PRECIOUS LIGHT

Contemporary Ink Painting by Wu Lan-Chiann

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Precious Light: Contemporary Ink painting by Wu Lan-Chiann is published on the occasion of the exhibition "Reflections: Contemporary Ink Paintings by Wu Lan-Chiann", presented at the Museum of East Asian Art, Bath, UK, from November 28, 2015, through May 15, 2016.

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This publicaton includes studies for Wu Lan-Chiann's project *Cycle of Life*, which is inspired by John Keats's "The Humans Seasons." *Cycle of Life* is a fiscally sponsored project of the New York Foundation for the Arts, and explores the rhythm of nature as an allegory for the human cycle of life.

Front cover: Reflections of the Past (1999).
Back cover: Wu Lan-Chiann at work in her studio. Seal: Playing with Ink.

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Foreword

In the World Heritage city of Bath, near the famous landmark the Circus, the Museum of East Asian Art opened its door to the public in 1993. Situated in a restored Georgian house, the museum houses a fine collection of ceramics, jades, bronzes, and much more from China, Japan, Korea, and several other regions. With nearly 2,000 sets of objects ranging from the Neolithic period to the twentieth century, the museum has the largest collection of East Asian art outside London and is the only museum in the UK solely dedicated to the art and culture of East Asia. Making the museum's collection accessible to as wide an audience as possible has always been an important goal of the museum. Exhibitions of contemporary Asian art can often help visitors appreciate that unfamiliar cultures and ancient traditions are, in fact, approachable and that they are very much relevant in today's world. The museum is therefore very pleased to host "Reflections: Contemporary Ink Paintings by Wu Lan-Chiann."

Wu studied painting with Lingnan School master Ou Haonian at the Chinese Culture University in Taipei and with American painter Arnold Mesches at New York University. While her paintings are distinctly contemporary in execution, she blends traditional Chinese and Western modes of representation into an authentic style. Therefore, museum visitors with different cultural backgrounds will be able to easily appreciate her art. In addition, although Wu uses tools and techniques that are closely associated with Asian painting, such as brushes, ink, and paper, she strives to present in her work values and qualities understood universally by all human beings, such as love, faith, and strength. We hope that that the exhibition and the beautiful artworks will inspire our visitors and bring them closer to the rich world of Chinese art.

The exhibition could not have been realized without the help of many people. I would especially like to thank our Board of Directors and the Museum of East Asian Art's staff. The museum would like to acknowledge the generous support from the Hakka Foundation, the Taiwanese American Arts Council, and the New York Foundation for the Arts. June and Simon K.C. Li, Michael and Amy Lin, Yvonne and Albert Chang, as well as Wu Kuang-Hsin and Tsao Zuway-Yun, have been keen supporters of the artist and sponsored her travel to the UK. The loans from Frank Barra and Marvin Hayes, Harry Brownlee and Marvin Koenig, and one anonymous lender have added precious works to the exhibition. The museum would like to thank John Tain, Assistant Curator at the Getty Research Institute, for authoring the main essay, and Ann Lucke for editing this publication. Finally, it has been a pleasure working with Wu Lan-Chiann, who not only contributed greatly to the planning of the exhibition, but also created a few new works specifically for the display.

Nicole T.C. Chiang
Curator, Museum of East Asian Art

Figure 1. *Snowflakes Quietly Descending* 1999
Ink and colors on paper
52 ½ x 37 in. (133 x 94 cm.)

Color, Space, Light: The Ink Painting of Wu Lan-Chiann

John Tain

Although Wu Lan-Chiann has neither lived nor worked in the United Kingdom, it is somehow appropriate that her first one-person exhibition should be taking place at the Museum of East Asian Art in Bath. After all, Wu's career spans the world, from Asia to the United States to Europe, and it is a testament to the international appeal of her work that it should find an audience halfway around the world.

Born in Taiwan, Wu grew up with an interest in Western painting and the desire to become an artist. With her family's encouragement, she attended the Chinese Culture University, located in Taipei in Yangmingshan, a national park that Wu would paint in 1995. There she studied with the well-known artists He Huaishuo (Ho Huai-Shuo) and Ou Haonian (Au Ho-nien). Ou himself had trained in Hong Kong under Zhao Shaoang, a well-known second-generation representative of the Lingnan School of Painting. Established in the first decades of the twentieth century in Guangdong by the brothers Gao Jianfu and Gao Qifeng, with the artist Chen Shuren, the Lingnan School had sought to bridge the divide separating Chinese painting (*guohua*, or national painting) and Western painting (*xihua*) that had beset artists in China since the late Qing dynasty.[1] They proposed to modernize Chinese ink painting by introducing elements from other pictorial traditions. Though the Lingnan School did not find a wide reception in China outside Guangdong, it did spread to Hong Kong, where it remains popular, and to Taiwan, via artists, such as Ou.

The lessons that Wu learned while apprenticing under Ou can be seen in *Old Street in Sanxia* from 1993 (plate 8). The painting makes use of a variety of classic Chinese ink techniques, balancing passages of wet and dry brushstrokes. At the same time, the urban street scene immediately establishes its modernity through the presence of cars and motorcycles, as well as the electric pole at the center of the picture, though the arches visible at the left reveal that this is not simply any old street in the Sanxia District, but Minquan Old Road in Taipei, whose brick architecture dates to the early twentieth century. The picture demonstrates how deftly Wu picked up the approach of adapting the tradition of Chinese ink painting to the task of depicting contemporary subjects, even as it also provides an early instance of her own personal predilection for the picturesque. After college, Wu followed her initial impulse to study art abroad, pursuing a graduate degree in art at New York University, where she worked with Arnold Mesches, a socially engaged figurative painter. Just as important as her formal education was firsthand exposure to the art and culture from around the world, both in New York and in Europe, where she traveled during this time. The blend of cultures suited Wu's own inclinations and informs the work from this period, such as *Snowflakes Quietly Descending* (1999;

figure 1), *Contemplative Moment* (1998; figure 2), and *Lantern Festival I* (1999; figure 3). In these paintings, Wu continued to employ the basic materials of Chinese ink painting—inks, pigments, and absorbent paper—but also to depict Western subject matter drawn from the realities of Wu's own lived experience at the time. For instance, as the suitably poetic title suggests, *Snowflakes Quietly Descending* represents a white and wintry day, not an unusual topic for Chinese painting. However, the snow happens to be falling, not on a distant mountain in Asia, but on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan. Wu was familiar with the area from her work as an instructor at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the picture perfectly captures the thoroughfare's characteristic high-rise apartments and the wall bordering Central Park. As much as the setting, the central vanishing point also gives the painting a decidedly Western air, an impression countered perhaps only by the artist's signature in Chinese accompanied by the stamp of the artist's chop.

