

Lo Ch'ing

A Contemporary Chinese Poet-Painter



Jason C. Kuo

Center for Art, Design and Visual Culture,
University of Maryland, Baltimore County

2018

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With an Essay by Lo Ch'ing
and a Contribution by Connie Rosemont

Center for Art, Design and Visual Culture,
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2018

Cover Illustration:

Lo Ch'ing, 日居月諸桃花源 / The Sun and the Moon of Peach Blossom Spring, 96 × 179 cm (2015)

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Preface

The Center for Art, Design and Visual Culture at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County is very pleased to host the presentation of “The Poet’s Brush: Chinese Ink Paintings by Lo Ch’ing.” It has been a great pleasure to work with the artist and Dr. Jason Kuo, Professor of Art History and Archaeology at the University of Maryland, College Park, in organizing this important exhibition. As the exhibition’s accompanying publication amply demonstrates, Professor Kuo’s knowledge and understanding of Lo Ch’ing’s artwork and the artist’s mastery of the centuries-old tradition of Chinese ink painting are undeniably impressive. What is equally impressive is Professor Kuo’s ability to transport us into Lo Ch’ing’s inner world, as an artist responding to his everyday surroundings on a daily basis. Here we experience Lo Ch’ing’s exquisite understanding of the simplicity and elegance displayed in nature’s most humble moments as well as the fractious and turbulent environment which makes up our contemporary urban existence.

What makes Lo Ch’ing’s embrace of the tradition of Chinese ink painting so unique is his ability to situate the viewer in a visual space where time is simultaneously suspended and expanded. Through his eye and brush, Lo Ch’ing’s mastery of gesture and concentration on the force of abstraction combine to radically energize and alter our perception of our contemporary world. His images sift commonplace wonders of the natural world down to their essentials and allow the viewer to meditate on the beauty found in isolated moments or amidst the effects of industrial mechanization. For Lo Ch’ing, urban density and pastoral spaciousness are not seen as opposites, but rather as expressions of one continuous reality where understanding and choice are the determining factors.

Ultimately, the paintings of Lo Ch’ing represent multiple paths to rediscovering our humanity. In allowing us to see the subtlety and beauty woven into the multifaceted framework of our everyday lives, he asks us only to reflect on our relationship to it. In doing so, he is giving us permission to act, to see this world anew and transform our relationship to it. That process, in itself, is the most powerful gesture an artist can make.

Symmes Gardner
Executive Director
Center for Art, Design and Visual Culture
University of Maryland, Baltimore County

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Jason C. Kuo

Note on Transcription

In general, the Wade-Giles system of transcribing Chinese names and terms is used. Exceptions include self-chosen names of modern Chinese scholars and artists, names and terms in titles of publications using different systems of transcription (such as the pinyin system), and a few names in Southern Chinese dialects.

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Lo Ch'ing: A Contemporary Chinese Poet-Painter

by Jason C. Kuo

There are three kinds of painting: 1. those which completely resemble actual objects; they are mere gimmicks on which empty reputations are built; 2. those which are completely devoid of any resemblance with actual objects; these, while pretentiously claiming to be the free improvisations of inspired minds, are actually fish eyes masquerading as pearls, and also belong to the gimmick category; 3. those which achieve both complete resemblance and complete non-resemblance; they alone are true paintings.

—Huang Pin-hung¹

Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labor. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year. . . . No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists.

—T. S. Eliot²

Lo Ch'ing is one of the major figures of the postwar generation of painters in Taiwan. Since the opening of relations between Taiwan and mainland China, Lo Ch'ing has maintained a studio in Shanghai and become active in the artistic and cultural circles of mainland China. Thus, he embodies the recent developments of art and culture in both Taiwan and mainland China.

In the past 175 years, since the Opium War of 1840, China has been moving from an agrarian society to an industrial one, and, in the last two decades, has emerged as a postindustrial country with dazzling speed. The “traditional China” that was nourished and hatched in an agricultural milieu was smashed in the late nineteenth century by invading Western industrial expansion. The dismembered pieces of this mirror not only scattered throughout China proper but followed the footsteps of Chinese traveling overseas, and were thereby disseminated throughout many countries all over the world. In Lo Ch'ing's painting and calligraphy, examples of his internalization of the conflicting states of tradition, modernity, and postmodernity are abundant, and his

1. From a conversation with Wang Po-min in 1952, at the age of eighty-nine; quoted in Wang Po-min, *Huang Pin-hung hua-yü-lu* (Shanghai: Shanghai jen-min mei-shu ch'u-pan-she, 1997), p. 1; trans. by Pierre Ryckmans, “Huang Binhong on Painting,” in *An Exhibition of Works by Huang Binhong*, ed. Tao Ho (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Arts Center, 1980), no pagination.

2. T. S. Eliot, “Tradition and Individual Talent,” first published in 1919; reprinted in *Critical Theory Since Plato*, ed. Hazard Adams, rev. ed. (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), p. 761.

mixing of realistic and impressionistic techniques to create groups of surrealistic images is too conspicuous for anyone to miss.

While reflecting external worlds, Lo Ch'ing's newly invented landscape paintings also delineate sophisticatedly and faithfully his internal spiritual pilgrimage in a changing country. Just as many intellectuals advocated reforms in the social and political arenas, so they also espoused changes in painting. Two main approaches to "new" Chinese painting emerged. One was the eclecticism offered by K'ang Yu-wei (1858–1927), an influential Confucian scholar, a central figure in the failed Hundred Day Reform of 1898, and an advocate of moral, economic, and political reform. The other approach espoused total rejection of tradition and was propounded by Chên Tu-hsiu (1879–1942), founder of the influential iconoclastic journal *Hsin-ch'ing-nien* (*New Youth*), cofounder of the Chinese Communist Party, and one of the most important figures in the May Fourth Movement, a "New Culture" movement that inaugurated the era of modern Chinese culture.

For several decades following 1949, under the newly established and largely insular People's Republic of China, three approaches to painting contended for official recognition and support in mainland China: conservative, traditional Chinese painting; Soviet-derived Socialist Realism; and a narrowly defined synthesis of Chinese and Western art based on earlier importations. Despite different circumstances, many modern Chinese painters share one common trait: contact with contemporary Western art. But they have not merely imitated it; instead, they have rediscovered abstract and expressionistic possibilities in their own tradition. It is in this sense that they are heirs to the great tradition of Chinese painting. Many modern Chinese artists, having been trained in the Western tradition by studying abroad, have succeeded in transforming the Chinese tradition and rejuvenating it without appearing "Westernized," exemplifying the excellence of a modern Chinese artist. Through their synthesis of the theories, techniques, and styles of traditional literati painting, they have been able to achieve innovation that enriches the tradition. Many great modern Chinese painters have shown ways to resolve the tension between the effort to modernize and the desire to retain a traditional cultural identity in modern Chinese history.

Lo Ch'ing, like many artists of his generation, has cultivated a "Taiwan Consciousness" (*Taiwan i-shih*). In other words, recent political, cultural, and social developments in Taiwan have shaped their art. A working definition of an artist's "Taiwan Consciousness" would be a confidence in creating an art that embodies the Taiwanese unique way of life—derived from Chinese culture but modified by Taiwan's colonial experience under Japanese occupation and by Taiwan's rapid modernization, economic development, and social changes in the postwar period.³ The Taiwan Consciousness treats Taiwan as the locus of a unique culture, not as a marginal and provincial region inferior to mainland China.

3. John Clark, "Peinture à Taiwan après 1945: le contexte politique et économique," *Études chinoises* 7, no. 1 (1988): 29-63. See also Tsong-zung Chang, "Taiwan's New School Draws Inspiration from the Past," *Far Eastern Economic Review* (28 June 1984): 42-43. Earlier versions of this essay have appeared in "After the Empire: Chinese Painters of the Postwar Generation in Taiwan," in *Modernity in Asian Art*, ed. John Clark, The University of Sydney East Asian Series 7 (Sydney: Wild Peony Press, 1993), pp. 105-115; "Painters of the Postwar Generation in Taiwan," in *Cultural Changes in Postwar Taiwan*, ed. Steven Harrell and Chun-chieh Huang (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 246-274; "Painting and Cultural Politics in Postwar Taiwan," a paper presented at the Workshop on "Creativity, War, and Reconstruction in East Asia, 1930-1960," University of Maryland, College Park, May 1991; "After the Empire: Painters of the Postwar Generation in Taiwan," a paper presented at the International Conference on Cultural Change in Taiwan, University of Washington, Seattle, April 1990; "Chinese Painting in Taiwan since 1949," a paper presented at the International Conference on "Modernism and Post-Modernism in Asian Art," Australian National University, Canberra, March 1991.

The increasing relaxation of political control and the end of martial law in the late 1980s have 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.

Lo Ch'ing was born in 1948 in Tsingtao, Shantung Province, in mainland China, but was raised and educated in Taiwan, where he received his B.A. from the Fu Jen Catholic University. Except for the brief period of time he spent in Seattle to complete his Master's degree in comparative literature at the University of Washington, he worked in Taiwan for most of his life and has since retired from his position as Professor at the National Taiwan Normal University. As a well-known poet writing in the contemporary Chinese language, his status as a painter is similar to that of amateurs in the Chinese literati tradition. But unlike his older contemporaries and many artists of the younger generation who have chosen to work in the more conservative style, in which imitation of older masters' work is emphasized, Lo Ch'ing has attempted to give expression to his experience of Taiwan. In his technique, he combines traditional ink painting and watercolor. In his subject matter, he broadens the scope of traditional Chinese painting. For instance, 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 flavor [unique to Taiwan].”⁴ Unlike many artists in Taiwan who attempt to represent landscapes from mainland China which they either have not seen for forty years or have seen only in photographs, Lo Ch'ing exemplifies an effort to respect and represent the Taiwan experience. He is keenly aware of Taiwan's uniqueness and importance:

When we look at what has happened in Taiwan, I think it presents a good example of how Chinese culture keeps developing in the process of modernization. . . . Taiwan has inherited Chinese cultural tradition and has developed something new. I think that literary and art critics, and economic and political scholars, should not neglect the fact that Taiwan is playing a creative role and is in the position of a lighthouse representing Chinese culture. To treat Taiwan as a mere branch of Chinese culture is not right, not fair.⁵

Lo Ch'ing fled to Taiwan with his parents from the mainland in the early 1950s after the fiasco that led to the dislocation of the Nationalist government. His parents still have not learned the local Taiwanese dialect. But Lo Ch'ing's identification with Taiwan is demonstrated by his ability to speak Taiwanese and his marriage to a Taiwanese who is an expert in traditional Chinese embroidery as practiced in Taiwan. Thus Lo Ch'ing exemplifies the inevitable emergence of a new generation of artists who look at their world, try to represent it in many refreshing ways, and open our eyes to their experience. On the societal level, Lo Ch'ing exemplifies the recent increase of intermarriage and interethnic social ties between mainlanders and Taiwanese. Perhaps one

4. Lo Ch'ing, “Tsung-lü-shu, hsien-tai Chung-kuo te hsin-hsiang-cheng,” *Chung-yang jih-pao*, July 6, 1982.

5. Interview of Lo Ch'ing by Michelle Pao, *The Economic News*, January 26, 1981.

may also say that he also reflects the political reality in which Taiwanization of the power structure has become increasingly inevitable.⁶

Like many of his contemporary artists, Lo Ch'ing has not completely disregarded the legacy of mainland China and has revisited the mainland. He has successfully reaffirmed his dedication to Taiwan and embodied a confidence in the Taiwanese way of life, thereby contributing to the Taiwan Consciousness.

