



Wei Jia

韦佳

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A Conversation with Wei Jia

Wei Jia was born in 1957 in Beijing. He graduated from the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) in 1984 and received his M.F.A. from Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania in 1987.

Wei Jia currently works and lives between New York and Beijing, where he teaches at CAFA.

In anticipation of his first exhibition in Hong Kong, a duo show with his wife, artist Lin Yan (at Kwai Fung Hin Art Gallery, November 17 to December 17, 2015), I sat down with Wei Jia at their home in Brooklyn on Wednesday, July 22, 2015, to discuss his process of art-making, the inspiration behind his work, and his thoughts on the evolution of traditional Chinese painting.

Daniel Chen: Could you explain a little bit about your creative process? How does a painting begin?

Wei Jia: Ever since I was very young, I have practiced traditional Chinese calligraphy every day, and I use this experience in my work. In my latest series, I reorder the calligraphy, or reinterpret it in my own way. I start by writing calligraphy in the old, traditional manner on layers of mounted *xuan* paper and then break up or tear apart the paper, reordering the layers as I remount them. I tear and remount over and over, moving many times back and forth between the two until I feel the piece is finished. I try to bring my life experiences into my process, as well as my artistic influences, whether they are from traditional Chinese art, Western abstraction, or Minimalism.

Daniel Chen: I have heard you mention that you are inspired by nature: the colours of changing seasons, layers of wood, the shapes of plants and flowers. How do these elements make their way into your work?

Wei Jia: When I look at nature, I like to use the phrase *chang jian chang xin* (the more you look, the more you see). For example, when I look at traditional paintings from the Song and Yuan dynasties, I know some of them by heart, but still, whenever I see them again, I always discover something new. Nature is like this as well. Every morning I go to Prospect Park in Brooklyn, New York, and every day I see something new. The leaves change their shape; the light changes from day to day.

Left: Wei Jia, *No. 15174*, 2015, gouache, ink, and *xuan* paper collage, 144.78 x 76.2 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Right: Wei Jia, *No. 14158*, 2014, gouache, ink, and *xuan* paper collage, 144.78 x 76.2 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



Daniel Chen: You mention traditional Chinese art, but in your work there are non-traditional materials such as gouache as well as methods such as collage. Do you still see yourself as part of this tradition?

Wei Jia: I often get this question: Is my work Chinese, or is it Western? I think it is both, or perhaps it is neither of them. Having spent twenty-eight years in China, and now thirty in the USA, I picture myself on my own narrow road, balanced between East and West. I am connected to my past, as I grew up with traditional Chinese art, and I continue to have love and respect for this tradition. In my own work, I want to develop what I believe are the best parts of Chinese art.

Daniel Chen: Can you elaborate on these “best parts”?

Wei Jia: I break them down into five areas: “the way of seeing,” “the suggestiveness of Chinese arts” (including poetry, music, gardens, etc.), “space and layers,” “control vs. non-control,” and “poetry and painting.” “The way of seeing” is about the way that traditional art originally was meant to be appreciated—paintings were on small scrolls that were viewed one at a time, by small groups of people, say, four or five friends. When viewing a scroll, you would start from the lower right, and slowly look from right to left, letting the painting take you on a journey. So traditional Chinese art required a close-up look, no more than an arm’s length. It was never meant to be exhibited the way you see paintings shown in museums today. I want to retain this “way of seeing” in my work—I would like to invite the viewer to take a journey in the same way they would in a traditional landscape painting. In my work the starting point no longer matters, but the movement matters. Your eye must move around the piece in order to discover it fully.

Daniel Chen: This seems connected to space in traditional Chinese painting as well. I know that in many traditional ink paintings, the artist leaves areas untouched by their brush in order to let the viewer's imagination fill the void—clouds, mist, water.

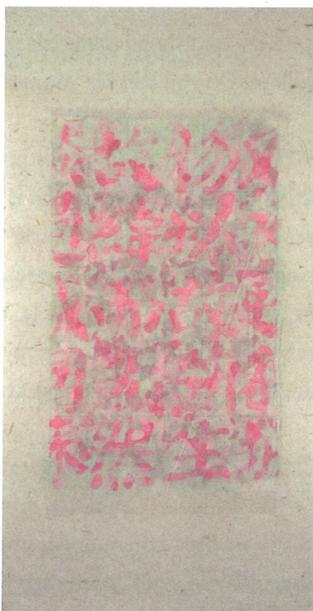
Wei Jia: Yes, actually this is key to the “suggestiveness” that I mentioned. I like to use this example: Picture a blank piece of paper, and upon it you draw a lone boat. All of a sudden the surrounding blank space becomes water. This water was not created out of perspective, nor was it drawn; it is wholly imagined. This is not only a traditional phenomenon—the contemporary artist Richard Serra is able to do the same thing with his steel sculptures. I recently saw one of his exhibitions—with tall sheets of steel that curved in and out, and you could walk between them—all of a sudden the space was transformed, just by placing a simple structure inside. I could feel a push, or pressure, as I walked through, as well as a pull, like being drawn toward the metal structure. He gave the space a meaning. This is close to the idea of suggestiveness in a traditional Chinese painting. This is just like the lone boat.

Daniel Chen: In your new series, the spaces that you leave seem very balanced, so that from a distance the composition appears almost evenly measured across the entire painting.

Wei Jia: Yes, I pay very close attention to these spaces between the brushstrokes. In calligraphy, leaving more space is related to Zen. The space inspires me in the same way shapes that I see in nature inspire me. Of course, these individual characters each have a meaning, but for me they merely seem like beautiful forms; they no longer hold any meaning. They are abstract. So the brushstrokes and the spaces between each brushstroke are fascinating. In my new series, I try to create a certain rhythm using “space and layers.” I keep a constant beat, a uniform composition that in the West could be called “all-overness.” But when you look closely, you will see that actually there is a lot to discover and a lot of space left for the imagination.

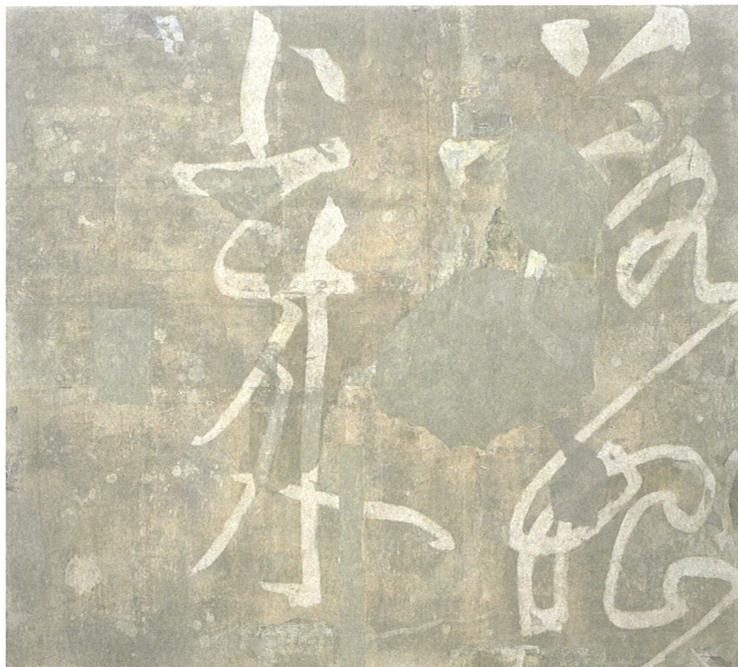
Daniel Chen: I see. Now what about non-control?

Wei Jia: “Control vs. non-control” means the accidents that happen in traditional art—accidents that often become the most interesting part of a painting. With traditional ink art, you spend a lifetime reacting to the ink and learning how to control it, but there is an element of chance that I want to retain in my work. So rather than controlling it using a brush, I removed



Wei Jia, *No. 15176*, 2015, gouache, ink, and *xuan* paper collage, 144.78 x 76.2 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Wei Jia, No. 0891 (detail),
2008, gouache, ink, and
xuan paper on canvas, 178
x 200 cm. Courtesy of the
artist.



the brush, and instead I tear apart layers of *xuan* paper. I never know what will happen. Sometimes the result is beautiful; sometimes it is disastrous. But this is what makes the process interesting to me—I must react to these accidents, and they lead me to new ways of creating.

Daniel Chen: I suppose this tearing process is a way of “de-skilling” your calligraphy.

Wei Jia: That is a good way to put it.

Daniel Chen: And finally, we are at “Painting and Poetry.”

Wei Jia: I like to use the phrase by Guo Xi, an eleventh-century Song dynasty artist: “A poem is an invisible painting; a painting is a visible poem.” I still read poetry every day, it helps me to sense the world. A poet writing about the moon one thousand years ago—I can look at the same moon and connect to this person through their words. I want to be able to connect with others in the same way.

Daniel Chen: It is enlightening to see how you are working to develop and further these traditions in your art. Although an important part of your process involves “removing the brush,” one key element that you have retained is *xuan* paper. In fact, you use a specific type of traditional handmade *xuan* paper, a material that carries with it a strong cultural connotation. In your earlier collage work, the paper is mounted onto canvas, and the areas of collage seem to form an image; in the new series, the fragments are more delicate, and now you work solely with full sheets of *xuan* paper. How has your manipulation of this material changed over time, and how, if at all, does your manipulation of it change its cultural context?



Left: Wei Jia, No. 15182, 2015, gouache, ink, and *xuan* paper collage, 144.78 x 76.2 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Right: Wei Jia, No. 14166, 2014, gouache, ink, and *xuan* paper collage, 144.78 x 76.2 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Wei Jia: *Xuan* paper has always been with me. I started traditional painting as a teenager and have used this paper ever since. I am very aware of its history and meaning. I began my previous series in 1991, where I tore the pieces of *xuan* paper to make a composition—the pieces were fragments from my memory, from my experiences. In my new series, I decided to begin and end my work using entire sheets of *xuan* paper, instead of tearing them into pieces. These are handmade sheets with beautiful edges, and I wanted to leave them intact. I wanted to leave a space around the layers of collage as well, so that each piece has the look of a traditional Chinese scroll, and also to give the audience a break for their imagination.

