Gao Xingjian
Ink Paintings
1983-1993

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Gao Xingjian : Ink Paintings, 1983-1993

Gao Xingjian
artist

Patrick and Beatrice Haggerty Museum of Art

Himmel und Überhimmel (Heaven and Beyond), 1989
Ink on paper
315 x 142 cm (124 x 56 in.)
Collection of the Morat—Institut für Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft, Freiburg im Breisgau

Gao Xingjian Ink Paintings 1983-1993

Curtis L. Carter

Gao Xingjian, Ink Paintings 1983-1993
(April 10-June 29, 2003)

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Acknowledgments

The exhibition **Gao Xingjian, Ink Paintings 1983-1993** at the Haggerty Museum of Art, Marquette University represents a collaboration between the Haggerty and the Morat-Institut für Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft, Freiburg im Breisgau. It is the first museum exhibition of Gao Xingjian's work in the United States. Born in 1940 in Ganzhou, Jiangxi, China, Gao is a major international painter, author, dramatist, director, and critic living in Paris. His ink paintings have been featured in more than thirty international exhibitions. Recent exhibitions of his work have been mounted at the Morat-Institut für Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft, Freiburg im Breisgau, and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid. In 2000, Gao won the Nobel Prize for Literature.

The aim of the exhibition is to bring to the Milwaukee Community the work of this important Chinese artist whose work incorporates traditional Chinese ink techniques with modern Western ideas concerning pictorial space. This is one in a series of Haggerty Museum of Art exhibitions featuring culturally diverse approaches to current developments in art. Previous exhibitions of Chinese art at the Haggerty include **Half a Century of Chinese Woodblock Prints: 1945-1998** (June 4-August 29, 1999) and **Feng Mengbo: Video Games** (November 20, 1998 - January 31, 1999).

The Morat-Institut für Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft has generously made paintings available for this exhibition from its collection. Mr. Franz A. Morat, director of the Morat-Institut, has been of great assistance in the planning and organization of this exhibition.

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The Haggerty Museum of Art staff was involved in all aspects of this exhibition. Annemarie Sawkins assisted in research and catalogue production; Jerome Fortier designed the catalogue; Lee Coppernoll assisted by Mary Wagner provided administrative support; James Kieselburg arranged the shipping and insurance; Andrew Nordin assisted by Tim Dykes installed the exhibition; Lynne Shumow coordinated educational programs and community outreach; Jason Pilmaier coordinated promotion and Clayton Montez served as the chief security officer.

Curtis L. Carter
Director

La nostalgie (Nostalgia), 1988
Ink on canvas
265 x 164.5 cm (104 3/8 x 64 3/4 in.)
Collection of the Morat—Institut für Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft, Freiburg im Breisgau

Rivière dans le noir (River at Night), 1986
Ink on paper
58.2 x 94.2 cm (22 7/8 x 37 1/8 in.)
Collection of the Morat—Institut für Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft, Freiburg im Breisgau

"The Sound of Urgent Bells and Drums" Gao Xingjian Ink Paintings

Curtis L. Carter

Gao Xingjian is a Chinese-born dissident painter, playwright, and novelist now working in Paris. He was born in 1940 in the midst of a national crisis precipitated by the Japanese military occupation of China. He was introduced to Western culture through the influence of his mother, an actress educated by Western missionaries, while his father provided him with an understanding of traditional Chinese culture. Gao's development as an artist began after the post-World War II struggle between the Nationalist and Communist forces. Along with other artists and intellectuals in China between 1966 and 1976, Gao was sent to the country for re-education through forced manual labor during the Cultural Revolution. Yet he insists that art is grounded in aesthetics rather than politics and is neither a tool of protest, nor an instrument of propaganda.[1] In the tradition of Chinese arts, Gao devotes equal effort to painting and writing. As he rose to prominence, his paintings and writings were confiscated, or banned in China. After a series of visits to Europe beginning in 1979, he moved permanently to Paris in 1987 and became a French citizen in 1997.

The works selected for the Haggerty exhibition were acquired from the artist for the collection of the Morat-Institute for Art and Art History, Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany between 1983 and 1993, and represent the finest of Gao's paintings.

Like Mondrian, Malevich, and Kandinsky in the West, Gao has written substantively on art. He shares with these writers a sense of the limitless possibilities open to art when its practices are guided by intuition rather than a particular theoretical aim. Still he asks the question, whether the possibilities for meaningful realizations in painting are exhausted by the efforts of Picasso, Kandinsky, and other modernist innovators in Twentieth-century painting. In answering this question Gao eschews philosophical questions concerning, "What does painting seek to express, and what is painting?" and turns directly to painting. He chooses to paint with traditional means consisting of free expression on a two dimensional surface of rice paper and India ink. Yet his work is not bound by traditional codes and conventions. Gao's palette extends over 30 grey, black, and white tonalities which he applies experimentally across the painting surface.

Although Gao's pictures are rooted in the aesthetic tradition of Chinese brush painting, they display a modern edge by incorporating a spirit of endless innovation gleaned from Western painting. The modern edge in Gao's paintings is achieved in part by enriching the ink surfaces with subtle variations of light, texture, and ink saturation and by applying the techniques of modern photography (angle, depth of field, and focus) to achieve greater pictorial depth. Gao's perspective is called "diffuse point perspective," or "false perspective" and is based on Chinese practices, rather than the linear geometric perspective of Brunelleschi and Alberti in the paintings of the Italian Renaissance.[2] Pictorial space in Gao's paintings, which contain both abstract and representational elements, is based

Vincent Van Gogh, *Olive Trees in Landscape with Mount Gaussier and the Rock with Two Holes,* 1889
Pencil, pen, reed pen and ink, 147 x 62.5 cm (18 1/2 x 24 1/2 in.)
Nationalgalerie, Berlin.

Wassily Kandinsky, *Impression III (Concert)*, 1911
Oil on canvas, 76.8 x 100 cm (30 1/4 x 39 3/8 in.)
Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, München.

on inner feelings rather than observations of the external world. According to Gao, "Inner visions have no depth of field; they cannot be taken apart by geometry or arranged according to topology...."[3] He likens the experience of space in his pictures to a dream-like journey into the interior of the picture "which shapes an inner vision and evokes emotion, energy and vitality."[4] A single lost figure wanders through the sparsely marked foreground space in Gao's *Towards the Unknown* (1993) into threatening dark patches of the picture, suggesting what a corresponding inner journey might be like. The experience demands attention and imagination from the painter as well as from the viewer.

Gao compares painting to writing, "where even today in using the language of our forebearers, we can still speak our own minds and come up with fresh things to say."[5] For him, "Painting begins where language fails."[6] Consequently, the paintings afford endless possibilities for new discoveries. This link between painting and writing accentuates the dual aspects of his own career as painter and writer, where he has achieved major stature as an artist in each medium. Like his paintings, Gao's plays such as *Weekend Quartet* (1995) are comprised of "interior landscapes of the soul" rather than of external actions.[7] *Weekend Quartet* examines the characters in the play with respect to their self-examination found in monologues reflecting dream sequences, hallucinations, and memory flashes aimed at disclosing the characters' dark inner secrets as well as their less profound responses to the stream of trivial events in daily life. Yet painting is not a theatrical act. "You never perform when you paint."[8] In his plays, as in his paintings, Gao strives for a new language. His plays do not follow the rules of conventional drama. In contrast to Stanislavskian realism, they employ disjointed temporal sequences, flashbacks, and the intermixing of subjective and objective voices. Characters are often divided into a plurality of voices or persons allowing for the same character to be enriched with many perspectives. His play, *The Other Shore* (1986) is made up of disjointed narrative units instead of a coherent plot. His aim is to portray life in a "pure dramatic form" that will evoke an experience of awakening or revelation. "The idea is to allow the mind of the audience to 'wander in contemplation' among the words so as to grasp their true spirit...."[9]

Unlike contemporary Chinese artists such as Xu Bing (born 1955) who embraced conceptual art, or Feng Meng Bo (born 1966) who developed CD ROM video games as art, Gao has chosen to reshape traditional ink paintings to serve his own contemporary purposes. For example, the delicately layered tones from white to grey to black in his *River At Night* (1986) cat. p. 8 are woven into a dream-like inner landscape extending the limits of traditional ink drawings to new levels. In contrast to this work, Xu Bing's monumental conceptual *Book From the Sky* (1988) consisting of scrolls, books, and panels of invented Chinese language characters depends upon conceptual factors as much as on aesthetics.[10] Feng Meng Bo's CD ROM video installation, *Taking Mount Doom By Strategy* (1998) is an interactive video game, which mixes traditional staging of the Beijing opera with video games to explore the meaning of the Cultural Revolution in China.[11] All three artists' work is widely admired in the West. Yet despite its incorporation of tradition, their innovative work was viewed with suspicion by the cultural agencies responsible for monitoring developments in contemporary art in China.

Of the Western artists who come to mind upon looking at Gao's paintings, certain works of Vincent Van Gogh, Wassily Kandinsky, and Clyfford Still bear interesting resemblances. All of these artists ground their art in aesthetic considerations rather than didactic moral or social aims. The common visual elements found in their works are especially notable when comparing black and white photographs of the artists' respective works. Van Gogh's drawings *Wild Vegetation in the Hills*, (1889), *Olive Trees in Landscape with Mount Gaussier and the Rock with Two Holes* (1889) cat. p. 9, and his painting, *View From Montmartre* (1887), a landscape with wheat fields, all share with Gao's ink paintings rich and compelling visual structures that immediately draw the viewer's eye into the picture space.[12] Both Kandinsky's early works and Gao's paintings employ elements of romanticism. They emerge from inner reflection rather than observation and exhibit forms that lend themselves to inner spiritual contemplation. Neither artist allows for a sharp differentiation of form and content, or of abstraction and figuration. See Kandinsky, *Impressions III (Concert)* (1911) cat. p. 10 and *Picture With a Circle* (1911).[13] In their use of white, grey and black tones to form the picture space, Still's paintings created in the mid 1940s bear close visual similarities to Gao's ink paintings between 1983 and 1993. This is particularly notable in the paintings *September 1946* and *1957-D No. 1*.[14] These apparent similarities do not suggest direct influence of the three Western artists on Gao's paintings. However, they do affirm his mixing of Chinese and Western approaches to painting.