Figure 2. *Contemplative Moment* 1998
Ink and colors on paper
21 3/4 x 32 3/4 in. (55 x 83 cm.)

Even a seemingly more traditional work such as *Lantern Festival I* is not quite what it appears. As its title indicates, the painting presents the characteristically red lanterns used in Chinese festivities lining the length of a street surrounded by sloped tile-roofed buildings, which suggest some historic village in Asia. A closer look at the architecture, particularly at the chimneys and construction, however, reveals that they are not Chinese at all. The setting is, in fact, Florence, which Wu visited during her travels through Europe, and the picture presents her vision of how the Chinese lanterns she remembered from childhood would appear in the Italian townscape. She adopts a similar approach of geographic indeterminacy in *Contemplative Moment*.

But what distinguishes Wu's work is not simply the introduction of modern or Western subject matter to ink painting. She also adapts the tools of Chinese painting for her own expressive aims. This can be seen, for instance, in her use of color. In Wu's pictures, there is quite frequently little ground that remains blank. She consistently applies colored washes to the surface of the painting, and when there is white, it is sometimes opaque paint that has been added, such as the falling snow and frosted branches in the New York snowscene (figure 4). The application of ink and color to the entire surface of the painting suggests that the entirety of the picture plane should be considered equally filled with visual incident. In other words, whereas one of the most prominent hallmarks of Chinese painting is the presence of large untouched areas, so that ink strokes stand out against the white of the paper or silk all the more and the painting thus can be understood also as a series of material traces on a background, Wu

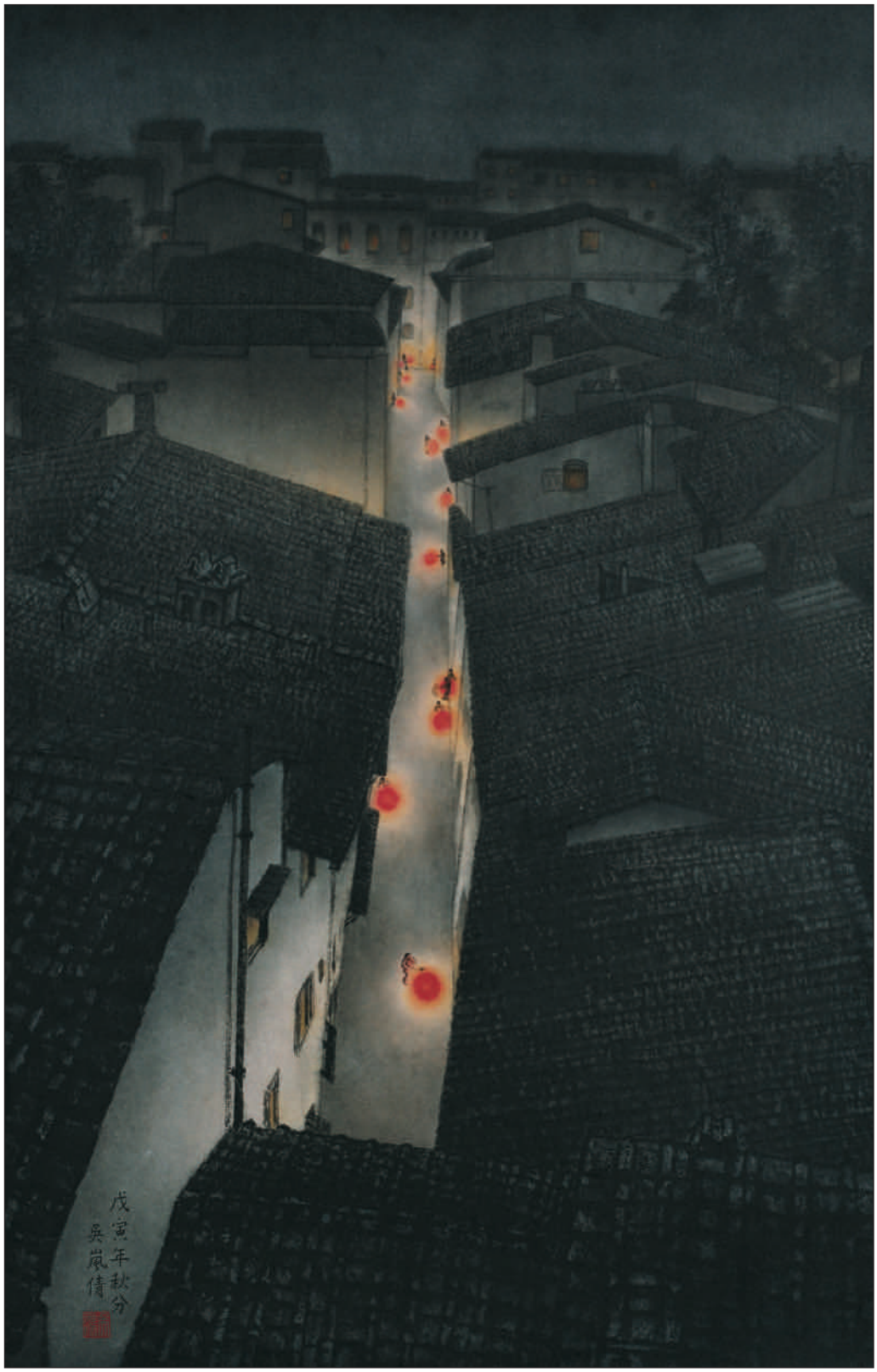

Figure 3. *Lantern Festival I* 1999
Ink and colors on paper
37 1/4 x 24 in. (94.5 x 61 cm.)