Daniel Chen: So you see this object as sculptural, rather than just a painting?

Wei Jia: I don't consider my work sculptural. Even though paper is translucent, there is a complexity to the surface of my work, and also there is a personality to the paper. Although the *xuan* paper is smooth and soft, there is weight and heaviness to it as well. I use this weight to give my work the feeling of a mural or stone surface from a distance. Together with the imagery, this makes an impact, something that will draw you to have a closer look.

Daniel Chen: You have explained the traditional development in your art; I wonder if you could discuss the non-traditional?

Wei Jia: There are actually ways in which my work challenges tradition, too, and colour is one of them. In traditional ink painting there are certain rules to applying colour that to me seemed outdated—it goes back to a time when paintings were meant to be viewed only by literati. I want to

Wei Jia, No. 0892 (detail),
2008, gouache, ink, and
xuan paper collage, 178
x 200 cm. Courtesy of the
artist.



go beyond this, so I mix and use colours that I see in nature around me. I like the colours that spark your own memories or recall past experiences. I don't respond to flashy colours like those in fireworks or the sharp colours of advertisements. I like colours that invoke a mood that can stay with you, even for several days. Colour to me works like a candle—you light it, and your mood changes.

This is related to another way my work challenges Chinese tradition—what I call objecthood. I explained earlier about the "way of seeing," how traditional paintings are meant to be viewed close up and slowly discovered. Although I want to preserve this in my work, I also try to give my work a presence that will attract you from a distance. Perhaps this is influenced by my love for colour field painters such as Mark Rothko—from a distance, you can really feel his painting in the room. One of the ways I achieve this presence is through abstraction, and the other is the constant, uniform rhythm in my compositions. The difference in my work from the colour field paintings is that once I am able to invite you in, there is still more to discover. As you move closer to the work, your eye can move around the piece, and hopefully it will create or suggest a mood inside of you. The painting is just an object; it is something, but at the same time it is nothing. The viewer gives it meaning.

Daniel Chen: A truly Zen statement. I hope that people will continue to discover your work and make their own personal connections to it. Thank you so much for your time.



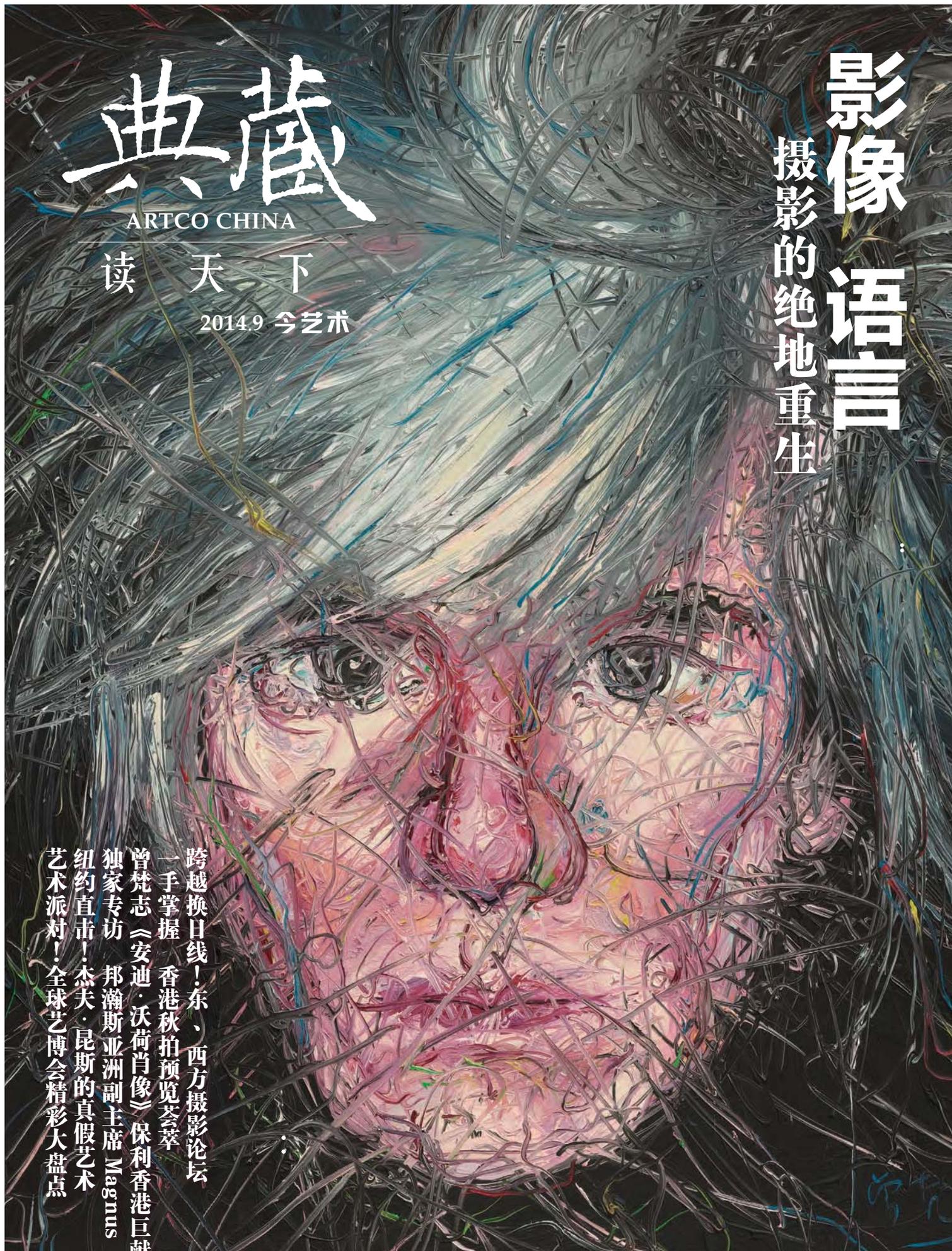
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ARTCO CHINA

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2014.9 今艺术

影像语言 摄影的绝地重生



跨越换日线！东、西方摄影论坛
 一手掌握 香港秋拍预览荟萃
 曾梵志《安迪·沃荷肖像》保利香港巨献
 独家专访 邦瀚斯亚洲副主席 Magnus
 纽约直击！杰夫·昆斯的真假艺术
 艺术派对！全球艺博会精彩大盘点



油与水：再读水墨

美国华人博物馆
2014.4.24-9.14

文 | 丁宁
图 | 美国华人博物馆

去年12月，纽约大都会博物馆的当代水墨展甫一开幕，即引发无数热议。一长串参展名单里少不了中国当代艺术的代表人物，却鲜见数十年专攻当代水墨的探索者。因而，这台由西方人策展主导的水墨大戏尽管来势汹汹，却似乎未能让所有人买账。今年4月，毗邻纽约SOHO与Chinatown的美国华人博物馆新展《再读水墨：韦佳、张宏图、仇德树》悄然开幕，呈现三位留美华人艺术家仇德树、韦佳、张宏图在传统水墨与西方艺术运动之间近三十年的游走试验。他们抗拒被归类，各自塑造了独立的视觉语汇与表达路径。

张宏图于1998年开始的“中国山水画再制”系列，借助西方现代艺术大师塞尚、莫奈、梵高的笔法再现石涛、董其昌等名家的山水画，并着意改编了应题诗作，工整写上自己的名字与创作时间。再制后，自然幽深的构图被光影带动，挥散了溟蒙浑厚的墨气，更加强了原作的运动态势。直截了当将东西方传统合并揉糅是他对两者和而不同的全面观照，亦是他多年海内外生活背景的投射。而在新作《无题山水》中，张宏图摒弃从前作品凸显的肌理与色块，尝试水墨与油彩相隐相现的对话效果。他在三块厚重木板上覆盖多层生宣，用墨勾勒纯粹山水，等干透后再覆以油画底油，重新使



张宏图，《再制石涛山水》，2003，布面油画



上 展览现场（摄影/丁宁）

下 仇德树《裂变》，2010，丙烯、宣纸，致谢美国华人博物馆

用轻薄的油彩勾勒近处景观。由底部透出的水墨痕迹带来磅礴的气势与写意的空间感，而图章状的摩天大楼与分割成方块的画面是他对城市生活与现代性的再度思考。至此，作品本身的意图和文化身份变得迷离，微妙的戏谑与冲突之余，贴上了作者个人的标签。显然，张宏图的作品并不能简单归类于用印象派手法来“取巧”，以这种带有特定韵律与迥异情绪的笔法来重现水墨画素材，而是为了提醒观者从另一个角度重新审视和质疑新水墨——水墨的继承究竟重在笔法媒介还是内部意蕴？单纯的改编是否能真正体现时代在个人与群体身上投下的烙印？

仇德树的裂变系列显露着意图脱离框架而又稳定永恒的自制感，随机偶发的形态组合被画面完整地把控。在接受了多年严谨的传统水墨教育后，仇德树将偶见的石头裂纹转嫁到宣纸上，通过撕扯产生干裂破碎的效果，开始了对于传统绘画的嬗变实验。在当代水墨依然沿用的媒介里，他干脆去除了水、墨、笔的牵绊，只留下宣纸作为唯一载体，通过碎片与纸张的叠加，以丙烯酸树脂勾勒出被撕裂延长的路途，形成一层不动声色的凹凸。笔触细微的渐变和渲染引发画面主体的挤压簇拥，在墨色背景下波云诡谲，一面造就暗流汹涌的动态画面，一面引伸浩淼宇宙的宏大命题。在仇德树眼里，龟裂不仅仅是连接画面的审美取向，也是当代社会从破