Lo Ch'ing certainly would not share the view of Taiwan held by P'u Ju (1896–1964; born in Peking), with whom Lo Ch'ing studied as a youth, and Huang Chün-pi (1898–1991; born in Canton). Both artists represent the older, mainland-born generation, whose paintings very often could easily appear as if they had been painted in mainland China—even though they have not returned there since they fled in the 1940s and 1950s.⁷ Trained in the orthodox literati tradition, P'u Ju and Huang Chün-pi copied ancient masters and often based their style on the practice of calligraphy. They rarely depicted their day-to-day experience. As refugees, perhaps they were not interested in the landscapes in Taiwan. Their participation as jurors in the *Sheng-chan* (Taiwan Province Exhibition of Fine Arts) had a strong impact from the 1950s onward on the cultural politics in Taiwan, dominating the more powerful segment of the art world.⁸ For example, in a 1949 newspaper article, P'u Ju cautiously but sympathetically criticized the works of Taiwanese painters in the fourth *Sheng-chan*; he was quoted as saying, “. . . most works in the Chinese style [in this exhibition] have adopted Western brush techniques. Though this departs from the authentic ways of Chinese painting, it might show *élan vital* and offer further possibilities.”⁹ The next year, in 1950, he was again appointed a juror for the *Sheng-chan*. This time, however, P'u Ju was more critical and less approving of the style of paintings submitted by Taiwanese artists under the influence of Japanese-style painting (*Nihonga*). In an article he published in the widely circulated newspaper *Hsin-sheng-pao* (*New Life Daily*), he wrote:

The right method of traditional Chinese painting (*Kuo-hua*) is calligraphy; and the orthodox style of Chinese painting is developed from that of the T'ang and Sung dynasties. One must learn calligraphy first before attempting to do painting. Only then can one hope to know the secrets of T'ang and Sung painting. During the Southern Sung dynasty, Japan and Korea sent their students to China to learn from the painting academy; when they returned to their country, they all followed the style of the “Northern School.” [In Japan], they mixed it with their own customs and developed the Japanese School of Painting. Their learned people still follow Chinese ways. Those who have not changed their ways simply are following their teachers; those who have changed are simply affected by their own customs. We can not say who is right and who is wrong, and who is better than others. Today, reproduction methods have become more and more refined and the calligraphy and paintings of ancient artists are now readily available for study. Enlightened people can choose what is good to follow every day in order to improve themselves and to enhance the arts.¹⁰

6. For a succinct discussion of recent political, economic, and social change in Taiwan, see Hung-mao Tien, *The Great Transition: Political and Social Change in the Republic of China* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1989), pp. 17-42.

7. For an example of Huang Chün-pi's paintings, see his “Cloudy Mountains” (1978) in Shen C. Y. Fu and others, *Contemporary Calligraphy and Painting from the Republic of China* (Washington, D.C.: Consortium for International Cooperation in Higher Education, 1980), Part I, no. 14.

8. For a discussion of the politics of these competitions, see Lin Hsing-yüeh, *Taiwan mei-shu feng-yün ssu-shih-nien*, pp. 15-72. See also Hsiao Ch'üung-jui, “Chan-hou Taiwan hua-t'an te cheng-t'ung kuo-hua chih-cheng,” Paper presented at the First Conference on Contemporary Art Development, National Museum of History, Taipei, December 1989.

9. Quoted in *Art Development in Taiwan* (Taipei: Council for Cultural Planning and Development, Executive Yuan, Republic of China, 1985), no pagination.

10. *Hsin-sheng-pao*, November 24, 1950, section 10. In conversation with his students in the Fine Arts Department of the Taiwan Normal University,

On the other hand, Lo Ch'ing's following statements reveals quite different concerns from those of his teacher P'u Ju:

There are many ways to modernize *Kuo-hua*, and I have found several options suitable for my direction, one of which is to discover ways to carry on traditions from the Song and Yuan Dynasties and further exemplify them. Therefore, exploring the relationships between contemporary poetry and new *Kuo-hua* became a subject I pay much attention to. Chinese art has always been affected by the political climate, and how to modernize it is the biggest problem for twentieth-century China; ethics, democracy, science are the three essential elements in the process of modernization. Literary art is an important sub-branch, and new poetry (*hsin-shih*) has advanced the earliest with the most rewarding outcome.¹¹

To modernize *Kuo-hua*, one must find the core of the problem, and the core lies in the term "modern." The contemporary age is different from ancient times in that an agricultural-based society is inherently dissimilar to an industrialized one. The agricultural society has perfect synchronization with time and nature, and it specifically functions around the idea of space. In the modern age, because the intervention of technology disturbed the natural order of time and space, people are no longer dictated by the weather and the seasons.¹²

Perhaps one of the best ways to comprehend Lo Ch'ing's total artistic intent is to examine "Calling to Wang Wei," his poetic commentary on "Deer Enclosure" (*Lu Ch'ai*), one of the most translated poems by the T'ang-dynasty poet-painter Wang Wei (699?-761). In each stanza, he first quotes one line from Wang Wei, then he adds a four-line commentary:

Calling to Wang Wei

空山不見人	(Empty mountain, no one seen)
因為我是原始太初	Because I am the very first
第一個	Primeval animal
自覺為人的	To become suddenly aware of my
獸	Humanity

then the only full-fledged and most prestigious art department in a Taiwanese university, P'u Ju was even more severely critical of the *Nihonga*-derived paintings submitted to the *Sheng-chan*; this criticism was recounted by the modernist painter Liu Kuo-sung, *Lin-mo hsieh-sheng ch'uang-tsao* (Taipei: Wen-hsin, 1966), p. 102. Liu Kuo-sung himself also had nothing good to say about the works of Taiwanese painters.

11. Lo Ch'ing, "Lo Ch'ing Interview" in *Pu-ming Fei-hsing-wu lai le* 不明飛行物來了 [*Here Comes the UFOs*] (Taipei: Ch'un Wen-hsueh Ch'u-pan-she, 1984), 130. Translated (with slight modifications) by Jen-yu Wang, "Luo Qing's Paintings of Post-Industrial Taiwan and Their Incompatibility with *Guohua*," M.A. thesis (College Park: University of Maryland, 2010), p. 6.

12. Lo Ch'ing, "Lo Ch'ing Interview," 133. Translated by Wang, "Luo Qing," p. 6.

但聞人語響
因為我是大千世界
最後一個
還能獸語的
人

(But human voices are heard)
Because I am the last person
In the whole wide world still able
To speak
Animal talk

返景入深林
因為世上最後一線
爆炸光閃
射穿我空洞肋骨的
深處

(Reflected light enters deep forest)
Because the very last thread of the world
Explodes in a flash
Penetrating deeply
My bones and flesh

復照青苔上
因為整個黑暗的地球上
只剩下一小塊彈片
在一層薄薄的青苔中
明滅

(Again shining on green moss)
Because what remains of the dark world
Is but a bit of shrapnel, shimmering
Upon the thinnest layer
Of moss

Lo Ch'ing's poetic commentary reflects his acute awareness that we can no longer read Wang Wei's poem in the same way readers in preindustrial society have done; on the other hand, contemporary readers will have to take into account all the changes in our perception and sensibility as a result of the technological and scientific advances since the Industrial Revolution. This awareness of our contemporary living experience has led Lo Ch'ing to develop his many innovative painting series in which ancient Chinese cultural values are combined with contemporary sensibility:

The Postmodern Turn

Self-Portrait Series

Deconstructed Landscape Series

Windows Landscape Series

One Man's Cultural Revolution Series

Modernism Revised

Asphalt Road and Landscape Series

Flying Series

Nocturnal Scene Series

Iron-and-Steel Landscape Series

Classical Renovation

Birds and Flowers

Extraordinary Arhats Series

Calling for the Ancient Series

Palm-trees Series

Multiple Collages

Other Series

Finding the Recluse Series

Cityscape Series

Here Comes the UFO Series

Broken Mirrors of China Series

The Traveling Stones Series

Ten-Thousand Landscape Series

Anecdote of Jars Series

The present exhibition of ink paintings by Lo Ch'ing succinctly exemplifies a formal pictorial audacity that encompasses drastic political, social, economic, and cultural changes in Greater China. Lo Ch'ing knits together his own past with the broader cultural and political world through both his subject matter and his style.

Take, for example, his numerous landscapes titled *Peach Blossom Spring*. It is important to note that Peach Blossom Spring (*Tao-hua-yuan*) is an enduring Chinese expression that means "utopia" or Shangri-la and comes from a fifth-century Chinese fable composed by T'ao Ch'ien (376-427), of a land of prosperity cut off from the modern world. Lo Ch'ing's *Peach Blossom Spring* paintings question the whole concept of "utopia," or at least make it a modern plural, "utopias." 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, floating clouds, and mountains. However, these works also express his exposure to, and interest in, western aesthetics and other surrealists, René Magritte in particular, although Lo Ch'ing of course injects his own uniquely personal interpretation of time and space. In many of his landscapes, 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 repetition of these scenes within cells renders the borders permeable and reconnects` them to the greater compositional whole of the canvas.

