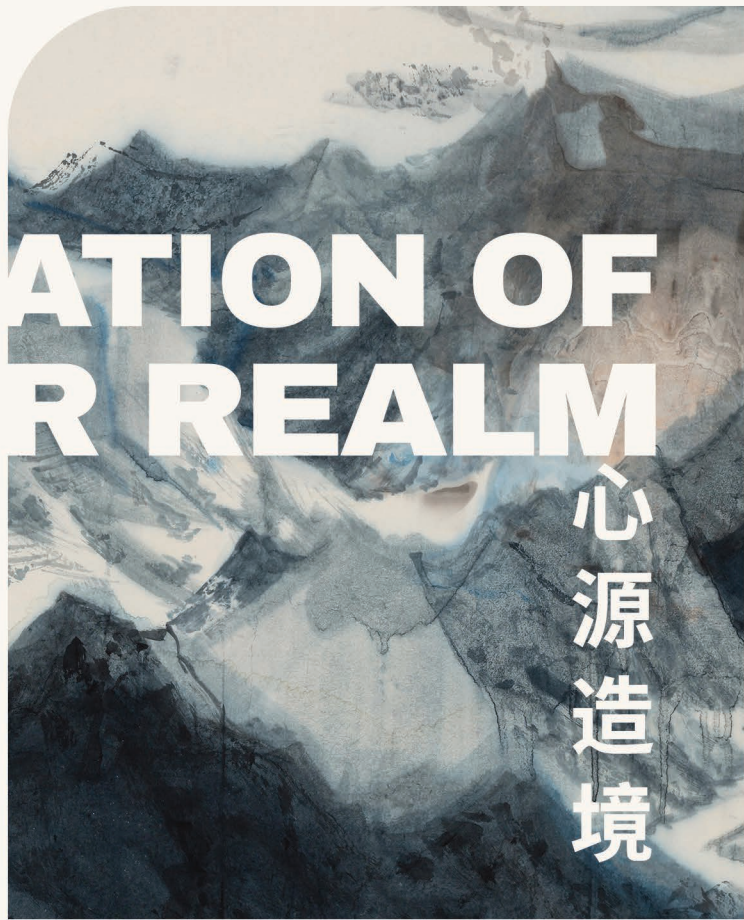


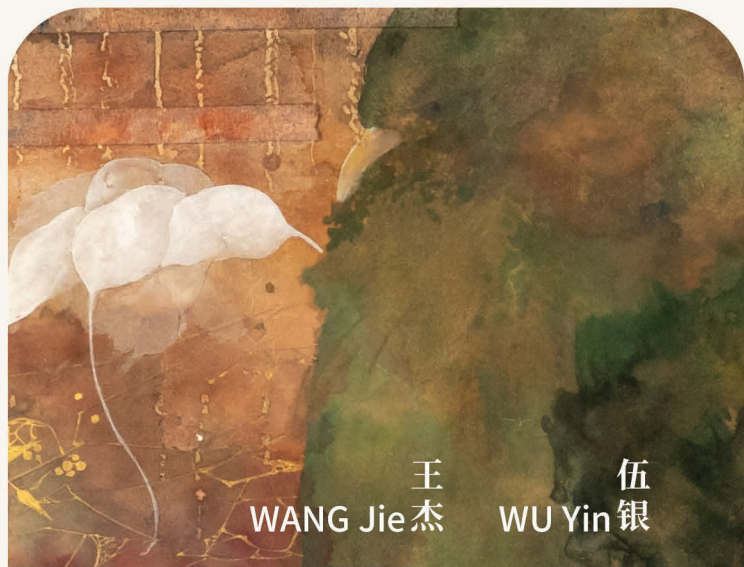
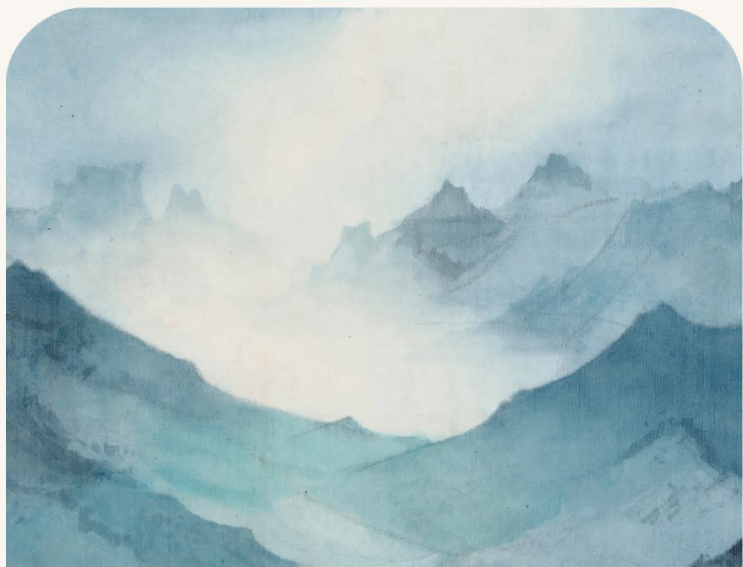


MING GU GALLERY
鸣谷轩



CREATION OF THE INNER REALM

心源造境



王杰
WANG Jie杰

伍银
WU Yin银

**CREATION OF THE
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Dr Wenny Teo

Remembrance of Things Past

Creation of the Inner Realm brings together the work of two millennial Chinese artists, WANG Jie (b. 1996, Hunan) and WU Yin (b. 2000, Sichuan), who both graduated from the prestigious Academy of Art and Design at Tsinghua University in Beijing as recently as 2022. They are of the generation of Chinese artists who spent their formative years with unprecedented access to digital technologies and the Internet and experienced the effects of globalisation most acutely, changes heralded by China's ascension to the World Trade Organisation in 2001 and its hosting of the Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008. As China's major urban centres began to be reshaped into 'global cities' at an accelerated scale and speed, new spaces for the development of the arts and culture industries were also carved out. The rapidly increasing numbers of privately-owned museums, galleries and auction houses on home ground exposed aspiring artists to global contemporary art forms, styles and concepts. At the same time, artists like Cai Guo-Qiang, Ai Weiwei, Huang Yong Ping and Cao Fei among others working across a variety of media, were being widely exhibited and collected by major artistic institutions across the world, driving the demand for contemporary Chinese art in the market. Meanwhile, several art academies began to expand their curricula to embrace digital technologies and more experimental, 'unofficial', forms of practice. Until relatively recently, artists who work with traditional media, materials, techniques and genres received far less critical attention, often excluded from surveys of 'contemporary Chinese art' in favour of multimedia, installation and video art that was seen to directly engage with and reflect China's dramatic transformations in the 'here' and 'now', rendering them legible to international audiences.¹ Yet, there are still many young Chinese artists like Wang Jie and Wu Yin who choose to continue working in these venerable traditions, returning time and again the art of the past to make sense of the tumultuous present.