Figure 4. Detail of *Snowflakes* Quietly Descending (figure 1)

treats the rectangle of the painting instead as a window through which the viewer has access to a space that is homogeneous in its extent and continuity, a feature generally not found in ink painting.

Not only is space in Wu's pictures mappable and coterminous with the viewer's own, but it also recedes with distance. The implied depth that Wu produces through the allover coloration of the paint surface is complemented by her use of perspective as a compositional device. Sometimes perspective in Wu's work is fairly evident, as with the vanishing point of *Snowflakes Quietly Descending*. Other times, it is subtler, as in the aerial view and the high horizon line of *Lantern Festival I*. But it is almost always present. Despite its ubiquity in her work, the use of perspective is arguably an effect, a consequence, of Wu's more general envisioning of pictorial space as uniform and continuous, in contrast to the occasionally discontinuous and varied sense of volume that can generally be found in ink landscapes.

Figure 5. *The Good Earth* 2004
Ink and colors on paper
13 3/4 x 16 3/4 in. (35 x 43 cm.)

The use of light also distinguishes Wu's work from traditional ink painting. At times, light, employed as accents of color, allows Wu to emphasize the two-dimensional design of a painting, as when the red stoplights in *Snowflakes Quietly Descending*, together with the pedestrians' colorful parkas, balance the deep recession created by the converging parallel lines and the alley of trees. However, light can also accentuate space in Wu's work. In *Precious Light* (2012; plate 24), for instance, the distance carved out by the curved walkway along the painting's right side is filled by the reflection of several light sources: the floating lantern about to be released by the kneeling figure, the two lights from the nearby buildings, and the moon. The play of light on the surface of the water has a flattening effect. But these directional sources of illumination also give spatial coordinates to the picture. The accentuation of space through careful illumination can be seen in *A Walk to Paradise Garden* (2011; figure 7), where the single source of light coming from the distance, with its resulting dramatic silhouettes, gives the picture its sense of depth, both emotional and physical.

Figure 6. *Li Bai's Moon* 2009
Ink and colors on paper
22 x 17 1/4 in. (56 x 44 cm.)

This distinctive use of color, perspective, and light explains why even when Wu works with ostensibly Chinese subject matter, the results nevertheless feel more uniquely hers. This is the case with *House of Souls* (2000; plate 20), in which the twilight greenery highlights the red glow emanating from the building, and with the similarly dusky *The Good Earth* (2004; figure 5), where the Asianness of Pearl Buck's story is matched by a pictorial treatment that is distinctly Western in feel. And *Li Bai's Moon* (2009; figure 6) explicitly invokes the Tang-Dynasty poet's "Night Thought," a canonical text memorized by every Chinese schoolchild. Yet the chiaroscuro modeling of the tree's many branches by the rays of the moon takes us far from China. Given the poem's evocation of longing for one's homeland, the aesthetic distance seems ironically appropriate.

Figure 7. *A Walk to Paradise Garden* 2011
Ink and colors on paper
27 ½ x 34 ½ in. (70 x 88 cm.)

Through the use of color, perspective, and light, then, Wu gives space to her own individual vision, even as she continues to work in the ink medium. To be sure, Wu is not the first to seek to introduce changes to the long tradition of ink art, and there is now a long lineage of twentieth-century artists who have expanded its borders. The founders of the Lingnan School, in their attempt to formulate a New National painting, combined what they felt was the best of both Chinese and non-Chinese aesthetics, including perspective, the use of colored backgrounds, and modeling.[2] Nor were they alone. Other Chinese painters, including Zhang Daqian (Chang Da Chien), Li Keran, and Wu Guanzhong, all worked through the question of tradition and innovation. Certainly, Ou Haonian, Wu's own mentor, continued in this legacy of balancing past and present.

Just as Wu's path as an artist is continuous with the aesthetic evolution of the ink-painting tradition over the twentieth century, so her trajectory as an artist from Taiwan who has lived and worked in California since 2004 should also be understood within the context of larger social and demographic shifts in the Chinese artistic community. That is to say, the course of Chinese history has been altered by massive migrations and movements caused by various factors, and these shifts have inevitably also left their mark on ink

painting as well. The peregrinations of the Lingnan School founders, first studying abroad in Japan before moving around within China, and then from Guangdong to Hong Kong, is one example of this.[3] And the latter half of the twentieth century provides many others, including Zhang Daqian, who left China in 1949 and spent much of the next few decades living in South America and California before finally settling in Taiwan, and Zeng Youhe (Tseng Yu-ho), an artist who established her international career after having moved from Beijing to Hawaii in 1949.[4] Meanwhile, some of the earliest scholarship on modern ink painting was done by Li Chu-Tsing, the Shanxi-born art historian, during his term as professor of Chinese art at the University of Kansas from the 1960s into the 1980s.[5]

In the last couple of decades, the number of artists of Chinese ancestry living and working abroad has grown to the point where it is now no longer necessary to be in China in order to contribute to the dialogue on Chinese art. Earlier generations of artists may also have gone overseas for periods of work and study, but many ultimately returned to China for personal and professional reasons. Wu, by contrast, is part of the community of artists who identify as Chinese but who live and work outside China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Indeed, many well-known Chinese contemporary artists today actually have spent or do spend significant portions of their lives elsewhere, whether in the United States (as is the case with Xu Bing, Ai Weiwei, or Gu Wenda), Europe (Huang Yongping and Yan Peiming), or elsewhere.[6] The trend is equally true for ink artists, with painters such as Liu Dan and Li Huayi—artists of an earlier generation whom Wu nevertheless considers to be peers, and who have trained and lived in the United States—and the American-born and educated Arnold Chang (Zhang Hong). Through their differing experiences and cultural encounters, these painters enlarge the frontiers of ink art and Chinese art. Like others in this community, Wu, too, is expanding our understanding of what it means to be an ink artist, to be a Chinese artist, to be an artist.

