

# POP ROCK

*An Exhibition about Rocks*

*Curated by  
Olivia Wang & Jérémie Thircuir*

藝倡畫廊

ALISAN FINE ARTS



Pop Rock

Artists

- 董文勝 *Dong Wensheng*
- 韓磊 *Han Lei*
- 熊輝 *Hung Fai*
- 洪強 *Hung Keung*
- 管偉邦 *Koon Wai Bong*
- 瑞安·拉巴爾 *Ryan LaBar*
- 潘英國 *Pan Yingguo*
- 史金淞 *Shi Jinsong*
- 韋邦雨 *Wai Pongyu*
- 邱榮豐 *Yau Wing Fung*
- 張健君 *Zhang Jianjun*
- 張小黎 *Zhang Xiaoli*
- 張鷹 *Zhang Ying*

Curated by

- Olivia Wang*
- Jérémie Thircuir*

Exhibition duration

*13 August – 06 November 2021*

*21/F Lyndhurst Tower, 1 Lyndhurst Terrace, Central, Hong Kong*

*www.alisan.com.hk*

## *Foreword*

*Daphne King*  
*Gallery director, Alisan Fine Arts*

We are excited to present Pop Rock, a group exhibition at Alisan Central co-curated by Olivia Wang and Jeremie Thircuir. The show features the work of 13 artists from Hong Kong and Mainland China, including Shi Jinsong, Hung Keung, Zhang Jianjun and Zhang Xiaoli, whose works have been exhibited in the gallery in the past. Highlighting the artists' diverse interpretations and explorations of the scholar's rock, a traditional literati object, in a contemporary way, the exhibition specifically re-examines the role of the scholar's rock in the history of Chinese art and re-defines its importance in a modern context. Through these commissioned works, Wang and Thircuir hope to draw recognition and appreciation on the once mystified subject matter.

Since the gallery first opened its doors 40 years ago in 1981, Alisan Fine Arts has been at the forefront of shedding light on Chinese contemporary art with a strong focus on ink art and diaspora artists. Introducing contemporary Chinese art to a broader audience has been a long-term commitment of the gallery and it is proud of the role it has played in supporting young and emerging Chinese artists and curators, such as Wang and Thircuir. Furthermore, it has made a concerted effort in promoting artists who portray traditional and classical subjects with modern mediums in the present context such as the artists found in Pop Rock.

In recent years, the interest in Chinese contemporary art and Chinese classical symbols has grown. We hope, through this exhibition that the audience can truly appreciate the beauty of the scholar's rock and keep pondering upon the boundaries between culture and nature, past and present.

# Pop Rock

*Olivia Wang & Jérémie Thircuir*

POP ROCK is a group exhibition that uses the scholar's rock as a starting point to create a dialogue between high and low culture, past and present. Featuring artists from Hong Kong and mainland China, the exhibition highlights the diverse explorations and perspectives of artists working in a range of different media—ink, photography, oil, sculpture, installation and video.

One of the challenges facing each generation of Chinese artists has been how to innovate and develop a personal idiom while remaining reverent to age-old artistic traditions. From the early twentieth century and increasingly in the last couple of decades, the desire to develop and incorporate Western aesthetics within Chinese art and culture has taken many different forms. This cultural hybridization has created much friction and misunderstanding of the formal, conceptual and spiritual dimensions of tradition.

As such, tradition today is often idealized. It is shrouded in a certain romantic myth that an artist is full of supernatural wisdom that connects to the natural elements, and is—unlike his or her audience—free from the material pressures of contemporary life. The notion of tradition thus has become almost sacred, and pushes the viewer further away from understanding it. POP ROCK seeks to bring tradition closer to us by making it more approachable and interactive. Symbols of the past need to be made alive and brought into the present in order to be appreciated and revered.

There is something otherworldly about beholding a rock—a prized icon in Chinese art history. An object for meditation, the rock was believed to be imbued with primordial and supernatural energies capable of dynamic transformations. From the Song dynasty, large rocks were an essential feature in gardens, and smaller ones made up home or studio collections, where they offered “imaginary travel” to mystical peaks and cave paradises.

Just as rocks have been appreciated for their mystical and natural beauty since ancient times, they continue to serve as objects of inspiration and curiosity for artists and collectors today. The abstract forms of a rock lend itself to endless possibilities of exploration and interpretation. Standing between an object from nature and a readymade enhanced by human hand, the rock also compels us to ponder upon the boundaries between culture and nature.

POP ROCK takes an irreverent and playful approach on this classical symbol, reflecting the idea that objects that we truly care about should be kept close and cherished.



# Wai Pongyu 韋邦雨

*b. 1982, Hainan*

Wai Pongyu is known for his complex and meticulous ballpoint-pen-on-paper drawings that stem from the rhythms and movements of lines, whereby each line follows the previous one, always moving forward without retracing itself or breaking. Delicate yet dynamic, precise yet sensuous, his inked lines create abstract images with an otherworldly presence.

The present work is from the artist's ongoing series "A Moment of Truth" (2011–) where elements from nature lie at its core. Here, Wai has merged disparate segments from plants, rocks and the human body, into a composite work of striking harmony. To him, the image serves as a reminder that "equality lingers in a society predominated by partiality and discrimination."

Wai Pongyu moved to Hong Kong with his family at the age of 2. A graduate of the Fine Arts department of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, his works are in the collections of the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco and Oxford University's Ashmolean Museum.