Though Lo Ch'ing's works can speak for themselves to a western audience, he actively portrays Taiwan Consciousness. Taiwan sits below the Tropic of Cancer and has beautiful beaches, both white and golden sanded, and some of them look out across the Straits of Formosa to China, no more than 140 miles beyond. He celebrates this beautiful and lyrical landscape and paints it from knowledge and experience, not from memory. The palm tree depicted frequently in his landscapes is not a plant that is exotic—inserted surrealistically into a Chinese landscape in place of bamboo—but is native to his country. In this small detail, Lo Ch'ing has captured contemporary sociopolitical conversations in three ways: 1. his personal interest in the structure and beauty of the palm tree; 2. his knowledge that the tree violates the traditional landscape vocabulary of Chinese painting; and 3. his assertions of his own Taiwanese-ness and of Taiwan's geopolitical place in the shadow of mainland China, with very little access to the table of stewardship and full self-determination.

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. 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. He plays with old and new elements that are pleasing to the eye and he grapples with ideas from Japan and the West—symmetry, asymmetry and color—locating a natural balance that suggests harmony. Lo Ch'ing recognizes that both the world of our ancestors and new concepts need nurturing. 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. . ." or "Calling to . . .", suggesting that the artist is in a conversation with a long-dead mentor. In some canvases, such as *Tracing the Footsteps to Wang Wei in Snow*, he not only references his beloved T'ang dynasty (618–906) poet Wang Wei, but also introduces Wang Wei to Magritte. It is this 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.

It is impossible to divorce Lo Ch'ing culturally from Taiwan, and yet he works strenuously to find a pictorial and compositional vocabulary that will speak broadly to all of us. The narrative quality of his works is striking and his strong literary disposition is evident in the titles of all of his pictures. In many of his paintings, we are immediately introduced to a plot line or "discussion point" that the viewer must take into account while "reading" the paintings. 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

colors, bold lines, polyhedron forms—all of this, so it appears, sustains the “real” world of the individual, who is seldom seen in Lo Ch’ing’s paintings, but is always actively present in the viewing, in the story, in the plotline.

Several paintings in this exhibition are from his “Window Landscape Series,” which exemplifies his lifelong pursuit of finding an artistic expression that integrates Chinese cultural tradition with contemporary experience. There is no better explanation than what he himself has written recently:

“Window Landscape Series” or “Email@ landscape.com Series” enables the landscape artist to incorporate various views and perspectives of mountains and waters simultaneously into one composition, and at the same time, to offer juxtapositions of the imageries extracted and digested from traditional heritages and contemporary novelties. In this milieu or setting, then, there are parallels of scenes seemingly related and yet not related; ostensibly not connected yet connected, such as agrarian scenes and industrial ones; political and idyllic. Urban construction and mythological Shangri-la could be comfortably nestled against each other to reflect a world of multiple choices offered by postmodern conditions and internet technologies; there is an endless variety of choices and possibilities.

With the application of calligraphic strokes in a composition, the structure of the painting becomes configured by segregated linear compartments, whose formal features echo a Windows program, the most welcome computer operating system around the world. The pictorial scenes, poetic texts, and electronic signs that are brushed in to fill in the irregular linear compartments constitute multi-leveled linkages to each other, and enable the painting to mean much more than what is shown on the surface. Consequently, the artistic methods and creative strategies employed, and their compatibility with the subject matter in the painting, reflect not only the spirit of the new century, but also the aesthetic attitude of the artist in the present time.¹³

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, we are confronted with many questions about tradition and creativity, the answers to which, in the dramatic transformation of modern China, have yet to be formulated: how extensively can tradition be re-invented before it is subverted? At what point is creative re-invention an act of betrayal? And finally, how has selective borrowing from the Chinese classical canon and from Western cultures enabled contemporary Chinese artists to make work that is relevant and meaningful not only for their own society, vital as it now is, but for an increasingly globalized world? As a poet-painter well versed in both the Chinese tradition and the Euro-American tradition, Lo Ch’ing has been searching for what Huang Pin-hung and T. S. Eliot have in common: to create an art that is both rooted in tradition and expressive of contemporary sensibility. There is much to experience in this exhibition, where ancient threads are subtly inserted into the fabric of the contemporary world. Lo Ch’ing is at times metaphysical and playful, 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 led to a sense of the unknown where it would be wise to expect the unexpected, but not the sinister. Lo Ch’ing’s paintings 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 postindustrial, consumer-driven, and individualist global citizen.

13. Lo Ching, “Windows Landscape,” unpublished paper.

Toward a New Ink-Color Painting Aesthetic Paradigm: Windows Landscape and Cross-Cultural Conversations

by Lo Ch'ing

The aesthetic problematics encountered by contemporary Chinese artists are externally overwhelming and internally sophisticated, especially to ink-color artists who have been fighting internally against diehard bigoted traditionalism on one hand and externally superficial Westernization on the other.

Chinese ink-color landscape painting, incubated in the third and fourth centuries and hatched in the seventh and eighth centuries, has been regarded as the thermometer of the intellectual trends of the times and of the aesthetic attitudes of artists. Between the fall of the Five dynasties and the rise of the Northern Sung dynasty (tenth century), it was fully fledged and it ushered in the first phase of an aesthetic evolution. Under a group of eminent masters, monochrome ink landscapes flourished. These monumental works marked the most magnificent milestones in art history, not merely of China but of the world.

From the late Ming dynasty to the founding of the Qing dynasty (the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) the second phase happened. A burst of stylistic variation accompanied the rise and popularization of the Neo-Confucian School of Mind (心學) initiated by Wang Yang-ming (王陽明 1472–1592). An affluent society emerged, and the ensuing vogue of national tourism accelerated the exploring, visiting, portraying, and publishing of famous grotesque landscapes, particularly scenery teeming with peculiarly shaped peaks, rocks, and trees in and about China proper. Traveling to and discovering these untarnished natural beauties and visual wonders, as well as appraising them through poetic works and illustrated books, became fashionable for poets, essayists, artists, publishers, and the general literati.

The ink-color painting tradition reached its third phase after the first Opium War (1839–1842) and continues to the present. That phase is marked by an eruption of groundbreaking styles. Within a span of 170 years, wading through frustrating political struggles and acute cultural transformations, the world of ink-color landscape painting evolved physically and spiritually from agrarian idyllic utopias into harsh industrial concrete jungles and dazzling commercial theme parks, and the sudden onset of the two World Wars (1914–1945) marked a twisted and uneven watershed of its developments. Painters born before and during the two World Wars mentally supported an ideal but elusive liberalism and an attractive but unpredictable democracy by advocating

and practicing the theory of “Art for Art’s sake.” They witnessed the rise and fall of nationalism, revolutionism, anti-traditionalism, industrialism, and modernism. An age-old imperialistic dynasty fell, a nationalist revolution was stoked, the first Asian Republic was founded, warlords fought each other in civil war, and campaigns were launched to resist foreign invasions. Most painters suffered or were victimized; some managed to survive totalitarianism, fascism, communism, and, most difficult, the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), only to discover ironically that they had no choice but to fall into the jaws of globalization, and above all to remain trapped in all-pervasive postmodern conditions.

Against this background, the painters of the war generation launched their artistic projects between battles, pull-outs, and refugee shelters, under the name of traditionalism, neo-traditionalism, reformism, modernization, industrialization, or Westernization. They offered spectacular stylistic changes with novel aesthetic interpretations, often structuralist, to confirm and consolidate their own vision and version of modernity. Some of them ventured to unite the ancient Chinese painting tradition to that of Western modernism through a *Chan* Buddhist (禪宗) approach tinged incessantly with certain Japanese techniques. Others tried to rediscover their heritage in a discarded orthodox past and a peripheral folk tradition, including slighted peasant craftsmanship and overlooked aboriginal handcrafts, for the sake of reinventing and revitalizing indigenous cultural practices that had been interrupted, devastated, and jeopardized by waves of social and political turmoil. Some vigorously exploited the cream of past crops to probe the core of modern sensibilities without recording the concrete external reality. Others explored faithfully and realistically their childhood experiences with romantic orientations that echoed the themes of the New Literature that followed the influential and widespread May Fourth New Culture movement of 1919.

There were also drastic revolutionary painters who thoroughly and decisively gave up the Chinese artistic tradition by vehemently adopting the Western oil painting tradition and by devotedly following every kind of modernist trend. Yet there were other artists, less aggressive and decisive, who pursued their revisionism by taking the violent painting revolution mildly and approaching overheated Westernization elastically. They modified the existing popular Chinese and Japanese stylistic variations and techniques to achieve market success in the East as well as in the West.

Artists of the postwar generation nurtured their arts during the Cold War (1947–1991). Some of them tenaciously survived the Communist purge of nationalist and nonsocialist conformists (1949–1979); others braved the White Terror in Taiwan (1949–1987) and prevailed. Their artistic projects culminated in the ensuing socio-political milieus of postmodern pluralism. The clouded poignant contentions about “Art for Art’s sake” and “Art for Socialism’s sake” eventually dropped and unnoticeably dissipated. Deliriously riding rollercoasters of thriving cultural theories—post-structuralism, deconstructionism, “the End of History,” “the End of Art,” and “After the End of Art”—postwar artists had to surmount the aftermath of the Cold War, tackle the traumatic memories of the Cultural Revolution, and finally wrestle with overwhelming globalization, and with it a pervasive internet and a culture of violent clashes catalyzed by multiculturalism. At the same time, they had to accommodate themselves to international crises such as ecological restoration, global warming, and even the impending danger of an aging population.

In Taiwan, the Chinese postmodern condition first loomed around 1986. It was uniquely complicated and, for postwar painters, unprecedented. In the first place, the Chinese cultural-political situation had been divided into two laboratories after World War II. The one in mainland China took on a continental tyrannical communist orientation, while the other, outside of China proper, chiefly in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and some major cosmopolitan cities around the world, adopted a liberal and democratic one. Painters in each milieu were expected to live up to and deal with a set of often strange and random collages of agricultural, industrial, and postindustrial contexts. Each collage was like a broken mirror caught in a whirling vortex of kaleidoscopic changes accelerated by ever-advancing internet technologies.