而立的真实写照。

与张宏图，仇德树稍显不同的是，韦佳始终将个人记忆与创作过程紧密结合。在80年代末初到美国时，他热衷将日常的细碎图像进行组合拼接，实现场景的还原与再造。在对水墨与西方艺术的兼容尝试中，他在多层宣纸上用炭笔随机临摹颜真卿、怀素等大家的书法作品，通过反复的覆盖和重新描绘，使半透明的画面渐渐浮现距离感与虚空的影子，在对传统技法规则的反叛与极简主义中寻求临界点的平衡。在为美国华人博物馆空间专门制作的贴纸新作中，韦佳通过撕除与贴合，融合非洲鼓点的节奏感，产生交叠的色块。他在创作中有意给自己制造困难，挑战对偶然突变的操控能力，以期产生意外的反应结果。跟随着刷子与纸面洒脱流泻的走向，画面得以展现传统水墨缺乏的浏览感，移动着的视觉体验重新定义了水墨的观看方式，而局部的细节层次与纤维暗示的趋势则需要观者走近细看。在韦佳的作品里，似曾相识的亲密体验得以重现，日常生活被有意识地记录，自然被空间与层次定格环抱。从早期对书法雅致之美的转化，到如今更多将自我感念注入作品中，韦佳对水墨抱有的态度始终如一。水墨、宣纸与他个人构成的关系不仅造就作品，也映像到他的居住体验和他对中国传统思潮的体认。[S]



上 张宏图在作品《无题山水》前，致谢美国华人博物馆

下 韦佳在美国华人博物馆谈论作品创作背景，（摄影/丁宁）

The New York Times

A Dialogue Between Hemispheres

The ‘Tales of Two Cities: New York and Beijing’ Features Five Pairs of Artists

By JANE L. LEVERE

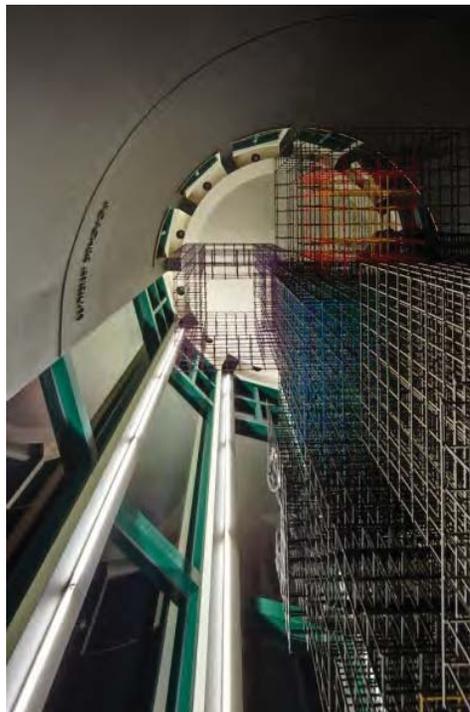
An exhibition at the Bruce Museum in Greenwich has fostered an unusual cross-cultural dialogue between artists in two capitals of the contemporary art world.

The exhibition [“Tales of Two Cities: New York and Beijing”](#) features works by five pairs of artists, each pair consisting of one who is New York-based and one who is Beijing-based.

An earlier collaboration by one of the pairs of artists laid the groundwork for the show at the Bruce Museum. In 2010, Michelle Fornabai, an architect and conceptual artist who works with ink and is based in New York, teamed up with Qin Feng, an artist who combines the Chinese ink painting tradition with Western modernism, to create a [video](#) for an exhibition at Studio-X in Beijing, a workshop run by the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation at Columbia University. In the video, the artists participate in a silent dialogue on canvas: One paints with ink, the other responds, and then the two paint simultaneously.



“City View #3” (2012) by Lin Yan.



“Grid Structure #1” (2014), a site-specific installation by Alois Kronschlaeger.

The New York Times

Pan Qing, a curator of the Studio-X and Bruce exhibitions and a deputy director for exhibitions at the National Museum of China in Beijing, writes in the exhibition's catalog that watching Ms. Fornabai and Mr. Qin "communicate silently through the brush helped to open my mind to the myriad possibilities of visual dialogues between artists from very different artistic backgrounds."

Ms. Pan joined with Michelle Y. Loh, a New York-based, Shanghai-born art consultant, and other advisers to come up with the pairings of the artists for the Bruce exhibition, which she hopes will be "the first in a series that facilitates the global interaction between artists."

Ms. Loh said that during the two years the exhibition was being developed, four of the five pairs of artists communicated with each other via email and Skype, and sometimes through studio visits. (Two of the five Chinese artists, Wei Jia and Lin Yan, are married and based in both Beijing and Brooklyn.)

Mr. Wei is paired with Joan Snyder, an American post-Minimalist artist. In the catalog for the exhibition, Mr. Wei calls the foundation of his artwork "a variety of handmade paper widely used in traditional Chinese painting and calligraphy" that is employed in "a vigorously repeated cycle of tearing, mounting and painting." Ms. Snyder says the ideas for her paintings "appear on unbleached linen with many layers of paint and often other materials." Ms. Pan calls both artists "masters of layered complexity."

Mr. Wei said he and Ms. Snyder had visited each other's studio and discussed "art and the art process."

"We exchanged ideas," he continued. "I really admire her, her working process and energy."

The New York Times



"Silk and Berries" (2013) by Joan Snyder, left, and "No. 0655" (2006) by Wei Jia.
Peter Jacobs, Courtesy of the artist



"Ink City" (2005), part of an animation series by Chen Shaoxiong. Credit Courtesy of Pekin Fine Arts

His works at the Bruce include collages made of rice paper, gouache, charcoal, ink and pastel; one features Chinese calligraphy characters. Similarly, a 1983 painting by Ms. Snyder, "My Pain Is No More Than Being's Pain," which is from the Bruce's collection, has text and contains papier-mâché and a tree knot on canvas.

The New York Times

The exhibition also pairs Alois Kronschlaeger, an Austria-born, Brooklyn-based creator of site-specific installations and sculptures, with Ms. Lin.

Ms. Lin created a circular installation in the ceiling of the Bruce's entrance rotunda using strips of off-white and black ink-dyed, handmade Chinese rice paper; these strips surround a northern gannet, a taxidermied seabird from the Bruce's collection. Although she said the work can be viewed as a reminder of Beijing's pollution problems, the bird, which appears to be in flight, could be going "somewhere hopeful."

Another of her works in the exhibition consists of black squares of paper in a variety of textures that represent the tiled roofs of Beijing's rapidly disappearing, traditional courtyard houses.

Mr. Kronschlaeger's site-specific piece, "Grid Structure #1," was made for a three-story high, circular atrium in a corner of the museum's exhibition space. This 18-foot-tall work consists of 22 cubes, stacked one atop each other; the cubes are constructed of over 6,500 sticks of bass wood. Each side of each stick has been stained with one of many colors of calligraphic ink; the colors shift as viewers walk around the installation and change their perspective.

Mr. Kronschlaeger and Ms. Lin also visited each other's studios. He said the top cube in his installation, which is black, was created in direct response to Ms. Lin's black rooftop work.

Ms. Fornabai is again paired with Mr. Qin at the Bruce. One of her works, an installation of papercrete and mirrors called "Concrete Poetry: Digging to China," is a riff on the old saying about "digging a hole to China."

She created a painting for her 2013 "Synesthesia Series," also on display at a program at the Bruce in June, during which she painted with ink on a player piano roll while accompanied by a slowed-down version of the song on the roll, "One Fleeting Hour." Folding panels by Mr. Qin here are painted with coffee and ink marks that resemble Chinese calligraphy characters.

Paintings by Li Taihuan, who uses multicolored oil to depict Beijing, a place he said is "becoming ghostly," and by Jorge Tacla, an artist born in Chile and based in Santiago and New York, address the decay wrought by urban existence today.

Chen Shaoxiong, who works across media, including paint, photography and collage, is represented by a somewhat less bleak video montage of ink drawings depicting daily life in Beijing. He is paired with Simon Lee, a British-born, Brooklyn-based artist.

"Despite differences in individual training, experience and culture, artistic sensibility is universal," Ms. Pan wrote in the exhibition catalog.

The New York Times

“To empathize with art,” she further suggests, “we should imagine ourselves in others’ spaces as well as let others inhabit our own. It is through this reciprocity that we begin to feel more connected in today’s fragmented world.”

“Tales of Two Cities: New York and Beijing,” through Aug. 31 at the Bruce Museum, 1 Museum Drive, Greenwich. Tuesdays through Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sundays from 1 to 5 p.m. Admission is \$7 for adults, \$6 for students and seniors, and free for children under 5 and for all on Tuesdays. More information: (203) 869-0376;brucemuseum.org.

A version of this article appears in print on July 20, 2014, on page CT11 of the New York edition with the headline: A Dialogue Between Hemispheres.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/20/nyregion/the-theses-of-two-cities-new-york-and-beijing-features-five-pairs-of-artists.html? r=1>

**Museum of Chinese in America opens "Oil & Water:
Reinterpreting Ink" Wei Jia at work.**



Wei Jia at work.

NEW YORK, NY.- The Museum of Chinese in America presents a contemporary Chinese ink painting exhibition, *Oil & Water: Reinterpreting Ink* featuring the work of three notable artists Qiu Deshu, Wei Jia and Zhang Hongtu. The exhibition is on view from April 24, 2014 through September 14, 2014.

In conjunction with the exhibition, MOCA will present a symposium on Sunday, April 27. Combining scholarly presentations with open conversations between the artists and leading art historians, the symposium will unpack the critical importance of the ink genre. Artists, scholars, curators, writers, and art historians will discuss the trajectory of Chinese ink art from traditional landscape painting and calligraphy to the creative reinterpretation of these historic models. The day-long program includes panels, artists in conversation, and gallery tours. Panelists include Qiu Deshu, Wei Jia, Zhang Hongtu, Melissa Chiu, Lilly Wei, John

Rajchman, Julia F. Andrews, Kuiyi Shen, Joan Lebold Cohen, Richard Vine, Robert C. Morgan, Jerome Cohen, and Aileen Wang.