## **A Moment of Truth 58**

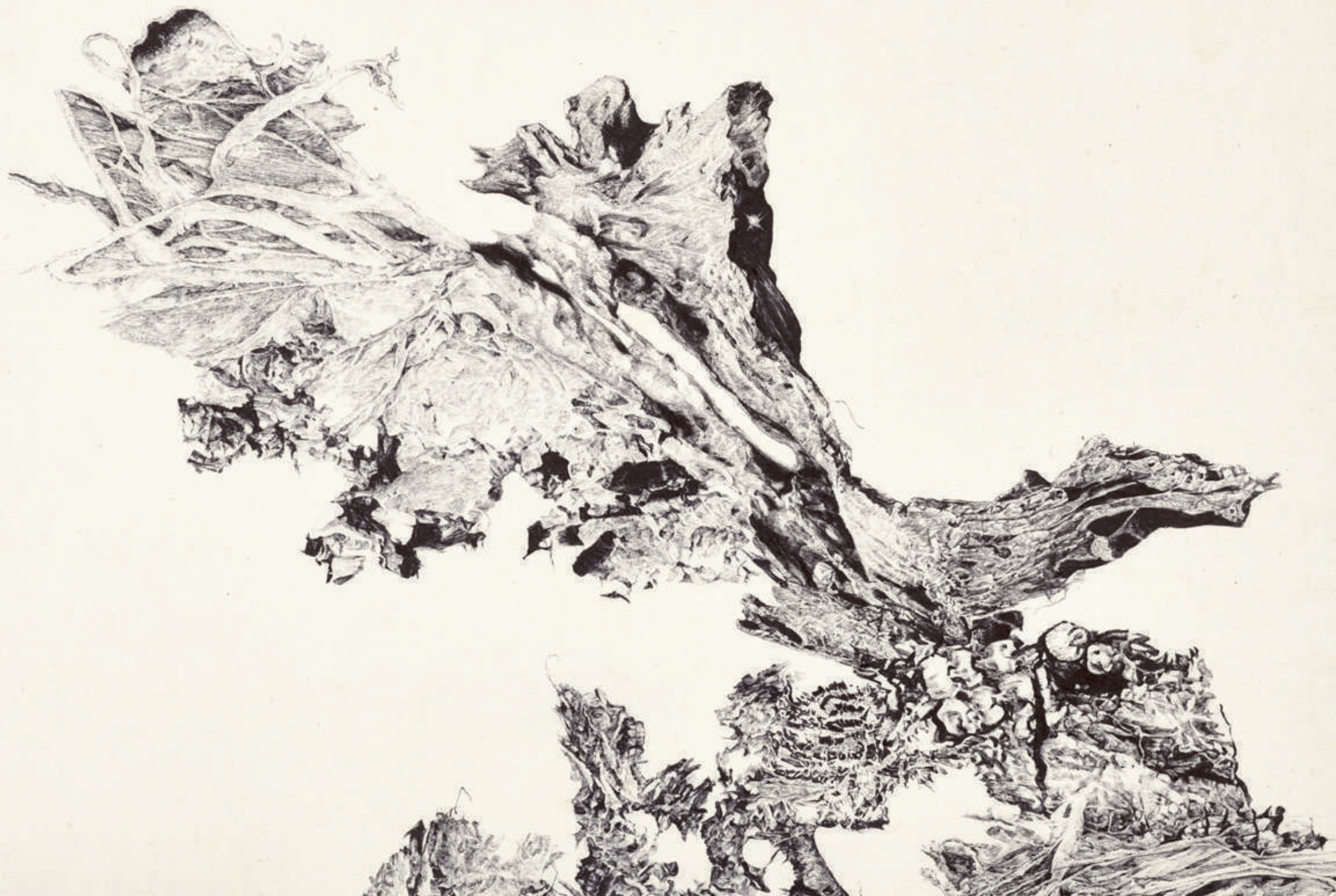
97.5 x 63cm

Ballpoint pen on paper

2021









# *Hung Fai* 熊輝

*b. 1988, Hong Kong*

The son of the noted ink painter Hung Hoi (b. 1957), the young Hung grew up surrounded by ink, brushes and his father's traditional landscape paintings. However, at an early age, he was determined to forge a creative language independent of his father's. Using the ink pen as his mode of expression, Hung has developed his own visual idiom, whereby he deconstructs the three elements in Chinese painting—paper, water and ink—and then conceptually manipulates and reconstructs them.

*The Six Principles of Chinese Painting—Transmission XX* (2020) challenges the sixth principle of “transmission” (learning through copying and imitating), as laid down by sixth-century art historian Xie He in his treatise “Six Principles of Chinese Painting.” Hung first invited his father to paint a rock in cinnabar red—a colour symbolic of authority and rarely used in Chinese painting—on a folded sheet of paper. He then saturated the paper with water, and traced the contours with an ink pen. The result, upon unfolding the sheet, is a kaleidoscopic image no longer bearing resemblance to the original rock. Hung has deconstructed and transformed his father's original rock. As the red and black ink seep through the paper, Hung draws our attention to the dynamics between master and apprentice, father and son, past and present.

A graduate of the Fine Arts department of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hung Fai's works are collected by M+ and the Hong Kong Museum of Art.

**The Six Principles of Chinese Painting -  
Transmission XX (with Hung Hoi)**  
139x70cm  
Ink and colour on paper  
2020





# *Yau Wing Fung* 邱榮豐

*b. 1990, Hong Kong*

Yau Wing Fung had a chance encounter with a certain rock on a walk in the Kowloon Walled City Park several years ago. He recalls that he was so struck by the huge garden rock shrouded between the smog and fog, that he immediately bought pen and paper to sketch it. Rocks have since become an important subject matter in his ink-painting oeuvre. He is particularly interested in exploring the negative space in rocks—revealed by the hollows and crevices shaped over time—and the interaction with its surroundings.

