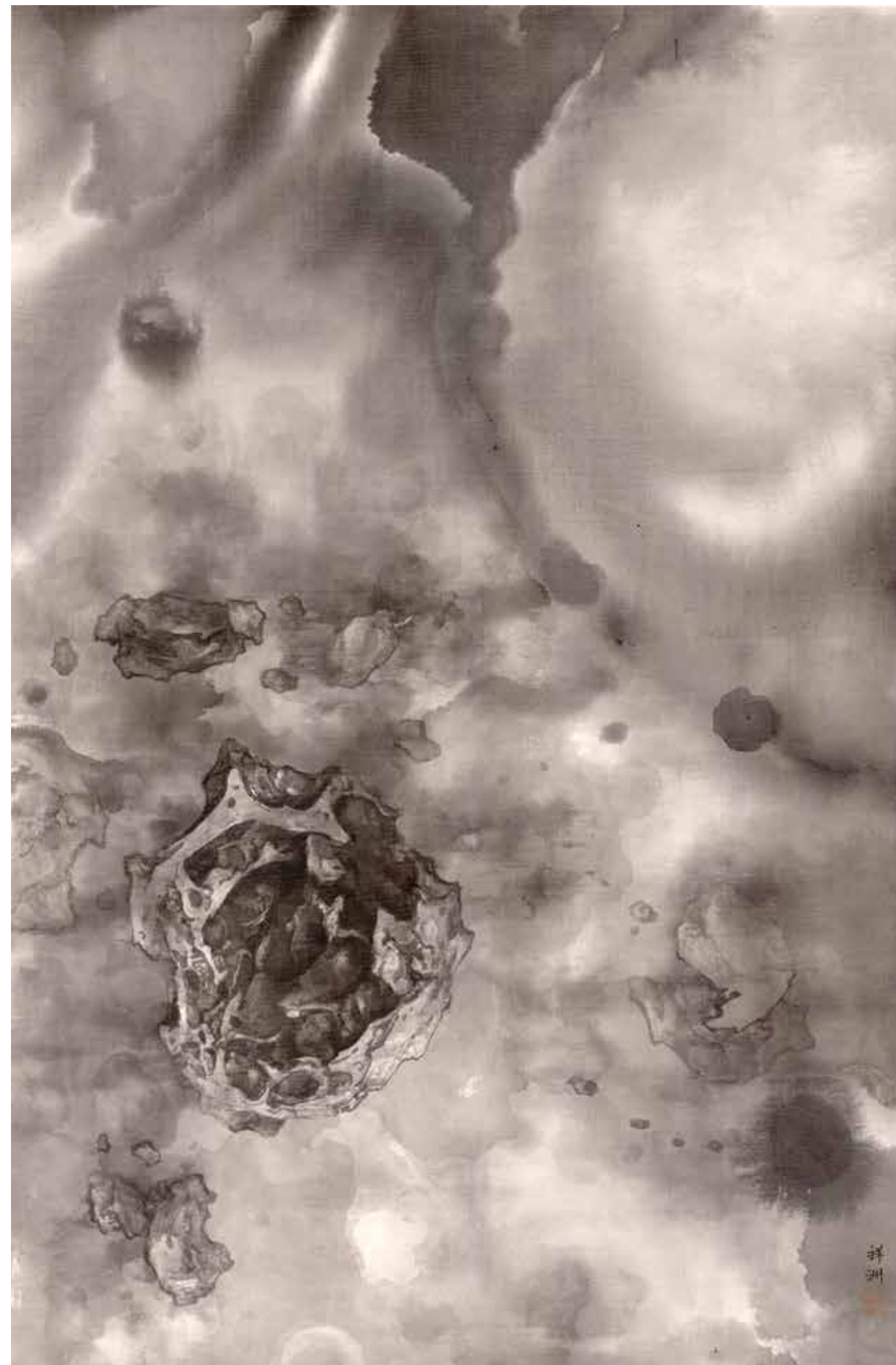


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*Celestial Phenomenon – harmonize inner  
light and become one with the dust, 2022*

形式 Ink on silk  
尺寸 91 × 60cm (35¾ × 23½ in.)  
落款 *Signature*: 'Xiangzhou'  
铃印 *Seal*: 'Xiangzhou'







5     *Sun shower in a spring mountain, 2022*

形式 Ink on silk  
尺寸 71 × 134cm (28 × 52¾ in.)

