

## A Tribute to Lui Shou-kwan: Introduction by Curator Olivia Wang

It is a great honour and privilege to curate *A Tribute to Lui Shou-kwan* at Ink Asia this year. The Ink Society showcased a tribute to Liu Kuo-sung last year; the current show celebrates another great master. Lui Shou-kwan (1919-1975) was a foremost figure in the creation of contemporary ink painting. One of Hong Kong's preeminent mid-twentieth century artists, it was Lui's pioneering vision that initiated the city's New Ink movement. As an ink artist, Lui distinguished himself from his contemporaries with his highly original and unique visual language, which was a result of his lifelong exploration and profound understanding of Chinese ink traditions, Daoism, Zen Buddhism, as well as Western abstract expressionism.

*A Tribute to Lui Shou-kwan* features 14 paintings from the late 1950s onwards. The works are on loan from private collectors in Hong Kong. Just as our exhibition last year, each collector was invited to share his or her thoughts on Lui and the paintings s/he has collected. Their contributions and personal anecdotes, which they have generously agreed to have published here, offer us another dimension by which to appreciate Lui's art and legacy.

The exhibited works present a cross-section of Lui's mature oeuvre, which falls broadly into three types: representational, semi-abstract and abstract. In the first category, *Aberdeen* (1963), *Big Wave Bay* (1965) and *Sampans in Causeway Bay* (1968) depict Hong Kong's lively maritime life. Drawing from nature for inspiration, Lui focused on sketching from life and capturing scenes of Hong Kong — his home after he immigrated from Guangzhou in 1948 at the age of 29 — throughout the 1950s and 1960s, from the coastline and cityscape, to the fishing villages and outlying islands. The differences in appearances of these three paintings reveal his versatility and appetite for experimentation. For instance, *Aberdeen* is painted in the ink tradition, while *Big Wave Bay* reflects Lui's interest in the landscapes of Turner and his impressions of light, colour and atmosphere.

In addition to learning from nature, Lui believed in analysing and copying classical Chinese masterpieces, absorbing their essence to nourish his art. As Leung Kui Ting, a former student of Lui's and a noted artist himself, writes in his tribute: "[Lui] often said that if one encountered a lack of artistic inspiration, one could try copying (*linmo*) a traditional painting, or sketching from life." The importance of learning from tradition is revealed in Lui's "study paintings", a group of works painted in the styles and forms of different ancient masters. As a dedicated educator, Lui created these pieces with the purpose of illustrating certain principles about traditional painting theory to his students. The landscape *Shoushan* (1972) is such an example. Composed of lines and dots, Lui explains in the accompanying inscription that these are the two main components of Chinese painting. The work was painted towards the end of his life, indicating that even during the pinnacle of his creative output when he was producing his iconic "Zen" series, he never abandoned tradition.

While grounded in tradition, Lui fervently believed in creating one's own style and artistic language. This individualism is evident in his semi-abstract and abstract landscapes, as demonstrated in *High Noon* (1956), *Solitary Boat* (1962) and *Abstract Landscape* (1963). Set beneath a gleaming midday sun surrounded by rays, the semi-abstract landscape portrayed in *High Noon* is rendered in a bold and expressive colour palette rarely seen in Chinese ink painting. Lui later transformed natural forms into powerful calligraphic brushstrokes, as shown in *Abstract Landscape*. Although devoid of any reference to nature, the black ink strokes accented by streaks of vivid blue against the unpainted surface remarkably suggest a mountain range surrounded by water.

Lui's breakthroughs in abstraction culminated in his renowned aforementioned *Zen* paintings, which he developed from the late 1960s. Employing different effects of ink on paper to forge two distinct styles known as "dry" and "wet", the *Zen* paintings are a visual essay on Lui's personal path towards enlightenment that centres around the lotus flower — a symbol of purity and Buddhahood. Lui captured this elusive and contemplative state in varying ways, as illustrated in the six distinct *Zen* works exhibited here. The over-two-metre-tall *Zen* (1970) (page 28) is made up of wet and dry styles where mightily applied fluid, broad washes of ink are fused with dense, dry brushwork. Above the layers of turbulent chaos hovers a red butterfly-like gesture in an expanse of white space, evoking the belief of metamorphosis and rebirth. By contrast, the more restrained *Zen* (page 30), executed in the same year, displays a red flame-like dot framed within a striking composition of sharp and angular lines painted with dark ink washes. As remarked by one collector in his tribute (page 31): "The artist's brave brush strokes and minimal use of colour and tone embody a deep abstraction, expressing bold statements whilst also imparting a sense of stillness and peace. For me, the works are timeless, as relevant today as when they were created."

Lui played a seminal role, both as practitioner and educator, in shaping a new language of ink painting during his lifetime. Although his death came prematurely at the age of 56, he left an enormous impact on the development of Chinese art. As his centenary approaches in 2019, there has been renewed recognition in his life and work, in the form of exhibitions at premier museums. In March 2018, the National Art Museum of China, Beijing, staged his solo exhibition; Oxford University's Ashmolean Museum will present a show and symposium dedicated to him later this year. The Ink Society is honoured to be a part of these endeavours to commemorate his extraordinary legacy. I end with Lui's words of advice inscribed on *Gladioli* (1970), which, like his paintings, resonate as much today as they did when they were rendered: "Without the solid foundation laid down today, there will never be any enlightenment in the future. Indeed, it took the ancients extensive travels to achieve wonders under their painting brush. But perhaps it is not at all impossible to engage in personal cultivation by painting gladioli blooming indoors for the sake of demonstration. Beware lest your painting be misguided by what I have failed to do."