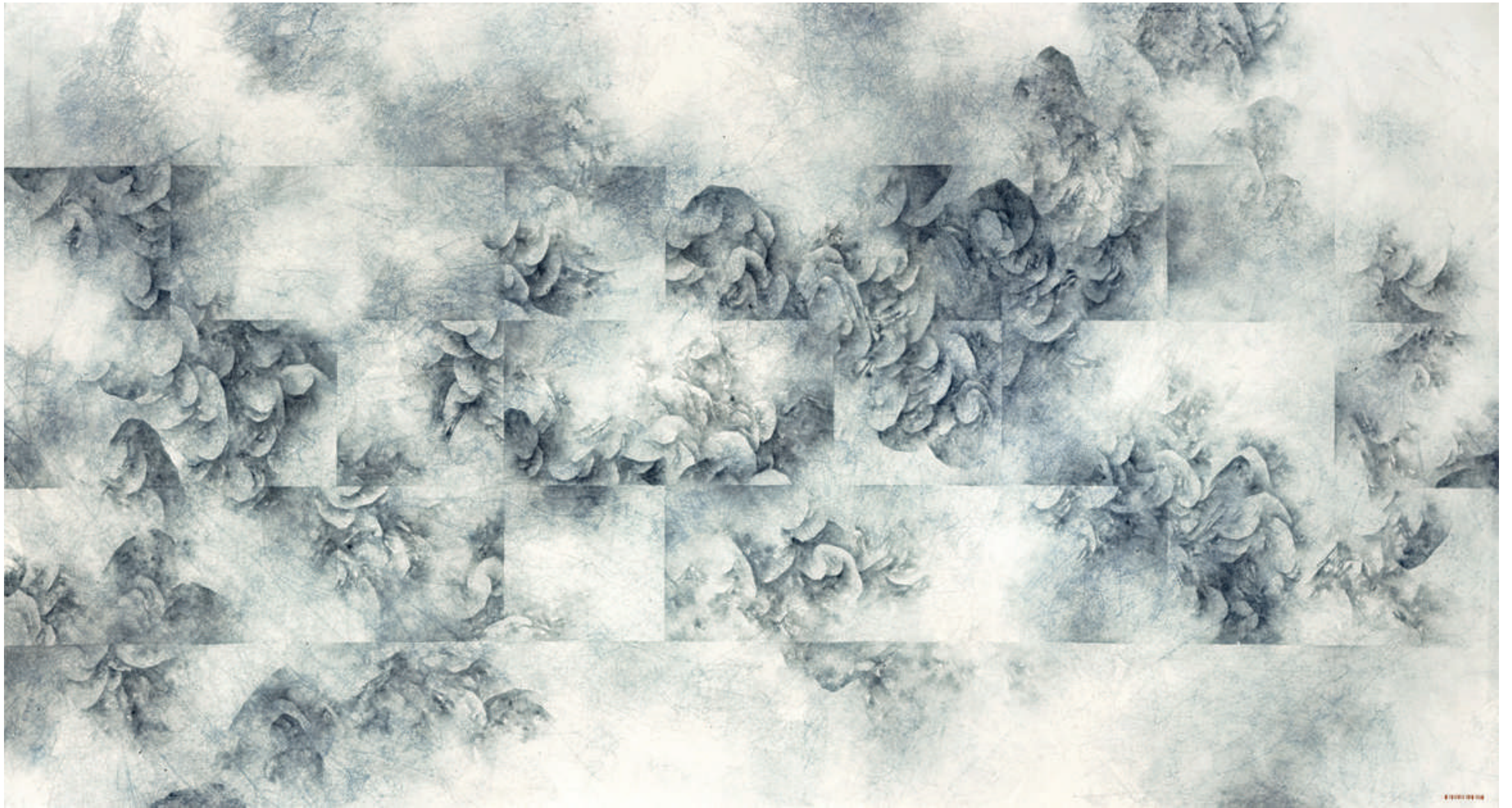
Yau's paintings of rocks have developed alongside his innovative pictorial strategies, which offer fresh interpretations of the Chinese landscape painting tradition. Inspired by the theory of master painter Guo Xi (c. 1000–c. 1090) that observation of the landscape is naturally in a state of motion (山形步步移、山形面面看), Yau takes the concept further. He splits the elements within the rocks and reconfigures them into a multiple grid structure, as we see in *Riding Mist XV* (2020). He also deploys a unique aerial point of view, which derives from his interest in technology and satellite imagery.

Yau Wing Fung received his undergraduate and master's degrees from the Fine Arts department of The Chinese University of Hong Kong. His work is in the collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

**Looming Scenery X**  
136.5 x 70cm  
Ink and colour on paper  
2020







**Riding Mist XV**  
96x179cm  
Ink and colour on paper  
2020



# Zhang Jian-Jun 張健君

b. 1955, Shanghai

A pioneer in abstract art in China, Zhang Jian-Jun gained recognition in the 1980s for his abstract, mixed-media works. He has since developed a diverse body of work spanning ink-on-paper painting, sculpture, performance, and installation. Throughout, his oeuvre engages with notions of existence, and the interactions between humanity and nature, tradition and contemporary.

*Ink Rock Series* (2019) is part of a body of work that Zhang has explored from the early 2000s, in which he uses hardened ink to mould scholars' rocks, an elaborate process that took the artist five years to develop and perfect. The present piece was cast from a mould with over 200 sections. It is a homage to Chinese artistic traditions, but also compels us to contemplate the boundaries between nature and culture.

Notable works in the series include the installation *Ink Garden of Re-Creation*, exhibited at the 2002 Shanghai Biennale, which featured rocks each made of solid black ink through which water flowed from its interior, gradually dissolving the rock and blackening the water surrounding it; and *Scholar's Rock (The Mirage Garden)* (2008), a garden rock playfully moulded in bright purple-pink silicone rubber, exhibited in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's *Ink Art: Past as Present in Contemporary China* in 2013.

Zhang graduated from the Department of Fine Arts at the Shanghai Drama Institute. He moved to New York in 1989, where he lived for over two decades. He currently lives and works in Shanghai, where is an Associate Professor of Arts at NYU Shanghai.