Notes

[1] See Laurence C. S. Tam, "Lingnan School Painting," in *Twentieth-Century Chinese Painting*, ed. Mayching Kao (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 110–29; and Ralph Crozier, *Art and Revolution in Modern China: The Lingnan (Cantonese) School of Painting, 1906–1951* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); and Liu Fangru and Xu Wenmei, eds., *Origins and Development of the Lingnan School of Painting* (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 2013).

[2] See the discussion of the initial reception of the Lingnan School in Lang Shaojun, "Traditional Chinese Painting in the Twentieth Century," in *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Painting*, Richard Barnhart et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 299–354.

[3] Maxwell K Hearn and Judith G. Smith, eds., *Chinese Art: Modern Expressions* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001), p. 13.

[4] See Zeng Youhe, "Chinese Painting Overseas: A Personal Account of Chinese Painters outside Chinese Society," in Kao, ed., *Twentieth-Century Chinese Painting*, pp. 224–43.

[5] See the forewords by Marilyn Stokstad and Joseph Chang in *Tradition and Transformation: Studies in Chinese Art in Honor of Chu-Tsing Li*, ed. Judith G. Smith (Spenser Museum of Art, University of Kansas, 2005).

[6] There is a growing body of literature on this. See, for instance, Hou Hanru and Gao Minglu, "Strategies of Survival in the Third Space: A Conversation on the Situation of Overseas Chinese Artists in the 1990s," in *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*, ed. Gao Minglu (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; New York: Asia Society, 1998), pp. 183–89; and Melissa Chiu, *Breakout: Chinese Art outside China* (Milan: Charta, 2007).

Figure 8. Detail of *A Walk to Paradise Garden* (figure 7)

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Figure 9. *Winter Breeze* 2008
Ink and colors on paper
23 1/4 x 16 in. (59 x 41 cm.)

Sources Of Inspiration

Wu Lan-Chiann

What motivates me to paint is my passion for creating art and for sharing how I see the world around me. Through my work I connect to people in a very personal way, which is tremendously gratifying to me. While my art originates in ancient Chinese traditions and the Lingnan School of painting, I walk my own path as a contemporary ink painter.[1]

When I was about five years old, I knew that I wanted to become an artist. I remember my mother telling me: "When you were very young, you would find any surface to draw on; tables, chairs, walls and floors." From as early as I can remember, I viewed the world as if I were looking through a rectangle; I was quite unique in the way that I observed my daily surroundings. In my younger years, I painted with watercolor and with ink. I was mostly concerned with getting the right composition, proper dimensions, technique, washes of color, and so forth, typical of any child. As I grew older, I started wondering about the meaning of life, and my art matured. Why are we here, what is our purpose, and what is our destiny? These are questions we all ask at some point in our lives, and they have become recurring themes in my painting.

Art is a universal language, often unspoken, but understood by people across time and place. Making painting is my calling, and creating work that focuses on the significance of universal humanistic values is my mission. I hope my work provides people with a moment of quiet contemplation on the beautiful and meaningful moments of life. In my painting *Winter Breeze* (2008; figure 9), for example, I painted the very moment when a cold gust of wind stirred a blooming plum blossom branch and carried away a few petals. With this work I wanted to capture a simple, but priceless moment in time. How many of us have paused just to look at the beauty of petals flowing away from a branch? By painting this particular moment, I express that each stage in life has its own strength and beauty, and while each stage has to end, it also heralds a new beginning.

In looking at ink painting throughout Chinese history, I feel moved by the spiritual and personal connection painters had to their subjects. The Six Dynasties landscape painter and philosopher Zong Bing (375–443) said: "I am here surrounded by creation, my eyes see the things that surround me, that's why I paint the shapes captured in my heart, that's why I paint the colors I feel in my heart."[2]

For me, the essence of Chinese ink painting remains exactly as the ancient masters described it: not an imitation of nature but rather nature represented through the soul

of the artist. The intellectual painters of China made a conscientious effort to represent nature according to their own values and aesthetic principles. They had a meaningful relationship with the subject matter and expressed their response through painting and occasionally through poetry. I see it as if they were painting "mindscapes" instead of landscapes. In *Memory of My Roots* (1994; figure 10), I painted the village where my grandmother was born. I was always very close to her, and this work is therefore deeply personal. However, I did not paint the actual village, but rather how I felt the connection with this special place.

Figure 10. *Memory of My Roots* 1994
Ink and colors on paper
26 3/4 x 26 1/2 in. (68 x 67.5 cm.)

The quality of brushstrokes is tremendously important in Chinese ink painting. It has to be strong and controlled, yet dynamic, fluid, and delicate. Painting on mulberry paper with watery ink requires absolute mastery of the medium, because mistakes cannot be corrected. Errors are unforgiven; the moment a brush touches paper, ink is absorbed and what has been painted cannot be undone. Consequently, in this medium, free expression can only be achieved through mastery of medium and techniques. Only then you can express yourself freely. More than a thousand years ago, Chinese landscape painter Kuo Hsi (ca. 1020–ca. 1090) commented: "A painter should be master over, and not a slave to, his brush and ink."[3]

Throughout my study in the fine arts, I have worked with different paint media, such as watercolor, oil, and acrylic paints. However, I discovered that I have an umbilical connection with ink painting, because these works often have a deeper meaning that goes beyond the image you see. In a certain way ink painting is very similar to poetry, where the meaning lies beyond the beauty of the words.