The works of Qiu Deshu, Wei Jia, and Zhang Hongtu are integral to the continuing story of Chinese ink and contemporary art in general. Since its ancient and medieval incarnations, ink has served as the primary medium of Chinese visual arts. As a pillar of Chinese culture, ink has long united China's 'three artistic perfections': calligraphy, poetry and painting. For thousands of years in China, ink has been ubiquitous as an expressive medium, but by the mid-20th century, Chinese artists were interested in exploring Western art movements such as impressionism, abstract expressionism, minimalism, and post modernism. Through exploring the diametric poles of Chinese ink painting and the Western tradition of oil painting, the works of Qiu Deshu, Wei Jia, and Zhang Hongtu took off in new directions.

Following their schooling during the Cultural Revolution in China, these three pioneering artists came to the United States in the 1980s seeking greater artistic freedom. Synthesizing ink painting techniques and influences from within the art scene in New York, each artist developed a unique visual vocabulary and technique that resisted easy categorization. Oil & Water will highlight significant works from these artists, spanning their mature careers from the 1980s to today.

"Qiu Deshu, Wei Jia, and Zhang Hongtu came to America at a critical stage of their artistic journeys. They found creative communities here in New York and adapted to their new conditions in ways that clearly informed their work," according to Herb Tam, the Museum's Curator and Director of Exhibitions.

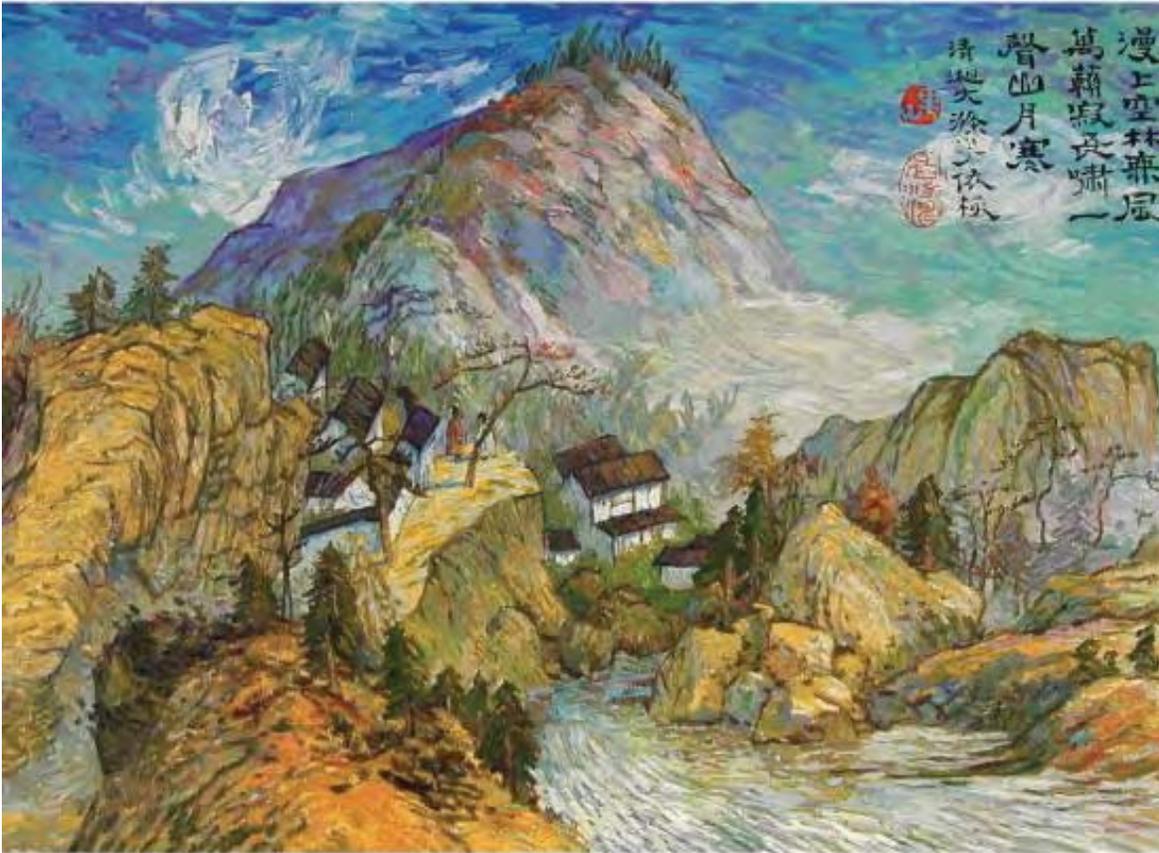
"Given the strong global interest in Chinese contemporary art today, the exhibition contributes to the conversation on the influence of contemporary art practices on the Chinese ink tradition and its place within the context of a historical paradigm," said Michelle Y. Loh, guest curator of Oil & Water.

Art in America

“Oil and Water: Reinterpreting Ink”

at Museum of Chinese in America, through Sept. 14

215 Centre St.



Contemporary Chinese ink art, once viewed in the West as an antiquarian pastime, is now the subject of intense debate. Is the form essential to preserving Chinese identity? Does it provide Western viewers an opportunity—or even create an obligation—to plumb the otherness of a foreign culture? Has the ink aesthetic been co-opted by the Party? The three veteran painters in this show seek a melding, a middle way. Qiu Deshu uses torn, ink-soaked paper strips to create dark "fissured" shapes that reflect social and psychological stresses. With larger appliqués and blocks of painted color, Wei Jia explores contrasting concepts of compositional space, East and West. Zhang Hongtu combines traditional Chinese motifs with once-radical modernist oil techniques to suggest the possibility of a global synthesis.

当纸脱离墨：韦佳访谈

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图1: 韦佳, No.11124, 48x72" (121.92x182.88cm), 2011年

采访/春妹

要谈韦佳的作品，大概要从宣纸谈起。宣纸作为书画用纸，以楮皮所造，取其产地安徽宣城以得名。受明代董其昌及后继四王（王世敏、王鉴等）影响，在清代极为盛行。然纸之发明在中国最早可以追溯到西汉，至隋唐时期中国造纸术达到鼎盛，书画开始大量使用。“古画本多用绢，宋以后兼用纸，明人又继以绫。”（《中国画学全史》）而至清代石涛、八大多非纸不用。造纸技术自宋至清，蒋玄伯认为“均为仿制时期而已，别无创新或改进。”（《中国绘画材料史》）由此可见，水墨艺术发展的固定性，及对材料的依赖程度。

纸作为书画的底子，虽产生已久，名目繁多，质地各异，却大凡是为水墨艺术服务的材料。即便是在当代，传统绘画杂糅西方艺术流派，摇身一变成为“新水墨”，艺术家们仍多寻求笔墨“变法”的老路子，而鲜有在意到水墨的载体——纸对于中国文人审美情趣的潜移默化作用。而更少有人像韦佳一样把宣纸这种绘画媒介提高到艺术表现主体的位置。韦佳试图呈现在脱离墨之后，传统手工造纸的物质性。宣纸的植物原料楮、桑、竹、麻，与生活在同一个地理环境中的人们具有天然的亲近感。摆脱笔墨的形象塑造以及文学叙事的功能，我们可以从宣纸特殊的纹理和质地中体验物质材料本身所带来的愉悦感。同时，

韦佳采用拼贴层叠的艺术处理方式，如非近看我们很可能将他的作品归为如马克·斯特兰德（□□□□□□□□）和李·克拉斯纳（□□□□□□□□）等的色域绘画一派，然而韦佳的作品相较之下色调更为细腻柔和，形式与色彩的冲突感也很好的控制在张力与节奏之中。更为重要的是，贴纸的形式又会在不经意间唤起关于文化和历史的记忆。艺术家的创作过程与中国字画装裱的过程在操作上有契合之处。当书画作品随时间和保存等问题出现虫蛀、污渍、破孔、断裂等各类磨损状况时，我们常会用裱褙的方式将一张新纸衬托于破损处或整个作品底部，以便保存。经过反复裱褙的纸上作品，在新的载体上面呈现出一种历史与时间的重叠，（图2）而韦佳的作品正在追求的也似乎是物质经过无数次破损与完善循环往复的打磨感与历史感。（图3）

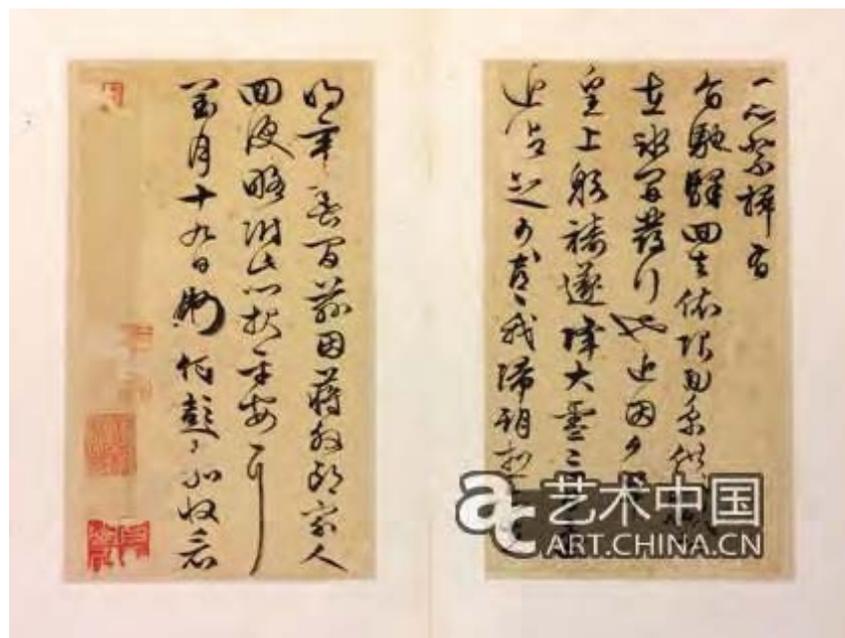


图2: 文征明,《草书旧作诗》册页,1□27年,广西壮族自治区博物馆藏



图3: 韦佳, No.34-□ □□□□□m□□, □2x□2" (132.08x132.08cm), 2004年

我和韦佳的对话从传统谈起，因为他开门见山地说：“我是继承和发扬传统的人，我的每一步都和中国传统绘画观念有关。”