Wang Jie's landscape paintings are awash with viscous tonalities of black ink, concentrated in certain areas to imply bodies of water, mountains and clouds that bleed into one another against the absorbent ground of *xuan* paper. An intricate filigree of miniature bare-branched trees and thatch-roof dwellings occasionally punctuate these atmospheric vistas, imbuing them with a sense of perspective and scale that conveys the magnitude of wider cosmological forces. Wang's ability to depict the natural environment with such a keenly observed sense of nuance and subtlety might be attributed to the fact that he was born and raised in the Hubei Province of South-Central China – a region known for its soaring mountain ranges, otherworldly geological formations and deep crystalline lakes. Yet, none of these spectacular landmarks are featured in his paintings. Instead, Wang landscapes are purely imaginary expressions of his inner world. Since the inception of landscape as a 'subject of cultural expression' in China, as the art historian Peter C. Sturman has observed, artists have not sought to capture the external reality of mountains and waters as such, but rather 'the *subjectivity* that underlies the experience of mountains and waters.'² In other words, the act of painting a landscape becomes

a form of practice in itself. Wang draws his inspiration from the Song Dynasty (960-1279) period, referencing the celebrated work of scholar-artists who sought refuge in the natural world, their landscapes depicting an idealised, introspective space of self-reflection, self-cultivation and reclusion, far removed from the political intrigues of the court and the chaos of everyday life.

Wu Yin's work is similarly executed in ink on paper and also speaks to the continuity of traditional Chinese genres and motifs; specifically centring on the iconological significance of animals in Chinese culture. In the long tradition of animal paintings, the repeated appearance of certain bestiary – such as gibbons, bats, swallows, crickets, and fish – might seem arbitrary at first. Yet, the symbolic import of these creatures is often linguistically coded and almost cryptographic, stemming from homonymic associations between their names and auspicious words in various regional dialects, or else associated with culturally specific myths, folklore and forms of divination, such as the twelve animals of the Chinese zodiac. Wu's colourful, delicately crafted and meticulously detailed paintings acknowledge how animal motifs appear across a broad range of Chinese visual culture and have a distinctly populist, quotidian appeal: often featured on household and decorative objects like plates and vases, as well as in some of the most valuable works of Chinese art from antiquity to the present day. In Wu's 'zoomorphic imagination', the choice of animals is indeed rather eclectic; their symbolism uncertain, surreal and perhaps more ominous than auspicious. What does it mean to see a cluster of delicately shaped white rats piled onto an amorphous, flesh-like mound of their offspring, gathered before the enlarged figure of a sleeping green owl on the night of a full moon?

In the words of the art historian Jerome Silbergeld, 'for an artist blessed with the ability to render reality and, as well, to depict the wanderings through his own imagination (...) what could have been more interesting to explore and describe than the peculiarly flexible boundaries of what it means to be human?'³

As he continued, the vast number of art objects centred on natural phenomena throughout Chinese history can be seen to reflect the very human struggle to reconcile 'two kinds of reality': 'the world the Chinese lived in (the "real" world) and their cultural perceptions of it (their interior "reality", individual and collective), along with the complex, often paradoxical relation between the two.'⁴ In this vein, it is worth considering how this struggle and the 'paradoxical relations' it shores up might apply to our understanding of Wang and Wu's practice in the present day.

The majority of paintings presented in the exhibition were created between 2021 and 2023, in a period marked by unprecedented citywide quarantines, social isolation and biopolitical control across the globe that followed the initial outbreak of the Covid-19 global pandemic in the Chinese city of Wuhan. Such biopolitical constraints have exercised pressure on the boundaries between exteriority and interiority, actual and virtual, human and animal, self and society, like no other time in modern history. Unlike most of the world, China's strict 'zero-Covid' policy was only lifted in late 2022, the same year that Wang and Wu graduated from Tsinghua University. One can only assume that the experience of the pandemic has profoundly shaped their practice, adding further layers of meaning to Wang's imaginary voyages through the landscapes of the mind, and return to the genre most closely associated with reclusion, self-reflection and self-cultivation. Wu's zoomorphic imagery too can be read in the light of wider

ecological and biological concerns, causing us to think about the consequences of mankind's encroachment on the natural world, and of how a global catastrophe brought about by non-human beings, whether viruses or animals, has tested the limits of our own humanity.

Indeed, Wang and Wu's archaism – the emulation of past artistic styles – has a long history in Chinese artistic expression. For centuries, Chinese artists have continually returned to reflect on the work by masters of previous dynastic periods, paying tribute to their artistry through painterly acts of appropriation and adaptation. The paintings that are modelled on past works are not mere copies or imitations. Rather, as Wen C. Fong phrased it, 'in mediating and commenting on a quoted text or an early landscape tradition or mode, the artist freely adapts and alters it to convey his new meanings (...) contrasting an unsatisfactory present with the idealised memory of the past, archaism represents less a standard than a longing and justification for change.'⁵ Wang and Wu's continued use of traditional media and motifs, like archaism as a methodology itself, 'simultaneously satisfies two seemingly contradictory impulses: the reconstruction of past styles as an individual, personal expression. It serves paradoxically, both orthodoxy and dissent, tradition and innovation.'⁶ There has been no shortage of contemporary artworks today, in China and elsewhere, that seek to represent, document and capture the turbulence and crises of our present moment. Like the literati painters of the past, Wang and Wu's artistic response is instead, 'subtle, cerebral and introverted, and in its complex derivation from ancient forms, often difficult and profound.'⁷

Wenny Teo

Senior Lecturer in Modern and Contemporary Asian Art

The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London

1 For a nuanced criticism of this tendency, see Francesca Dal Lago; The "Global" Contemporary Art Canon and the Case of China. *ARTMargins* 2014; 3 (3): 77–97, and the essays in the important exhibition on Chinese ink painting at the Metropolitan Museum in New York in 2013, *Ink Art: Past as Present in Contemporary China*, Ed. Maxwell Hearne, (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art) 2013.