A turning point for devoting my creativity to ink painting was caused by studying the work of Song-dynasty painter Cui Bai's (active ca. 1060–85) painting *Magpies and Hare*, in the collection of the National Palace Museum in Taipei. The painting shows a very powerful composition and incredibly masterful brushwork. There is a strong diagonal tension between the upper right and lower left corners of the painting, which is purely captivating. This magical composition gives us the privilege of observing, without intruding on, a territorial dispute that is as ancient as life itself in a seemingly unarranged natural scene. The magpies are scolding a hare that evidently ventured too close to their nest; the hare, bewildered, pauses with one paw raised. You can almost hear the noise that the magpies make to scare away the hare; this is a painting with sound. What I like the most in Cui Bai's painting is his effortless combination of a fine and meticulous painting style with

Figure 11.
Copy After Cui Bai
1994
Ink and colors on silk
76 1/4 x 40 3/4 in.
(193.7 x 103.4 cm.)

fast, expressive strokes in such great harmony. I was completely drawn into this work when I copied it as an undergraduate student (figure 11).

To me, the quality of Chinese brushwork is another aspect that makes ink painting so special. Together with Cui Bai there are several other masters who influenced my work either aesthetically or philosophically. More recent masters whose work I admire include: Zhang Daqian (Chang Da Chien); Li Keran; and Wu Guanzhong.

Zhang Daqian believed that artists needed to learn first from observing masterpieces, then from copying them. He felt that artists should learn from as many masters as they could, and not only learn through hard work, but also with their souls. He encouraged artists to use their wisdom to understand the spirit of the masters, and then to assimilate that knowledge to become independent and make their own creative work. True to his words, between 1941 and 1943, Zhang catalogued the paintings in 309 caves and copied 276 murals in the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang, China. During my undergraduate studies, I copied Zhang's *Resting in the Afternoon* (1951), which I painted in my undergraduate years (plate 1). His painting was clearly influenced by what he learned in Mogao, and my work is based on what I learned from his. The genius of Zhang is his ability to master all subjects and styles, which is quite amazing. Especially, I admire his astounding ability to switch freely between realistic and abstract work.

Li Keran was a prominent figure in the field of twentieth-century Chinese ink painting and a great artist. Li's soulful and poetic artwork speaks a lot to me. His attitude in life of learning from everything, of learning from the other, of learning from nature, as well as his pursuit of merging Eastern and Western art in Chinese ink painting have had a real impact on my development as an artist. One of his comments still resonates with me today, which is especially beautiful: "Delve into tradition with the utmost power and break away from it with the utmost courage."[4]

Wu Guanzhong has also had a great influence on my work. Wu had to overcome many difficulties in his life, and his perseverance encouraged me to continue to believe in making art. In particular, his book *I Give My Life for Art* completely captivated me. I used to read it under my blanket, and I am still truly touched by some of his words: "The key to an artwork is the emotion it conveys. The essence of art is to pass on emotions."[5]

I have had several excellent teachers who helped me advance my technical skills and understanding of the philosophical aspects in life. In particular, my mentor, Ou Haonian (Au Ho-nien), who is one of the greatest living masters of the Lingnan School, has been generous in this regard. Professor Ou is a fantastic painter, and he has been hugely influential in my work. His Lingnan style is clearly visible in my early work, for example, in *Solitude* (1994; figure 12).

While learning Chinese ink painting, I was also attracted to the use of perspective and light, more commonly found in Western painting. Therefore, in some of my earlier work, you can see the influence of both the Lingnan style and that of Western art. An example

Figure 12. *Solitude* 1994
Ink and colors on paper
20 x 28 in. (51 x 71 cm.)

is my painting *Old Street in Sanxia*, which I created while I lived in Taiwan in 1993 (plate 8). In my more recent work, the influence of the Lingnan style is not as strong because I have begun to develop my own personal style.

My first steps in a new direction can be seen in several paintings I made in the late 1990s. For example, my painting *Snowflakes Quietly Descending* (1999; figure 1) was made in New York City, where I then lived. As I began to explore new ways to paint, I also examined what inspires me to make art. My inspiration comes from daily life, but always centers on universal values and themes. In my work, I seek to create a connection between people and places. My creative ideas are often inspired by my immediate environment.

In preparation for painting *Snowflakes Quietly Descending*, I stood in the snow and watched it falling on me day after day. During that time, I was observing the scenery, making sketches, taking notes, and experimenting with new painting techniques (figure 13). Then, I brought my studies back to my studio to complete the composition. The original work is quite large, so when you stand at a certain angle and look at the painting, it is as if you can walk right into the New York street. *Snowflakes Quietly Descending* is a view of Fifth Avenue in Manhattan, looking south from the Guggenheim Museum on 89th Street. In this particular painting, I aimed at capturing a quintessential New York City "landscape" during a light winter storm. The painting expresses my love of the city.

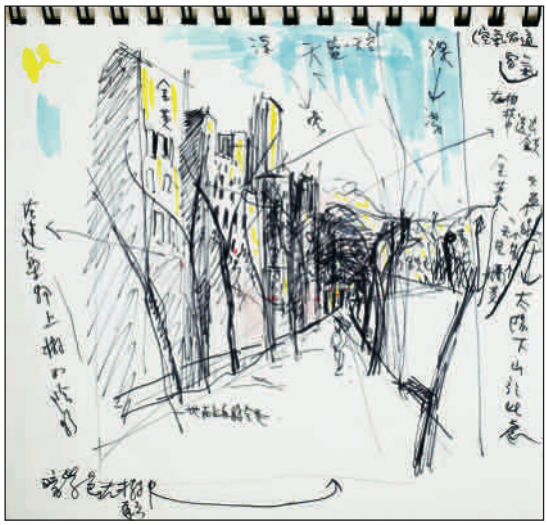

Figure 13. *Study for Snowflakes* 1999
Ink and colors on paper
8 x 7 1/4 in. (20.3 x 18.5 cm)

brought me back to my childhood's favorite festival in Taiwan. At that particular moment, I realized that no matter which city (East or West) you visit, a city's energy is universal, and that is what I wanted to express in *Lantern Festival I*. Both it and *Snowflakes Quietly Descending* demonstrate my interests in perspective and light and illustrate the fact that I make conscious connections between people and places, across cultures.