**Ink Rock Series**  
102x56x39 cm  
Chinese ink and mixed media  
2019



# Koon Wai Bong 管偉邦

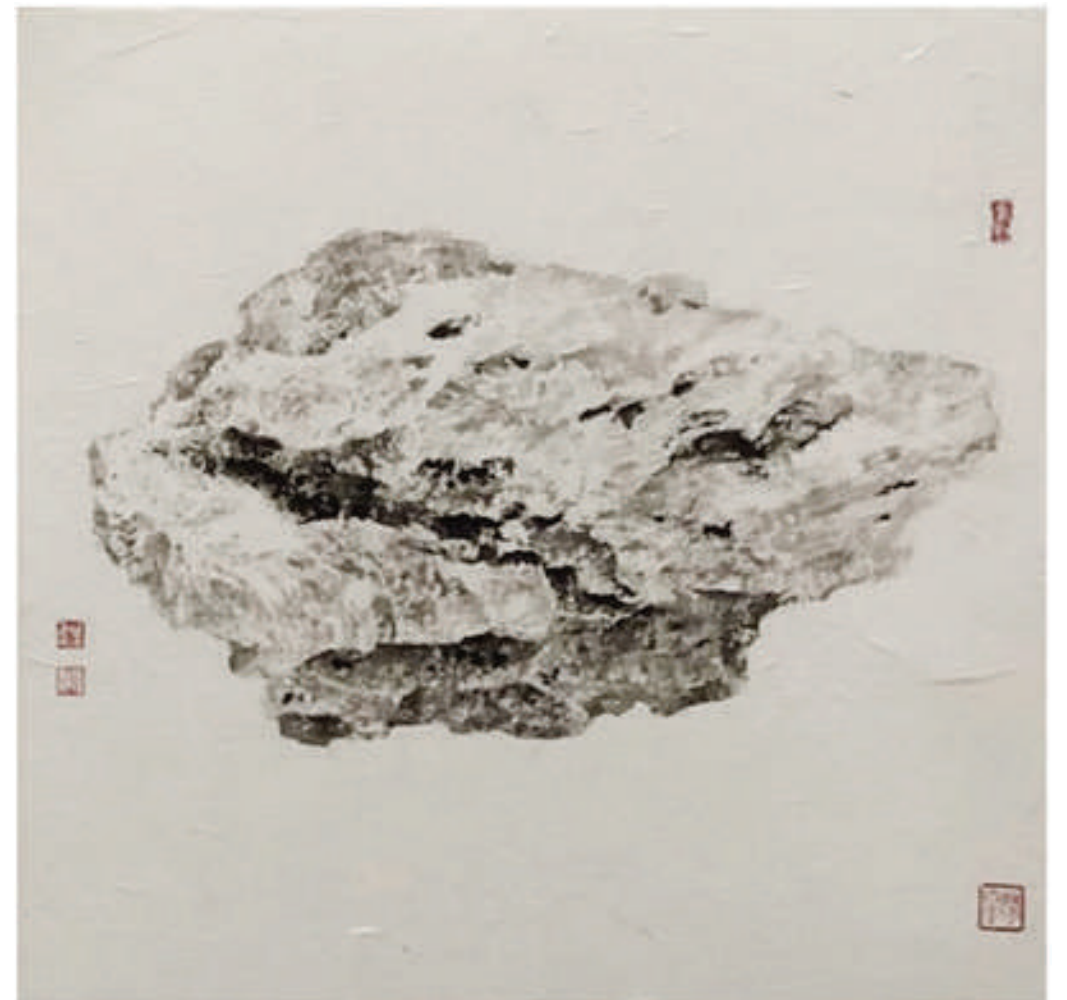
b. 1974, Hong Kong

Koon Wai Bong has developed new expressions and techniques in ink painting through his unique compositional and pictorial strategies. As we see in *Rhino Rock* (2021), Koon divides the composition into a series of individual panels. His intention is to guide our eyes through each scene frame by frame—a reference to the contemporary viewing experience of mobile phones and tablets—thereby encouraging us to slowly rediscover visions of the past with fresh eyes. Throughout his work, however, he never eschews delicate, disciplined brushwork, reflecting his years of training and study of master painters of the past.

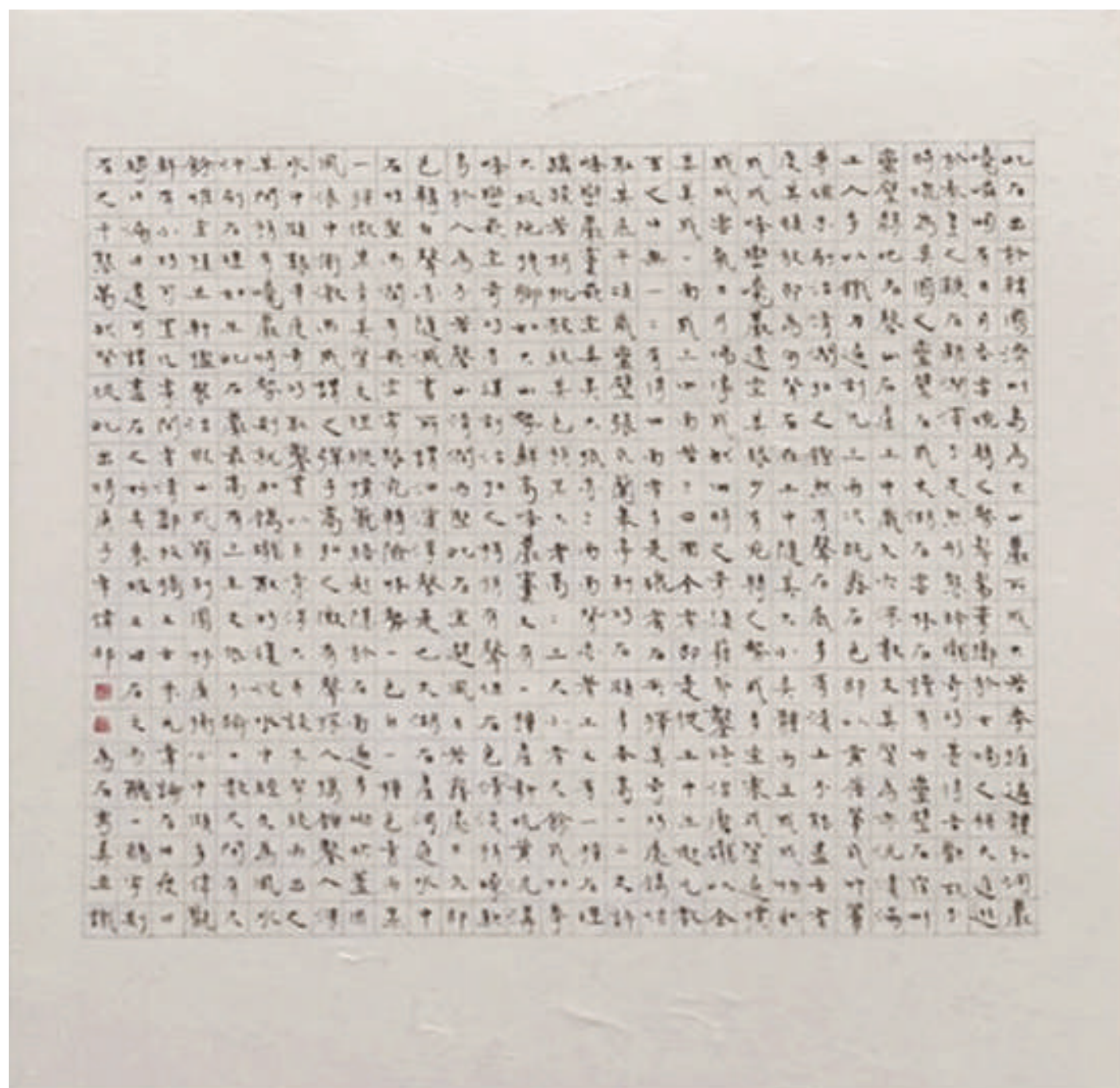
In *Stonehenge* (2021), Koon uses the rock as a vector for political expression. The image depicts the bricks known as the “mini-Stonehenges” used as roadblocks during the recent Hong Kong protests. According to the artist, though the assemblages were formed on the streets, they meet the aesthetic criteria for appreciating rocks. The accompanying inscription weaves the history of the Stonehenge monument with the events that unfolded across the city.