2 Peter C. Sturman, 'Landscape' in *A Companion to Chinese Art*, Ed. Martin J. Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang. (Oxford: John Wiley) 2016, p 178.

3 Jerome Silbergeld and Eugene Wang (eds) *The Zoomorphic Imagination in Chinese Art and Culture* (Honolulu: Hawaii University Press) 2013, p 16.

4 Jerome Silbergeld, p 10.

5 Wen C. Fong, *Beyond Representation: Chinese Painting and Calligraphy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1992, p 8-9.

6 Wen C. Fong, p 23.

7 Wen C. Fong, p 199.

王 WANG Jie

杰 B. 1996, Changde, Hunan, China

Wang Jie's ink painting is rooted in traditional Chinese ink art, and fully combines his own understanding of mountains and rivers. His work does not completely break away from the tradition, but instead builds upon the evolving understanding of classic works. This is done through the extraction of active elements from the brushwork norms that align with current aesthetic and spiritual expressions, such as the panoramic landscape composition and roaming perspectives from the Song Dynasty (960-1279) period. In addition, he strives to maintain a distance from traditional brushwork norms, leading to gradual, progressive changes. He has adjusted the traditional Chinese painting's tendency of having a weak overall structure, introducing free natural light and black and white layouts to create visual tension and mysterious elements on large scales.

The changes in life determine that ink painting must evolve. Under the context of emphasising the contemporaneity of the work, he hopes to use his own feelings and experiences of contemporary life and nature as an entry point, incorporating the Southern China landscape and his awe, longing, and nostalgia for natural mountains and rivers into the picture. Then, through expanding the expressive possibilities of the material of brush and ink, he aims to realise the construction of new ink painting diagrams.

He now lives and works in Changde, China.

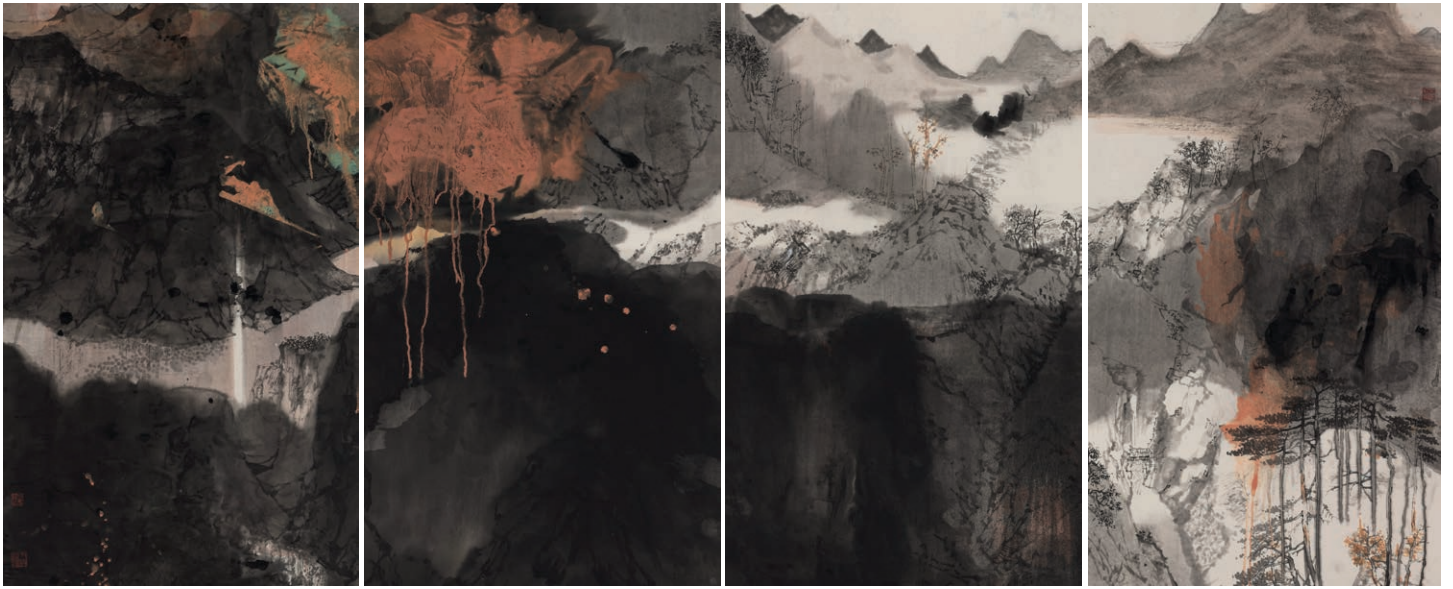
Education

2015-19 BA, Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University, Beijing, China

2019-22 MA, Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University, Beijing, China

