

PRODUCED AND DIRECTED
BY OLIVIA WANG
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UNSUNG HEROES *of* INK

無 名 詩 人

CINEMATOGRAPHER 攝影 VINCENT DU 杜海 EDITOR 剪輯 BOB LEE 李博 MUSIC 音樂 ERWANN CHANDON

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無 名 詩 人

PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY OLIVIA WANG

PRESS KIT

Length: 25 min.

Language: Mandarin Chinese

Subtitles: English

Year: 2020

Trailer: <https://vimeo.com/319245728>

Website: <https://www.scholarsinkstudio.com/unsung-heroes-of-ink>

Instagram: @unsungheroesofinkfilm

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Short Synopsis

UNSUNG HEROES OF INK shines a light on the often overlooked role of paper in Chinese ink painting. Beijing-based artists Liu Dan and Shao Fan explain how paper shapes their work. Their collaborators are craftspeople in the remote Jing County, Anhui Province, who observe ancient methods to hand-produce *xuan* paper. These craftspeople, who have spent a lifetime honing their skills, are the “unsung heroes of ink”.

Long Synopsis

In the “Asian century”, Chinese art travels the globe. Leading living artists like Liu Dan exhibit their works from Paris to San Francisco. They are discussed in the same breath as Western masters. Ink painting is particularly resurgent. Chinese artists have for centuries used the ancient method of ink on paper. Artists today continue to reinterpret and recast classical concepts and practices. The resulting body of work, while firmly rooted in tradition, is radically contemporary.

Despite growing appreciation for ink art, much of the art form remains unexplored. An ink painting comes into being when ink meets paper. The two elements commune and react to each other. As Liu Dan says: *“Once your brush makes contact with the paper, the material will respond to you immediately.”* For Shao Fan, *“the allure of paper resides in its variance. It is more sensitive and more receptive than other materials.”* In the era of the “rockstar artist”, the role of paper and papermaking is often overlooked.

UNSUNG HEROES OF INK seeks to redress this balance by shining a light on the previously unexplored role of paper in ink painting. First-time filmmaker Olivia Wang speaks to artists Liu Dan and Shao Fan, who explain how *xuan* paper shapes their work. She then takes the viewer to the remote Jing County, Anhui Province, where we see their collaborators—craftspeople who use ancient methods to hand-produce *xuan* paper, the prized paper favoured by painters from the sixteenth century. These craftspeople have spent a lifetime honing their skills. Unbeknownst to many, they are the “unsung heroes of ink”.



"The documentary is well narrated and inspiring. It brings back the papermakers to the stage. Painting materials have always been regarded as an extension of the artist's hand in imperial China. It's encouraging to see how the film adds to the discourse of ink."

—Dr Pedith Chan, Senior Lecturer, Department of the History of Art and Archaeology, SOAS, University of London

"The film is a wonderful gateway for people who want to know more about papermaking."

—Jo-Fan Huang, M+ Paper Conservator, Hong Kong

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Over the years of researching Chinese ink painting, I have come to understand the importance of high quality materials for each artist, from antiquity to present day. Artists are meticulous and exacting about the materials they use. They test papers made of different materials and sized to varying degrees before selecting the perfect one. Some even commission their papers to specific papermakers. The relationship between an artist and his or her papers is a subtle alchemy.

While appreciation for ink art is growing, few are familiar with the importance of an artist's tools and materials. There is so much focus on the artist and their practice, that the role of paper—and the craftspeople who make the essential material—is often overlooked.

I felt compelled to make a documentary to redress this and shine a light on the previously unexplored role of paper in ink painting. I also wanted to show the rural landscape of Anhui Province, an area vastly different from what we associate with modern China today.

The papermakers in Anhui are the ones whom I named in this film after. I hope this documentary will change that and make them, as heroes, a bit less unsung.

DIRECTOR'S BIO



UNSUNG HEROES OF INK is Olivia Wang's debut documentary, which she directed and produced.

Based in Hong Kong, Olivia is an independent art curator, consultant and writer, with over twelve years of industry experience. Her writing on contemporary Chinese ink art has appeared in the Wall Street Journal, ArtAsiaPacific, Orientations, Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art, among others. See her writing on her [website](#).

Olivia holds a BA from Brown University and MPhil from Oxford University.