Artists of the postwar generation, especially landscape painters, are bound to tackle head-on these colliding contemporary issues with new aesthetic strategies and new modes of creative thought, since ink-color landscape painting has always been the dominant way for artists to search for new sensibility, to demonstrate quintessential beauty, and to convey the zeitgeist of a new epoch.

Personally, I am inclined to adopt and reinvent the age-old-aesthetic concept of *hsing* (興), or “juxtaposed contingent improvisations,” by incorporating new interpretations into the creative process of my landscape explorations. At the same time, I rely upon the cultural semiotics of the Chinese language, both graphic and linguistic, to find virgin frontiers and to investigate new possibilities. Linguists have classified Chinese as a topic-comment language, in contrast to subject-prominent, non-inflective languages, like English. The Chinese language allows a topic in a sentence to be followed by comments of rhapsodic narrative or *fu* (賦), of figurative speech or *pi* (比), or of juxtaposition of imagery or *hsing* (興). When the grammar of the verbal language is applied to the practice of the painting language, the most compatible “comment” of a graphic sentence “topic” will be juxtaposed with graphic patterns selected from the graphic signifier systems provided by the ink-color painting dictionaries, among which *The Mustard Seed Garden Painting Manual* (芥子園畫譜), first compiled and published in the early seventeenth century, is the best known and most accepted.

“Topic-supplementary comment” painting theory, derived and modified from “topic-comment” theories of verbal language, enables the painter to employ ancient and modern pictorial and calligraphic idioms and quotations to construct synthetic graphic sentence patterns. Writing and composing painted images allow an artist not only to express meaning beyond word and meaning beyond picture, but also to conduct “hyperspace communication” in art, constantly shaping and performing dialogues not only with the masters’ works past and present, but also with those of Western and other cultures.

Paintings of crosscultural conversations share all the traits demonstrated by recent internet and videographic technology, especially the internationally well-received Microsoft Windows operating system. The orientation of “Windows@landscape.com Series” enables a landscape artist to incorporate various views and perspectives of mountains, waters, and cityscapes simultaneously in one composition and at the same time to juxtapose imagery and calligraphy extracted and digested from traditional heritage and contemporary novelty. In Windows Landscape, a viewer can find parallels of graphic sceneries and verbal signifiers seemingly related and yet not related, seemingly not connected yet connected, such as poetic characters and concrete shapes, agrarian

scenes and industrial ones, political and idyllic, urban construction and mythological Shangri-La, and so forth. Signifiers of all kinds can be comfortably nestled into each other to reflect a world of multiple choices offered by postmodern conditions and internet technology.

Based on the traditional Chinese painting dictionary *The Mustard Seed Garden Painting Manual*, codified, expanded, and enriched after its first appearance, new graphic lexical patterns of the twentieth century are created to join the old to facilitate grammatical contacts and dramatic ambiguities through calligraphic linear brushwork thickening up and thinning out to form successive rhythmic tension. The parallel images either in antithesis or in symmetry always acquire internal complexities proportionate to their external opacity or lucidity.

With the application of calligraphic strokes, the composition of the painting is constructed by segregated linear compartments whose formal features echo programs in Windows. The pictorial scenes, poetic texts, and electronic signs fill in the irregular linear compartments and constitute multi-level linkages to each other, and enable the painting to mean much more than what it seems to say. Consequently, the artistic method and aesthetic strategy employed and their compatibility with the subject matter in the painting reflect not only the spirit of the new century but also the aesthetic attitude and aptitude of the artist of our times.

Close Encounters with Lo Ch'ing: Excerpts from an Interview

by Connie Rosemont

Lo Ch'ing is an internationally recognized painter now in his seventies. He was born in China in 1948 but grew up on the island of Taiwan. To grow up in Taiwan during the twentieth century was to be caught in the crosscurrents of history and geopolitics, to come of age in a century that saw unprecedented political upheaval in Taiwan and China, including war, occupation and revolution.

Lo's painting navigates these crosscurrents and their social repercussions with a grace and beauty that belie the underlying complicated philosophical issues. He seeks to keep tradition alive while also accepting the inevitable forward-march of change. His works grapple with the transformation of Chinese art and culture and the necessity of building from the language and symbols of an agrarian past a new vocabulary that does not erase that past or make it unintelligible.

As Lo Ch'ing has developed his distinctive vocabulary over five decades, he has nurtured and positioned himself to be one of the most innovative, determined, and successful stewards of the Chinese brush-and-ink painting tradition, which goes back almost nine hundred years. Seeing himself always in conversation with the centuries of artists who have come before him, he has created links ever further back in time, mooring his work with design references as early as Chinese Neolithic pottery.

His art is infused with techniques and a painting tradition that are distinctively Chinese, but he puts this technique to use through an artistic vocabulary that pulls as much from Western painters such as René Magritte and Paul Klee as it does from the Chinese canon. In their synthesis, his works are decidedly global and warmly embrace the modern and the postmodern. His breathtaking creativity and command of the brush give his inventive juxtapositions and his often unsettling, semi-abstract compositions a narrative authority and graphic self-confidence that allow the viewer to feel a sense of harmony, even boldness, in the jumbled landscape of the twenty-first century.

In addition to being a sought-after painter, Lo Ch'ing is also an award-winning poet, a literary critic, an aesthetic theorist, a teacher and a great storyteller. He reaches for inclusive audiences, well beyond East Asia, and, for the attentive visitor, he opens the door wide to evocative and positive experiences.

The following are excerpts from an interview with Lo Ch'ing conducted in Seattle, in October 2016, concerning his artistic development and aesthetic goals. The interview has been extensively condensed and edited for clarity and length.

How did you begin painting? It seems reaching an audience has always been part of your inspiration.

Lo: Well, I inherited some initial painting ability from my mother's family. I could draw and sketch. If you want the real story, in third grade a boy transferred from another school to my class. He could obviously paint cartoons and he was very popular and suddenly attracted all the girls, who would ask him to paint for them after class. I was surprised and jealous, because I could do this too, in a minute! And so, I copied him. His way was stylized and popular. I added details to make mine more vivid, or pathetic, or romantic, like adding a teardrop on the cheek. I liked the attention and once I saw I could attract the girls, then I wanted to attract the boys. So I painted generals, and then I had to learn to paint horses so I could put the generals on them.

In middle school, my art teacher gave us watercolor paper and watercolor brushes and sent us outside to paint. This is when my eyes opened to art. It made all the cartoon practice seem so naïve, so shallow. I realized now, this was art. This was the beginning. And I also realized that with brushes and watercolors, and working outside, I could capture bigger audiences: passersby, farmers, poor kids, workers. They would sometimes stop behind me and try to guess what I was painting – that house, that tree? At first to “surprise” them, I deliberately attempted to paint something they couldn't pinpoint. And they would think, at first, “ah, he's painting this!” but I would be painting something different.

When did you discover your own interest in modernity? When did you see your own art theory emerge?

Lo: In college in 1966, by chance, I ran into a book published a year earlier called *Pop Art One*. It was about Andy Warhol and Jasper Johns and others. It was my first exposure and the first English book I read. It was all wonderful. For me there was no dilemma; I didn't have this problem, “Western art is more advanced and Chinese art lags behind.” No such conflict. Both were equally good, because I understood them both. From my teacher P'u Ju [a well-known painter, cousin to China's last Ch'ing dynasty emperor], I had learned that traditional life is very enjoyable too, and how to appreciate jokes. Years later, I understand this attitude is a bit remarkable.

Living in the dorms, I couldn't paint. I decided to write down my painting ideas in language form and paint at home during vacations. My notes were very much like modern poetry. I organized them and got them published [as poems]. So, I first became famous as a poet, and people didn't know I was a painter. Once again though, to impress my female classmates, I tried to do something new. With Pop Art as my new Bible, I took rocks from a riverbed, tied them with wire and threw colors on them. I did an exhibition in the girls' dormitory, which was the only dorm that had space for an exhibition. In 1967–1968, this was pretty avant-garde and was called outrageous. That kind of performance can astonish people, but it becomes repetitive, you repeat yourself. After I did twenty to thirty rocks, they all looked fake. So I gave it up. Besides, no one wanted the pieces. But if I would paint a traditional landscape, someone would say, “give this to me, I like it very much.” I thought, “I better

return to something more ... solid.” In 1969, I tried to combine traditional paintings with ideas from the West. Even that kind of painting was astonishing to my classmates. I did a lot of that. In college, led by intuition, I incautiously tried to discover modernity, the modern element in traditional Chinese thought. I tried to translate that into a language that my contemporaries could understand. If you wanted to see something modern, you could see elements of it in my painting. If you wanted to see evidence that I am in the Chinese tradition, then in my calligraphic technique you could see something as well. I tried to show something to both camps.

How much do you paint for Chinese audiences versus painting for a general public, say, for an American who knows nothing of Chinese painting?

Lo: I paint for you, of course! I paint for everybody. Art is a high-rise building and everyone is invited into the first floor. But to get to the second floor, you must be more knowledgeable. To get to the third floor, you need even more knowledge. And to get to the fourth floor, you’ll need to understand art history, and then *detect* the fourth floor door. But still, the painter always hides himself. When you create a pictorial image, you want it to last a long time, and a different time will offer a different interpretation. I don’t want to pinpoint it in one direction.

You are a very ambitious painter and your concept of “being in conversation” with past Chinese painters is part of an important art historical tradition in China. How do you see yourself participating in “conversation” with past masters?

Lo: This is an idea that has had three important moments in the history of Chinese literati painting. I am conducting the fourth conversation. Chao Meng-fu (1254–1322) is the first to say that an artist must conduct conversation with his past masters in his paintings (*guyi*, 古意). His method was conscientious and systematic, but it was still traditional and he only took his conversations back to the T’ang dynasty (618–907 CE).

Tung Ch’i-ch’ang (1555–1636) then began the second great conversation with past painters and carefully identified those painters who were in conversation with past masters, dividing them into Southern school painters (also called literati painting, *wenrenhua*, 文人畫), as opposed to Northern school painters, who did not follow this tradition. Like Chao Meng-fu, he further clarified how external scenery can’t emulate art, that it is art itself and the technical practices of the artist that embody this cultural conversation.