问：您是如何继承传统的？您的作品在形式上难道不是对传统的颠覆吗？

韦佳：要谈继承传统的话，首先要知道中国传统艺术的特点是什么？其次你想继承的是什么？首先、中国传统绘画特点之一与它的观看方式有关。中国人的看画方式和西方人不同，中国绘画做为纸上艺术往往要求欣赏者“近看”。我最早跟中国著名收藏家张伯驹先生的夫人潘素学习青绿山水。（图4）那时候只有逢吉日或朋友聚会时，大家凑在一起，非常想要欣赏绘画了，才樟木箱子打开，拿出一幅画来展开，三五个人围着先生，听他讲解这幅画的笔法、用墨、来历、师从传承、经历突破等等。细细的就品一幅画，等看完这幅画收好才再拿出下一幅画来。你经常可以看到古代绘画有名为“文墨图”、“观墨图”、“观画图”之类的题材，画的就是长者坐在中央，书童拿一竹竿挑着一幅画，几个文人墨客围观欣赏的情景。从来没有朋友来做客在家中墙上一次挂个五幅十幅让大家随便看看。都是老友到访，展出画来，窗明几静，沐浴焚香才开始欣赏。



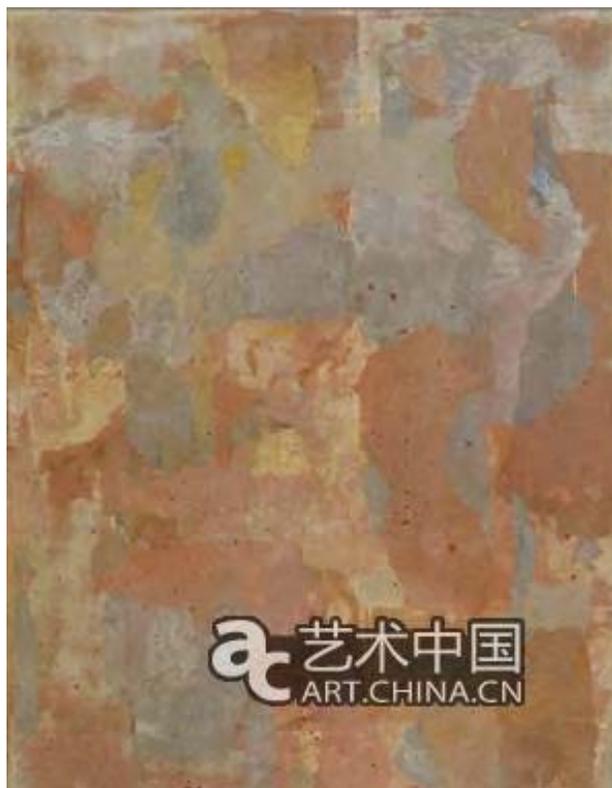
图4: 韦佳, 早期仿宋代山水作品, 1972年

我去年年初买过一本书《更大的信息》，作者是英国画家大卫·霍克尼（David Hockney），1981年时他曾经去大都会美术馆，与亚洲部馆长一起观赏王翬的《康熙南巡图》，两人跪在地上看了三四个小时都觉得不够，我觉得这是有种古人的风范。我所说的近看是一种视觉游历，左右移动。而西方绘画却并非如此，而是那种站在屋里望窗外的观看方式，但即使是欣赏现代抽象表现主义的画家波洛克（Jackson Pollock）和罗斯科（Mark Rothko）的作品也不需要近看，只有与绘画保持一定的距离，才能感受到画作的色彩和节奏，除非你是专业类艺术研究才可能会凑近看看画家笔触的处理。

其次中国艺术与暗示和联想有着紧密的关系。看一幅手卷的过程是边展边收，随收随展，因此观看的过程不仅仅需要视觉上的游历，还要用想象来链接上下文的内容。不仅中国的绘画、书法如此，建筑、戏剧都具有这种关系。中国园林为什么可以以小见大，中国的戏剧舞台为什么摆一个桌子能演出一个三岔口来，推门只需要手一拨的动作，而每一个身段，每一个步骤，每一手指动作，都象征着整个场景和剧情的发展。而这些又全部跟“近”与“暗示”有着密切关系。

问：那您的作品也希望观众以“近看”的方式来观赏吗？

韦佳：我的作品上所有的小局部，和一点点的细节都是需要近看的，我的画和中国传统绘画一样，如果站在五米之外看，虽然能看出大色调，浅色的或深色的、绿色的或是红色的□但如果仅仅是一片红色也没有什么特别吸引之处，必须走进观看才会发现这片红里面还有很多小层次，不同纸的纤维以及彩色在拼贴中的斑驳的细微变化，这片红色是由很多细节组织而成的。就是像一幅山水画，能让观者在其中视觉游历，古人说“远观其势，近观其质”，这是我在画面上一致的追求。



图□ 韦佳, No.12131, □4x48" (1□2.□□x121.92cm), 2012年

问：您的作品在形式上是西方表现主义式的，而为什么在材料上您仍坚持使用宣纸来创作？

韦佳：我是从小学国画出身的，从小跟宣纸打交道。有时候到了一定的年龄，会唤起年少时的愿望与追求。我想居住环境也会影响你的审美，若你居住的是木头房子，亭楼草棚的木质结构便和纸有着更亲切的关系。若你住的是砖房、水泥房，钢筋水泥的空间也会影响绘画的发展，例如巨幅尺寸的抽象绘画可能更适合这类空间。

我和林延（韦佳夫人）都是从北京买纸回来，每次带都带很多，回来把箱子打开，从地上开始一排排摞起来，层层叠叠的全部是纸，每一种纸的颜色都不一样，纤维也不同。这个纸即使什么都不画，只是拿出来往这儿一放，你看其中的纤维，以及它的薄边，完了再一摞各种不同的颜色、各种不同的材质，就好像你去荣宝斋买纸，名目繁多的各种纸整

齐的摆在架子上面,你会马上感受到一种文人气息,觉得你已经在这种文化的范围里面了。玉和纸都是中国人喜欢的东西,不像西方人喜欢的水晶和钻石要求晶莹透明,中国人的玉讲究半透明,那是中国人的性格喜好。中国人的性格本身就是半透明的,讲究不温不火的中庸之道。纸也一样,我喜欢它这种半透明的特质,可以一边画一边隐约透出底层的東西。而且通过与人的互动、时间的打磨,显得更加有人情味。

宣纸现在仍然是手工制作,现代制造的手工纸和机器纸最重要的区别就在于“搨纸”这个步骤是由人手工完成还是机器完成。宣纸仍然是手搨,仍然是需要搭木架子用沙网把宣纸从树浆中搨起来。手工纸它论刀卖,一刀或是半刀。其次纸的性质也有很大区别,传统手工造纸是硷质的,机器造纸是酸性的。所以我们说宣纸“纸寿千年”,它变化和腐朽的速度非常之缓慢。因为纸的特性,我们一旦在宣纸上题词作画,很多形象不需要填满,其他的材料我觉得很难想象,但是宣纸是可以达到的。在空白的画纸上面只画一只小船,天空和水的形象便自然随着人的想象会浮现出来。中国绘画的空白的特点也许和宣纸的材料特性有很大关系。

问:汉字和书法在您之前的创作中是最常使用的元素,为什么您最近的作品中却逐渐摒弃了书法和水墨的使用?

我之前的作品即使出现文字,也是一种打乱顺序的方式,我想要展现的并非是我的书法,而是提出一个小的观念。我认为中国人欣赏书法的时间其实非常短暂,我们对于书法形式上的欣赏,很快便会转变成成为文学意义上的欣赏,对于用笔、空间、气势、结构的思考很短暂,马上就会变成一个认字和读诗的过程。我这样做是为了把文学性彻底解构,只让观众停留在视觉上面。因为我写的字和我画的画其实可能不是你所感觉到的东西,我可以画出一幅很好的美女图,但为什么不画呢?因为观众看到的只是美女,而我在呈现时对于美的感觉、把握和创作是你无法感受到的,你看到的是一个美女,那是画中的形象美,而不是我对于美的体验和创造美的能力。所以我不想再画这些了。

另外因为收藏家和观众大多数为西方人,他们看画时总会问你,这个书法写的什么意思啊?让我来给讲讲。其实我的用意不在于文字所表达的内容,而是这种文化所传达的一种审美感受。我更想传达的是我的创作,而非我借用的这些元素。所以后来就把文字逐渐去掉,变得越来越抽象。这样,东西方人在我的画面前就平等了。

问:自然的因素在您的创作中是否重要呢?