## 向呂壽琨致敬：策展人言 汪鈴

今年，能夠為「向呂壽琨致敬」策展，是莫大的光榮和榮幸。去年水墨會展現了向劉國松的致敬；今次的展覽則讚美了另一位大師。呂壽琨（1919-1975）是現代水墨畫創作首屈一指的人物。呂作為香港最為卓越的二十世紀中期藝術家，正是他獨具探索性的眼界開創了這個城市的新水墨運動。有別於同時期的藝術家，呂作為一位水墨畫家，他高度原創而獨特的視覺語言，別樹一幟，是他對中國水墨傳統、道教、佛教禪宗以及西方抽象表現主義的終身探究與深刻理解的結果。

「向呂壽琨致敬」展出了十四幅二十世紀五十年代之後的畫作。這些作品均由香港私人收藏家所借出。正如我們去年的展覽一樣，每位收藏家都獲邀請分享他們對呂及其收藏畫作的想法。他們的貢獻以及慷慨地同意在此發表他們個人的趣聞軼事，為我們欣賞呂壽琨的藝術及其作品提供了另一個角度。

展出的作品呈現了呂成熟的畢生之作的一個橫截面，其大致可分為三種類型：寫實的，半抽象的以及抽象的。在第一類中，香港仔（1963），大浪灣（1965）以及銅鑼灣漁艇（1968）描繪了香港朝氣勃勃的海上生活。從自然中汲取靈感，呂專注於素描生活以及捕捉香港的景色——他二十九歲於一九四八年從廣州移居後的家鄉——貫穿了上世紀五十至六十年代，從海岸線和城市景觀到漁村與離島。這三幅畫的外觀差異揭示了他的多才多藝以及對實驗創新的渴望。例如香港仔是以水墨傳統繪製的，而大浪灣則反映了呂對特納的興趣，包括他筆下的風景畫以及他對光、色彩和氣氛的印象。

除了向自然學習之外，呂信奉分析和臨摹中國傳統傑作，並從中吸取它們的本質精華來滋養他的藝術。正如他之前的學生，也是著名的畫家梁巨廷在他的致詞中寫道：“（呂）常談如創作未成可嘗試臨摹傳統畫，或是寫生觀察事物”。從呂的“習作”，一組以不同古代大師的風格和形式所成的作品中便可窺見學習借鑑傳統的重要性。作為一名敬業的教育家，呂創作這些作品的目的是向他的學生們展示傳統繪畫理論的某些真理。山水畫壽山（1972）便是其中一個例子。呂在題詞中解釋了點與線是中國畫兩個主要的組成部分。這幅是他的晚年作品，顯示即使是在他創作出“禪宗”系列的創作巔峰時期，也未曾放棄過傳統。

在堅持傳統的基礎上，呂熱切地主張創作出自己的風格和藝術語言。這種個人主義在他的半抽象以及抽象山水畫中得以體現，如日中（1956），孤舟（1962）以及抽象風景（1963），均可見一斑。在閃耀的正午烈日的光芒下，日中所描繪的半抽象風景呈現了中國水墨畫罕見的大膽而富有表現力的色彩。如抽象風景所示，呂其後將自然的繪畫形式轉化為有力的書法般的筆觸。雖然缺少對自然的參照，但鮮豔的藍色所點綴黑色水墨筆畫與留白的畫面相交，明顯地呈現了被河流環繞的山脈。

呂在抽象畫上的突破以他在上世紀六十年代晚期創作的著名的禪宗水墨畫系列告終。採用水墨在紙面上不同的效果，形成了兩種截然不同的風格，即“乾”和“濕”，禪宗系列是呂個人走向啟蒙道路上的視覺散文，其以蓮花為中心——即純潔與佛性的象徵。呂以不同的方式捕捉到了這種捉摸不透的，冥想的狀態，正如這裡展出的六件迥異的禪宗水墨畫所示。超過兩米高的禪（1970）（28頁）是由乾與濕兩種風格合併而成，大量塗抹的顏料，洗刷上去的寬厚筆墨與緻密而乾燥的筆觸融為一體。在狂暴的混沌層之上，在一片空白的蒼天中盤旋著一個赤色的、蝴蝶般的姿態，喚起了蛻變和重生的信念。相比之下，另一幅更為剋制的禪（30頁），於同年創作而成，展現了由尖銳而稜角分明的黑色水墨線條所構成的醒目結構內的一個紅色的火焰狀點。正如一位收藏家在他的致詞中如是說（31頁）：“他有力的筆觸和極簡的色彩使用表現了一種深層的抽象，在表達了大膽的觀點的同時也傳達了一種靜止與寧靜的感覺。對我而言這些作品是永恆的，它們直到今天也如同剛被創作出時是與當代緊密相連的。這些畫作，歷久不衰，韻味依然”。

在他一生中塑造一種新的水墨畫語言的同時，呂在作為實踐者和教育者中也起到了至關重要的作用。雖然他於五十六歲時便英年早逝，但是他為中國藝術的發展留下了巨大的影響。隨著二零一九年他的百年誕辰將至，他的一生和作品在著名博物館的展覽中得到了重新的認同。在二零一八年三月，北京的中國美術館舉辦了呂的個展；牛津大學的阿什莫林博物館將在今年稍後為他舉辦一個展覽和研討會。水墨會很榮幸能夠參與其中，以紀念他非凡的遺產。我將以呂在劍蘭（1970）上題寫的作為結語，一如他的畫，給人帶來在它們誕生之時同樣大的共鳴：“立穩根基，將來必有所悟。古者遊名山大川，下筆有奇氣。今寫室內競放劍蘭示範，亦未嘗不可以養胸懷，勿因我之不能而錯認畫道也”。