Then in the early twentieth century there was Chang Dachien (1899–1983). This was the third great conversation. He revived interest in painting from the Five Dynasties period (tenth century CE) and went west to the caves of Tun-huang for three years. He was the first painter in one thousand years to visit those caves, the first painter in one thousand years who was not satisfied with the established conversations of the traditional masters. He couldn’t accomplish a sophisticated conversation without that visit to the caves. He also reintroduced the color conversation.

For me, I’m conducting the fourth conversation. I am going all the way back to Neolithic pottery. I use patterns

from the pottery and appropriate them. I translate them on my canvases into computer chips, into modern industrial railroads.

Can you talk a bit more about how your use of lines and design references to Neolithic pottery? Why does this matter?

Lo: This pottery, these geometric patterns, prior to the twentieth century, we had no knowledge of these works. We don't know the original meanings of the patterns on the pottery. But in talking about the history of art, scholars now *start* with Neolithic art, and so we need contemporary artists to talk about this too. How can you say these patterns are Chinese? You can bring back their designs.

There has been an important concept in Chinese poetic composition since the T'ang Dynasty (seventh century CE), namely, that when you begin a verbal composition, you must re-form your starting idea until it transforms into a new unity (*qichengzhuanye*, 起承轉合). When you begin to paint on the belly of a Neolithic pot, you are working with a round object. You can ask, "Why did Neolithic potters cover the belly with design?" This is vitally linked to my aesthetic theory. This is not Aristotelian, with a beginning, a middle, and an end. On the round pot, the potter starts the first stroke anywhere. There is no absolute beginning. The belly of the pot is on the wheel. *When* you start is the beginning. And then after that, you can't tell which is the beginning stroke. It is a totally different concept. This later Chinese poetic idea comes from Neolithic pottery. From Neolithic pottery to my work, this idea is present. Through very personal interpretation, I can make it become universal. I can never dominate the conversation. Other artists can also engage the Neolithic. I can only do my part.

Your rocks are also interesting. Some of them are drawn quite intricately, like those in your *Road to Modernization* (1993) series (Figure 1). Can you talk about why rocks are so interesting to you?

Lo: Yes, although a rock is very simple, you want to paint it uniquely. When you try to use a line to capture shapes, your line has to serve shape. If you paint a tiger, you don't need a high-quality of line. The shape is more important. People will judge whether the tiger has similitude. If you exaggerate the characteristic of your line, your tiger will look disturbed, will become your personal tiger, deformed, not like a literal tiger. This is a transformation from realism to expressionism. For a rock, you don't have the problem of realism from the very beginning. A rock is a rock. If shape isn't the issue, then what is? Execution of line is. You can use all kinds of lines to paint a rock. If the quality of the line is no good, then the quality of the rock is no good. How do you make your line charged with emotion, with expression; how do you make it "knowledgeable?" This touches the core of art. From the very beginning, a Chinese painter tries to express his feelings through external objects.

But stones also have the ability to represent something else, like the old European stories of meeting a hag on the street, only to learn later that the hag was actually an angel. If I paint stones floating, it can be a perfect conversation about modernization. It's a force. Sometimes it can be dismissed, but sometimes it actually blocks your way. Painting rocks gives you a strong desire to discover.

A number of your works have very odd juxtapositions, including references to old Chinese masters, even when your canvas seems to have no resemblance to a past piece. What is your goal here?

Lo: That is part of the conversation. Past painters were dealing with dilemmas of their eras. My dilemma is living in a post-industrial time, the co-existence of having just adjusted to industrial times and here comes the post-industrial. For me in Taiwan, in the 1950s and 1960s, Taiwan was basically still agricultural. When I returned from studying in the States in the early 1970s, I realized we were now in an industrial age. The apartment had an elevator, I could travel by airplane anywhere. When my son was in third grade, they started to teach computers and I had to force myself to learn a new language, otherwise I couldn't converse with my child. I'm seventy now and I've even learned "e-language" and have used the computer to write automatic poetry. Life today is segmented. Pieces that are totally irrelevant to each other are joined together. When you are on an airplane, you can see the famous Yellow Mountain outside the window, and be watching television inside. World images collapse, collide together. The past and present, East and West. And in Taiwan, sometimes it is just Taiwan's insular environment, which is either oceanic, or continental or, sometimes, with a European orientation, or there might be a touch of Japan.

Is the way you've segmented many of your canvases relevant?

Lo: Our experience nowadays has multiple perspectives. Sometimes we have a bird's-eye view. Or a telescopic view, or maybe a microscopic view. In my *No Travelers among Mountains and Streams* for example, the zigzag is open to free interpretation. This is a landscape painting; I've got mountains and water, including *under* water. I've tried to put as much complexity as possible into this painting. Spring, summer, winter, autumn, they are all there. This kind of juxtaposition is sometimes relevant, sometimes irrelevant. It becomes abstract art. I try to combine this based on two principles. If the shapes match, I'll try to put them together, even if the content doesn't match. Similar shapes give us a sense of connection. This is purely visual. And then there will be combinations that will be analogous. And some will be based on meaning. Thus, when a composition is formed, the meaning is never fixed, but the general meaning is the big thing: you can go in one direction with many levels of interpretation. I am trying to create maximum complexity in one painting, to integrate all the juxtapositions that I've learned from Chinese art history and western art history. In this painting, for example, you put two irrelevant things together and you wait for the reader to see the relevancy. The world images become a collage, they combine together, past and present, East and West. And sometimes they just touch.

You see yourself as inheriting the Chinese literati painting tradition and updating it, keeping it relevant for today's audiences. What does this mean to you, how have you accomplished this?

Lo: After I graduated from university, it became a conviction for me that I have a historical responsibility to update Chinese painting from the Ch'ing dynasty (after 1814) to the present, to try to reflect a society moving from an agrarian to a post-industrial society. I could show my artistic opinion of how an agricultural custom continues, how to transform it to a post-industrial time. Besides painting to enjoy myself and please my friends, I take this as my responsibility.

When I was younger, up to forty, my ambition was to be encyclopedic. I have a photographic memory. I wanted to go beyond my predecessors. I studied literature, I know painting, I can create. I know English well. Maybe I am boasting, but I read the Western tradition, the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, Aristotle's *Poetics*, Plato, and so on. I taught these books to help me read. Then, I was forced to learn computers. When I learned computers, I realized that the ambition I was chasing in the past will be passé. I didn't realize we'd get like this, that we'd have Google, that computers could deal with such enormous data. Some of my old friends lost their jobs—like the Kodak company, suddenly gone; cameras have all changed. These were traumatic experiences for my generation. I sensed this and tried to adjust myself.

I thought, how can I bring the ancient past forward? Postmodernism let me see how previous eras are all overlapping and it would be perfectly okay for me to reflect that. But how? Magritte, Paul Klee, Velasquez, and Michel Foucault also helped me. I looked back at the T'ang dynasty and I saw the first postmodern phenomenon. Emperor Tai-tsung created an archetype of the "ideal" calligraphy and said "this is our model," but the model was assembled selectively from a four-hundred-year history of calligraphy. This is very postmodern. If you see the landscapes I'm doing now, which I call "Windows" landscapes, they are like opening one landscape, then another, like you open tabs on your computer.

You've also updated the kinds of images that appear in brush and ink paintings. Tell me a bit about your use of palm trees. What do they mean for you?

Lo: Paintings are sensory and reflect Chinese culture. Taiwan has an obvious oceanic orientation. I see it as my responsibility to represent a plant from this region and so selected the palm tree. Five Confucian virtues can be embodied in it. It stands erect and can withstand typhoons. It can withstand salt. It can survive in a bad environment. It also gives shade and it gives coconuts. The palm tree's shape also suits the modern. Traditionally, you needed a tree to zigzag, but now that I'm representing high-rises, you need your tree to stand straight up.

This raises the next question. How can I paint a palm tree to represent these things? I can only say, "This is a green brush." So I have to do it a different way to convey meaning. Let's say I want to show that the palm tree is a green torch. I paint it in a nocturnal scene, with a dark sky. This is not usual in Chinese painting. You would put a moon up or a candle in a hut to show the nighttime, not paint the night sky. But in my case, because of modern electricity, I can have a night sky and I don't have to have streetlights; I can have a clear picture of the tree and a starry sky behind, the electricity would show this. Paintings express ideas beyond images.

Your art practice is as much about process as it is about design. Talk to me about your aesthetics theory, which you call a "contingency" aesthetics (*hsing*, 興) and how that works as both process and design.

Lo: The idea of *hsing*, which I translate as "contingency" but can also mean a "starting off point," goes all the way back to the *Book of Odes* (ca. 700 BCE). My short answer about what *hsing* is: suddenly, you put two irrelevant things together, and you wait for the reader to see the relevancy. But on the flip side, when two things are

together, you must separate them to see the significance of each. So the reverse is also *hsing*. The positive aspect is that you see two different things and build a bridge to connect them. At the same time, when you see two things joined firmly together, you should be able to see a crack between them. The juxtaposition of two images or groups of images that are related yet not related becomes the highest principle of Chinese art. This has a long tradition also in Chinese poetry.

Another way to see it is, if you make a narrative, like a story, the temporal will continue. If you make an analogy, you are offering an explanation. But when you simply put two objects together and say they are connected, this feels like an improvisation. While it can be prepared, even orchestrated, it is purely contingent and you need the reader's participation.

For example, in my "Windows" landscapes—this is perfect for *hsing*—I juxtapose scenes. Continental China and Oceanic Taiwan; north, south; East and West; past and present. It took me forty years to figure out. The key is modern poetry. I can freely recombine characters, but I am doing it with calligraphy, an established art form. Traditionally, to refer to the moon poetically, you would use two characters, jade and rabbit. But now I can combine moon and ball. Both are ancient words, but they've not been put together this way. "Moon ball" is a brand-new concept, but not strange to the past. So why can't I do that also with Chinese painting? I don't need to borrow Western elements; I can use juxtapositions.