I mentioned before that I am moved by universal humanistic values and principles that cross every society. My painting is often inspired by the work of others who share similar values, for example, in a poem, a story, or a novel. A good example is a painting I made in 2009, which is based on "Night Thought," a poem by Li Bai (701–762).[6] For this work, I sketched an old tree that I saw every day near my children's school. I combined it with sketches I had made of the moon in colored pencil (figures 15 & 16).

Snowflakes Quietly Descending is now in a private collection on the West Side of Manhattan, and, therefore, I feel that a part of me still resides in that city.

Another example of my developing style is *Lantern Festival I*, which I made after my visit to Florence in 1997 (figure 3). Transformed by the architectural beauty of the city, I made several sketches looking down from one of the windows of the Palazzo Vecchio. To express my special feeling for Florence, I wanted to give this painting a mesmerizing quality by creating a night scene. I tested this effect with charcoal and a basic composition before I completed the work (figure 14). During the creation of this painting, my imagination

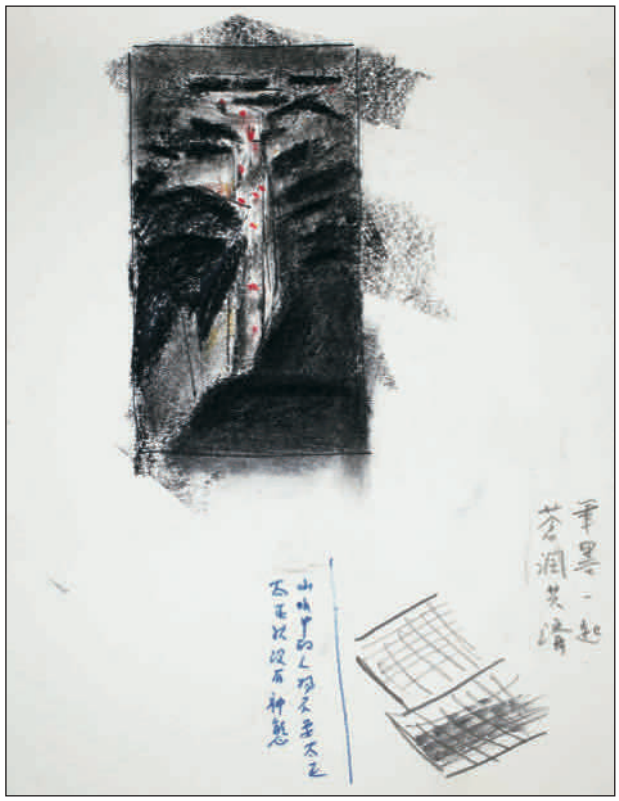

Figure 14. *Study for Lantern Festival I* 1999
Pencil, ink, charcoal and color pencil on paper
7 6/8 x 10 1/8 in. (20 x 25.7 cm.)

"A bright moon shines before my bed,
I wonder . . . is it frost on the ground?
I raise my head and gaze at the moon,
then lower it and think of home."[7]

I named this painting *Li Bai's Moon* (figure 6). As some of the ancient masters said, poetry is a picture without form and a painting is a poem with form. When I read Li Bai's "Night Thought," I wanted to picture his poem, as his words vividly described an image before my eyes. "Night Thought" touches on the umbilical connection that we have with our roots; it is a universal theme. What really fascinated me is that after 1,300 years, its meaning still remains current, as we will always be connected to our roots no matter where or when we live.

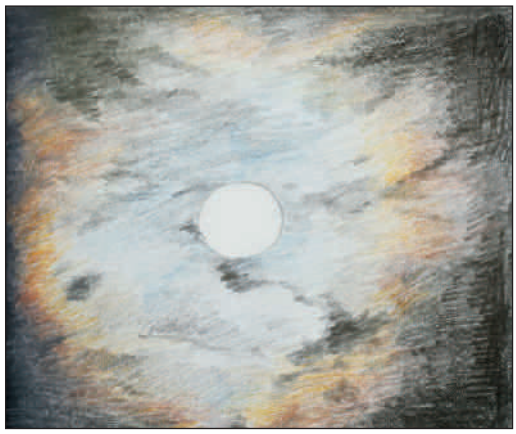

Figure 15. *Moon Study* 2009
Pencil and color pencil on paper
7 1/2 x 6 7/8 in. (19 x 17.5 cm.)

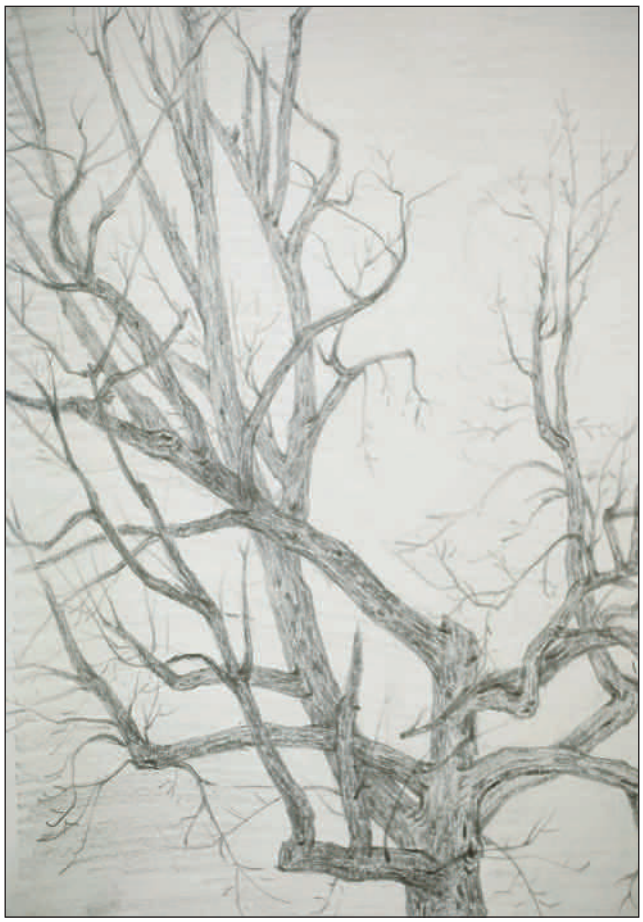

Figure 16. *Tree Study* 2009
Pencil on paper
8 3/8 x 11 in. (21.3 x 27.9 cm.)