Koon Wai Bong received his BA, MFA degrees from the Fine Arts department of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, and his PhD from RMIT University. He is an Associate Professor at Hong Kong Baptist University where he teaches ink painting. His works are in the collections of M+, Hong Kong Museum of Art, Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, Oxford University’s Ashmolean Museum, among others.

**Scholar’s Rock I**  
Diptych; each 32x33cm  
Ink on paper  
2021

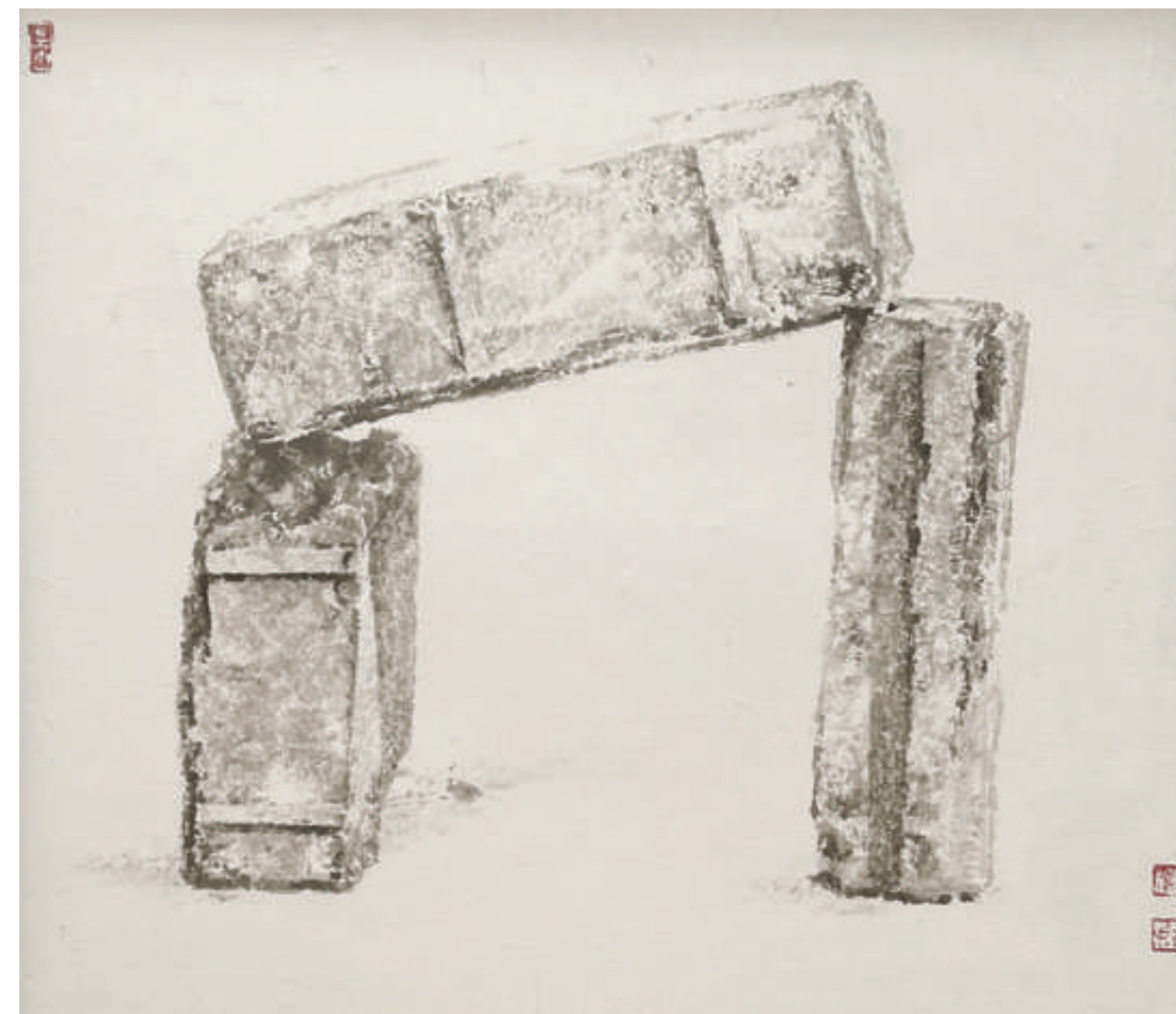
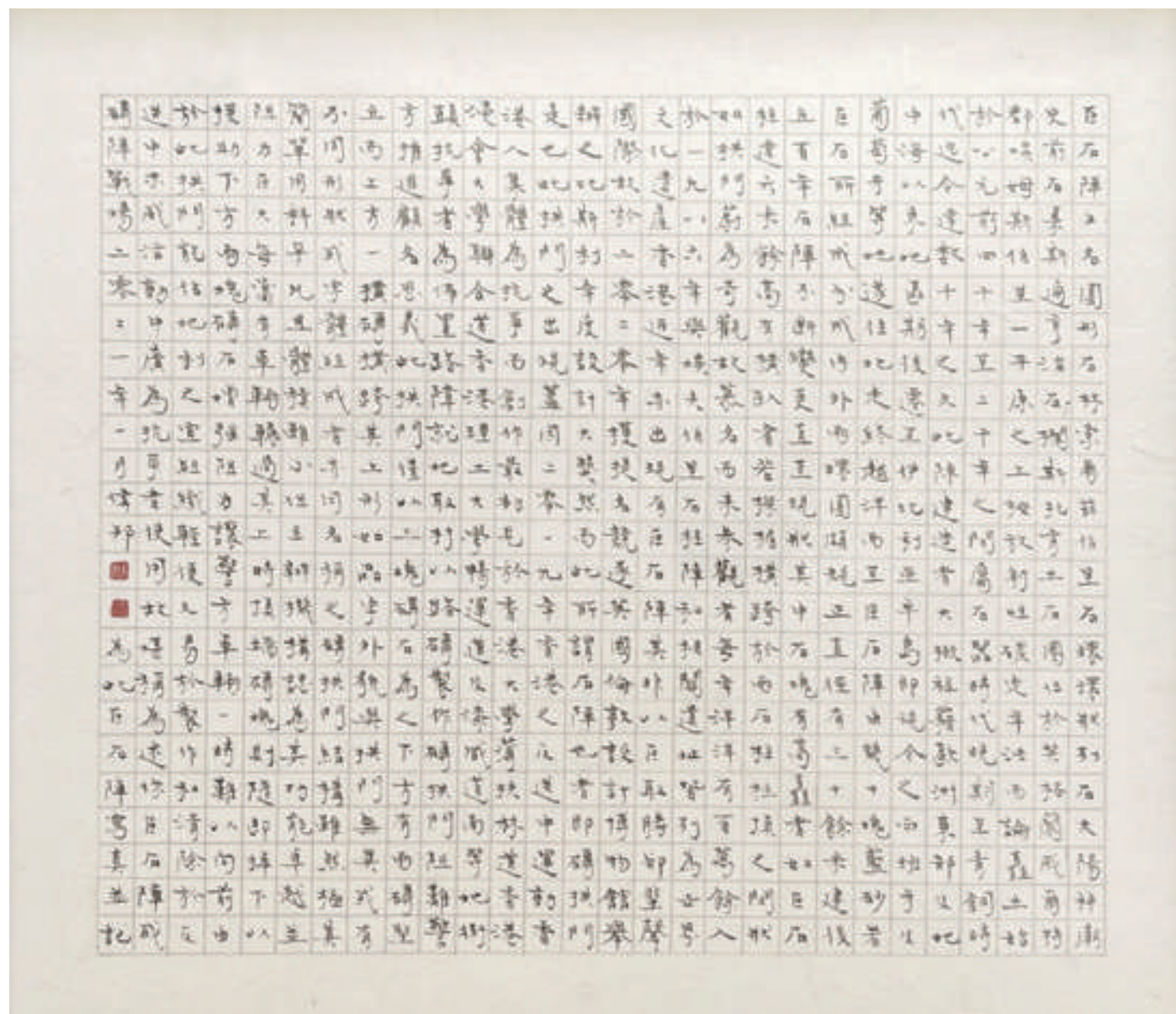