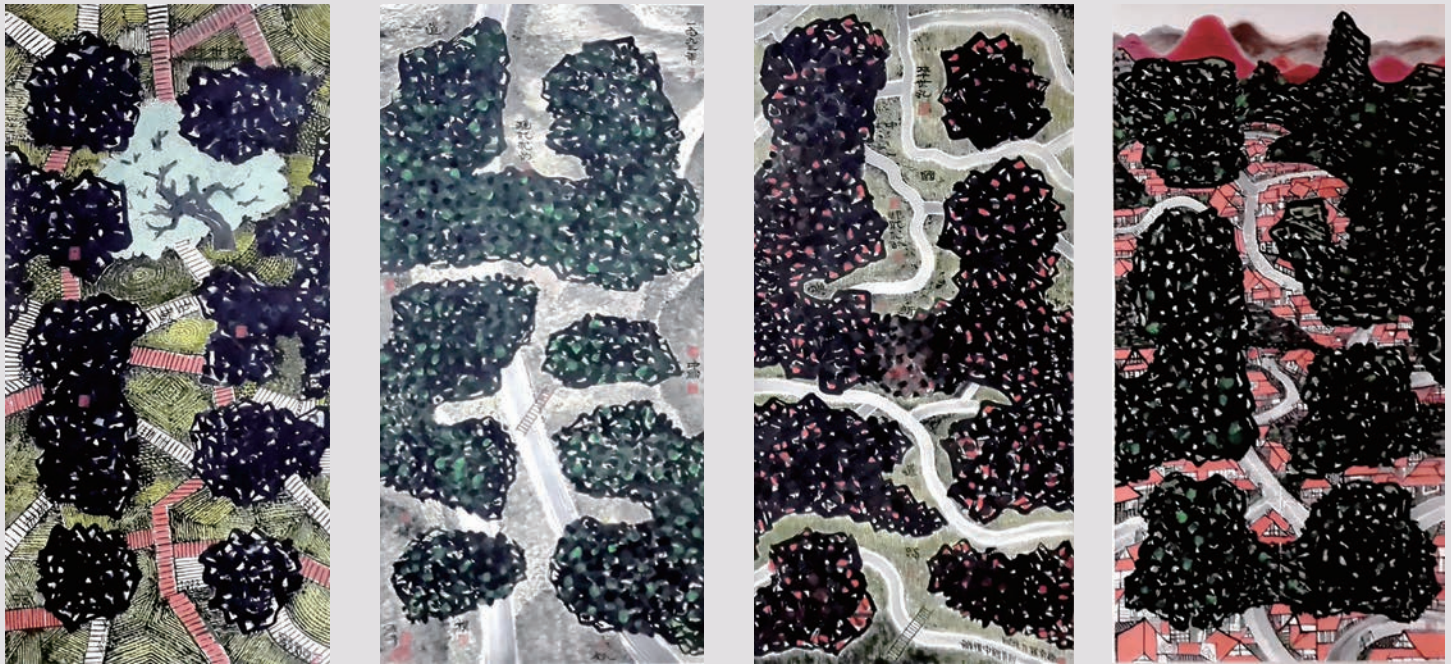


Figure 1.
中國現代化的道路(四聯屏) /
Road to Modernization (quadriptych), 138 × 69 × 4 cm (1993)



Figure 1A.
中國現代化的道路
(四屏之一) /
Road to Modernization
(panel 1),
138 × 69 cm (1993)

Figure 1B.
中國現代化的道路
(四屏之二) /
Road to Modernization
(panel 2),
138 × 69 cm
(1993)



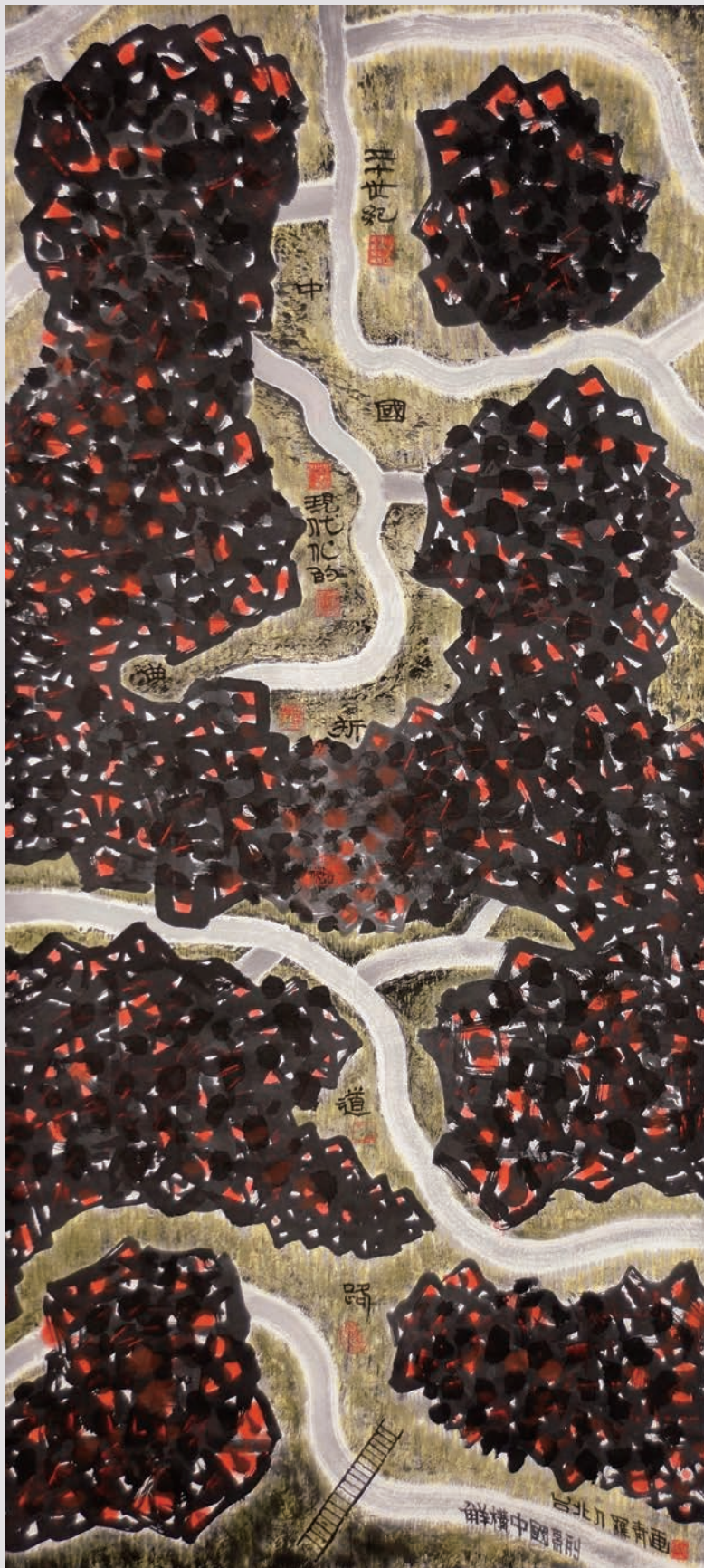


Figure 1C.
中國現代化的道路
(四屏之三) /
Road to Modernization
(panel 3),
138 × 69 cm (1993)

Figure 1D.
中國現代化的道路
(四屏之四) /
Road to Modernization
(panel 4),
138 × 69 cm (1993)



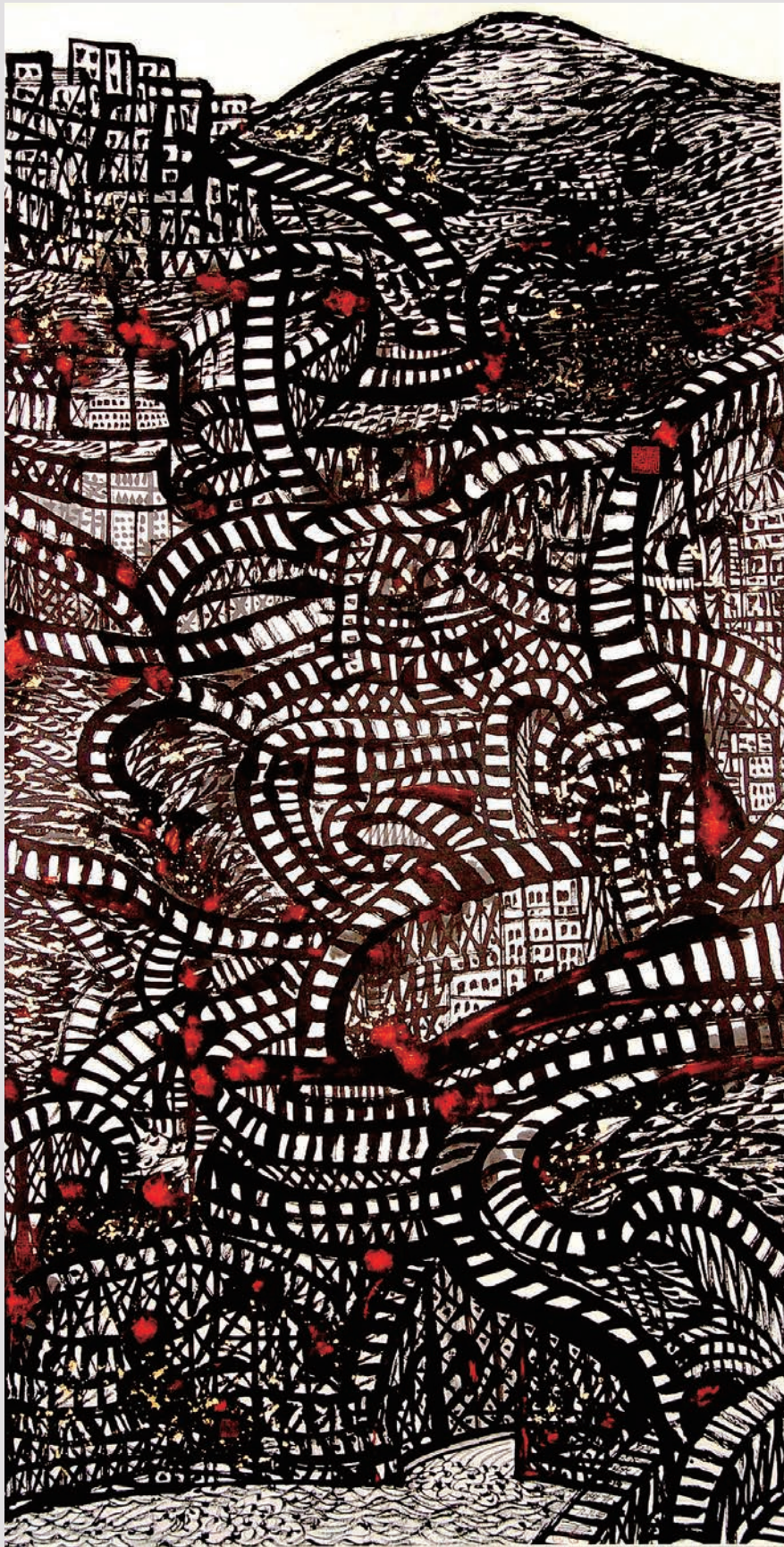


Figure 2.
萬條軌道 /
Ten Thousand
Railways,
137 × 69 cm (1994)