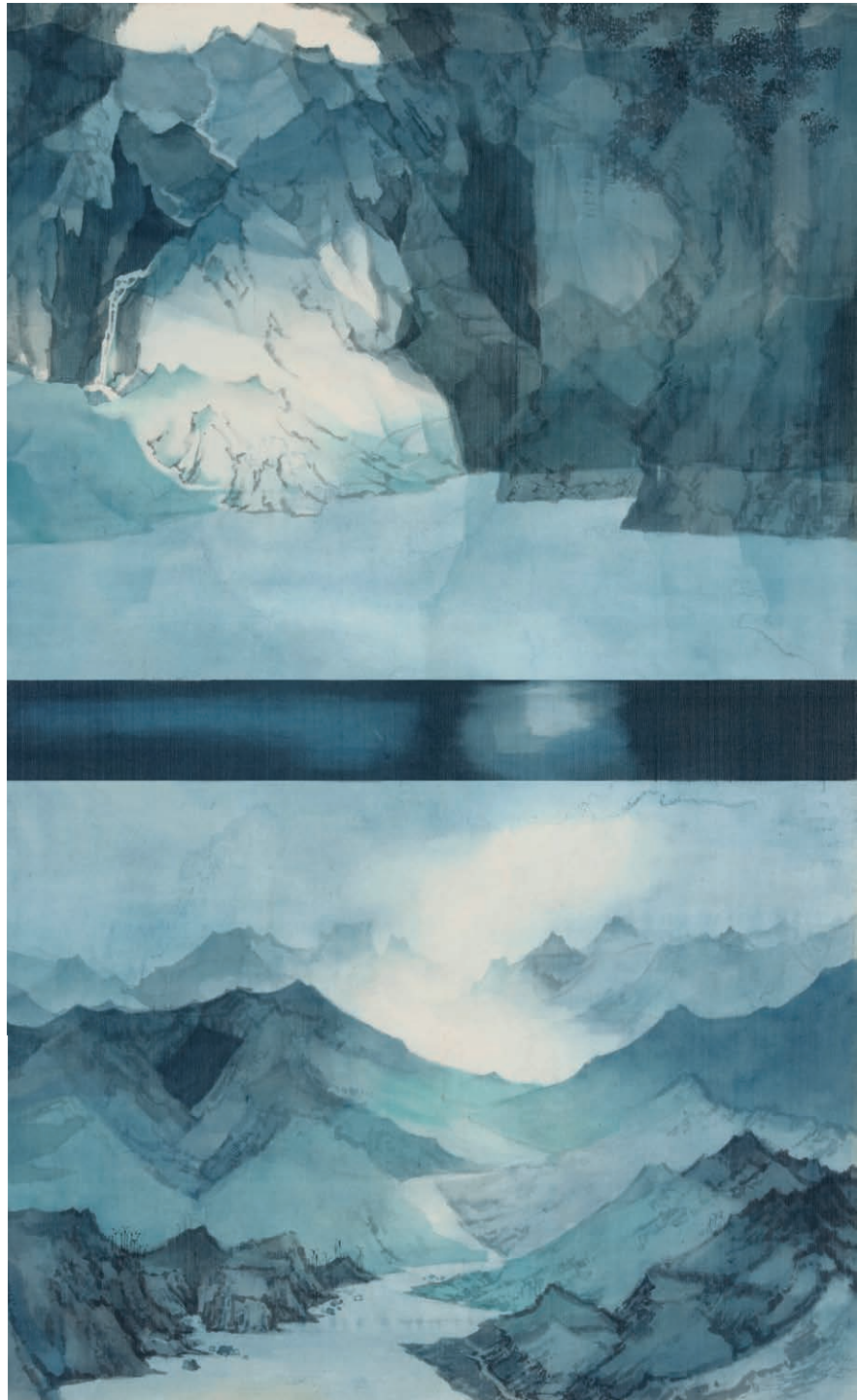
Exhibitions

- 2023 The 4th Art Exhibition by Chinese New Talent, Da Vinci Talk, Auckland, New Zealand
2022-23 Xu Qinsong Creation Award Exhibition, Guangzhou Cultural Centre, Guangzhou, China
“Boundless: A Thousand-Mile Journey”, Exceptional Graduate Works Exhibition of National Key Art Universities, Art Museum of Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts, Xi'an, China
- 2022 Life Aesthetics Cross-Border Art Exhibition, Liaocang Digital Art Museum, Beijing, China
The Second National College Student Art Exhibition, National Art Museum of China, Beijing, China
- 2021 “City Landscape”, National Art Colleges Landscape Creation and Teaching Seminar and Exhibition of Teachers and Students' Works, Shanghai Art Museum, Shanghai, China
“Explosion: Inspiration in Everything”, Tsinghua University Creative Art Exhibition, Beijing, China
- 2020 “Beyond Entity”, Tsinghua University Academy of Arts and Design Student Works Exhibition, Beijing, China
National Art Colleges and Universities Landscape Painting Teaching Works Exhibition, Art Museum of Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts, Sichuan, China
- 2019 “New Dimension: The First National Works Invitational Exhibition”, Guan Shan Yue Museum, Hubei, China
“Congsheng Art: The First Joint Exhibition of Outstanding Works of Art Academies of Both Mainland China and Taiwan”, Art Museum of China Academy of Art, Zhejiang, China