Clyfford Still, *1957-D No. 1*, 1957
Oil on canvas, 287 x 403.9 cm (9 ft 5 in. x 13 ft 3 in.)
Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY.
Gift of Seymour H. Knox, Jr., 1959.

Gao's art practices are based in part on Zen philosophy.[15] In keeping with Zen philosophy, Gao looks inward for inspiration and away from oppression, conventionality, consumption, fashion, and other "worldly" cultural practices that might diminish the inner human spirit. He is concerned with understanding the self, but not in a Nietzschean sense. Ink marks on the paper carry feeling and implication and display free expression as in traditional Chinese painting. However, he regards expression as self-purification grounded in aesthetics rather than "I" centered self-expression.

1. Gao Xingjian, *Return to Painting*, translated from the French by Nadia Benabid, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2002), p. 13. Previously published in French, translated from the Chinese by Noël and Liliane Dutrait, (Paris: Flammarion, 2001).
2. Gao, *Return to Painting*, pp. 47, 48.
3. Gao, *Return to Painting*, p. 42.
4. Cristina Carrillo de Albornoz, "Chinese Abstraction in Paris," *The Art Newspaper*, no. 125 (May, 2002), 26.
5. Gao, Xingjian, "Thoughts on Painting," *Gao Xingjian: Tuschmalerei 1983-1993* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Morat Institut für Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft, 2000), p. 95.
6. Gao, *Return to Painting*, p. 39.
7. "Introduction," *The Other Shore: Plays by Gao Xingjian*, translated by Gilbert C. F. Fong (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press of Hong Kong, 1999), p. xxxix.
8. Gao, *Return to Painting*, p. 40.
9. *The Other Shore: Plays by Gao Xingjian*, p. xxv.
10. *Words Without Meaning, Meaning Without Words: The Art of Xu Bing*, exh. cat., (Washington, D.C.: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and Seattle/London: University of Washington Press, 2001), p. 47.
11. Curtis L. Carter, *Feng Meng Bo Video Games*, exh. cat., (Milwaukee: Haggerty Museum of Art, Marquette University, November 20, 1998-January 31, 1999).
12. J.B. de la Faille, *The Works of Vincent Van Gogh*, F1542, F1544, (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff International, 1970), p. 533.
13. John Golding, *Paths to the Absolute* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, Bollingen Series 48 XXXV, 2000), pp. 99, 102.
14. Golding, *Paths to the Absolute*, pp. 186, 217.
15. Gao, *Return to Painting*, pp. 29, 30.

Urwald (Jungle), 1988
Ink on paper
103 x 105.9 cm (40 1/2 x 41 3/4 in.)
Collection of the Morat—Institut für Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft, Freiburg im Breisgau

The China of Gao Xingjian

Daniel Meissner

Introduction

The well-known saying, "May you live in interesting times!" implies both the potential and peril of living through periods of tumultuous change. Few nations have experienced such a turbulent history as China over the past half century. For Gao Xingjian, the political convulsions, social upheavals, and dogmatic fanaticism of this era may have stimulated his creative genius and galvanized his will to persevere. For many other talented intellectuals, however, these same conditions stifled originality and crushed the productive spirit. A brief introduction to China's modern history helps one to more fully appreciate Gao's literary insights and artistic achievements.

Wartime Turmoil

On January 4, 1940, Gao Xingjian was born in Ganzhou, a city located in the southeastern province of Jiangxi, approximately 225 miles north of Hong Kong. At that time, China had been at war with Japan for nearly ten years, and nearly all of eastern China was under Japanese occupation. The war had begun far to the north in Manchuria in August 1931, when a bomb explosion along the Japanese-controlled railroad led to a retaliatory attack by Japanese troops stationed in the region. Chinese resistance countered Japanese aggression, expanding this "Manchurian Incident" into full-scale warfare. The Chinese, however, proved no match for the superbly trained and well-outfitted Japanese troops, and within months were forced to accept an armistice. The Japanese created a new State of Manchuria (Manchuguo) and established a puppet government with Puyi – the last boy-emperor of the Qing (Ch'ing) dynasty (1644-1912) – installed as regent.

The loss of Manchuria ignited massive nationalist protests, urging President Chiang Kai-shek to mount a more assertive and resolute defense of China. Chiang, however, was more intent on destroying the last vestiges of the Chinese Communist Party than on opposing Japanese aggression. Since his violent purge of Communists in 1927, he had steadfastly pursued a campaign to eliminate the remaining soviet encampments in China. In 1934, after encircling the largest of these – the Jiangxi Soviet – in a mountainous region near Gao's hometown, Chiang was on the verge of success. However, the Communists broke free and their new leader, Mao Zedong, led nearly 100,000 followers on the "Long March," a year-long trek covering 6000 miles to a safe haven at Yenan in the northern province of Shaanxi. While rallying his troops in nearby Xian to continue the attack, Chiang was kidnapped by his own officers and forced to reconsider his policy. Ultimately, he agreed to a truce and the formation of a United Front with the Communists against their common enemy, the Japanese.

In 1937, that "common enemy" was primed for further conquest, awaiting only the opportunity to strike. A minor skirmish between Chinese and Japanese soldiers near the Marco Polo bridge outside Beijing provided the pretext, and the incident quickly escalated into war. Japanese troops poured into Beijing and Tianjin and the first bombs fell on Shanghai. After months of stubborn resistance, both Shanghai and Chiang's capital at Nanjing fell. As Chiang's government fled inland to establish a war-time capital at Chongqing in Sichuan province, Japanese troops occupied Nanjing and brutalized those Chinese remaining in the city. With the crumbling of all military resistance in the east, the Japanese swept south, cutting off Gao's hometown and province

from China's inland leadership. For seven years, Gao – like millions of other Chinese – coped with the daily stress, trauma, and uncertainty of life in occupied China.

But even Japan's eventual defeat did not bring peace to China. Shortly after the Japanese surrender, the United Front dissolved, and military conflict between Chiang and Mao resumed. Although the Communists were outnumbered and under-supplied, their guerilla tactics and peasant support gradually turned the tide in their favor. After decisive victories in the northeast, the Communists entered Beijing in January 1949, Shanghai in May, and Canton in October. Chiang and his Nationalist government fled to Taiwan. On October 1, 1949, Mao stood atop the Imperial Palace wall in Beijing to announce the establishment of the People's Republic of China. "Red China" was born.

Communist "Liberation"

Although the civil war had ended, peace was still not at hand. As Mao implemented his new policies of land reform and egalitarianism, he also enforced a new social system based on "revolutionary purity." Poor peasants, workers, soldiers, old cadres and revolutionary martyrs occupied the highest positions and commanded the utmost respect as "true red" elements, while former landlords, rightists, and at the very bottom, the "stinking ninth" category of intellectuals comprised the dregs of society – the black elements. For youth such as Gao, the prestige of the red, or the stain of the black elements passed from parents to children. As the son of a bank official and an amateur actress associated with the Y.M.C.A., Gao was thoroughly tainted by his Western bourgeois heritage. Consequently, he was destined to struggle in a system which despised his previously privileged class. Indeed, red elements victimized during the "feudal" regimes of the past were now encouraged to confront their oppressors in "speak bitterness" meetings. Throughout the countryside, poor peasants vehemently denounced landlords, as village councils under the instruction of party cadres redistributed the land and property of the rich. Black elements were often beaten to death during these struggle sessions or executed in a "settling of accounts."

After most accounts were "settled," Mao initiated a series of collectivization policies, which by 1956 had significantly improved agricultural production in the countryside. Convinced that rising standards of living and political education campaigns had successfully molded an appreciative and compliant population, Mao relaxed restrictions on public criticism in order to gauge popular reaction to his policies. In particular, he encouraged intellectuals to contribute to the country's socialist development by constructively critiquing the government's performance. As he publicly declared: "Let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools of thought contend." The response, however, was far from what Mao expected. Widespread discontent surfaced in complaints against the incompetence of local cadres; wall posters denounced the abuse of power by party officials; and the most radical protests even challenged the legitimacy of the Communist Party itself. Shocked by these responses, Mao drew the movement to an abrupt end and immediately initiated a punitive "anti-rightist" campaign to identify, isolate, and re-educate the "poisonous weeds" intellectuals through labor reform. At this time, Gao entered the prestigious Beijing Foreign Languages Institute, where he studied French language and literature. He managed to avoid the political pitfalls of the "Hundred Flowers" and "Anti-rightist" campaigns, and upon graduation in 1962, became a member of the Communist Party.

More determined than ever to pursue his own vision of Communist development for China, Mao pushed forward an ambitious, but ultimately disastrous, communization program. In 1957, he ordered the rural collectives to be consolidated into huge People's Communes, each an autonomous, self-sufficient organization providing cradle-to-grave care for all of its approxi-

mately 25,000 members. Mao was convinced that the communes' efficiencies of scale and the indefatigable enthusiasm of the revolutionary peasants would provide a solid productive base upon which a "Great Leap Forward" in industrialization could be launched. China would match the industrial output of England, he confidently predicted, in fifteen years. But poor weather, incompetent leadership, and irrational policies turned the "Great Leap" into one of the greatest catastrophes in modern history. By 1960, industrial growth had stagnated and famine had ravaged the communes.