FEATURING



Cheng Yang

Cheng Yang is the manager of Jin Xuan Tang Paper Factory, a paper mill established in the 1980s by Cheng Yang's paternal and maternal grandfathers. Cheng Yang joined the family business in 2009 at the age of 18. He assists his father in the management and running of the mill.



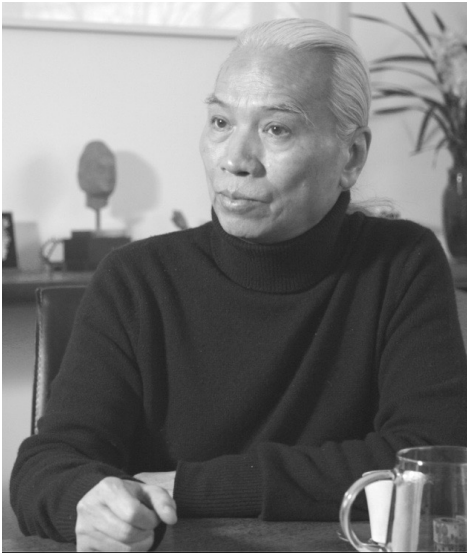
Hu Kai

Hu Kai is the manager of Tao Ji Xuan Paper Factory, a mill established in 1986 by his father. Hu Kai joined the family business as an apprentice in 2000 at the age of 20. In 2012, his father handed the business to him and he has since been responsible for the running of the mill.



She Xianbing

She Xianbing has worked in the paper industry from the age of 16. In 1999, he established his own paper mill, Yi Xuan Ge Paper Factory.



Liu Dan

One of China's most renowned living artists, Liu Dan works in the medium of ink in radically new ways. His paintings of meticulous landscapes, large-scale portraits of rocks, flowers and traditional books, are a testament to his fresh perspectives on the ink painting tradition, as well as his technical virtuosity. Liu Dan's work has been exhibited extensively around the world. He has had major solo exhibitions at the Minneapolis Institute of Art (2016), the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford University (2016), and the Suzhou Museum (2013).



Shao Fan

Raised in an artistic family, Shao Fan graduated from Beijing's Art and Crafts School, where he studied wood carving and porcelain making. In the last few years, Shao has devoted his artistic practice to ink painting. He has become well known for his ink-on-paper paintings of rabbits, as well monkeys and horses. Shao Fan has had solo and group exhibitions at institutions around the world, including the Noordbrabants Museum (2020), Ludwig Museum Koblenz (2018), Suzhou Museum (2018), Kunst Museum Lucerne (2018) and the Metropolitan Museum of Art (2013).



Yang Hongzhe

Yang Hongzhe has pursued painting and calligraphy as a serious hobby throughout his professional life. In recent years, he has carried out extensive research on the materials used by ink artists, and the craftsmanship involved in their production. Yang Hongzhe is a graduate of the Fine Arts Department at Ningxia University. He is based in Beijing.

FULL CREDITS

DIRECTED AND PRODUCED BY Olivia Wang

CINEMATOGRAPHER Vincent Du

EDITOR Bob Lee

MUSIC Erwann Chandon

SOUND RECORDIST Luo Hao

COLORIST Zhong Xiaobo

ASSISTANT EDITOR Wan Shan

CAMERA ASSISTANTS Wang Yiming

Zhao Tengfei

ENGLISH SUBTITLES Denise Chu

Kevin Ma

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Shao Fan (chiba)

Marion Elan Trigo (cello)

COMPOSER AGENT Marie Sabbah Agency

GRAPHICS Renatus Wu

PHOTOGRAPHY Nicolas Chow (poster)

FULL CREDITS

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

The Ink Society

The Ink Society Limited was founded by a group of Chinese ink art enthusiasts in 2003 in Hong Kong as a non-profit-making organisation with charitable status under Section 88 of the Inland Revenue Ordinance (Cap. 112).

The mission of The Ink Society is to foster a broader understanding and appreciation of modern and contemporary art that is based on or inspired by the ink tradition through an extensive range of programming, education and outreach activities.

Website: <http://www.inksociety.org/about>

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Website: <https://www.uobartacademy.com.hk/>

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Liu Dan
She Xianbing

SPECIAL THANKS

Cheng Yang
Hu Kai
Shao Fan