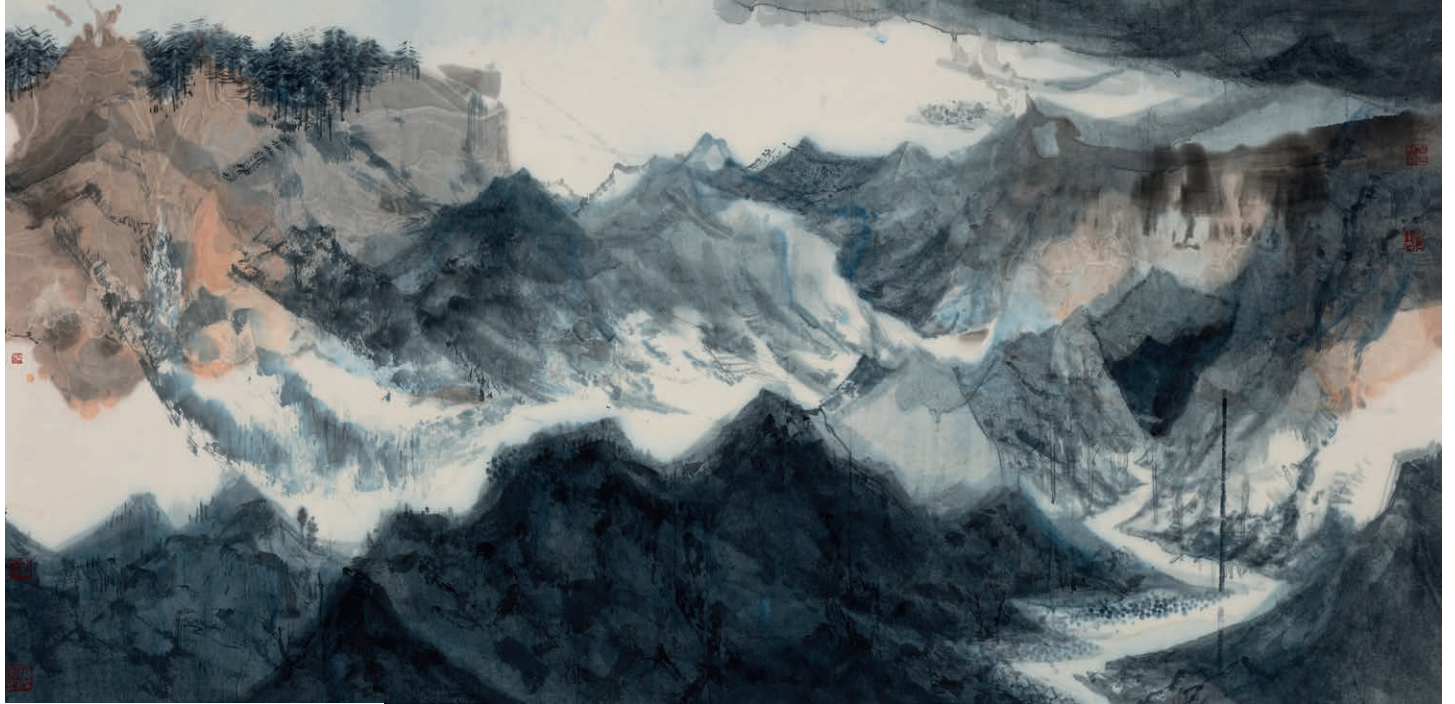


Clouds and Mountains | 云山图 (quadriptych), 2021

Ink, water, xuan paper, Chinese colour ochre and the third malachite
99.2 x 60.5 cm | 39 x 23.8 in (each)



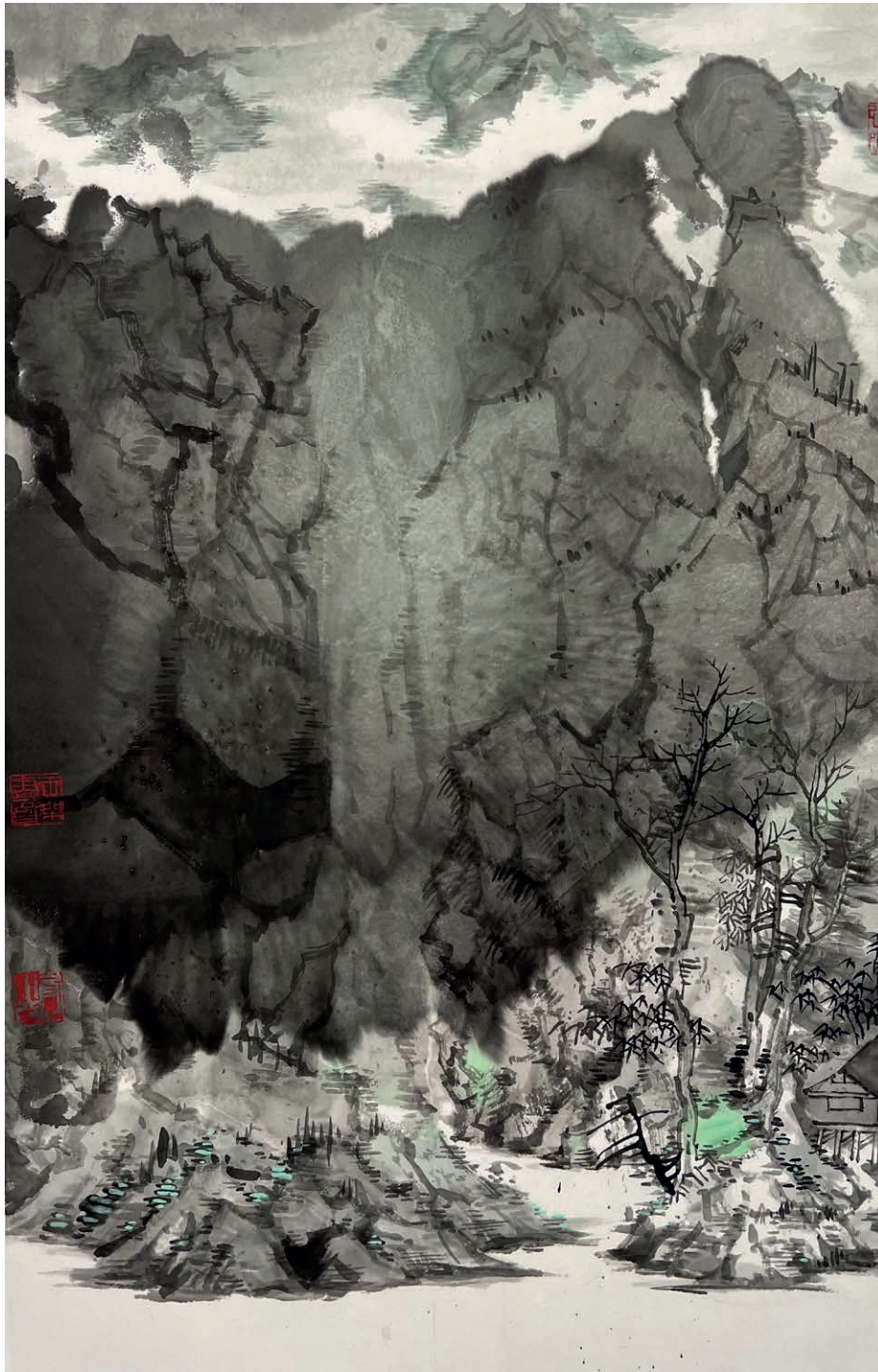
Lunar Reflection | 水中月, 2022
Water, Japanese silk, Chinese colour
cyan and jade green
77.5 x 49 cm | 30.5 x 19.2 in