Disgraced, Mao stepped out of the political spotlight as Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping restructured the communes and implemented market reforms to stimulate the economy. Household private plots were reintroduced and private markets reopened. Although the economy rebounded, Mao denounced the Party's revisionist policies and China's back-slide toward capitalism. In 1966, he again claimed the spotlight, calling upon the youth of China – who had been thoroughly indoctrinated in the tenets of self-sacrifice and socialist duty – to lead a new "Cultural Revolution." Millions responded, converging on Beijing and waving their red books of Mao's quotations with hysterical fervor. Mao empowered this army of "Red Guards" to attack and destroy the enemies of the revolution: "capitalist roaders" such as Liu and Deng, traditionalism such as the "four olds" (old culture, ideas, customs and habits) and Western bourgeois influence such as foreign literature, music and art. With his blessing, ten years of chaos, destruction, humiliation, and cruelty were unleashed upon China.

Gao Xingjian could not escape the onslaught. As an intellectual, French expert, and Party member, he was quickly targeted for "struggle." Throughout the entire ten years of the Cultural Revolution, he was detained in a labor reform camp for cadres, where he burned a suitcase full of manuscripts to protect himself against further accusations and incrimination. Hundreds of thousands of other intellectuals were also "sent down," and tens of thousands more were persecuted to death. China lost a talented generation of teachers, artists, bureaucrats and managers, and as in Gao's example, literary and artistic works of untold value.

A turbulent era ended with Mao's death in 1976. His policy of incessant revolution was replaced two years later by Deng Xiaoping's economic pragmatism. The color of the cat (socialist ideology) did not matter any longer, only whether or not it caught mice. New reforms promoted personal enterprise, and to get rich was now considered "glorious" not "decadent." Intellectuals were needed to drive forward these reforms. They were recalled from the countryside, schools were reopened, classes resumed, and life slowly began to normalize. Gao returned to Beijing and in 1978 published his first novella. The following year, he was allowed to travel abroad to France and Italy. Although the government still called for periodic campaigns against "spiritual pollution" associated with Western culture, social restraints continued to relax and individual rights to improve. In 1989, however, Deng's government drew a blood-red line in the sand on the issue of political freedom. After more than a month of pro-democracy demonstrations, marches, and hunger strikes, a million protesters who were still encamped in Tiananmen Square refused the government's demand to disperse. In the early morning of June 4, Deng called in armed troops and tanks to clear the square of demonstrators. Within hours, hundreds if not thousands of protesters were dead.

Gao responded to the government's brutality by rejecting his membership in the Communist Party. Chinese officials countered with a ban on all his works. Now a blacklisted writer living in Paris, Gao became a French citizen in 1997. His experiences during this turbulent period in Chinese history, however, continue to provide insights which deepen and embolden his art.

Au fin fond de la montagne (At the Base of the Mountain), 1987
Ink on paper
32.5 x 39.3 cm (12 3/4 x 15 1/2 in.)
Collection of the Morat—Institut für Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft, Freiburg im Breisgau

Chinese Abstraction in Paris
an interview with Gao Xingjian

Cristina Carrillo de Albornoz

"We exist in a state of barbarity, where art is on the point of not loving art"

Gao Xingjian won the Nobel Prize for literature in 2000 but he has also revived abstract painting by his Eastern sensibility and technique

Winner of the Nobel prize for literature in 2000, Gao Xingjian, the author of *Soul Mountain*, is also a virtuoso painter in ink against the trend of contemporary conceptual art. This voluntary exile who chose to live in Paris to escape the constraints of the Chinese Cultural Revolution believes that art cannot be dissociated from poetry. Gao (his surname), wrote his first novel and exhibited his first drawings at the age of 12. A painter, man of letters and the stage, he explained, "Painting is my real profession, my livelihood, while literature is my luxury, my hobby".

This aesthete who champions the poetic vision of the world was a star in his own country at the age of 30 but after suffering "censorship and self-censorship and extreme personal tragedy" under the communist regime, he decided to move to the West and chose Paris which he professes to love for being "very humane and universal". "Here," he says, "one does not feel a foreigner".

His pictorial revolution consists in having turned the ancient tradition of Chinese ink into something utterly modern. To break the deadlock of the centuries, he has introduced to it vital elements of Western art: light and colour; depth, creating what he calls "false perspective", as well as the dynamics and innovation of contemporary art techniques. Light and depth have turned into the subjects of his work, which under the influence of Zen philosophy becomes a series of visions or inner landscapes between abstract and figurative. Gao Xingjian, who insists that the difference between West and East does not interest him, paints using wholly traditional materials (rice paper, Chinese brushes and ink) but his technique, colour and light are utterly modern. He gave an interview to *The Art Newspaper* as his retrospective opened at the the Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid:

The Art Newspaper:
For you, being an artist is associated with pleasure. What is your conception of painting?

Gao Xingjian:
Painting is more a purification than an expression of self. The inner self is very small, a black hole. I do not believe in inspiration nor in the "I", because man is chaos, not to say hell. It needs courage, taste, vitality and ingenuity to succeed in seeing further than oneself (and this world full of shit); that is how to achieve lucidity and a vision that projects luminosity.

TAN: Your painting is done with the most traditional materials (rice paper Chinese brushes and ink) yet this was a late adoption. Why ?

GX: I started painting very young in the Western traditions, watercolour and oil. The first time I came to the West, in 1978, at the end of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, as an interpreter, part of an international delegation, we travelled to Paris, Rome and Florence. When I saw with my own eyes the real quality of the masterpieces of Western painters and the colour, I realised that what I was doing with oil paint in China was

worthless. I compared all the sensibility, that knowledge, that taste, those material those tones, and asked myself, is it worth my continuing? The answer was, certainly not. Oil never had a tradition in China so I lacked everything, from knowledge to finesse.

At the same time, in Nice, at the Maeght Foundation, I saw the ink drawings of Picasso, of Henri Michaux, and the same thing was happening to them as to me with oil; they lacked richness, nuance, the creativity that ink can stimulate, because there is no long tradition in that medium here. Everything looked black and white, of a brutal simplicity. This is the great lacuna of the Westerners. I realised that there was no sense in breaking with the ink tradition, but decided to rework it.

TAN: How?

GX: For me, it has never been enough to accept all the traditional codes and conventions. They have to be reworked and that is my talent. My idea was to make something modern of the Chinese ink tradition, with a Western dynamic. In truth I do not like the old tradition of Chinese painting because it repeats itself and the inks have been static since the days of the Tang dynasty when the technique was highly evolved; later in the Ming and Song eras there was a small innovation and ink became a little more expressive but the technique was the same. The problem in China is that there is a huge burden of tradition and because of this, development is minimal. Meanwhile Western contemporary art has not ceased to innovate. My point of departure was to combine the traditional medium of ink and the advantages of my experience of work ing in oil. Light is too important to be left out.

TAN: Because of that you have turned light into a medium of your painting.

GX: By using light as a medium I avoid a possible crude reduction of my painting to black and white. Light, for its part, works the tones of the picture. In my inks, the white is never empty space nor the black a hole, because light gives them substance. My work has a palette of over 30 grey, black and white tonalities.

TAN: In addition to light, the other great subject of your investigations is depth. You have created false perspective. What is it exactly ?

GX: Flat painting ended in the Renaissance with perspective finding a third dimension, but this depth has been sacrificed again in modern painting. Why? Perhaps the perspective of the Renaissance with its vanishing points is not valid. I thought that a new perspective needed to be invented, which I call “false perspective”. It is not the perspective of the Renaissance nor the geometric perspective of Euclid; nor is it akin to the Cubist decomposition of space or to flat or deconstructivist geometry. I refer to a depth based in the visual gaze, to a depth like a vision, like an impossible dream, for a picture should be worth the trouble of being looked at to infinity. It is an indefinite depth; it can be compared to the zoom of a camera. It is a depth like a journey to the interior of the picture which shapes an inner vision and evokes emotion, energy, vitality. And it is the same for the artist as for the viewer of the picture. One needs to look in the same way as one paints: it demands the same attention and imagination. When I paint or write I use language to create an inner vision not a description.

TAN: In what way are you influenced by Zen philosophy ?

GX: Already as a young man I started following my father1s interests; then, after the Cultural Revolution I completed my inquiry into Zen philosophy. I have always looked within. I have never made copies. Zen is my support because it is a way of life in which no obsessions exist, in which the "I" is forgotten. It is a way of creation for the artist, inexplicable, beyond words. Emptiness in art does not mean the absence of everything; it is rather a spirit that illuminates the works of art revealing an inner state that the artist feels. The Zen spirit is very beneficial to artists because it frees the individual's hidden creativity. It lets go all kinds of prejudices. However, my painting does not seek to give form to philosophy but to find its own way, in other works to succeed in feeling the great inner void that everyone in the world possesses.

TAN: With Zen you have found your personal language, a world "between". Between what exactly?

GX: Everything that is defined, clear, is of no interest here. "Between" refers to a vast field of exploration between the abstract and the figurative, between dream and reality. That intermediate area is what interests me. My initial idea was to break the absolute division between the figurative and the abstract, which means, in its turn, doing away with the division of the history of art into successive layers. The categorisation of art obliges a label to be pinned on an artist to identify him at first sight. Artists should reject this type of classification; when concepts and definitions of painting are abolished, one gets concrete forms, naturally born forms, forms full of feeling.

TAN: There is a great sensual force in your work. Is this linked to your love of women?

GX: I love women; if life is worth the trouble of living it is thanks to love. Otherwise life is a bitch. Art and love, art and women are for a man the essence, the marvel.

TAN: You were speaking of the great inner void as if we had to run away from everything. What are you running away from?

GX: We have to run away from many things, nearly everything. Not only oppression but conventionality. Consumption. Fashion. Simplification. The masses. The Other. To write, to paint is an act of defiance. It is a flight from what impoverishes and diminish es the human being. One has to run away from everything except oneself even though the chaos reigns within oneself.

TAN: You were saying that Western art has not ceased to innovate but despite all the innovations, people complain that contemporary art has stayed on the surface.

GX: That's where the tragedy lies; it has been reduced to the investigation of matter. The art of today is profoundly materialistic! Only matter talks and the materials are regarded as the language of creation; it is a sickness of our time. The tragedy of the art of our age is that so much art is the search for pure form, which turns it into mere decoration.