特别重要,时时刻刻受周围环境和自然的影响,这是我一直保持的原则,它一定要和自然有着直接的关系,和中国传统绘画与诗有关系。艺术是一种抽象的方式反映我每天的生活和状态。对我而言,公园的叶子要比街上的行人更为好看。就是因为你能发现那么多叶子在阳光下和谐地生长出层次关系,它们长在一起,叶子的形状、树的形状却每一个都那么有个性:有长的、有圆的、有细长的、有的经脉是那么清晰、有的那么微弱。所以我不仅在“观看方式”上面继承传统,在“观察方式”上面也是继承古人的。古人在观察自然时会萌生一种感触,然后回到内心里面再酝酿,这个酝酿过程其实是把他的经历和审美中

合的过程，而在创作的时候又要遵循绘画的规律，有一种还要跟着画面走的事情。正如郑板桥说的“眼中之竹”，“胸中之竹”和“手中之竹”的区别。这一点恰切地说明了中国古人的观察和创作方式。

我并非要画一个诗意的风景，而是以个以诗意的精神状态来作画。我不想要表现一个“片片飞花弄晚，蒙蒙残雨笼晴”的景色，而是处于同样这个场景中也想要表达的人，只不过我不是诗人，而是画家，但我的状态也是诗意的。“诗是无形画，画是有形诗”（郭熙《林泉高致》）我最近为什么突然想要画粉色的作品，这可能就和自然有关系，跟当时在秋天里面想到的春天有关系。（图 □）诗往往是跨越时间和空间的，在一句话里面往往就可以把春天和秋天写在一起。这类的诗词很多，如“春花秋月何时了”表达的是年年复年年的感叹，但却用“春花”和“秋月”来表达时间的跨度。我觉得这些方面是比较具体、可以传承的东西，而不是说就是在那个笔墨上。



图□ 韦佳, No.13144, □8x48"x2 (172.72x121.92cmx2), 2013年

问:能否具体介绍一下您作品的创作过程?

比如当时我创作这幅作品时（图7：No. 0□□0-□□□□□□）我采用这个绿色是因为我想到的是宋代山水画，这种青绿山水是宋徽宗、王希孟等宋元大家所精通和擅长的。这里的书法其实是拿铅笔涂描出来的，我尽量避免用毛笔写，避免要用墨，我像画素描一样画出书法的效果来。其实这个字写了两遍，还有一遍在底层，所以写第二遍的时候和第一遍肯定有差距，边缘不可能完全一致，这样的话纸是半透明的，你在欣赏它的时候，他们之间有一个空间和虚影，所以这个字就显得实在，仔细看原作的时候它周围会有一个影子，字就会有一个深度在里面，是写一遍书法无法达到的效果。



图7: 韦佳, No.000-000000, 132x132"(132.08x132.08cm), 2000年

我的贴纸作品其实一开始创作时仍然是文字，我慢慢的撕掉，是一个撕了贴，贴了再撕的过程。只留下我想要的局部，最后慢慢的变成色块，如果你仔细看大概还能看出文字的字型来，我其实是喜欢汉字里面的空间、结构和观念，这是一个传统的东西。但我的贴纸作品跟别人又有很大不同，我在创作一个画面，但我不用油画的方式，而是用纸来代替油画颜料，同时也代替了中国传统的笔墨，这样我在继承传统的同时，可以用新的材料来发现、发展传统。我不断在古人的创作中发现今天仍然值得借鉴的东西，但是我不是要重复它！我要传承它！在传承的过程中是要经历种种挑战的。

注：韦佳、仇德树与张宏图三人展：“油与水：重新阐释水墨” (*Oil and Water: Reinterpreting Ink*) 将于美国华人博物馆展出至9月14日。

韦佳：不是去解读文字，而是静心感受它的传递

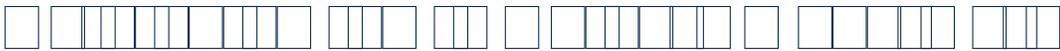


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2014年5月18日下午3时，“感知中国：中国当代油画展”在大都美术馆开幕，本次展览至6月22日结束。在中法建交五十周年之际，这次展览由联合国教科文组织、中国联合国教科文组织全国委员会、北京大都美术馆主办、北京外交人员服务局协办。

大都美术馆也自去年10月举行开馆展后，经7个月的改进调试，包括库房安全、增添设备、合理规划、完善机制的试运营，由本次展览起正式面对社会公众开放。鉴于在巴黎展出时场地条件限制，本次展览展示新中国成立60年以来，特别是改革开放以来代表性的优秀油画作品61件，展出作品内容紧凑。涉及社会发展、文化精神、艺术语言的变迁等多方面的内容。包括董希文、罗工柳、靳尚谊、詹建俊、全山石等几代艺术家的代表作品，内容广泛。

艺术中国在现场采访了参展艺术家韦佳。



Updated: 2014-04-28 13:05

By Jack Freifelder in New York (China Daily USA)

Ink has long been a widely used medium in Chinese art, especially in calligraphy or poetry, but an exhibit at the Museum of Chinese in America (MOCA) puts the focus squarely on Chinese ink paintings.

MOCA hosted a daylong conference Sunday in conjunction with its most recent show - Oil & Water: Reinterpreting Ink.

Close to 100 people attended the symposium at the museum in downtown Manhattan, which featured a number of conversations on the trajectory of modern ink painting. Art historians and critics were paired with exhibiting artists for discussions on topics including the role of ink painting in a modern setting and the effects that political and artistic developments have had on American and Asian art.

Michelle Y. Loh, guest curator of the show, said the exhibit spurs interest in contemporary Chinese art by promoting a dialogue about the "influence of contemporary art practices on the Chinese ink tradition".

"The three artists in our exhibition are representative of a unique historical period," Loh said. "All three - Qiu Deshu, Wei Jia and Zhang Hongtu - came to the US and devoted their energies to seeking and creating a visual language that reflects the intersection and collision between two sides - geopolitically between the US and China, and artistically between old, traditional mediums and new ones."

"By putting these works together in this exhibit, we are trying to revisit the idea of modern art through the lens of these artists," she said. "Contemporary artists are not just looking at pure aesthetics, they're touching on a lot of issues and working through them using art."

Wei Jia, a painter with a penchant for works that involve elements of Chinese calligraphy, said calligraphy has been an integral part of his maturation as an artist.

"When I was young I practiced calligraphy, but even still today I practice calligraphy for at least one hour every day as self-cultivation, almost meditation even," Wei said. "It's like when you go to the gym to exercise, but the only difference is the body and mind."

Wei said the dilemma for a painter in a contemporary setting are the limitations that traditional painting techniques and the label of "contemporary Chinese painter" put on an artist and a work of art.

"What I want to do is continue to explore Chinese traditional painting," Wei said. "But I have to challenge the traditional way of painting because it doesn't fit today. I don't use a Chinese brush and I try to avoid these ways because if I use Asian materials I will definitely be limited."

"I don't want to be labeled, so I just do what I love to do," he said.

Zhang Hongtu, a New York-based painter and installation artist, said people would understand more about Chinese contemporary art after visiting MOCA.

"From my 30 years over here in the US, some people are concerned that Chinese art is old and shouldn't even be put in a museum," Zhang said.

"For this show, the three of us work in different mediums but if you want to do something new you can learn from tradition," he said. "In this case people will understand that tradition itself can be part of the contemporary culture, but it depends on the way you treat tradition."



Painter Wei Jia (left) chats with art historian Robert C. Morgan at an event presented by the Museum of Chinese in America (MOCA) on Sunday in New York. Jack Freifelder / China Daily



2014-04-24 10:52

By Jack Freifelder

Ink has long been a widely used medium in Chinese art, especially in calligraphy or poetry, but an exhibit at the Museum of Chinese in America (MOCA) is putting the focus squarely on Chinese ink paintings.

MOCA, in downtown Manhattan, will open an exhibit of contemporary Chinese ink paintings this week, and the guest curator for the installations said the display may cause visitors to rethink contemporary Chinese art.

Michelle Y Loh, the guest curator for Oil & Water: Reinterpreting Ink, said the exhibit spurs interest in contemporary Chinese art by promoting dialogues about the "influence of contemporary art practices on the Chinese ink tradition".



From left: Zhang Hongtu, a New York-based painter and installation artist; guest curator Michelle Y. Loh; Qiu Deshu, a Shanghai-based artist; and painter Wei Jia pose for a photo at the Museum of Chinese in America (MOCA) on Wednesday. The three artists joined Loh for a preview of the museum's exhibit Oil & Water: Reinterpreting Ink, which is set to open on April 24. Jack Freifelder / China Daily

"The three artists in our exhibition are representative of a unique historical period," Loh said on Wednesday in an interview with China Daily. "All three came to the US

and devoted their energies to seeking and creating a visual language that reflects the intersection and collision between two sides - geopolitically between the US and China, and artistically between old, traditional mediums and new ones."

"By putting these works together in this exhibit, we are trying to revisit the idea of modern art through the lens of these artists," she said.

Oil & Water: Reinterpreting Ink, which juxtaposes the work of three contemporary Chinese artists - Qiu Deshu, Wei Jia and Zhang Hongtu - will be on display from April 24 through Sept 14.

In conjunction with the installation, MOCA will host outreach events to promote the exhibit, including family workshops on art made within the Chinese ink tradition.

At the end of the week, MOCA is also hosting a day-long conference on the traditional and cultural significance of Chinese ink art.

The event on April 27 will feature a number of art historians and art critics, as well as the curator and artists involved in Oil & Water.

Zhang Hongtu, a New York-based painter and installation artist, said people will understand more about Chinese contemporary art after visiting MOCA.

"From my 30 years over here in the US, some people are concerned that Chinese art is old and shouldn't even be put in a museum," Zhang said on Wednesday in an interview with China Daily. "It depends on how you treat tradition and what's your perspective. Every tradition is still alive, even back to 1,000 years ago, even if not so many people respect the tradition today."

Wei Jia, a painter with a penchant for works that involve elements of Chinese calligraphy, said calligraphy has been an integral part of his maturation as an artist.

"When I was young I practiced calligraphy, but even still today I practice calligraphy for at least one hour every day," Wei said in an interview. "I practice calligraphy as self-cultivation, almost meditation even. It's like when you go to the gym to exercise, but the only difference is the body and mind."

Wei says the dilemma for a painter in a contemporary setting is the limitations that traditional painting techniques put on an artist and a work of art.

"I got a strong influence from studying calligraphy and Chinese painting when I was young, but I've been in America for 28 years," he said. There are two different influences in my painting; they show my experiences and what I thought every day."

To Wei, the label of "contemporary Chinese painter" is a misnomer.

"What I want to do is continue to explore Chinese traditional painting," Wei said.