落款 Signature: 'Xiangzhou'  
钤印 Seal: 'Xiangzhou'



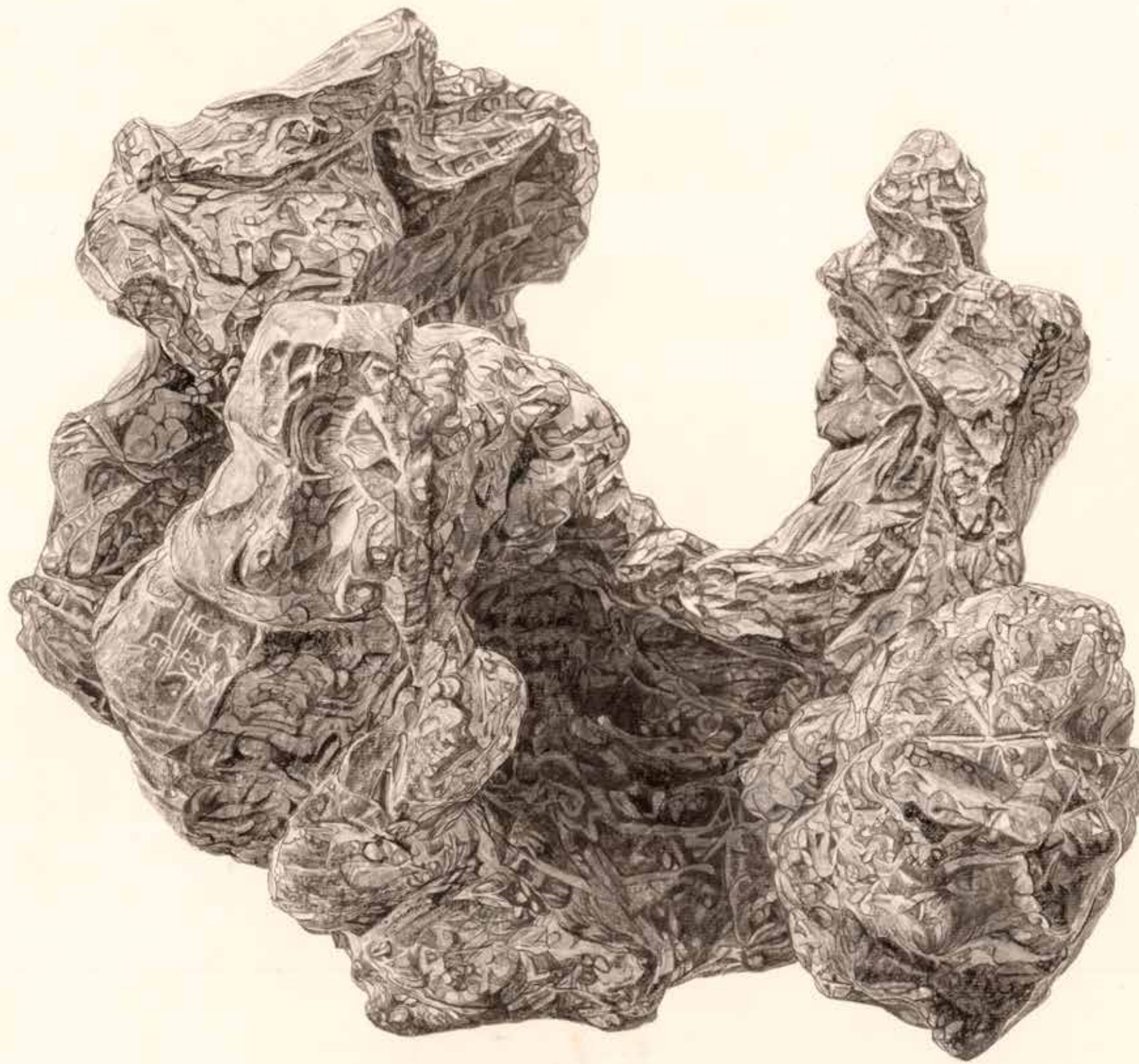
## Eternal Heaven and Enduring Earth, 2022