Scholar's Rock II  
 Diptych ; each 32 x 33cm  
 Ink on paper  
 2021



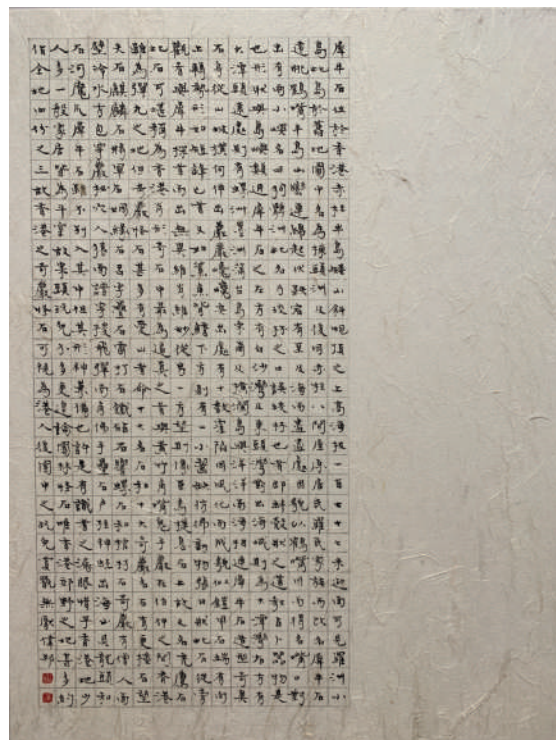


**Stonehenge**  
 Diptych; each 32.5x 33.5cm  
 Ink on paper  
 2021









# Rhino Rock

Tetraptych;

painting: 36x77.5cm; right: 47x63cm; left: 30.5x35cm; inscription : 39x30cm

Ink on paper

2021





Informational text panel, likely providing details about the artworks or the exhibition.





# Zhang Ying 張鷹

b. 1969, Suzhou

Though Zhang Ying trained as a figure painter, she is drawn to the spiritual qualities of the Chinese landscape painting tradition and has focused the last few years of her practice on landscape, rock and tree paintings. Chinese painters of the past portrayed landscapes to reflect the vastness of the universe. Similarly, rocks represented a microcosm of nature to which artists turned for inspiration and meditation. Zhang draws from these legacies and transforms them into her personal visual language. According to the artist, she endeavors to create a space for reflection between the present and the spiritual. Indeed, there is a meditative quality in each of her paintings—along with their poetic titles—that invites our contemplation.

*Wind at Sunset* (2016) recalls the rock in the painting *Auspicious Dragon Rock*, attributed to the emperor Huizong (r. 1101–1125), one of most prominent petrophiles in Chinese history, who spent huge sums to gather the finest specimens of rocks from all over the country to decorate his gardens. *Heart of Strength* (2016) depicts a large rock holding strong amid the tumultuous waves crashing against it, embodying the resilience and solidity that rocks are believed to possess.

Zhang Ying received her undergraduate and graduate degrees from the China Academy of Art, Hangzhou, where she specialised in ink and figure painting. This is the first time her works are exhibited in Hong Kong.