Figure 3.
萬重鋼架 /
Ten Thousand Steel
Frames,
136 × 70 cm (1994)





Figure 4.
萬壑爭流 /
Ten Thousand
Cataracts,
137 × 69 cm (1994)

Figure 5.
為愛子孫護青山 /
To Love the Green
Mountains is to Love
Our Posterity,
137 × 69 cm (1997)





Figure 6.
歡送遺忘啟航 /
Seeing Oblivion Off,
137 × 69 cm (2002)

Figure 7.
高呼吳彬: 萬山書屋 /
Calling for Wu Pin, A
Small Library among
Ten Thousand
Mountains,
137 × 69 cm (2008)





Figure 8.
溪山行旅圖第七圖 /
Calling for Fan Kuan's
"Traveler Amid
Streams and Moun-
tains" No. 7,
137 × 69 cm (2010)

Figure 8A.
溪山行旅圖第七圖
(局部) /
Calling for
Fan Kuan's "Traveler
Amid Streams
and Mountains" No. 7
(detail),
137 × 69 cm (2010)





Figure 9.
移動山川 /
The Changing
Mountains in an
Unchanged Heart,
137 × 69 cm (2012)

Figure 10.
萬道長虹 /
Ten Thousand
Rainbows,
137 × 69 cm (2012)



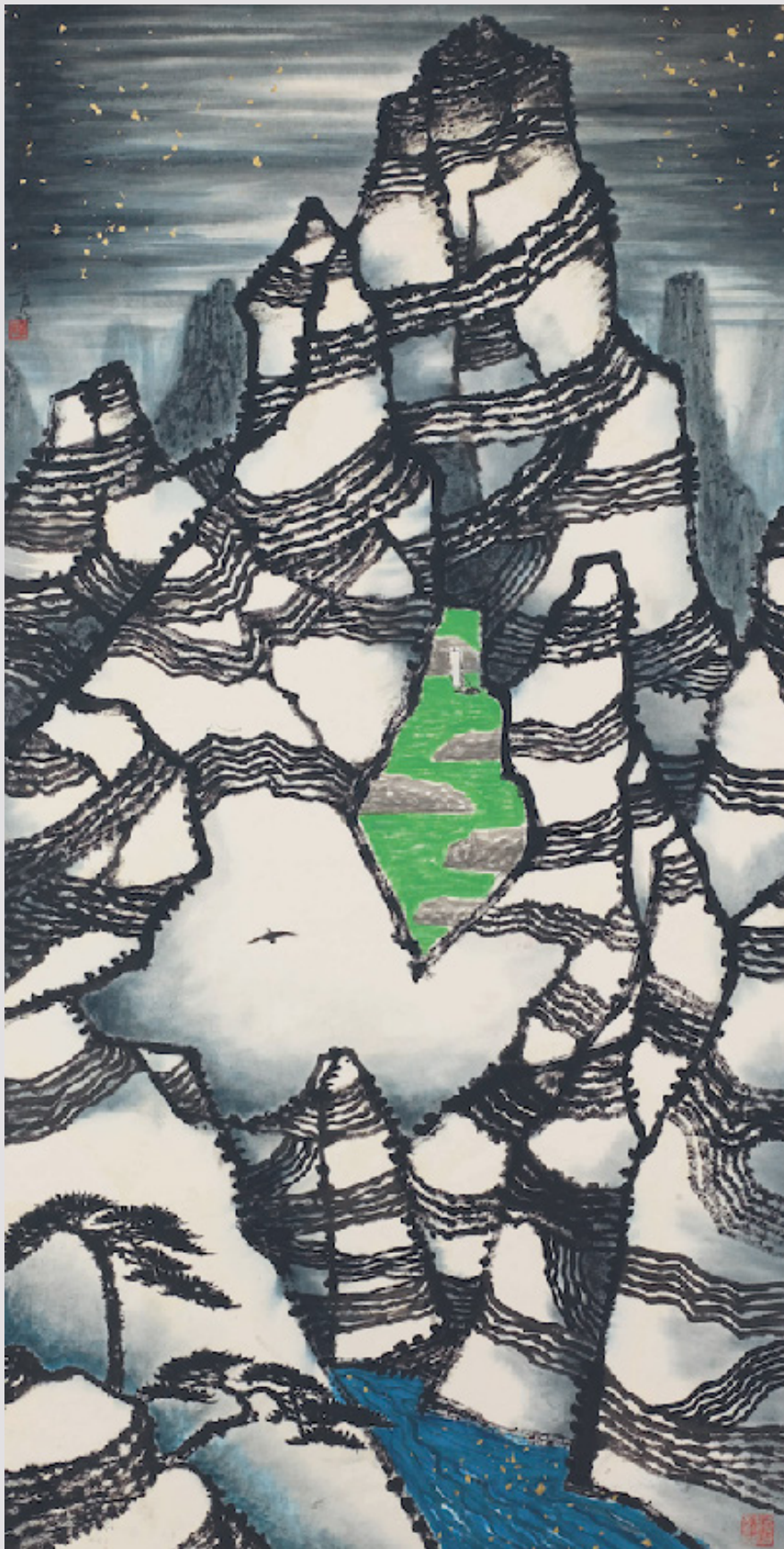


Figure 11.
飛向心中綠水青山 /
Fly to the Green Land
in My Heart,
137 × 69 cm (2009)

Figure 12.
凍雲懶得過鐵橋 /
The Frozen Cloud is too
Lazy to Use the Iron
Bridge,
137 × 69 cm (2009)





Figure 13.
日月東西跳 /
The Sun and the Moon Jumping from the East to the West,
96 × 179 cm (2015)



Figure 14.
溶溶日出桃花源 /
The Morning Sun of Peach Blossom Spring,
96 × 197 cm (2015)



Figure 15.
日居月諸桃花源 /
The Sun and the Moon of Peach Blossom Spring,
96 × 179 Cm (2015)

Figure 16.
高呼華嶽: 連中元 /
Calling for Hua Yen,
Good Things Come
in Three,
137 × 69 Cm (2009)





Figure 17.
蝴蝶羅漢 /
Butterfly Arhat,
137 × 69 cm (2009)

Figure 18.
冰山來了II /
Here Comes
the Iceberg II,
179 × 96 cm (2015)

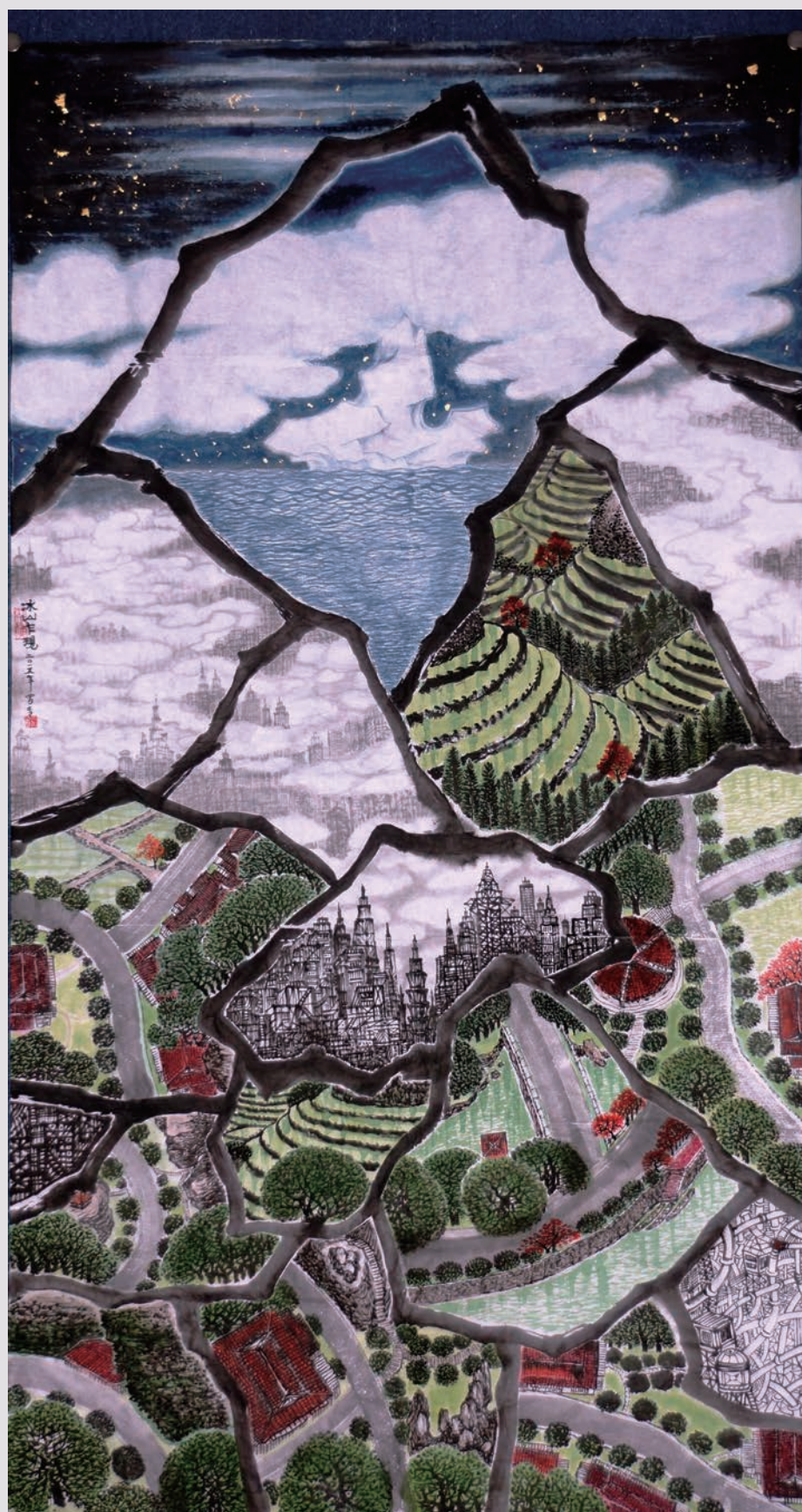




Figure 19.
載一船星光歸去 /
Row a Boatful of
Starlight Home,
179 × 96 cm (2015)