A Casual Encounter Between Water and Clouds | 云自无心水自闲, 2022

Ink, water, xuan paper, Chinese colour ochre and cyan

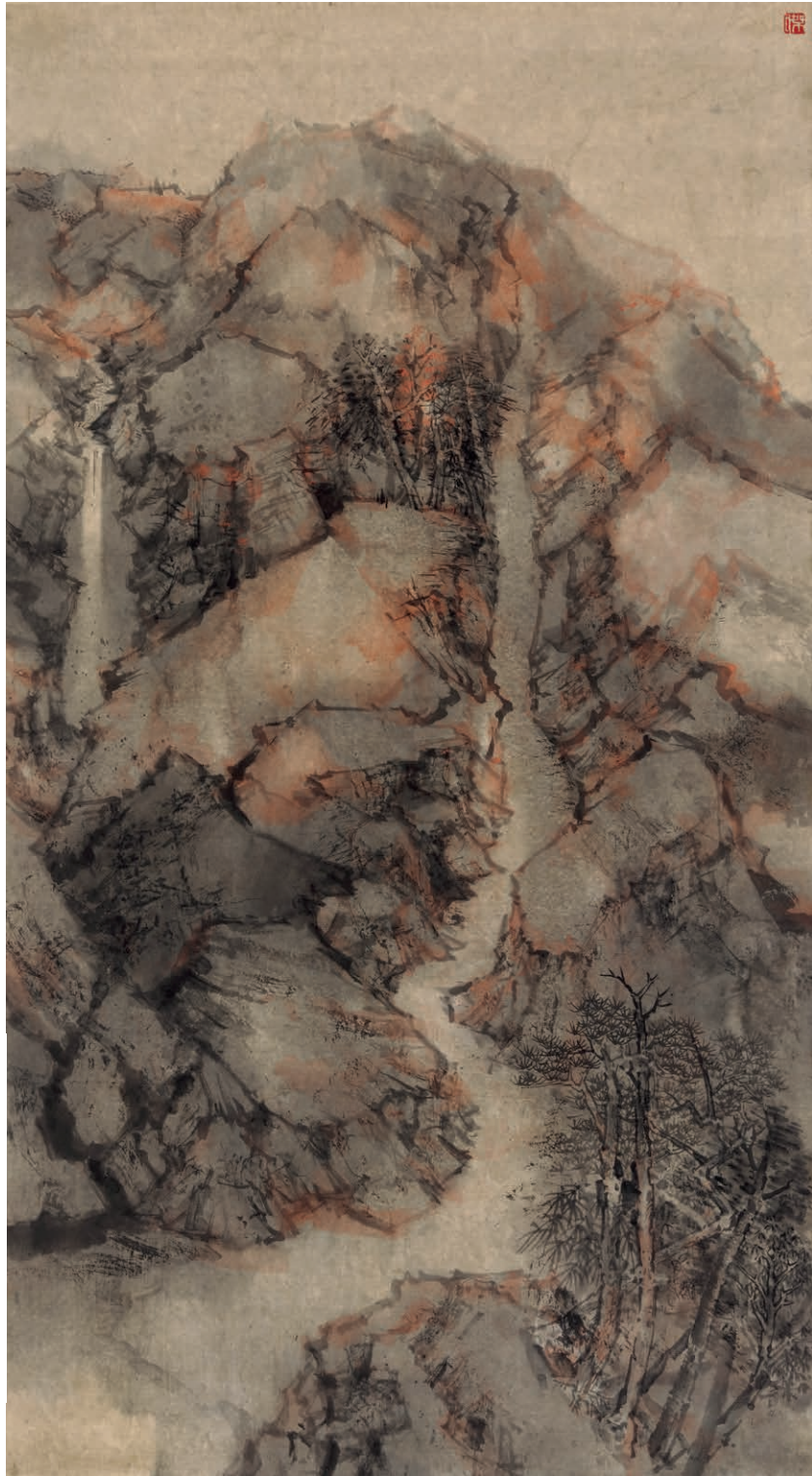
67.8 x 136.8 cm | 26.6 x 53.8 in



Mountain Living | 山居, 2022
Ink, water, xuan paper, Chinese
colour the third azurite
52.4 x 33.1 cm | 20.6 x 13 in



A Happy Excursion | 逍遥游, 2021
Ink, water, xuan paper, Chinese colour
47 x 173 cm | 18.5 x 68.1 in



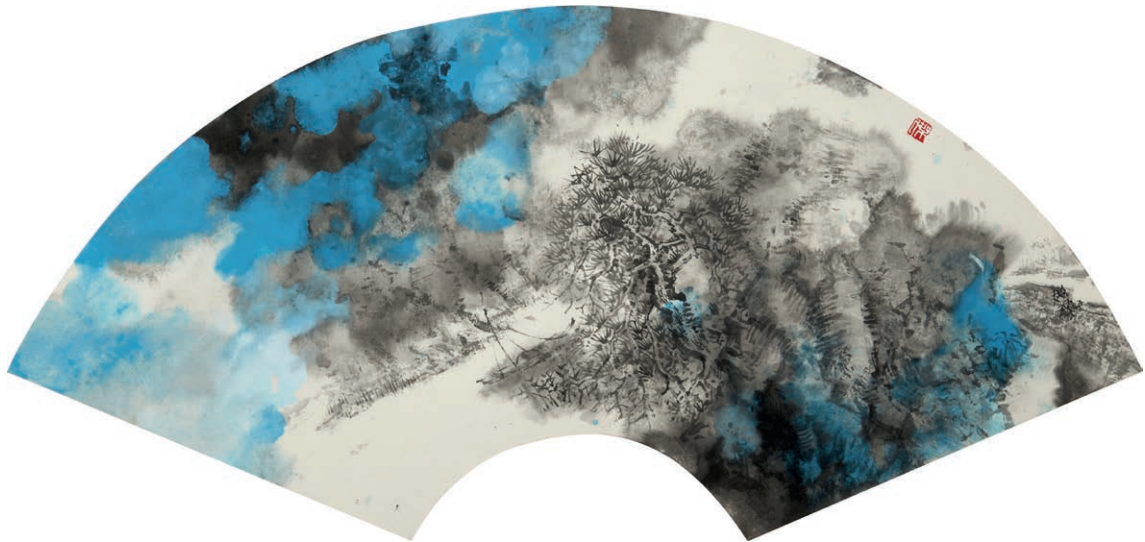
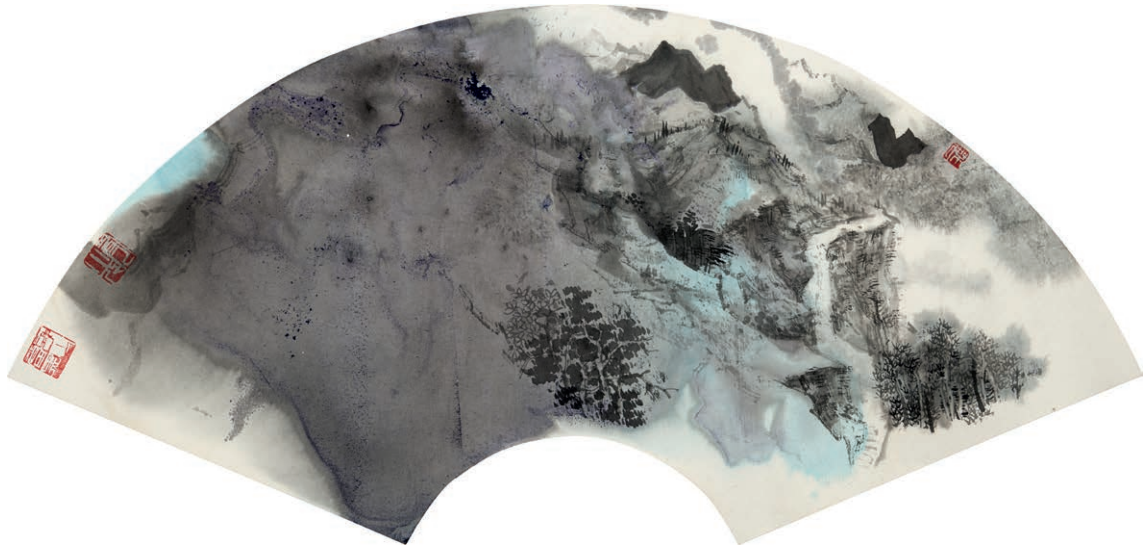
Winding Path, Inspiring Autumn |