Another example of such inspiration came from Pearl S. Buck's seminal novel *The Good Earth*. Published in 1931, the story of struggling farmer Wang Lung is set in China, but it could have been any farm in any country, and toiling workers desperate to make a living is a universal theme. My painting *The Good Earth* (figure 5) is a response to the novel. I created an image with a low perspective and an overall composition that is more typical of Western art. The light inside the farm creates a sense of interior warmth and safety: the hope within. I see the lights in my work as metaphors of human resilience—the hope, love, and strength that we each carry within ourselves. I have always been fascinated by our innate strength to overcome difficulties in life.

More recently, the inspiration for my painting *A Walk to Paradise Garden* (2011; figure 7) came from a 1946 photograph by Eugene Smith, which has a similar title. Eugene Smith was seriously wounded in World War II, and after a slow two-year recovery period and on a day of great personal crisis, he felt the need to photograph something significant. The very first photograph that he took was what mattered most to him: his children.

Pat saw something in the clearing, he grasped Juanita by the hand and they hurried forward. When I followed my children into the undergrowth and the group of tall trees—how they were delighted at every little discovery!—and observed them, I suddenly realized that at this moment, in spite of everything, in spite of all the wars and all I had gone through that day, I wanted to sing a sonnet to life and to the courage to go on living it.[8]
—Eugene Smith

The central light in my painting represents a hope for a bright future, which I think is a universal desire. The children in this painting literally walk into the light toward that bright future; this is the hope that I have for the generations to come (figures 7 and 8).

Figure 17. *Reflections of the Past* 1999
Ink and colors on paper
17 x 36 ½ in. (43 x 93 cm.)

The recurring use of light, or sometimes only glimmers of light, in my work are metaphors for human resilience: the love, hope, and strength that we all harbor. My paintings *Reflections of the Past* (1999; figure 17) and *Precious Light* (2012; plate 24) are good examples. Resilience is a central theme in these paintings. It is the innate strength that we all share, which helps us endure difficult phases in our lives.

Reflections of the Past was inspired by the Japanese summer festival of remembrance, called O-Bon. O-Bon is an annual reminder of the importance of family ties, of respect for those who have gone before us, and of the brevity and preciousness of our lives together. Japanese people welcome home the souls of deceased family members by floating paper lanterns on water. I am keenly aware that everyone carries within his or her soul memories of passed loved ones like precious glowing lights. While the festival of O-Bon is a collective tribute to those who have passed away, the lonely little boy in *Precious Light* expresses my belief that each individual deals with his or her memories in a very personal way, which in this painting is particularly poignant.

Figure 18. *Life Model Study* 1999
Pencil on paper
11 x 14 in. (27.9 x 35.6 cm.)

Figure 19. *Life Model Study* 1999
Pencil on paper
11 x 14 in. (27.9 x 35.6 cm.)

In 2013, I began working on a project that is inspired by the words of British poet John Keats:

> Four seasons fill the measure of the year,
> There are four seasons in the mind of man.[9]

With these words, Keats opened his sonnet "The Human Seasons." His poem is a reflection on the stages of life, and, touched by his words, I have embarked on one of the most ambitious painting projects in my career: the *Cycle of Life* series.

