Modern and Contemporary Chinese Ink Painting: Histories, Borders, and Values | Virtual Symposium

Discussion published by Tiffany Beres on Friday, March 11, 2022
Type: Symposium
Date: April 20, 2022 to April 27, 2022
Subject Fields: Art, Art History & Visual Studies, Chinese History / Studies, East Asian History / Studies, Fine Arts, Humanities

Modern and Contemporary Chinese Ink Painting: Histories, Borders, and Values

An International Virtual Symposium

April 20 & 27, 2022 | 8:00-10:30 PM EST

INK PAINTING is arguably the most vibrant of China’s many national arts. Rather than conceiving of Chinese ink painting merely as a medium, the aim of the symposium is to reconsider its historical, theoretical, cultural, social, and political dimensions. What are the ways in which contemporary Chinese ink painting embodies Chinese culture and society? How have indigenous and foreign traditions impacted Chinese artists? What are the multiple contexts in which these artworks have been created and circulated? The purpose of this symposium is to ultimately help us take stock of the present state of Chinese ink painting, and to re-consider the multiplicities of contexts, histories, boundaries, and values that have combined to shape its current expression. Join us for this two-day online international symposium and scholarly gathering.

This event is free and open to the public. Registration is essential.

For registration please visit: https://mozhaifoundation.org/inkpainting/

Agenda

The two-day symposium takes place online across different time zones. The symposium starts at 8:00pm EST in the US and ‘simultaneously’ at 8:00am in Taiwan and China the next day. If you are joining the symposium from another timezone please take account of the relevant time difference.

Wednesday April 20, 2022 (all times in EST)

8 PM: Welcome and Introduction | Jason Kuo

8:10-30 PM: Landscape and Artistic Revolution: André Claudot (1892-1982) and the Modern
Art Movement in China | Julia Andrews

As art historians rediscover and interpret the modern art of pre-1949 China, seeking to document the experiences of Chinese artists studying abroad has been of particular interest. Somewhat less attention has been focused on the impact of foreign artists who mentored students in the nation’s fledgling modern art institutions. This paper explores the role of the free-thinking French painter André Claudot (1892-1982), who spent four years teaching in China between 1926 and 1930, a period when China’s art world arguably reached the peak of its twentieth century cosmopolitan ambitions. Claudot, a veteran of Montparnasse who painted exuberant canvases in a fauvist manner, left a demonstrable legacy in the work of his oil painting students in Beijing and Hangzhou. The equally interesting artistic exchanges among Claudot and Chinese ink painters, including Lin Fengmian, Qi Baishi, and Li Keran, will serve as the primary theme of this paper.

8:30-50 PM: Forging Ink Modernities: The Rediscovery of Shitao in China and Japan | Yanfei Zhu

Shitao (1642–1707) was widely admired and studied in the guohua (National Painting) and shinnanga (New Southern Painting) movements that began respectively in Republican China and Taishō Japan in the 1910s. The popularity of this seventeenth century artist and his unorthodox paintings was entangled with a proliferation of contemporary counterfeits of his work and the changing power dynamics in Sino-Japanese relations. This paper analyzes and compares how artists and critics in the two countries appropriated and (mis)interpreted Shitao and his art in the 1920s and 30s as they navigated the issues of national identity, cultural aesthetics, avant-garde styles, etc.

8:50-9:10 PM: Qi Baishi and Noguchi: Six Months in Beijing | Britta Erickson

In 1930, the paths of two of the twentieth century’s greatest artists briefly intersected, subtly influencing the direction of the younger one’s oeuvre. Qi Baishi (1864–1957), one of China’s most famous painters of the past century, took the great Japanese-American sculptor Isamu Noguchi (1904–1988) as his ink-painting student for six months. Just as sculpting in stone is a creative method that permits no turning back, so, too, is ink painting. A mark once made cannot be withdrawn. Noguchi embraced this corollary of ink painting, confidently capturing forms in space through brush gesture. The understanding of the relationship between forms and space is a crucial element in ink painting, where the paper that is left blank plays an active role in the composition. This relationship is also at the core of much of Noguchi’s later sculpture.

9:10-20 PM: Break

9:20-40 PM: The Only Way to Paint Real Pictures: Contemporary Chinese Painting in 1940s New York City | Joseph Scheier-Dolberg

Between 1943 and 1948, The Metropolitan Museum of Art organized three exhibitions of contemporary Chinese painting. Though little remembered today, these were among the first attempts in the twentieth-century United States to grapple with contemporary art from China, a fact that alone makes them worthy of examination. Adding to their interest is the historical backdrop, World War II and its immediate aftermath, which saw a continuing struggle to define modern China
through art, ideology, and politics. A roster of key figures in these exhibitions—Wellington Koo, Hu Shih, Lin Yutang—reveals that the stakes of such exhibitions were apparent to the highest echelons of Chinese society and its diaspora. Through an exploration of the art historical and political dimensions of these three exhibitions, this essay aims to add an important lost episode from the history of contemporary Chinese art in the United States.