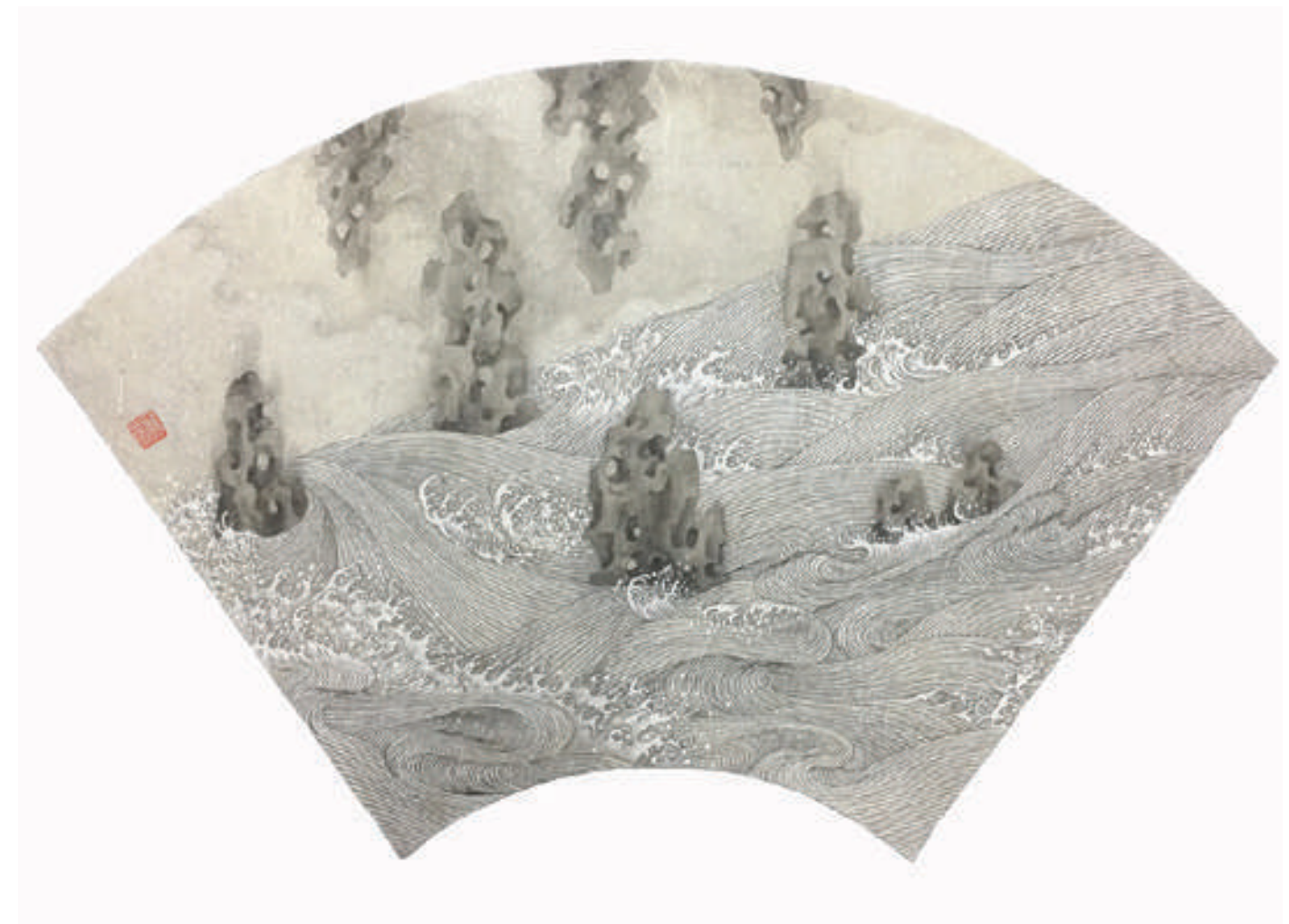


**The Symphony of Waters**

36x55cm

Ink on paper

2016



**Wind at Sunset**

36x55cm

Ink on paper

2016





**Heart of Strength**  
36x55cm  
Ink on paper  
2016



**Butterflies, Imagined**  
122x71cm  
Ink on paper  
2019



# Zhang Xiaoli 張小黎

b. 1989, Guiyang

Zhang Xiaoli employs the gongbi technique to create ink-and-colour paintings that synthesize ancient and contemporary elements, but with a twist. She brings together the classical Chinese perspective with the isometric view used in the video games of her childhood, as well as a rationalization of shapes. Her works are characterized by surreal scenes of Chinese landscapes meticulously painted inside miniature boxes and receptacles, conjuring a sense of displacement between the different realms. Her recent works assimilate her interest in science and biology with elements of traditional landscape painting.

Zhang Xiaoli moved to Hong Kong to pursue higher education at The Chinese University of Hong Kong, where she received her BA in Fine Arts and Biology. She received her MFA from the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, in 2021, where she studied ink painting with Qiu Ting.



**Chimera Stone**  
45x35 cm  
Ink and colour on silk  
2021







# *Han Lei* 韓磊

*b. 1967, Kaifeng, Henan*

Pioneer of street photography in China, Han Lei began his artistic practice with documenting urban life in the 1980s, after he graduated from the Central Academy of Arts and Crafts, Beijing.

Han enjoys nothing more than to blur the boundaries between high and low culture. *Stone* (2016) is part of the artist's series of 3D lenticular photographs, technology widely popular in China during the 1980s. He combines the scholar's rock—a symbol of Chinese literati high culture—with a very pop culture format. Beyond this social play, Han's works allow the viewer to observe what the artist has described as "transient instants"—static moments that vanish are otherwise extended. Here, he has playfully transformed the meditative experience of beholding a large taihu rock into a psychedelic and colourful one.

**Stone**  
150x120 cm  
Lenticular photography  
2016









# *Pan Yingguo* 潘英國

*b. 1985, Chongqing, Sichuan*

A graduate of the oil painting department of the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts, Pan Yingguo plays with mimesis and the idea of replicating nature in a quasi-realistic way.

The representation of the scholar's rock has for centuries been intimately linked to ink painting. Very few oil painters dare to venture within such a classical subject, especially those using a realist technique, which goes against the sensitivity and permanence of the inked brush on paper.