TAN: You had an education that was both Western and Eastern. How did this happen?

GX: The Western education was from my mother. She died young and because of this I always remember her as beautiful. She came from a great family and perhaps because of this never suffered or had psychological problems; she was always happy even during the war. She had a very Western education with American missionaries although she was not a believer. She was an actress and started to work in the theatre with a Mormon group. It was a great milieu through which to be introduced to Western culture. But the theatre was modern and also opposed to the Sino-Japanese war. I went onstage with my mother at the age of five. She was a very liberal woman with many friends in Hong Kong. In my house there were no taboos of any kind. My house had Western paintings, photographs of American actresses. But I was lucky to be educated also on the traditional front.

TAN: By your father, wasn't it?

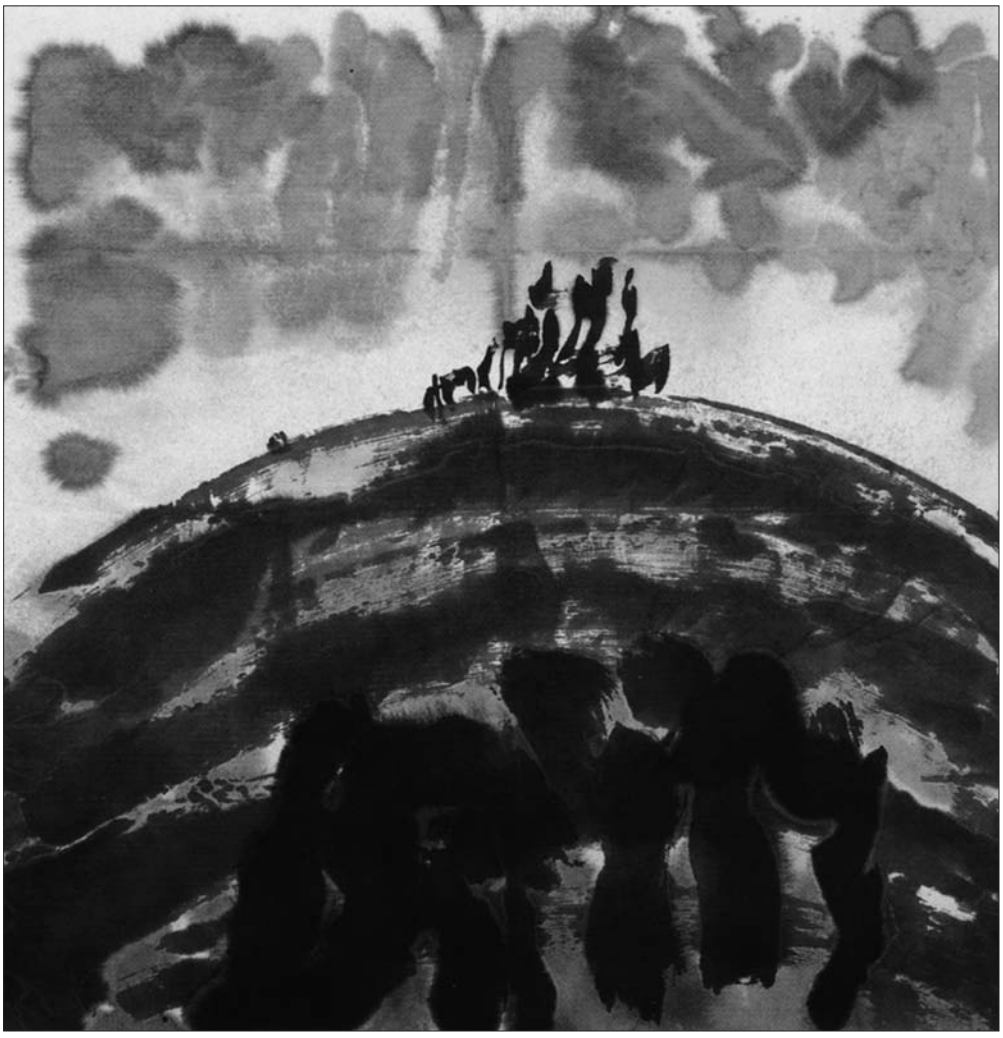
GX: Yes. He was a man who knew much about traditional Chinese painting and had a fabulous library of old books. When the Communists came into power, everything was controlled but in my house we already had everything. I was really very lucky.

TAN: The Cultural Revolution took away your parents, made you burn your writing, confiscated your painting. Are you able to forgive?

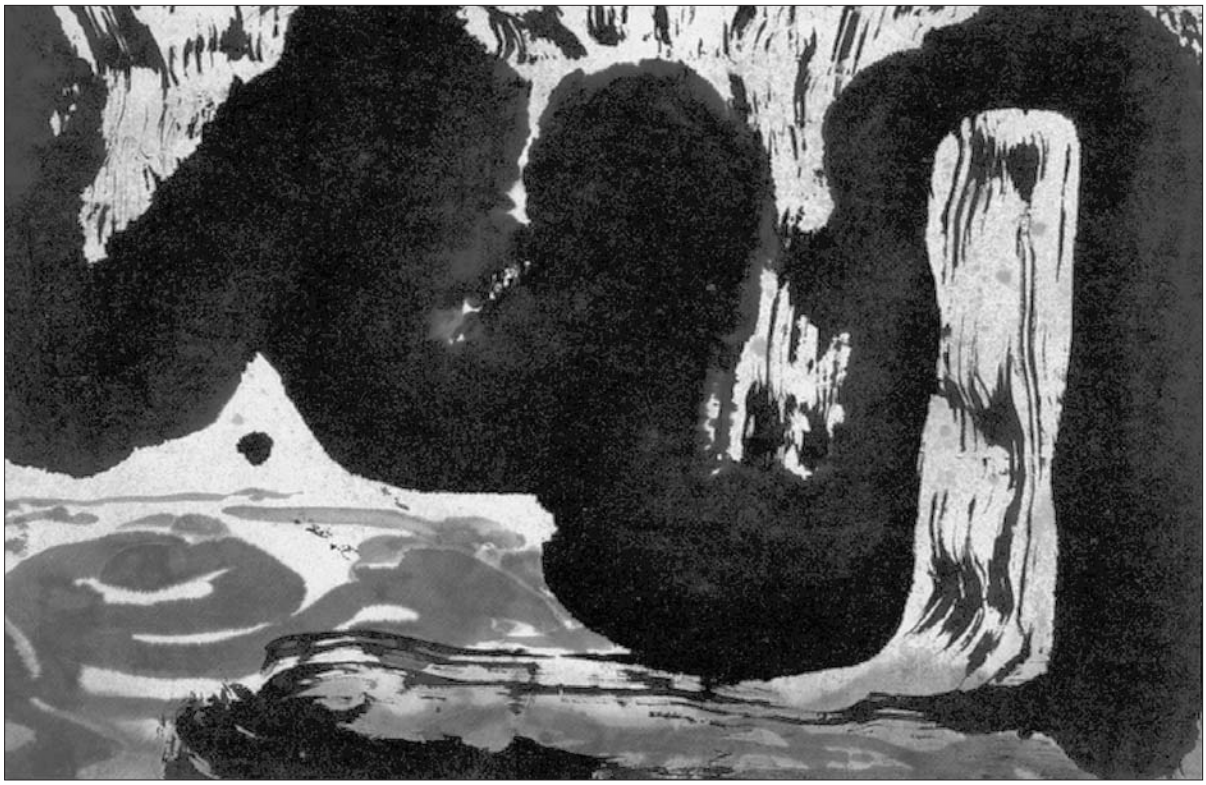
GX: What does rancour achieve? Rancour kills life. I have suffered a great deal but had I remained in a state of hatred and rancour I would have misspent the rest of my life.

TAN: You say you are an aesthete; your book *Soul Mountain* is a search for beauty. How does this influence your painting?

GX: The essence of art lies in aesthetics. The artist is above all an aesthete and the genesis of his or her thinking cannot be dissociated from the activities of artistic judgement and creation. The criticism he or she makes of society and the challenge issued is an aesthetic and ethical judgement rather than an ideological act. If the artist substitutes for his or her aesthetic judgement any other value judgement, be it social, political or ethical, that person is dead as an artist. No artist has ever saved the world. Beauty is the object of all my work and I look for perfection. However, beauty is not what is pretty, but what is worth looking at. Nor is it something minutely worked, but the search for harmony, something that should spring forth immediately, by chance. Beauty is intuitive, objective and subjective at the same time. The beautiful is not abstract but something very concrete and not only spiritual. Beauty has a very sensual side and sensuality is something of substance, like the body of a woman or a smile as subtle as Mona Lisa's. Beauty is always an ephemeral state. Everything that is impossible to fix is beauty.



Un jeu noire (A Dark Game), 1985
Ink on paper
104.5 x 101.6 cm (41 1/8 x 40 in.)
Collection of the Morat—Institut für Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft, Freiburg im Breisgau



Effet xylographique (Impression Effect), 1983
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Thoughts on Painting

Gao Xingjian

Following the realization of the possibilities of painting by Picasso and Kandinsky, abstract painting has wallowed for nearly a century. The question thus arises, what more can the realm of painting possibly produce?

Following the supplanting of painting with collage, color, materials, photographic techniques, computer graphics, photoelectric techniques, text, and even conceptual games, can we continue on painting?

Today, painting has come full circle to figurative painting. Confronting face-to-face the previous generations throughout its history, can painting today come up with any new performances?

Can painting escape the limitations of two dimensions and continue to be painting? Or perhaps we should ask: Without leaving the planar surface, can it find new possibilities in the treatment of space within these limitations?

Further, within the restrictions of two dimensions, apart from points, lines, fields, colors, chiaroscuro, and arrangement, are there any other methods left?- Or, perhaps to beg the question further: If the methods currently at our disposal are discarded, can painting still be considered painting?