9:40-10:00 PM: Two Female Ink Modernizers in Colonial Hong Kong: Fang Zhaoling and Irene Chou | Aida Yuen Wong

This paper examines the trajectories of two women artists who blazed their own paths in colonial Hong Kong: Fang Zhaoling (1914-2006) and Irene Chou (1924-2011). Both emerged from the shadow of male mentors, Chang Da-chien (1899-1983) and Lui Shou-kwan (1919-1975) respectively, and developed individualistic compositions in ink and color. Fang experimented with dramatic perspectives and created deliberately naïve figures that embody “zhuo,” or clumsiness, an aesthetic that is not traditionally associated with the feminine ideal in classical China. Her striking representations of the plight of the Vietnamese boat people speak to her empathy for displaced people, a subject rarely treated in ink painting. Chou turns more toward her inner world, developing biomorphic abstractions that have immense visual power. Similarly for her paintings of women, Chou’s most striking compositions often incorporate an intense blackness that captures melancholy and anxiety. Under-examined outside of Hong Kong, these two artists exemplify the immense freedom in ink painting during the late twentieth century, and invite discussions on the role of Hong Kong in this development.

10:00-10:30: Discussion and Q & A

Wednesday April 27, 2022 (all times in EST)

8 PM: Welcome and Introduction | Jason Kuo

8:10-30 PM: Louis Chan and His Hong Kong Kaleidoscope | Kuiyi Shen

This paper will examine Luis Chan (Chen Fushan; 1905 – 1995), a Hong Kong artist renowned for his unique artistic vision. It was he who had the most profound contemporary consciousness among Hong Kong artists at the time. Over the course of his career he worked in various different realms of painting and also devoted himself to writing art criticism, translations, introductions to contemporary art, as well as to promoting the development of Hong Kong art. He had great achievements in oil painting, watercolor, collage, and acrylic, especially in his later years, when he used ink and color to express his fantasy world. Crossing the boundaries of medium, he brought forth images characterized by their absurdity and humor to reflect on the remarkably diverse phenomena one might associate with Hong Kong in the second half of the twentieth century, and thus created his unique personal painting vocabulary and style.

8:30-50 PM: Huang Yao (1917-1987): A Sinophone Ink Painter in Malaysia | Nan Zhong

Active as a cartoon artist (manhua) in Shanghai in the 1930s, Huang Yao settled in Malaysia in the 1950s when he took up ink painting and calligraphy, and remained active in the artistic and cultural circles until his death in 1987. His extensive works in ink were rediscovered only after his death. This
paper will examine the stylistic innovation of his works in the contexts of the cultural politics of the Chinese diaspora in the 1950s-1980s.

8:50-9:10 PM: Crossing the Pacific Twice: Zen in 1950s-60s Taiwan Abstract Painting | Kuo-Sheng Lai

Zen was an important element often encompassed in the art of abstract expressionism in 1940s-50s New York. When the art came into vogue in the world, a group of artists in Taiwan also explored this then avant-garde art of abstraction in the 1950s-60s. They were well aware of the expression of Zen in the works of their American counterparts, and did not hesitate to feature in their works this trait that originated in the East. Despite the fact that the art was from New York, it inspired Taiwan’s abstract painters, and thus Zen in the works of artists in Taiwan had multi-layered meanings. This paper explores the complex history of the spread of Zen and Zen art from Asia to America, and how artists in Taiwan adopted this art of both the East and the West.

9:10-20 PM: Break

9:20-40 PM: Communicating the Spirit of Ink: on the Curation and Reception of Ink Dreams: Selections from the Fondation INK Collection | Susanna Ferrell

Beyond the finite components of ink on paper or silk, there is a spirit of ink that transcends time and media. Beginning with intuitive aesthetic connections, the Fondation INK Collection expands the genre of “ink art” from works of or about ink to include contemporary photography, oil, acrylic, installation, and sculpture that are aesthetically or conceptually linked to the ink art lineage. This paper discusses a broadened, abstracted re-conceptualization of the genre of “ink art,” extending from East Asia to the global contemporary art world, presented in the exhibition Ink Dreams at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA, 2021), and the necessary considerations in communicating this concept to the general museum-going public.

9:40-10:00 PM: Disappearing Ink: Transmediality and the Imaginaries of Ink Painting | Richard Vinograd

A “material turn” in art practice and discourse has gained prominence in contemporary Chinese ink painting, with a foregrounding of the substance, properties, and processes of ink in ways sometimes signaled by a terminological and conceptual shift to ink art. A countervailing tendency, no less prominent, involves a proliferation of media modalities and substitutions aimed at achieving ink painting effects and appearances, including photographic and digital images, light and shadow projections, oil painting, and AI-controlled image production, among other forms. Beyond the considerable intrinsic interest of such diverse transmedial operations, these practices provoke interrogations of a fundamental nature, since many do not involve ink, or painting, and may be only partially or problematically Chinese. This paper will briefly explore the imaginaries of ink painting that undergird and guide such practices that may illuminate not only the present situation of the genre but also its historical natures.

10:00-10:30: Discussion and Q & A
Contact Email: tberes@mozhaifoundation.org
URL: https://mozhaifoundation.org/inkpainting/