曲径清秋, 2023

Ink, water, antiquated xuan paper,

Chinese colour cinnabarite

67.9 x 36.9 cm | 26.7 x 14.5 in

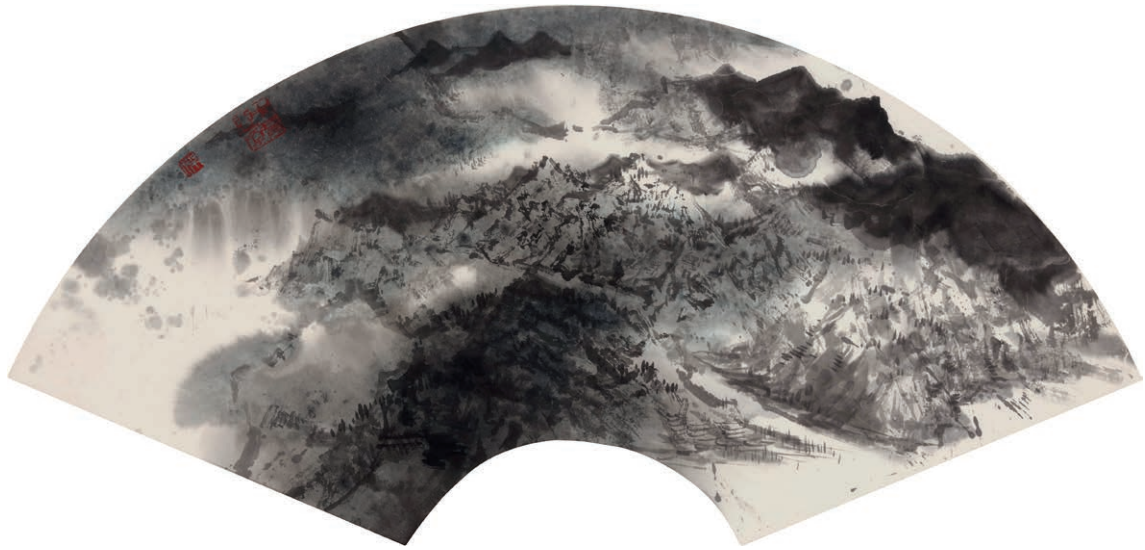


Views from the Mountain Top | 山顶的风景, 2023

Ink, water, xuan paper, Chinese colour purple and azurite
26.6 x 55.8 cm | 10.4 x 21.9 in

Adrift Amongst Whispering Leaves | 一叶飘然, 2023

Ink, water, xuan paper, Chinese colour phthalocyanine blue, white and azurite
26.6 x 55.8 cm | 10.4 x 21.9 in

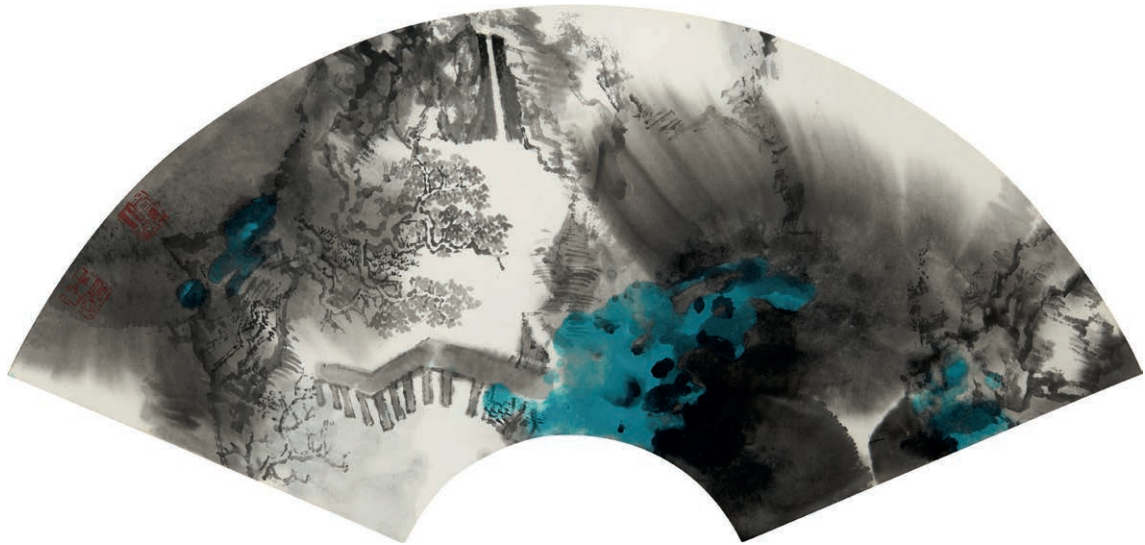


Sweeping Wind, Rising Storm | 山雨欲来, 2023

Ink, water, xuan paper, Chinese colour azurite
26.6 x 55.8 cm | 10.4 x 21.9 in

A Spring Outing | 游春, 2023

Ink, water, xuan paper, Chinese colour phthalocyanine blue
26.6 x 55.8 cm | 10.4 x 21.9 in





Crow in a Misty Night | 黑鸦入夜, 2021

Ink, water, xuan paper

138.6 x 34.5 cm | 54.5 x 13.5 in

伍 WU Yin

银 B. 2000, Sichuan, China

Wu Yin intertwines his creative instincts with his deep fascination with time and nature. Paintings, for Wu, are much more than a means of aesthetic expression; it is a means to introspect, self-evaluate, and distil the essence of his journey through life onto paper. His work is a melting pot of his experience and environment, and the unique materials he employs, wrapped gracefully by the arms of time.