Going yet another step further, it can be asked whether after all these methods are taken away, can the materials or colors which make up a plain surface themselves be considered painting? Or maybe if actions are performed onto this surface, such as making a gash with a knife, ripping, or burning, or rolling over it with one's body, or letting a slug slime over it... can these be considered methods of painting?

Shall the constant promotion of the revolutionizing or reformation of "modernism" over the past century inevitably lead to the repudiation of this art? What exactly is "modernism"? Does it have any definite historical connotations? or is the transcendence of the era or the moment the one and only basis on which the value of art is judged? What does painting seek to express, and what is painting? Is its significance in the act of painting itself, or in its expression? Such questions confuse me. Not getting the answers, I have simply returned to two-dimensional surfaces and the traditional materials of rice paper, brush, and ink. And in so doing, I have discovered that painting with these materials holds endless delight. Furthermore, I realized that it is similar to writing, where even today in using the language of our forebears, we can still speak our own minds and come up with fresh things to say. Naturally, we can still come up with new paintings with the same old tools - the only question is how the artist re-familiarizes himself with the techniques used over and over by mankind since the inception of painting in civilization.

There are two approaches to creating paintings on two-dimensional surfaces. First is realistic space, such as aligned perspective, to create the illusion of a third dimension. The other approach is recognizing the planar surface of painting, stressing the qualities of painting and painting directly on the surface. Both of these approaches can claim their own respective history and tradition in the East and West. However, the East and West seem to have switched roles and taken opposite paths in the modern painting. Since Cézanne, the efforts of Western painters have returned to the planar nature of painting, while Eastern painters have searched for depth on the planar surface. Each accomplished painter can be said to have found a certain resolution, while each artist who desires to make his or her creative mark on painting is faced with exactly such a dilemma.

For the painter, this space is not speculation; rather, one must accurately reflect one's treatment of space on the canvas or paper. This challenge is the final dividing line between wisdom and physical dexterity. That art is more than just empty talk is proven on the surface of a painting. Modern artists have found a number of ways to get around this problem, as with Picasso's division of cubes into planes, Cezanne's elimination of depth, Matisse's employment of strong color contrasts, Kandinsky's overlapping alignment, and the juxtaposition of real and imagined spaces. Zao Wouki, who is after all Oriental, is just the opposite - applying layer upon layer of thin color in search of a depth not found in traditional Eastern painting. The so-called language of painting must be expressed by some type of method; otherwise, for the artist it is nothing more than empty talk.

As for my own painting, naturally I intend to find my own solution. Perhaps, because I am after all still Chinese, I am accustomed to the free expression on two dimensional surfaces in traditional Chinese painting, while the depth of Western painting has always been especially appealing to me. Consequently, even if I am using ink for free expression I look for this depth of space, albeit one which differs from Western perspective. There is a component of modern Chinese painting theory called "diffuse point perspective" which borrows Western art theory to interpret traditional Chinese painting - something which naturally makes sense.

By setting out from traditional Chinese freehand painting and attempting to achieve a depth of space, I am not coming from observation of actual depth of field, but rather depth which is visualized from within; it seems to have a feeling of perspective, but does not agree with perspective with a focus, and it is not poli-focal. When one maintains a certain inner vision, one finds that so-called "distance" shifts and floats, much like a camera shooting in the dark whose auto-focus lens moves in and out in a herky-jerky fashion. This is merely a simple comparison, as when one closes one's eyes and views these images of the mind that appear at times, they are there before one's eyes but have no clear distance - not following the law of smaller objects further away and larger objects closer. How to capture such inner visions in the picture, yet without resorting to strict perspective, is the challenge I seek to resolve.

For my current purposes, I shall call this feeling of depth in inner visions "false perspective" - and treat inner visions as different levels and different viewing angles. However, I shall place them in what seems like the same space, using different levels of space to create a feeling of perspective and compose an overall picture (rather than separate parts). This is a space conceived at will on the spur of the moment, not according to rules of perspective, and without particular focus or diffuse focus - yet still creating depth of field as if shot by a real camera. However, rather than objects or scenes, shadows are described - revealing themselves in the mind in unexpected places. Although the tangible feeling they have is illusory, such visions can definitely be achieved. All painting attempts to do is to turn the seeds of these visions into pictures.

Although these visions sometimes have colors, as they flash by in an instant they are difficult to grasp, making them murky. This is why expressing them with ink is closer, and why I only use monochromatic ink and not colors.

I first began painting abstract paintings with ink, as the brushing and spread of ink on rice paper in Chinese ink painting holds a definite kind of enjoyment and interest. My earliest abstract inks came from Zen paintings, where I sought not images but states of mind. Still, I hope that what is left on the paper can be made out as pictures after some time.

The ink left on the paper by the masters of traditional Chinese ink paintings is full of inexhaustible interest itself. Kandinsky's studies of points, fields, and lines did not mean removing the pure form of implication, which has its similarities to the spirit which is sought after in traditional Chinese ink painting. There, brush strokes and ink marks are not merely means to create forms, but their implications are equally important. My abstract ink paintings are not only imbued with a certain kind of form, but at the same time intend to let brush strokes and ink marks carry feeling and implication.

I gradually came to realize that the dividing line between the abstract and the figurative is not necessarily cut and dry, and that for me such a dividing line is increasingly unnecessary. As a result, some people see figurative images in my works, while others might see abstraction; it's images and forms at the same time. This is that quality of painting for which I strive - contained within the brush and ink, but also existing beyond them. Points, lines, and fields must contain the feeling of the brush and ink, and must in themselves form pictures. So for me, the dividing line between the figurative and the abstract is unimportant, which allows me to work spontaneously without any constrains.

When it comes to painting, I ascribe to no conceptual doctrines and belong to no school. The thing I fear most is the attachment of some new fashionable label to my work. I believe that the most important thing for an artist is to stay as far away from others as possible in order to avoid getting mixed up in some trend. If one is able to fine one's own distinctive artistic expression, there can be no greater reward or joy. The reason is that, in real life individual freedoms are invariably subject to constraints, and only in the realm of individual artistic creation can one achieve the freedom to truly express oneself. Yet this freedom depends on whether or not one can find the necessary form of expression, without which freedom of artistic expression is meaningless.

For the artist, freedom of artistic expression, more than the strict will, lies in the ease with which one employs one's chosen devices to achieve this freedom. This means that in addition to having (or not having) one's own thoughts, the artist must study the materials and tools he or she uses to see how much freedom can be achieved. Specifically, how else can the paper, brush, and ink be employed in ink painting? This depends on the investigation of the performance of materials and techniques of application. The more I investigate, the more I discover that the potential of ink painting is far from being exhausted, even though this art form has been around for at least 1000 years. This art is expressed differently in the hands of each individual artist, which is also why ink painting is continually invested with new life. So I'm perfectly happy to keep working away in the realm of ink painting.

Actually the same is essentially true for oil painting. Nobody can say for sure when oil painting will be unable to come up with anything that was not painted previously. Granted, nowadays any material or techniques can be used in art, including computers and lasers, but I'm perfectly willing to manipulate monochromatic variation of depth with ink and paper within the bounds of two-dimensional surface to create my pictures. Broadly speaking, any kind of art is about striving for limitlessness under given restricted conditions.

What should art express? There is a different answer for each different artist, and exactly because of the different answers do we have a variety of artistic pursuits. Moreover, no answer is universal, or the only correct answer. In art, there is no judgment of right or wrong, or morality, because artists do not accept other people's truths. Because there is no god and no master in art, artists are free to throw themselves into their endless pursuit and never notice how hard it is.

At the same time I adhere to the possibilities and interest of the ink and brush, I search for textural quality not found in traditional ink painting in the attempt to fuse the grace of ink painting with emotional quality expressed in oil painting. Not only do I place particular emphasis on the effects of ink saturation, but I also employ this to give images a different textural quality. As a result, ink not only has layers, resulting from contrasting qualities between images, but abstraction and concreteness follow composition and result from variation in the qualities of various images.

I also use light to enrich the expressive power of ink. My particular angle is that I do not set the source of light, unlike many Western paintings. I believe that light can be wherever there is life or spirit. When a person looks inside to see a vision, the image or the image's border emits a lustrous light, an effect created where ink meets ink.

Having also studied photography, I bring the viewing angle, depth of field, and focus of photography into my ink painting to look into the images of the mind, naturally resulting in images that cannot be captured with a camera. Art attempts to reach a realm that is unattainable in reality. Otherwise, why go through all the trouble?