"But I have to challenge the traditional way of painting because it doesn't fit today. I don't use a Chinese brush and I try to avoid these ways because if I use Asian materials I will definitely be limited. I don't want to be labeled, so I just do what I love to do."

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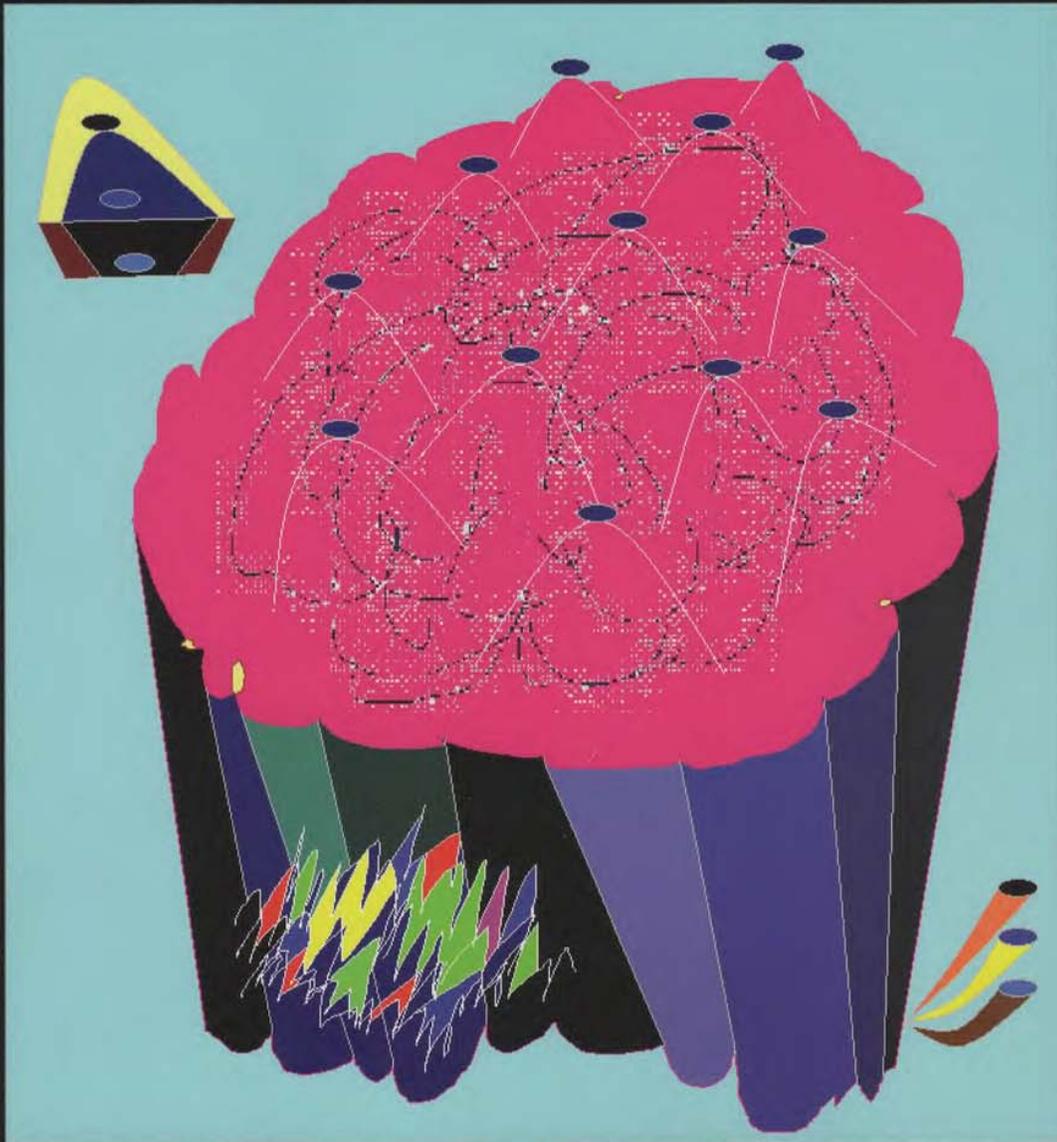
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HONG KONG MASTERS



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The Paradox of Xuan



Lin Yan, **Back To Brooklyn No.3**, 2011, xuan paper, 38 x 49 in. All images: Courtesy of the Artist and Cheryl McGinnis Gallery, New York.

There is something quite magical about the sense of presence and absence in the xuan paper art of the New York-based Chinese artist Lin Yan. There is also an intensity of emotion and balance running through her startling recent collection. Even in her blackest of works there is a connection with the timeless cosmos that jogs the imagination into life.

By Robert C. Morgan

Much of what has been said or written about the work of Lin Yan has been descriptive in approach, largely focusing on the artist's technical or formal methods. In each case, the work is described differently, which suggests two possibilities: either the actual process or nature of the materials may not be well understood, or, if understood, little is said about the interaction of ideas in relation to the materials. Because of this, some may assume that Lin Yan's work is a form of artisanry, rather than seeing her constructions and castings as sculpture in which the materials constitute a poetic statement about the world that she inhabits.

As a Chinese artist living in New York, Lin Yan functions as an artist on a diurnal basis, meaning she is occupied with her art on a consistent basis every day. In addition to the rewards of those who follow and admire her work and her working process, she may occasionally confront those who are oblivious to the traditions—historical, cultural, and aesthetic—that exist in relation to the kind of work she makes. For example, among those who regard Chinese contemporary art primarily as an investment opportunity, the tendency may be to categorize her work in such a way that simplifies its importance. This generally happens out of ignorance or occasionally through an overt lack of sensitivity.

This aspect of the human condition in today's global environment has become common fare in the circuit of global art fairs where viewers either drift or become consummately disengaged from the process of comprehending advanced art as anything other than an investment. In addition to the omnipresent problem of art as commodity, there are other further inhibiting factors as well. For example, the unrealized barriers of language, culture, protocol, and history are very real. They may stand in the way of opening a dialogue or engendering a spirit of commonality in the exchange of ideas. One should not assume that the readymade solution to these barriers is to indulge in

mindless market talk, particularly with Lin Yan. In the course of my trips to Asia, I have learned that most serious artists I have encountered in China are less interested in the market than in the ideas that stand behind their work. Here again I would include Lin Yan and her husband, the painter Wei Jia, who would rather spend time engaged in a discussion about their work from a Western critical perspective than to discuss the most recent market strategies. In their case, I am convinced this is true. They are passionate in their interest to grasp something more important than passing trends or media hyperbole.

In another way, the Western emphasis on relegating work to some stereotypical category or medium becomes over-determined and is used in a negative way, often preventing a more open, unbounded discourse that pertains to the way artists in China actually feel and think about their work. The struggle to locate a common point of reference by which to begin a discourse on the work of Lin Yan and bring it into a clear focus is a challenge, but it is a challenge worth the effort if only to understand how the reality of difference plays an essential role in how we understand and look at art today.

Enshrouded is the title of a recent exhibition of work by Lin Yan at the new gallery of Cheryl McGinnis in the TriBeCa section of New York. The title is somewhat elusive. What does it mean? Is the artist metaphorically wrapped-up in her work? In the case of Lin Yan, it might refer to the layers of *xuan* paper that project out into the space of the gallery. Is there something being concealed or hidden from view? The term "enshrouded" suggests a wrapping or covering of some sort, as in the chador worn by Islamic women—but the Chinese reference is problematic, particularly in relation to Lin Yan. My image of the artist's work is somewhat different, less about covering than the process of layering and unlayering as in the Zen Buddhist notion of work that appears insignificant, such as sweeping the pathway to the stone step of the temple. (Of course, this is not really as insignificant as it might appear. Rather it is a form

of mediation used by practitioners in the Rinzaï sect, who adhere to enlightenment by engaging in simple repetitive actions, such as sweeping.)

"Enshrouding" might also have an obverse side as in the process of unknowing what one knows—that is, to engage in giving away what one has enshrouded by learning as in the ritual involved in reciting passages from the sutras that one has spent years in memorizing in original Sanskrit. Thus, enshrouding is a special kind of constructive/deconstructive process, whereby something is learned or acquired only to be given away.

In the art of Lin Yan, involving one layer of thin paper against another, one piece over another (or "step by step," as quoted by Lin from a speech by President Barack Obama in 2009.) Unlayering is where the truth of the process is shown, the archeology of traces that Lin carefully and fastidiously reassembles. Even so, there is a paradox in all of this. There can be no unlayering without first layering, and nothing can be revealed that was not enshrouded. In either case, the body is implicated, as is the mind, the thoughts of the artist as she engages



Lin Yan, *Me, Going to Brooklyn*, 2011, xuan paper, 78 x 60 in.

in the process of creating density from transparency. *Enshrouded* reflects a state of levity and suspension where the *xuan* paper specters created by Lin Yan reveal their uncanny, dark, inscrutable, seemingly contradictory process. Together her works—whether cast, draped, and stained with the density of black ink—suggest a regal manifestation of the paradox embodied in the ancient Tao—so close in their reckoning to the wandering scribe from the Zhou dynasty (ca.1046 – 221 BCE), who taught "the Way" in southern China—that being and non-being were inextricable, bound to the same phenomenon, the same force, where the milky way confronts a single blade of grass.

To acquire knowledge through ink and paper involves a process that admits a form of heightened sensory cognition on the part of how the artist works with the paper. It is a process in which mind and body are one, inseparable from one another. The force of unity is the basis for the slow release of energy, where the artist projects feeling in relation to material. It is the process of unknowing—to regain knowledge by letting it go, the emptying of the mind. This Taoist paradox is latent within her work. To saturate paper with ink, to bind and sheave the cut-paper together, to assort and fasten the paper in such a way that the free edges flutter gently according to the current of air rising up from the floor—all of this done without effort as if to suggest a simple happening, an impulse, a sensation.