Propelled by his relentless exploration, the desire to uncover the secret language of painting is reflective in Wu's art. His experimentation with fire-treated paper signals his interest in the uncontrollability of the artistic process, bridging the old and new, traditional and unconventional. His flawless combination of both *xieyi* (freehand) and *gongbi* (meticulous) techniques allows him to create a blend of traditional motif from Chinese art and timeless interpretation of nature and animals.

Wu's work pays tribute to the mastery of both Eastern and Western art. Drawing inspiration from old masters such as Bada Shanren, Pan Tianshou, Gustav Klimt, and Joseph Turner, Wu carefully weaves in their distinct strokes into his artistic narrative. His choice of composition reflects the nuance of Chinese art and the tangible reality embodied in Western art, blending these aspects to elicit viewers' response.

The choice of materials is a testament to Wu's philosophy of balancing innovation with tradition. By juxtaposing the marks of flames with his artwork's composition, Wu crafts a distinctive balance. Using classic mediums such as ink, Chinese colours and mineral pigments, he enhances his works' texture. This blend of traditional and experimental elements in Wu's paintings offers a captivating visual experience, inviting the viewer into a realm where history graciously entertains contemporary spontaneity. Through his artistic practices, Wu opens the door for a refreshing exploration, constantly challenging and refining self-perceptions while honouring historic roots under the umbrella of inventive modernity.

He now lives and works in Beijing, China.

Education

2018-22 BA, Academy of Arts & Design, Tsinghua University, Beijing, China

Exhibitions

2023 "Boundless: A Thousand-Mile Journey", Exceptional Graduate Works Exhibition of National Key Art Universities, Art Museum of Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts, Xi'an, China

2022 Graduate Exhibition of Tsinghua University Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, China



Monkey's Ceremony | 礼猴, 2023

Processed xuan paper, ink, Chinese painting pigments
68 x 60 cm | 26.7 x 23.6 in



Devouring Mothers | 白鼠噬子, 2023

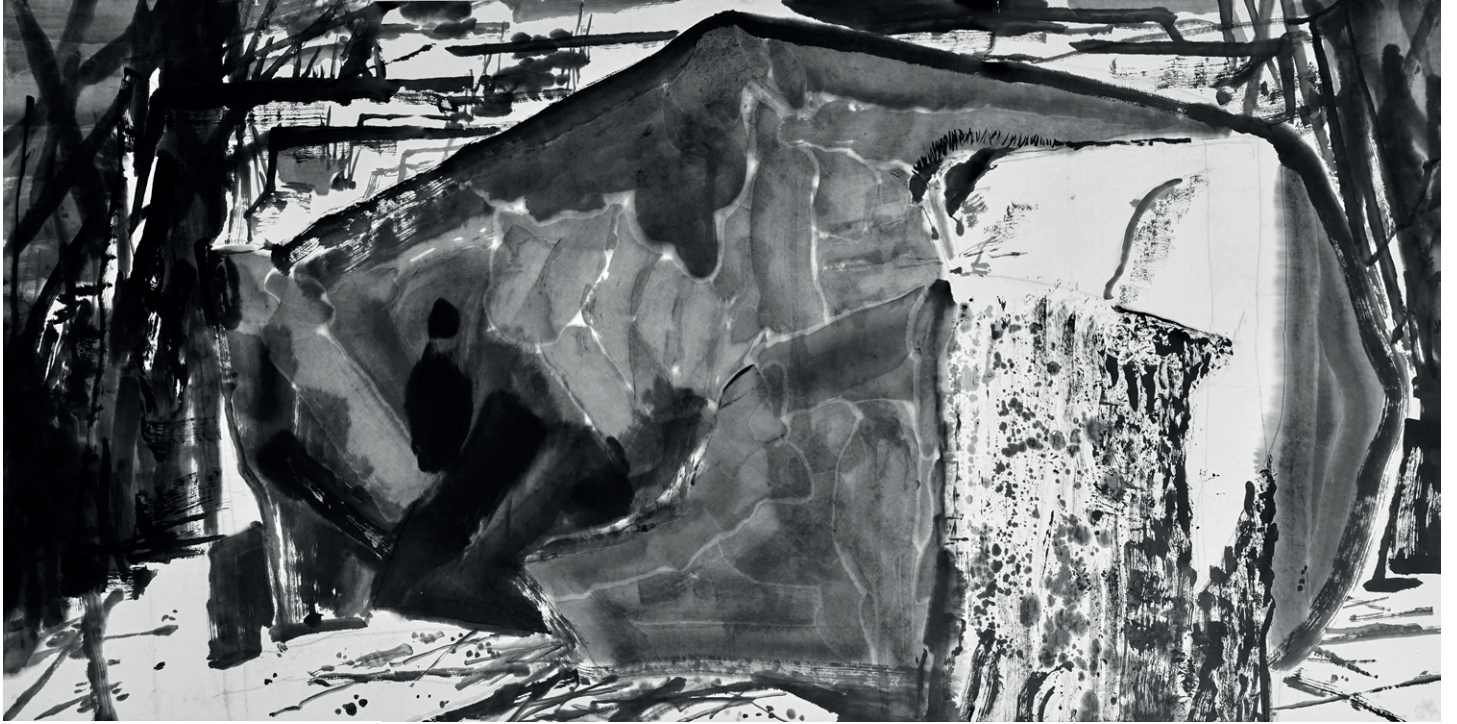
Processed xuan paper, ink, Chinese painting pigments
60 x 63 cm | 23.6 x 24.8 in



Golden Time | 金时, 2022

Processed xuan paper, ink, Chinese painting pigments, water colour, tissue paper, hydro gel, gravels

96 x 178 cm | 37.7 x 70 in



Sleeping Bear | 睡熊, 2021

Raw xuan paper, ink

69 x 138 cm | 27.1 x 54.3 in



Fire Lily | 火莲, 2022

Processed xuan paper, ink, Chinese painting pigments, water colour, mixed media

69 x 138 cm | 27.1 x 54.3 in

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Ming Gu Gallery 鸣谷轩

London 2023

guming@minggugallery.com

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