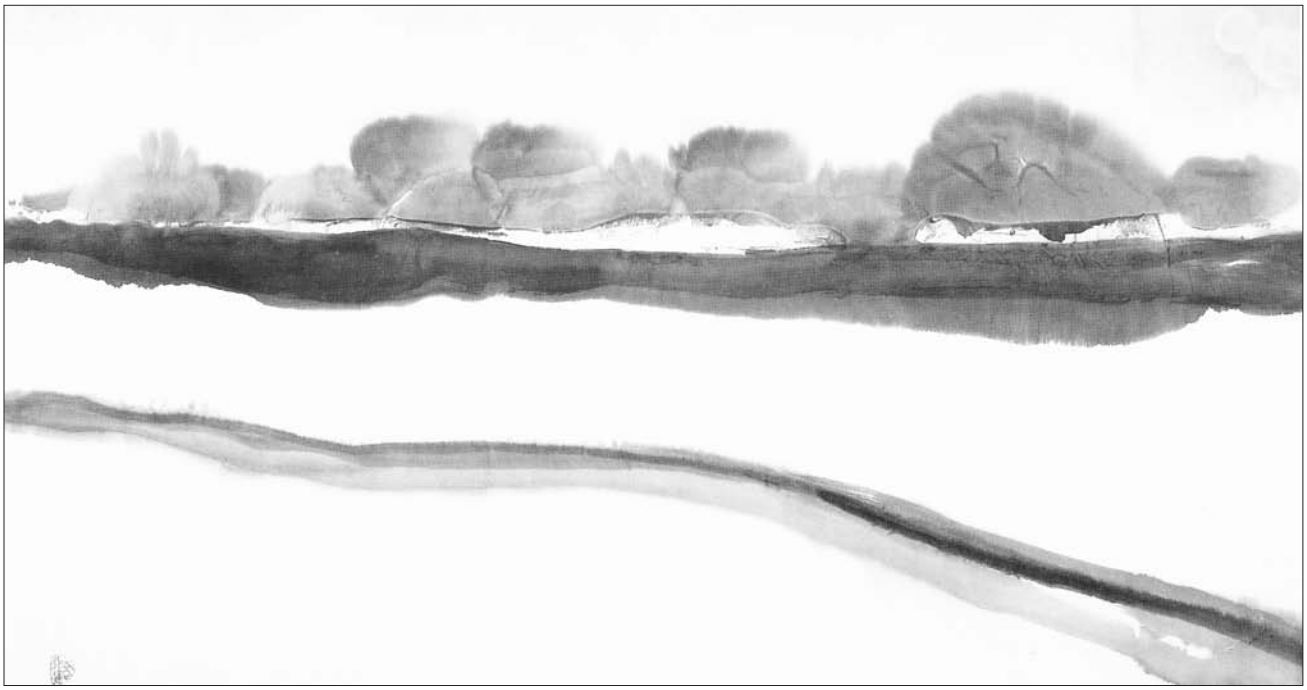
I always listen to music while painting, waiting for the music to strike a chord in my heart before setting out. Once moved, images flow from me, and with the movement of the brush and ink, the music gives my painting a certain kind of rhythm. Music gives the respective components of painting (points, fields, and lines, or brush strokes) even more feeling, so why not use it? This method of creating shapes and images allows the various colors of mood, giving a painting a living presence.

I do not consider painting a pure expression of form. Form is admittedly important, especially in the plastic arts, where one cannot achieve expression without it. However, modern painting this century has progressively approached purity of form, making pursuit of form into the ultimate aim of painting. Pure form, which is constantly losing expressiveness, has become increasingly close to decoration, to the extent that it has become a white wall, or a field of oils, a few blocks of color, or several lines which is signed by the executor. This is the result of fruitless play with form, yet art has not been destroyed because of it.

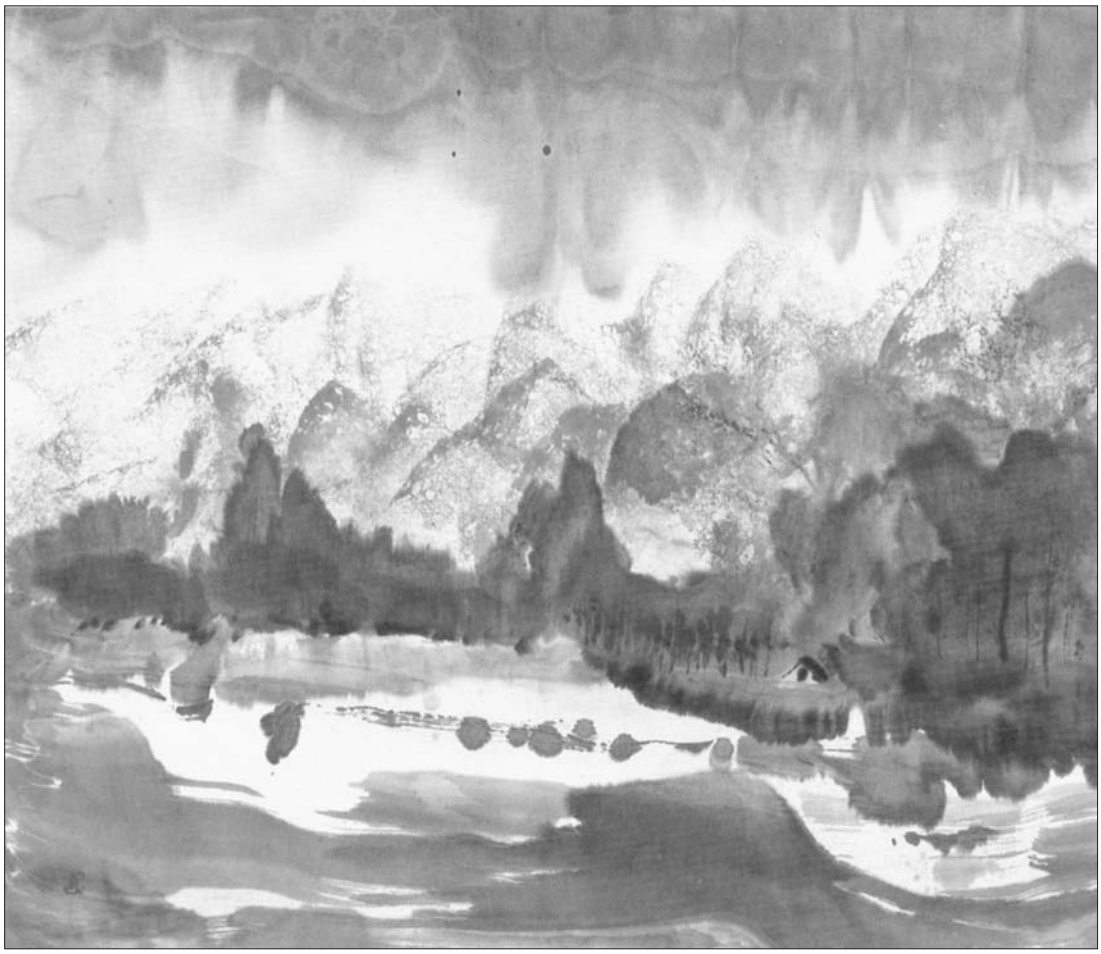
If the self-expression of an artist becomes the direct expression of self, then one's art will be a mess. As the self (or ego) is a chaotic mass, or a black hole to begin with, unless an artist exercises self-knowledge and removes himself for dispassionate observation of the world (including the self), then what is there to see?

More than self-expression I see art as a case of self-purification - observing with a pair of somewhat sober eyes the ever-changing world and one's own mainly unconnected self. And although he may not understand the riddles of life, the artist can leave behind a surprise or two.

Paris, 14 July 1995



La neige (Snow), 1991
Ink on paper
83.3 x 151.4 cm (32 3/4 x 59 5/8 in.)
Collection of the Morat—Institut für Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft, Freiburg im Breisgau



Hermitage, 1990
Ink on paper
66.9 x 83 cm (26 3/8 x 32 3/4 in.)
Collection of the Morat—Institut für Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft, Freiburg im Breisgau

Works in the Exhibition

Works are ink on paper unless otherwise noted. Dimensions are given as height by width.

1. *Effet xylographique (Impression Effect)*, 1983
   44.7 x 64 cm (17 5/8 x 25 1/4 in.)

2. *Naissance (Birth)*, 1985
   96 x 205 cm (37 7/8 x 80 3/4 in.)

3. *Un jeu noire (A Dark Game)*, 1985
   104.5 x 101.6 cm (41 1/8 x 40 in.)

4. *Visions intérieures III (Interior Visions III)*, 1985
   54 x 68 cm (21 1/4 x 26 3/4 in.)

5. *Goût de l'encre (Taste of Ink)*, 1986
   104.4 x 229 cm (41 1/8 x 90 1/4 in.)

6. *L'angoisse (Anguish)*, 1986
   84 x 151.5 cm (33 1/8 x 59 5/8 in.)

7. *Légende préhistorique (Prehistoric Legend)*, 1986
   66 x 100.9 cm (26 x 39 3/4 in.)

8. *Rivière dans le noir (River at Night)*, 1986
   58.2 x 94.2 cm (22 7/8 x 37 1/8 in.)

9. *Un homme assis (A Seated Man)*, 1986
   39.5 x 29.7 cm (15 5/8 x 11 3/4 in.)

10. *Au fin fond de la montagne (At the Base of the Mountain)*, 1987
    32.5 x 39.3 cm (12 3/4 x 15 1/2 in.)

11. *Entre le ciel et la terre (Between the Sky and the Earth)*, 1987
    124 x 246.5 cm (48 7/8 x 97 in.)

12. *La nostalgie (Nostalgia)*, 1988
    Ink on canvas
    265 x 164.5 cm (104 3/8 x 64 3/4 in.)

13. *Le paysage cursif (The Winding Countryside)*, 1988
    68.2 x 133.5 cm (26 7/8 x 52 1/2 in.)

14. *Urwald (Jungle)*, 1988
    103 x 105.9 cm (40 1/2 x 41 3/4 in.)

15. *Après l'orage (After the Storm)*, 1989
    94.9 x 178.4 cm (37 3/8 x 70 1/4 in.)

16. *Himmel und Überhimmel (Heaven and Beyond)*, 1989
    315 x 142 cm (124 x 56 in.)

17. *Idéogrammes (Ideograms)*, 1989
    95 x 178.2 cm (37 1/2 x 70 1/8 in.)

18. *Hermitage*, 1990
    66.9 x 83 cm (26 3/8 x 32 3/4 in.)

19. *La montagne de l'âme (The Mountain of the Soul*), 1990
    135.9 x 178.8 cm (53 1/2 x 70 3/8 in.)

20. *La nature vierge (Pristine Nature)*, 1990
    96 x 83.5 cm (32 7/8 x 37 7/8 in.)

21. *La Révélation (Revelation)*, 1990
    83.6 x 93.4 cm (32 7/8 x 36 3/4 in.)

22. *Légende de l'enfance (Legend of Infancy)*, 1990
    83.5 x 84.7 cm (32 7/8 x 33 3/8 in.)

23. *Totes Dorf (Dead Village)*, 1990
    132.2 x 182 cm (52 x 71 3/4 in.)