Lin Yan's choice of archival handmade *xuan* paper began in 2006. Traditionally used by courtly scholars in the Tang dynasty, the composition of this paper is made from finely crushed bark taken from elm and mulberry trees. It is a delicately refined process that produces dense fibers and a tensile strength strong enough to last a millennium. (In contrast, the development of canvas used for oil painting was invented in Europe centuries later and has been used by painters for much less than a millennium. At this moment, it is difficult to project exactly how long Baroque paintings from the early 17th century will survive. Hypothetically—if

left untreated—the oil pigments could rapidly disintegrate the fibers of these works of art. On the other hand, there are ink brush paintings on Chinese *xuan* paper that have already proven to have lasted a thousand years.)

The kind of sensory awakening in Lin's works is precisely located within the process of the making. It is a feeling made manifest through the artist's manipulation of her materials. Art created on this level leaves few distinctions. The artist's process enters into oneness with the materials. The resulting quality happens within and through the process of the work. In some sense, it is held or suspended within the consciousness of feeling. While I recognize this course of thinking may not find acceptance among those bent on standardizing the thoughts and emotions of human beings in a globalized network, the true artist operates on a much different level. The imperative for such an artist as Lin Yan is to liberate thought and emotion from the dulling impact of repetitive slogans proclaimed by media, and to engage in making a work capable of transmitting a tactile sensation. Put another way, Lin Yan makes art that connects with the retina—that will, in turn, connect with the neurons of the brain. Finally the work may be felt—not merely as static information, but through a form of haptic involvement. The texture and ink absorbed into the *xuan* may incite a feeling made possible through the artist's material handling. Concurrently, the layering of the nearly translucent sheaves offer a dimension of light and air, creating a sense of immediacy that the art we are seeing shares a connection with nature. Emptiness of mind

literally unfolds as nature retrieves its balance. These are significant works of art that move us—inspires us—to be in the present, to see the world in a fresh way, perhaps, never thought possible before.

As I engage visually and conceptually with the works of Lin Yan, I am fully aware of their tactile sensation—"tactile" in the sense that the works are possessed by a kind of physical presence (as well as a paradoxical absence.) They hold my focus and therefore sustain a feeling of balance

and equilibrium within my consciousness. To transmit a sense of balance in a work of art is a marvelous and rare achievement. In these recent works, there is a feeling of balance, but never completely without tension. While her work may suggest an ecological intention in terms of how they are made and soaked in black ink, offering an intense contrast between the black and white surfaces of the *xuan*, this does not deter from their structure.

It merely adds to the complexity and the overall intensity of the work. This,



Lin Yan, *Peace*, 2011, xuan paper, 60 x 36 x 7 in.

too, is part of its balance. Embedded within her passion to cast details from architectural sites, which she has done frequently in her work over the past six years, one may visually absorb the feeling of the dark ink and billowing ecstasy of her delicately torn paper. The act of tearing these sheaves has evolved into an expression of her connection to eroded surfaces based on how they have evolved and become relics of the past, essentially what they are.

The artist has spoken about her use

of ink: "The richness of blacks is like ink in Chinese painting. Black is a complex and sensitive color. It's very powerful when you handle it well." Generally, from a Chinese perspective, one reads black as having less to do with tragedy than fertility, the place where things grow out of the darkness, which is an essential Taoist teaching. Thus, Lin Yan will cast metal floors and walls of bricks not simply as decorative or textural patterns in the formal sense, but as signifiers of her past and of China's past as well. In addition, the artist further speaks of the contrasting elements of metal as being traces of an industrial past and paper as having a more delicate cultural component directly associated with Eastern aesthetics and philosophy.

Having come from an important artistic family associated with the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing (where she, in fact, was educated and later taught), and having been raised with an acute visual and aesthetic sensibility, the architectural traces of Chinese culture are important to her. She pays attention to the details in architecture and is gratified that her work captures something of her intimate past, not only in China but in Brooklyn as well, where she maintained a studio for many years. In Lin Yan's case, the studio is a place of inspiration and delight: therefore, what she sees on a regular basis in the process of developing and envisioning her work becomes essential to her knowledge as an artist. In Lao-tse, much emphasis is given to what one sees in nature. The Taoist view of nature—in contrast to Western philosophy—is less in opposition to culture than an extension of it. What one senses and what one knows are not equivocal; they are essentially the same. In this regards, the kind of heightened sensory cognition felt by the

artist in the intimacy of her studio is a preeminent aspect of her work. What Lin Yan achieves in her work is a statement on the autonomy of ink on paper as a form of absence in art. This absence reflects the enduring emptiness that all her work represents. Δ

Robert C. Morgan is a professor of art, author, and artist who lives in New York. He is a contribution editor for Asian Art News and World Sculpture News.

The Brooklyn Rail

Critical Perspectives on Art, Politics and Culture

JUL-AUG 2012

 **BROOKLYN RAIL**
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

WEBEXCLUSIVE

AVANT-GARDE INK IN CHINA

Beyond Pop and Expressionism

by Robert C. Morgan

TENRI CULTURAL INSTITUTE | MAY 4 – 25, 2012

The following comments on *Vaulting Limits*—a group show seen last month at the Tenri Cultural Institute in the West Village—may offer a slightly different perspective than what some of my colleagues have chosen to see as important in contemporary Chinese art today. Over the past few years, relative to a series of studio visits with artists working in various parts of China, I have felt increasingly compelled to reflect on the development of ink painting. I am taken by the fact that many artists are seemingly less concerned with Western formulas, Pop and Expressionism among them, and are focusing instead on developing ways of working with more traditional materials including ink, brushes, and xuan paper. Some Western observers have misconstrued this revival as regressive, which I believe is incorrect. Rather, many contemporary Chinese ink and brush painters are striving to rediscover their own language and, in doing so, reinvent the vanishing medium by bringing it back into the foreground of a renewed, present-day cultural awareness.



Yu

an Zuo, "Serene Valley White Night," 2012. Oil on canvas. Photo: Yuan Zuo.

One of the criteria for inclusion in *Vaulting Limits*, curated by Michelle Y. Loh and Thalia Vrachopoulos, was that each artist should be a graduate of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing (not all from the same year), considered by many to be the most important art school in China, next to the Hangzhou Academy of Fine Art. The ratings don't really matter, other than to

suggest that these artists are some of the best ink painters currently working either in China or, in some cases, New York.



Cao Jigang,

“Silence and Meditation,” 2011. Tempera on canvas. Photo: Cao Jigang.

Lin Yan casts and constructs assemblages with ink and xuan paper. This thin, nearly translucent paper is made from crushed elm and mulberry tree bark and is said to last a millennium. (By comparison, canvas left untreated tends to erode over a much shorter period of time.) Lin's subject matter revolves around the principles of space, time, and spirit. The latter term is a conundrum for Westerners, who tend to confuse this idea with religion or, in the modernist sense, Kandinsky's appropriation theosophy. Lin Yan works with the empty surface of xuan paper as well as with the saturation of ink. Somehow both aspects of her artistic approach reach the same conclusion, which is related to the emptiness of nature, a kind of hovering in time, an absence replete with meaning that dissolves before one's eyes.



leaves are gone,” 2009. Handmade paper, ink, and plexiglass. Photo: Ken Lee.

The ink on Xiao Bing’s surfaces in large-scale paintings such as “Disappearing of Han Prose Rhyme” (2010) is sprinkled lightly rather than saturated or poured onto the surface. The sense of lightness on the surface embodies the “spirit” of the work. He claims there is history within the painting. According to Bing, history should not be mistaken for time. By employing the conventional Chinese use of obverse space, in which the top of the painting appears closer to the viewer than the bottom—first used in the landscapes of the Northern Song Dynasty in the tenth century (and later, the Yuan Dynasty)—Bing creates three-point perspective by showing the edges of a steel frame bending diagonally inward on either side of the ink sprinkled surface. Even as I could see the field of ink, it appeared to conflate, to turn in upon itself, only to ricochet back into my visual field.



Wei Jia, "No

#12132," 2011. Gouache, pastel, paper collage on canvas. Photo: Ken Lee.

In "Silence and Meditation" (2011), Cao Jigang is more involved with deeply saturated areas of vertical space, his paintings rich and beautiful. Jigang employs the saturation of ink with full confidence, and in the process, belies the more studied precision generally associated with elder artists steeped in calligraphy. Another artist, Wei Jia is a brilliant theorist and painter, whose works also involve the saturation of color inks on xuan paper, one upon another. The results often appear more solid and lyrically intriguing than paintings associated with American Color Field painting in the 1960s, largely due to the superior absorbent quality of the paper made from crushed mulberry leaves.



Xiao Bing,

“Withheld of Han Poetry Rhyme,” 2010. Pigment on linen. Photo: Xiao Bing.

Yuan Zuo also works with color—using the brush as if it was ink on paper, but, in fact, it is oil on canvas. This means he has appropriated a Western idea of materiality and surface in a manner that appears like Abstract Expressionism. But it is not. In works, such as “Image #5” (2008), the gestural integration of blue, sienna, green, and ochre suggest a landscape, but the emphasis is entirely on the virtuosity of the brush, the way in which the strokes are made and collide with one another. What I understand when I stare at a painting by Yuan Zuo is that the brush is always in the foreground of thought, which in his case is a kind of deferral, whereby the surface

becomes something without the slightest degree of self-consciousness. With Yuan Zuo, the brush determines the surface, which is quite the opposite of Western-style Abstract Expressionism where the surface becomes a form of pictorial space.

In contrast, Wei Jia works with the more traditional style of saturated colored inks on xuan paper – as does his wife Lin Yan. In contrast to Lin Yan – who focuses primarily on minimal-style usage of black ink and white paper surfaces, Wei Jia covers every square inch of surface with color, as in “Huang Xingjian No. 0775” in which the green calligraphic marks are placed on top of the red and ochre surface. The surface fills the spectrum of the retinal gaze. There are few interstices of space other than those given to the heat of his color.