Figure 19A.
載一船星光歸去
(局部) /
Row a Boatful of
Starlight Home
(detail),
179 × 96 cm (2015)





塞上風雲接地陰
2015年

Figure 20.
塞上風雲接地陰 /
Clouds and Winds
Lock the Mountain
Gorge Pass,
179 × 96 cm (2015)

Figure 21.
羅青天下 /
The Art World of
Lo Ch'ing,
179 × 96 cm (2015)





Figure 22.
電郵@山水 /
Email@Landscape,
179 × 96 cm (2015)

Figure 23.
不廢江河萬古流 /
The Present Could
Never Pass the Past,
179 × 96 cm (2015)



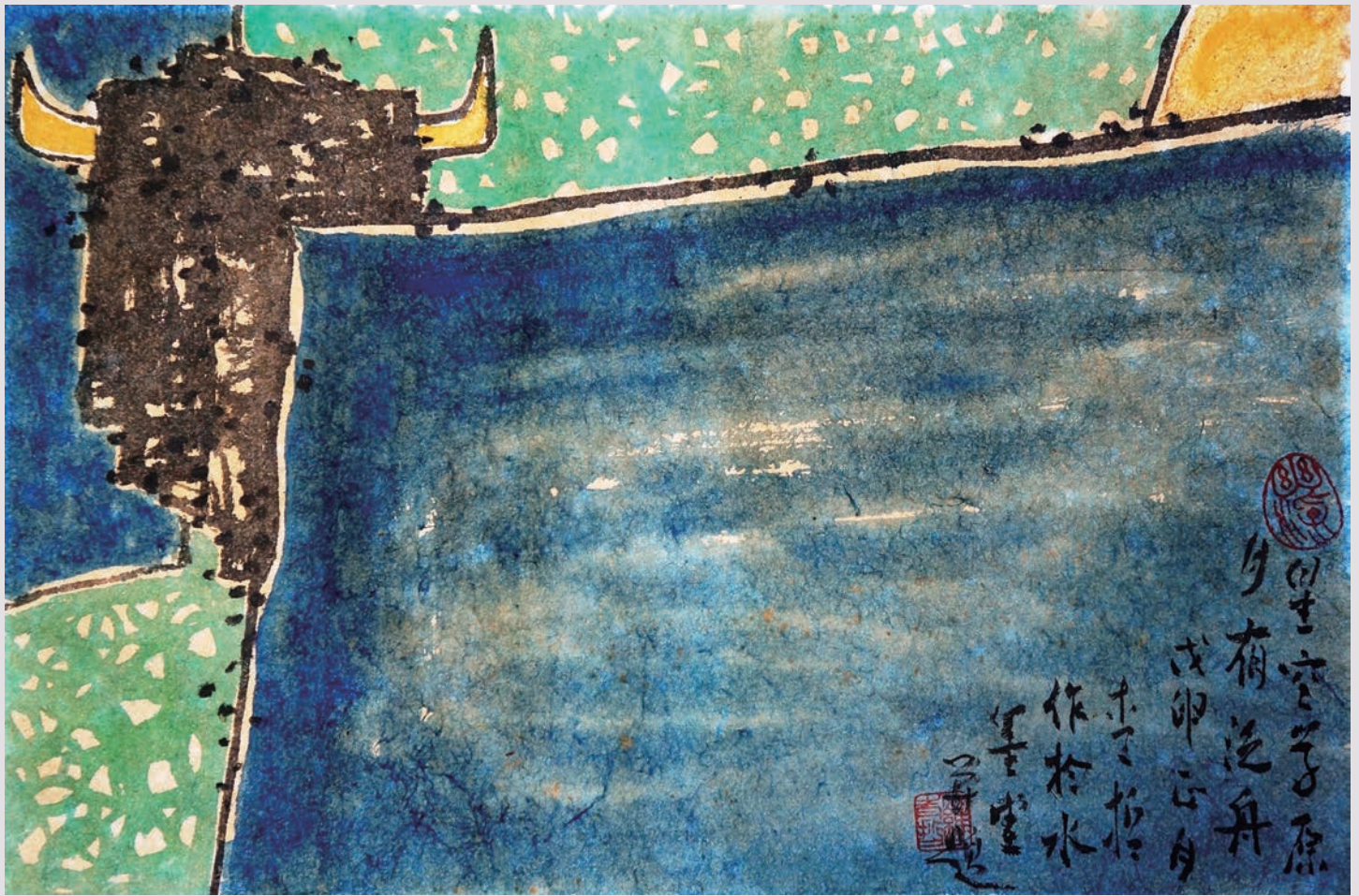


Figure 24.
星空草原月夜泛舟 /
Starlit Sky, Meadows and Moonlight Sailing,
28.5 × 43.5 cm (1968)

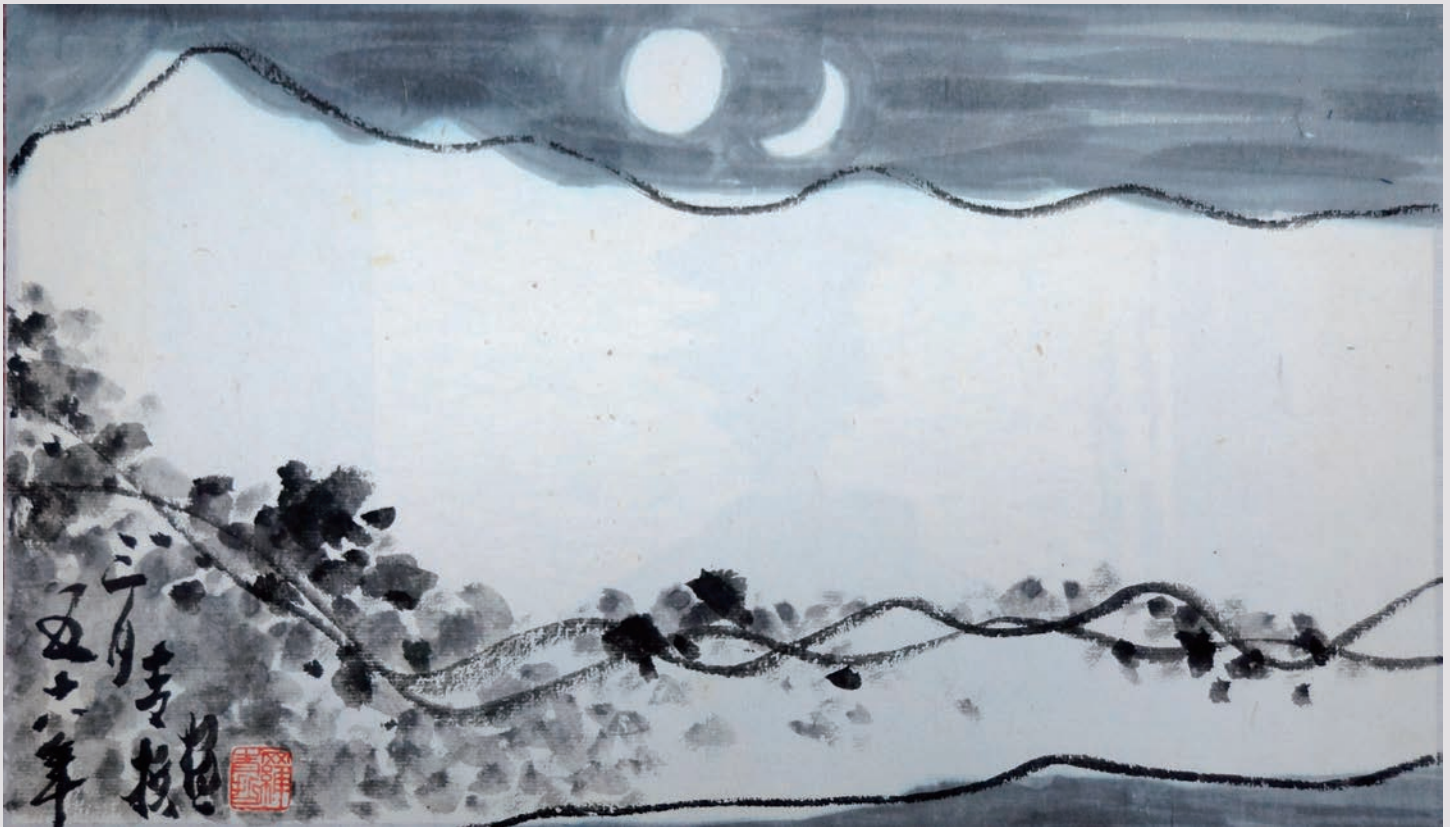


Figure 25.
月日橫挑不顧人 /
The Mountain that Shoulder-poles the Sun and the Moon,
25 × 43 cm (1969)



Figure 26.
夜的變奏 /
Variations of the Nocturnal Song, 29
× 35 cm (1969)



Figure 27.
南籬下 /
By the Southern Fence,
24.5 × 34.3 cm (1971)



Figure 28.
霧散漁夫現 /
Fisherman Emerging in the Fog,
30 × 40 cm (1971)



Figure 29.
高呼齊白石: 夏日火鳥 /
Fire Bird of Summer (Calling for Ch'i Pai-shih),
69 × 69 cm (1985)



Figure 30.
墨火山(自畫像) /
Ink Volcano (self-portrait), 70
× 69.2 cm (1992)

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