24. *Automne (Autumn)*, 1991
    82.5 x 151.6 cm (32 1/2 x 59 3/4 in.)

25. *La neige (Snow)*, 1991
    83.3 x 151.4 cm (32 3/4 x 59 5/8 in.)

26. *Le sort (The Spell)*, 1991
    94.8 x 108.3 cm (37 3/8 x 42 5/8 in.)

27. *Méditation I*, 1991
    143.8 x 113.7 cm (56 5/8 x 44 3/4 in.)

28. *Nuit blanche (White Night)*, 1991
    67.9 x 91.4 cm (26 3/4 x 36 in.)

29. *Sacrifice II*, 1991
    67.8 x 137 cm (26 3/4 x 54 in.)

30. *Stupéfaction (Amazement)*, 1991
    84 x 151.5 cm (33 1/8 x 59 5/8 in.)

31. *Untitled*, 1991
    46.5 x 42.9 cm (18 1/4 x 16 7/8 in.)

32. *Ville morte (Dead City)*, 1991
    83.2 x 147.6 cm (32 3/4 x 58 1/8 in.)

33. *La Révélation (Revelation)*, 1992
    124 x 145 cm (48 7/8 x 57 1/8 in.)

34. *Les légendes (Legends)*, 1992
    124 x 248 cm (48 7/8 x 97 5/8 in.)

35. *Sous la neige (Under the Snow)*, 1992
    124 x 248 cm (48 7/8 x 97 5/8 in.)

36. *Vers l'inconnu (Towards the Unknown)*, 1993
    124 x 248 cm (48 7/8 x 97 5/8 in.)

Le sort (The Spell), 1991
Ink on paper
94.8 x 108.3 cm (37 3/8 x 42 5/8 in.)
Collection of the Morat—Institut für Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft, Freiburg im Breisgau

Biography

1940
Born January 4th in Ganzhou, Jiangxi province, in eastern China. His father, a bank official, and his mother, an amateur actress, stimulate his interest in the visual and performing arts.

1948
Begins to keep a journal.

1954
Studies at the American School in Nanjing under Yun Zhongyu.

1957
Enrolls at the Beijing Foreign Languages Institute.

1962
Graduates from the Beijing Foreign Language Institute with a degree in French. Becomes a member of the Communist party.

1966-76
Sent to re-education camp during the Cultural Revolution. Fearing further punishment, burns a suitcase full of manuscripts and plays. Writes secretly during this time for psychological relief.

1977
Works for the Writer's Association ordering foreign literature for their library. Works as a translator for the Chinese Writers Association. Becomes resident playwright at the People's Art Theatre in Beijing.

1978
Publishes first novella.

1978-9
Visits France and Italy. Begins painting again upon his return to China.

1981
Put under government surveillance after publication of *A Preliminary Discussion of the Art of Modern Fiction*, a violent polemic on modernism. Joins the Beijing People's Art Troupe as a writer.

1982
His theatrical debut, *Alarm Signal*, is a success. Diagnosed with lung cancer, weeks later found to be misdiagnosed. Begins writing novel *Soul Mountain*.

1983
His play *Bus Stop* is performed and banned by the Chinese government during the campaign against "intellectual pollution."

1983-84
Begins a 10 month, 9,300 mile walking tour of Sichuan province, following the Yangtze from its source to the coast. Publishes *Collected Plays*, including *A Pigeon Called Red Beak*, and the play *Wild Man*, which creates heated debate in China. Invited by the Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst (DAAD), Germany and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, France to visit Europe. Mounts solo exhibitions at the Beijing Center of Folk Art, Kunstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin, and Alte Schmiede in Vienna.

1986
His new play, *The Other Shore*, is banned by Chinese authorities, and becomes his last play performed in China. *The Other Shore* is performed in Taiwan and Hong Kong without controversy.

1987
Invited by the Morat Institut für Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft, Freiburg im Breisgau and the French Ministry of Culture. Settles in Paris as a political refugee, sells paintings to fund his literary pursuits. Publishes *In Search of a Modern Form of Dramatic Representation*, and continues work on *Soul Mountain*. Solo exhibition at the Département de la Culture, Lille, France.

1989
After the massacre at Tiananmen Square, renounces membership in the Communist Party. Completes *Soul Mountain* and writes the play *The Fugitive*, a love story set against the background of the massacre. Chinese government declares Gao *persona non grata* and bans all of his works. France immediately grants him political asylum. Solo exhibitions in Stockholm and Malmö, Sweden. Part of a group exhibition at The Michael Goedhuis Gallery, London.

1990
His novel *Soul Mountain* is published in Taiwan. Solo exhibition at Centre Culturel de Lumière de Chine, Marseilles, France.

1991
Soul Mountain is translated by Gören Malmqvist and published in Sweden.

1992
The Fugitive is translated by Gören Malmqvist and produced at the Kongl. Dramatiska Teatern, Stockholm. Awarded the *Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* by the French government. Solo exhibitions in Metz and Marseilles, France.

1993
The Fugitive is translated into English. Writes the play *Nocturnal Wanderer*. Exhibitions in Bourges and Aachen.

1994
Receives the Belgian *Prix Communauté Française* for *Nocturnal Wanderer*. Solo exhibition at the Teatr Polski, Poznan, Poland.

1995
Soul Mountain is translated by Noël and Liliane Dutrait and published in France. Writes the play *Weekend Quartet*, and publishes "The Voice of the Individual." Solo exhibition at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum in Taiwan.

1996
Publishes anti-ideology essay "Without Isms." Solo exhibition at Alisan Fine Arts, Hong Kong.

1997
Becomes a French citizen. Awarded *Prix du nouvel an Chinois* for *Soul Mountain*. Solo exhibition at the Schimmel Center for the Arts, New York.

1998
Paintings displayed at the *XIX Bienniale Internationale des Antiquaires*, Carrousel du Louvre, Paris.

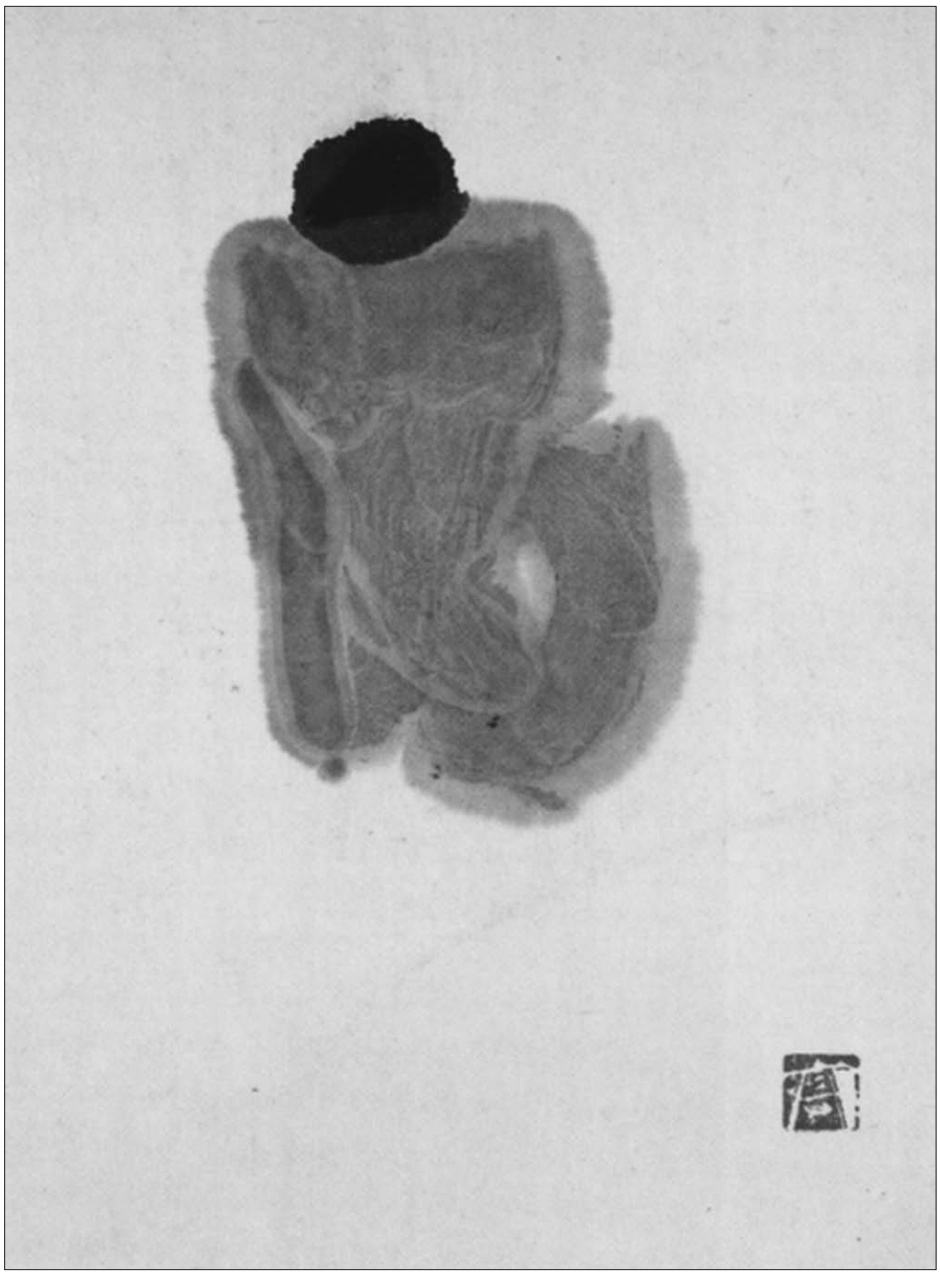
1999
The Other Shore: Plays published in English.

2000
Awarded Nobel Prize for literature and the *Premio letterario Feronia* in Italy. *Soul Mountain* published in English.