### 跋文 INSCRIPTION

*The Tao is like an empty container: it can never be emptied and can never be filled. Infinitely deep, it is the source of all things. It dulls the sharp, unties the knotted, shades the lighted, and unites all of creation with dust. It is hidden but always present. I don't know who gave birth to it. It is older than the concept of God. The spirit of emptiness is immortal. It is called the Great Mother because it gives birth to Heaven and Earth. It is like a vapor, barely seen but always present. Use it effortlessly. The Tao of Heaven is eternal, and the earth is long enduring.*

落款 *Signature*: 'Xiangzhou'  
铃印 *Seal*: 'Xiangzhou'

形式 *Ink on paper*  
尺寸 41 × 60cm (16 × 23½ in.)



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之門是謂天地根繇若存用之不勤故能天長地久者也祥洲







7

*Celestial Phenomenon –  
At peace in indifference, 2022*

落款 *Signature:* 'Xiangzhou'  
铃印 *Seal:* 'Xiangzhou'

形式 Ink on silk  
尺寸 120 × 120cm (47¼ × 47¼ in.)







8

*Celestial Phenomenon –  
a recursive process, 2022*

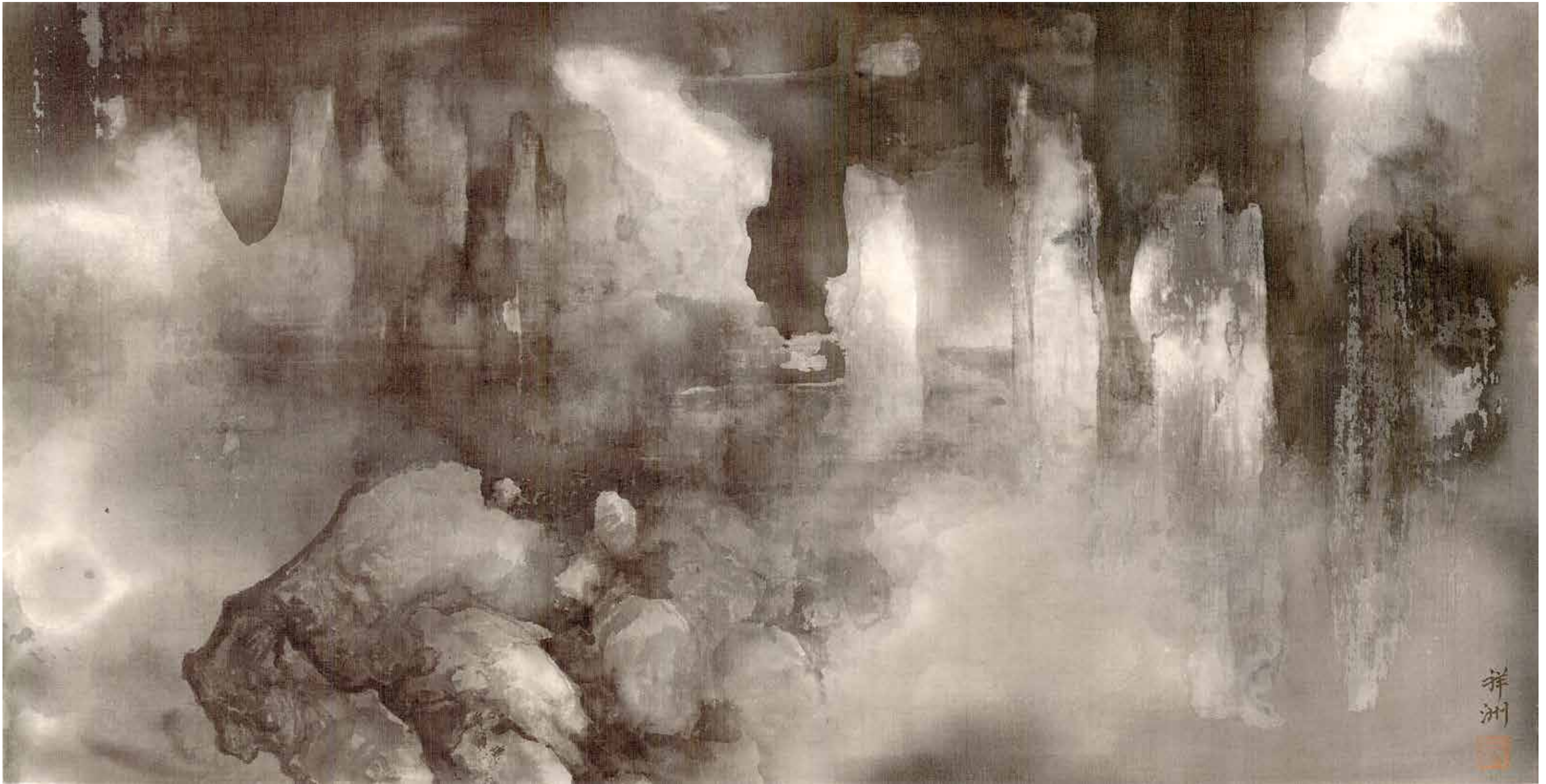
落款 *Signature:* 'Xiangzhou'