Putting the subject aside, almost everything in Pan's works goes against Chinese tradition. Going against the fast-paced essentiality of the ink, the artist uses the slow, layered qualities of oil and months of labour to realize each of his paintings. Against poetic evocation, he uses faithful representation and against the monochrome, he introduces colours. From his paintings, we can see the desire of a Chinese painter venturing into his culture and tradition, but from his very own perspective.







**Three Stones I**  
90x160 cm  
Oil on canvas  
2020





**Three Stones 2**  
90x160 cm  
Oil on canvas  
2020



# Dong Wensheng 董文勝

b. 1970, Ganyu, Jiangsu

Dong Wensheng's photography and video works are composed of enigmatic and surreal narratives set against visually rich backdrops. Drawing from a diverse mix of artistic influences including Yves Klein's 1960 iconic photograph *Leap into the Void*, classical Chinese ink paintings, traditional Chinese gardens and porcelain, Dong's practice probes the dynamics between the past, present and future.

The taihu rock is a reoccurring motif in Dong's work. A taihu rock is held in a skeletal palm in *Skeleton Rock* (2007). There is something unsettling about the textures of the objects which appear to mirror each other, but the artist prefers to leave interpretation up to the viewer. In the video *The Moment of Stone Sinking* (2007), Dong traces the life journey of a taihu rock, after it is removed from modern civilization. The rock is uprooted by a crane, then transported by a truck to a wooden boat on a lake. It is then cast into the water, sinking to the bottom, returning to nature from where it was conceived. When released back into nature, the rock sheds the cultural associations that it was previously charged with.

Dong Wensheng studied art at Jiangsu University of Technology. His works are in the collections of M+, White Rabbit Gallery, and the Art Museum of Nanjing University of the Arts.



**The Moment of Stone Sinking**

27 mins

Video

2007









**Skeleton Rock**  
100x120cm  
Archival inkjet print  
2007





**Yidam**  
100x120cm  
Archival inkjet print  
2007





Skull covered in moss and small plants, displayed in a white bowl.



Skull with a large, textured, greyish mass on top, displayed on a white surface.



# *Shi Jinsong* 史金淞

*b. 1969 Dangyang, Hubei*

Shi Jinsong is known for his mixed-media installations and sculptures that explore the dynamics between traditional Chinese aesthetics and the modern day. Since the early 2000s, the artist has played with scholars' rocks to create artificial landscapes formed from bricks and fragments from demolished buildings, often set on intricately carved steel stands. The resulting assemblages conjure a sense of dissonance, expressing the complexities brought about by the social and cultural transformations and challenges in 21st century China.

He takes the converse approach in *Garden In The Living Room* (2021). Here, he has playfully reimagined the rock in the form of a comfy sofa set. There is a collision of Chinese tradition, high and low culture, natural and man-made. Produced from eco-friendly foam material that the artist sourced in Germany, the surface mimics the craggy, wrinkled texture and perforations of rocks.

A graduate of the Hubei Institute of Fine Arts where he studied sculpture, Shi Jinsong's works are in the collections of M+, Yuz Museum, Louis Vuitton Foundation, among others. He lives and works between Wuhan and Beijing.



**Garden In The Living Room**

89x46x41 cm

Fire retardant & eco-friendly foam

2021



**Garden In The Living Room**

65x55x25 cm

Fire retardant & eco-friendly foam

2021











# *Ryan LaBar* 瑞安·拉巴爾

*b. 1975, Great Falls, Montana*

Introduced to the concept of rocks after moving to China from the US nearly six years ago, LaBar has often compared his porcelain sculptures to scholars' rocks. He has said: "They are objects that open the mind, inviting contemplation, abstract in form, dancing between material and space. Both embody the transformational processes." He also follows the same aesthetic criteria traditionally used for judging rocks—thinness, openness, perforations, and wrinkling—to assess his own sculptures.

LaBar's abstract, virtuosic sculptures are composed of individual and wheel thrown elements. The production involves a labour-intensive process in which the artist assembles the parts together to form an elaborate matrix before placing them in a kiln. As the heat of the kiln melts the clay and glaze, the once precariously-stacked components settle into a stable, composite piece. As the forms twist, bend and interact with each other, the final, dynamic work reflects the tension, chaos, harmony and unity, between the individual components.

LaBar received his BA in Biology and Art from Gonzaga University, Spokane Washington, and his MFA from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He has lived and worked in Taoxichuan, Jingdezhen since 2014.







**Chameleon**  
62x75x40 cm  
Glazed ceramics  
2021



# *Hung Keung* 洪強

*b. 1970 Kunming, Yunnan*

Hong Kong-based Hung Keung is known for his interactive installations that integrate film, video and digital new media with classical Chinese themes of philosophy, art and literature. One of his best known interactive projects *Dao Gives Birth to One* (2009–2012) examined and visualized the relationship between human beings and the Daoist notion of “ten thousand things”. Through his innovative and completely original interactive strategies, Hung creates novel ways for audiences to experience and engage with traditional themes and concepts.

The present work is the artist’s interpretation of “three distances” (三遠)—the three ways Chinese artists traditionally expressed distance in landscape painting—as well as the concept of “perceiving details from a macroscopic perspective” (以大觀小). Here, Hung has expanded the viewing experience to the four-dimensional. Viewers are engaged within a virtual scene, where hundreds of Chinese characters in the form of radicals are projected on the wall and move in constant motion, clustering around moving objects. The characters include the words for human being, power, success, which according to the artist, represent a blessing from him to the city where he grew up.

Hung Keung received his BA from the Fine Arts department of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, MA in film and video from Central Saint Martins, London, and PhD from Zurich University of the Arts and University of Plymouth, UK, in digital media and Chinese philosophy. He is currently an Associate Professor in the Department of Cultural and Creative Arts at the Education University of Hong Kong.

## **Everywhere**

Size varies

Digital installation, mixed-media 2021









For more exhibition information or artists biography,  
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contact us :

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Co-founded in the 1980s by Alice King, Alisan Fine Arts is one of the first professionally run galleries in Hong Kong and has been a pioneer in the field of Chinese contemporary art and New Ink Art. In particular, focusing on promoting mainland Chinese artists as well as established Hong Kong and Chinese diaspora artists. Currently, the gallery manages two premises in Central's business district and Aberdeen.

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