2001
Receives Honorary Doctorate from the University of Sun Yat-sen, Taiwan; the Chinese University of Hong Kong; and the University of Aix-Marseilles, Provence. Solo exhibition at the Palais des Papes, Avignon, France.

2002
Semi-autobiographical novel, *One Man's Bible*, published in English. Receives the Golden Plate Award from the American Academy of Achievement. Solo exhibition at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain.

2003
Gao Xingjian: Ink Paintings 1983-1993, Haggerty Museum of Art, Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin (April 10-June 29, 2003).



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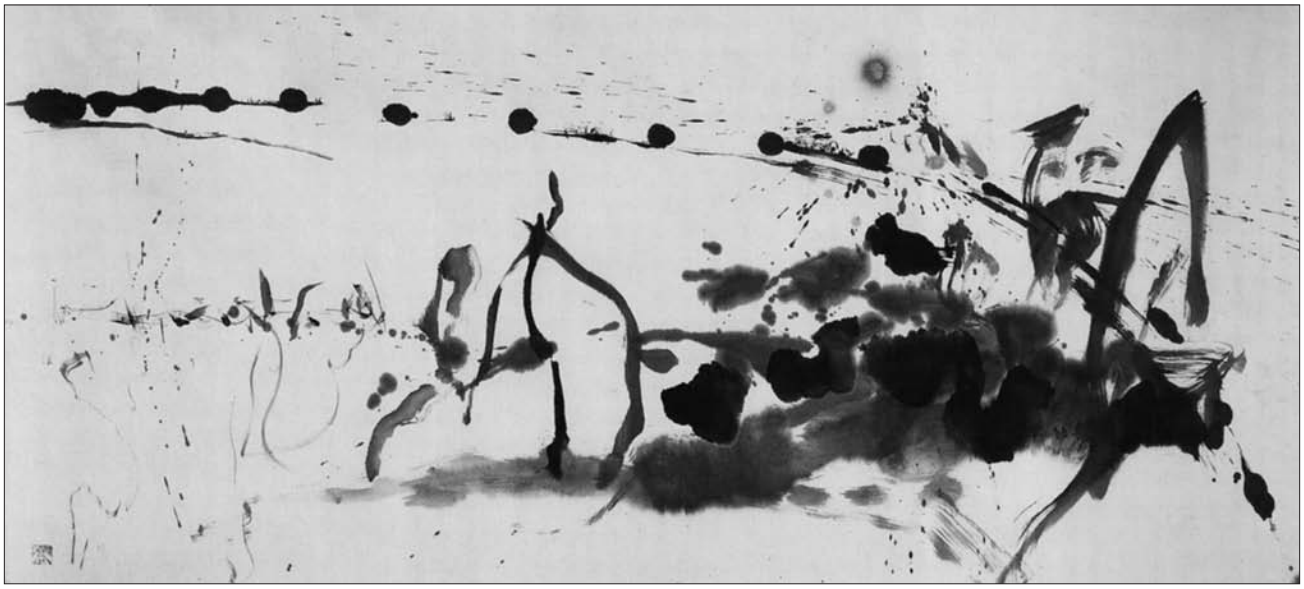

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Exhibition History

Solo Exhibitions

1985 Beijing Center of Folk Art, Beijing, China

1985 Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, Germany

1985 Alte Schmiede, Vienna, Austria

1987 Département de la Culture, Lille, France

1988 L'office municipal des beaux arts et de la Culture, Waterloo, France

1989 Ösatasiatiska, Museet, Stockholm, Sweden

1989 Krapperrus Konsthall, Malmö, Sweden

1990 Centre culturel de lumière de Chine, Marseilles, France

1991 Espace d'art contemporain confluence, Rambouillet, France

1992 Espace d'art contemporain le cercle bleu, Metz, France

1992 Centre culturel de l'Asie, Marseilles, France

1993 Maison de la Culture de Bourges, Bourges, France

1993 Galerie La Tour des Cardinaux, Isle-sur-la-sorgue, France

1993 Galerie hexagon, Aachen, Germany

1994 Espace d'art contemporain le cercle bleu, Metz, France

1994 Teatr polski, Poznan, Poland

1995 Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei, Taiwan

1996 Palais de justice, Luxembourg

1996 Espace d'art contemporain le cercle bleu, Metz, France

1996 Galerie La Tour des Cardinaux, Isle-sur-la-sorgue, France

1996 Alisan Fine Arts, Hong Kong

1997 The Schimmel Center for the Arts, New York

1998 Galerie La Tour des Cardinaux, Isle-sur-la-sorgue, France

1998 Espace d'art contemporain le cercle bleu, Metz, France

1998 4 Arts, Caen, France

1998 Alisan Fine Arts, Hong Kong

1999 Le Printemps du Livre, Cassis, France

1999 Galerie La Tour des Cardinaux, Isle-sur-la-sorgue, France

1999 Boulevard de Potes, Bordeaux, France

1999 Scène nationale de Bayonne, Bayonne, France

2000 Asiart Center, Taipei, Taiwan

2000 Espace d'art contemporain le cercle bleu, Metz, France

2000 Morat-Institut für Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft, Frieburg im Breisgau, Germany

2001 Palais des Papes, Avignon, France

2001 Alisan Fine Arts, Kaleidoscope, Hong Kong

2002 Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain

2003 Musée de Mons, Belgium

2003 Haggerty Museum of Art, Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI., USA

Group Exhibitions

1989 Grand Palais, Figuration Critique, Paris, France

1990 Grand Palais, Figuration Critique, Paris, France

1991 Grand Palais, Figuration Critique, Paris, France

1991 Trejiakov Galerie, Figuration Critique, Moscow, Russia

1991 Galerie de l'association des Artistes, Figuration Critique, St. Petersburg, Russia

1989 The Michael Goedhuis Gallery, London, England

1998 XIX bienniale Internationale des Antiquaires, Carrousel du Louvre, Paris, France

2000 Art Paris, Carrousel du Louvre, Paris, France

2001 Goedhuis Contemporary of London, Sotheby's, New York

Work in Public Collections

Morat-Institut für Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft, Frieburg im Breisgau, Germany

Leibnizgesellschaft für kulturellen Austausch, Berlin, Germany

Östasiatiska Museet, Stockholm, Sweden

Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden

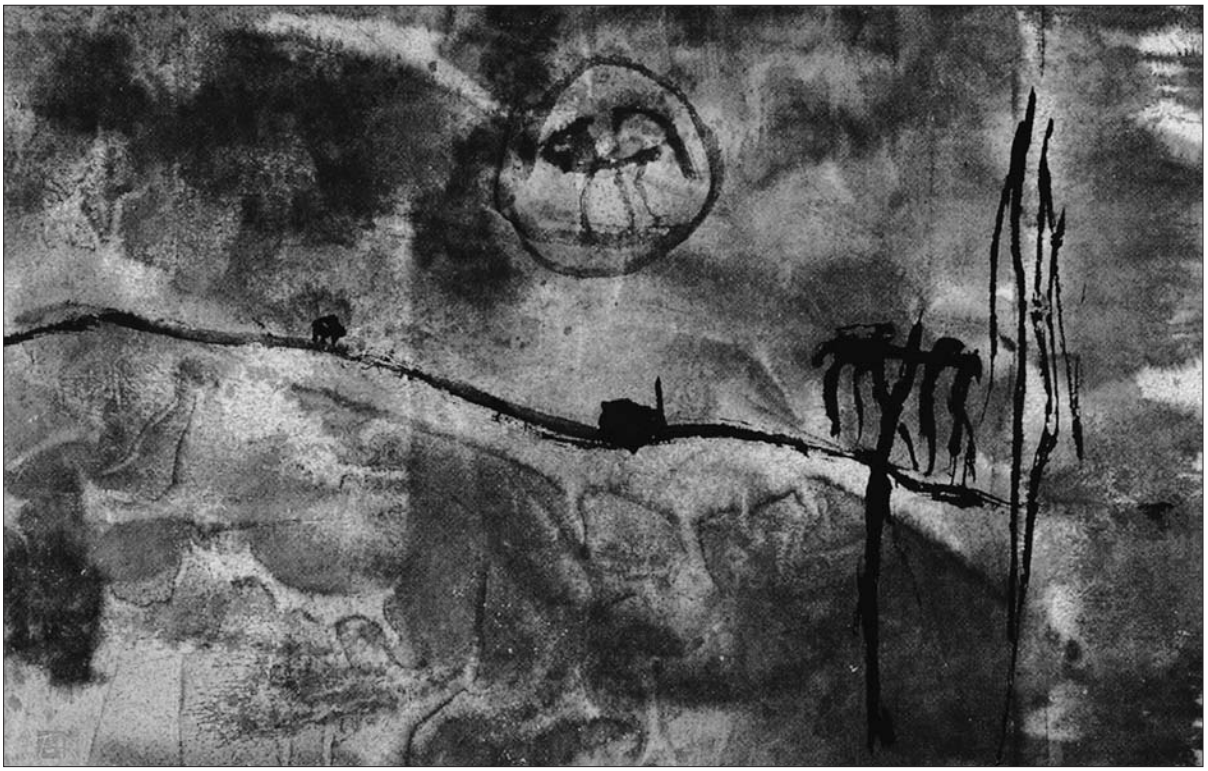
Krapperrus Konsthall, Malmö, Sweden

Maison de la Culture de Bourges, France

Artothèque de Nantes, Nantes, France

Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei, Taiwan

Théâtre Molière, Paris, France



Légende préhistorique (Prehistoric Legend), 1986
Ink on paper
66 x 100.9 cm (26 x 39 3/4 in.)
Collection of the Morat—Institut für Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft, Freiburg im Breisgau

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Chang Chen-Yu. *Ink Paintings by Gao Xingjian*. Taipei Fine Arts Museum: Taiwan, 1995.

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Vers l'inconnu (Towards the Unknown), 1993
Ink on paper
124 x 248 cm (48 7/8 x 97 5/8 in.)
Collection of the Morat—Institut für Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft, Freiburg im Breisgau