铃印 *Seal:* 'Xiangzhou'

形式 *Ink on silk*

尺寸 139 × 24.5cm (54¾ × 9½in.)





9

*Celestial Phenomenon –  
Cleanse the inner vision, 2022*

形式 Ink on silk  
尺寸 68.5 × 35cm (30 × 13¾ in.)

落款 *Signature*: 'Xiangzhou'  
钤印 *Seal*: 'Xiangzhou'



*Galaxy and Heaven, 2022*

落款 *Signature*: 'Xiangzhou'

铃印 *Seal*: 'Xiangzhou'

形式 Ink on silk

尺寸 58.5 × 37cm (23 × 14½ in.)

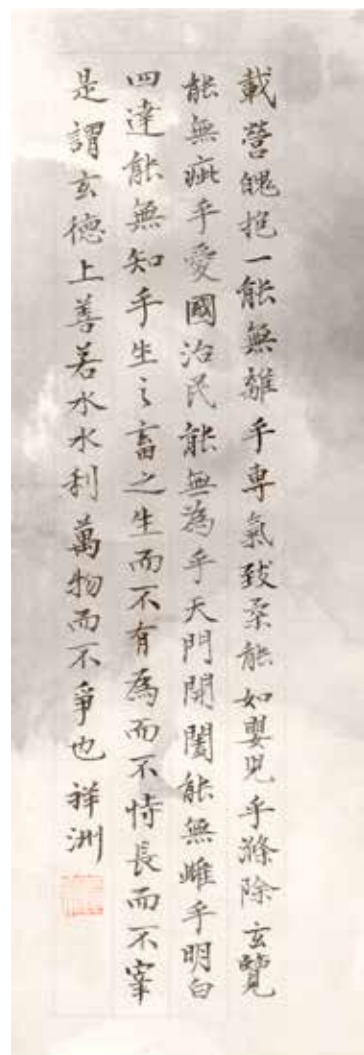






*Celestial Phenomenon – The supreme good is like water, 2022 (DETAIL)*





11

## Celestial Phenomenon – The supreme good is like water, 2022

跋文 INSCRIPTION

*Nurture the darkness of your soul until you become whole. Can you do this and not fail? Can you focus your life-breath until you become supple as a newborn child? While you cleanse your inner vision will you be found without fault? Can you love people and lead them without forcing your will on them? When Heaven gives and takes away can you be content with the outcome? When you understand all things can you step back from your own understanding? Giving birth and nourishing, making without possessing, expecting nothing in return. To grow, yet not to control: This is the mysterious virtue. The supreme good is like water, which benefits all of creation without trying to compete with it.*

落款 Signature: 'Xiangzhou'

铃印 Seal: 'Xiangzhou'

形式 Ink on silk

尺寸 36.7 × 202cm (14½ × 19½ in.)



**12**

*Stone Appreciation, 2022*

落款 *Signature:* '2022 Xiangru'  
(daughter of Tai Xiangzhou)

形式 Oil on canvas  
尺寸 30 × 40cm (11¾ × 15¾ in.)



**13**

*Orange, 2019*

落款 *Signature:* 'Xiangru 2019'  
(daughter of Tai Xiangzhou)

形式 Oil on wood  
尺寸 15 × 22cm (6 × 8½ in.)



## COLOPHON

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