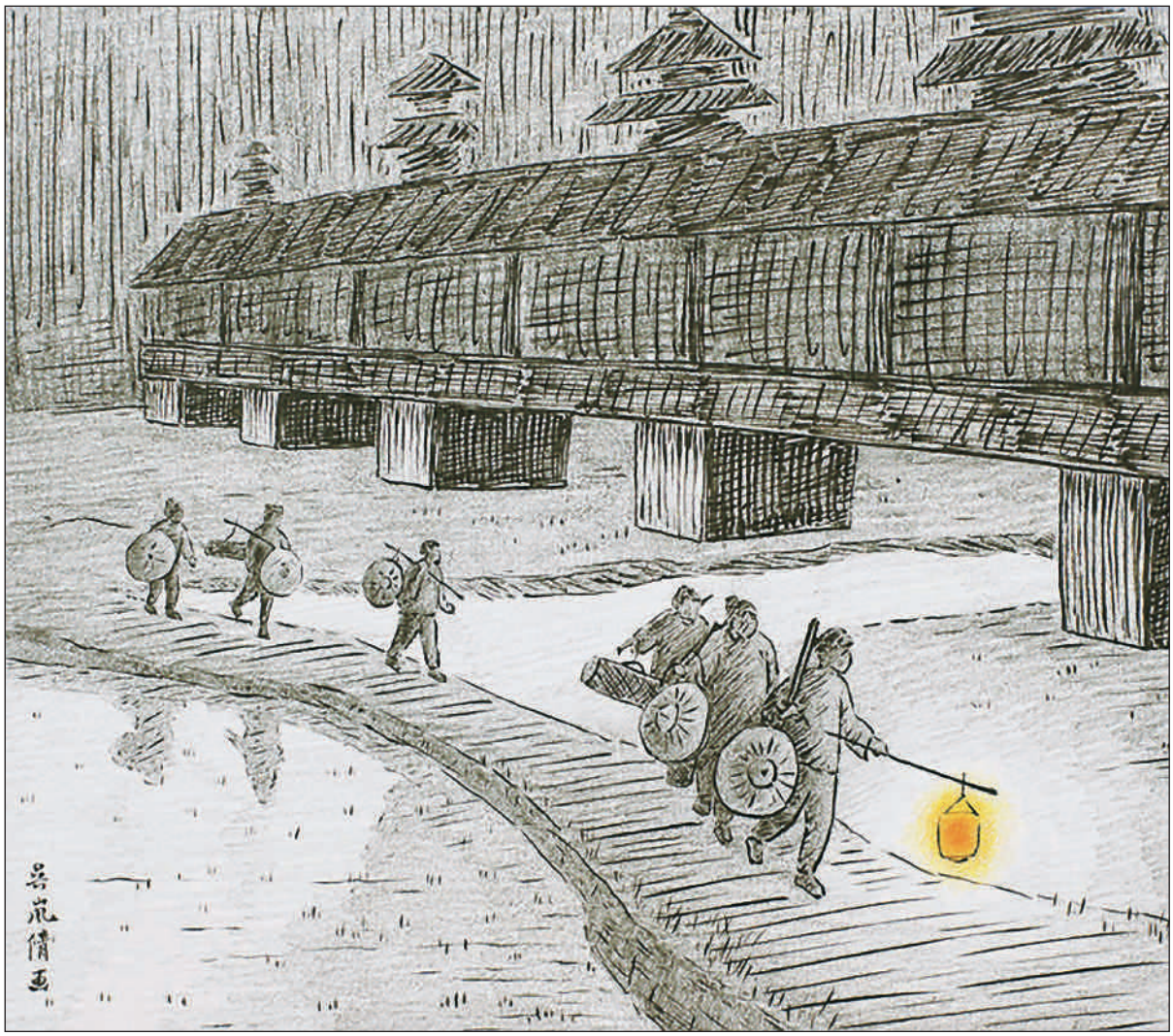

Figure 20. *Leading the Way Home* 2004
Ink, pencil and color pencil on paper
6 3/4 x 7 3/4 in. (17.2 x 19.7 cm.)

In *Cycle of Life*, I am exploring the human seasons to create a visual context for the different stages we pass through in life. I will depict the rhythm of nature as an allegory for the cycle of life. That said, I envision each season in my own very personal way. For example, I imagine spring as human beings coming to this earth with unknown destinies, similar to an early morning that announces a day filled with expectation. To explore this idea, I used my sketch *Leading the Way Home* (2004; figure 20) as a base and developed it into a study for spring. For the painting, I envisioned a foggy landscape at sunrise to represent physical and mental birth. Called *A New Dawn* (2013), it depicts figures, each carrying a lantern, which indicates the direction of our individual lives on earth (plate 23).

Figure 21. Detail of *Before the Storm* (plate 34)

Before the Storm (2015; figure 21 and plate 34) is another one of my studies for *Cycle of Life*. In this painting, each leaf has its own cycle, has its unique shape and color, has its own way of floating through the air, and has a different path of falling to the earth. The leaves represent human beings; each has different upbringing, life experience, and destiny. Eventually, however, we touch the ground, the end of it all, and a new generation is to come. In this painting, I use the shimmering metal flakes to represent human resilience. In addition, I painted some leaves clear and some vague; others are rendered complete and yet others damaged, just as in people's lives. Some have a clear direction, but others are hurt and lost; some lives are peaceful and others are turbulent, all captured in one painting.

Our humanity, our core values and principles, is what binds us together as one people across time and place. That is what matters to me and that is why I paint the way I do.

Notes

[1] For more information about Lingnan painting, see Liu Fang-Ju and Hsu Wen-Mei, *Origins and Developments of the Lingnan School of Painting* (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 2013).
[2] Lin Tong Hua, *Zong Baihua: Complete Works* (Anhui: Anhui Education Press, 2008).
[3] Kuo Hsi, *An Essay on Landscape Painting*, trans. Shio Sakanishi (London: John Murray, 1959), p. 60.
[4] Wan Qingli, *The World of Li Keran*. (Taipei: Xi Zhitang Culture Publishing, Inc., 2000), p. 35.
[5] Radio interview; April 10, 2009. CRIENGLISH.com. Web Editor: Zhang Jin. Accessed, May 5, 2013.
[6] Chinese poet Li Bai lived from 701 to 762.
[7] "Night Thought" translation by Wu Lan-Chiann and Ton Wilmering.
[8] Ben Cosgrove, "Into the Light: W. Eugene Smith's 'Walk to Paradise Garden,' " *Life Magazine*, Culture Section. http://life.time.com/culture/into-the-light-w-eugene-smiths-walk-to-paradise-garden/#1, Accessed, September 16, 2013.
[9] H. Buxton Forman, ed., *The Complete Works of John Keats* (New York: AMS Press, 1970), vol. 2, p. 201.

> Four Seasons fill the measure of the year;
> There are four seasons in the mind of man:
> He has his lusty Spring, when fancy clear
> Takes in all beauty with an easy span:
> He has his Summer, when luxuriously
> Spring's honied cud of youthful thought he loves
> To ruminate, and by such dreaming high
> Is nearest unto heaven: quiet coves
> His soul has in its Autumn, when his wings
> He furleth close; contented so to look
> On mists in idleness —to let fair things
> Pass by unheeded as a threshold brook.
> He has his Winter too of pale misfeature,
> Or else he would forego his mortal nature.

Figure 22. Detail of *Winter Breeze* (figure 9)

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1. *Copy after Zhang Daqian* 1994

Ink and colors on paper
17 7/8 x 28 in. (45.5 x 71 cm.)

Plates

2. *Lily in Vase* 1993

Ink and colors on paper
11 ½ x 23 in. (29 x 58.5 cm.)

3. *Ancient Mountain Road* 1995

Ink and colors on paper
26 3/4 x 26 1/2 in. (68 x 67.5 cm.)

4. *Night Market* 1995

Ink and colors on paper
26 3/4 x 26 1/2 in. (68 x 67.5 cm.)

5. *Hsinchu Train Station* 1995 *(top left)*

Ink on paper
6 3/4 x 6 5/8 in. (17.2 x 16.8 cm.)

6. *Hualien Street* 1995 *(left)*

Ink on paper
6 1/4 x 8 in. (15.6 x 20.3 cm.)

7. *View of Chiung-Ling Farm* 2004

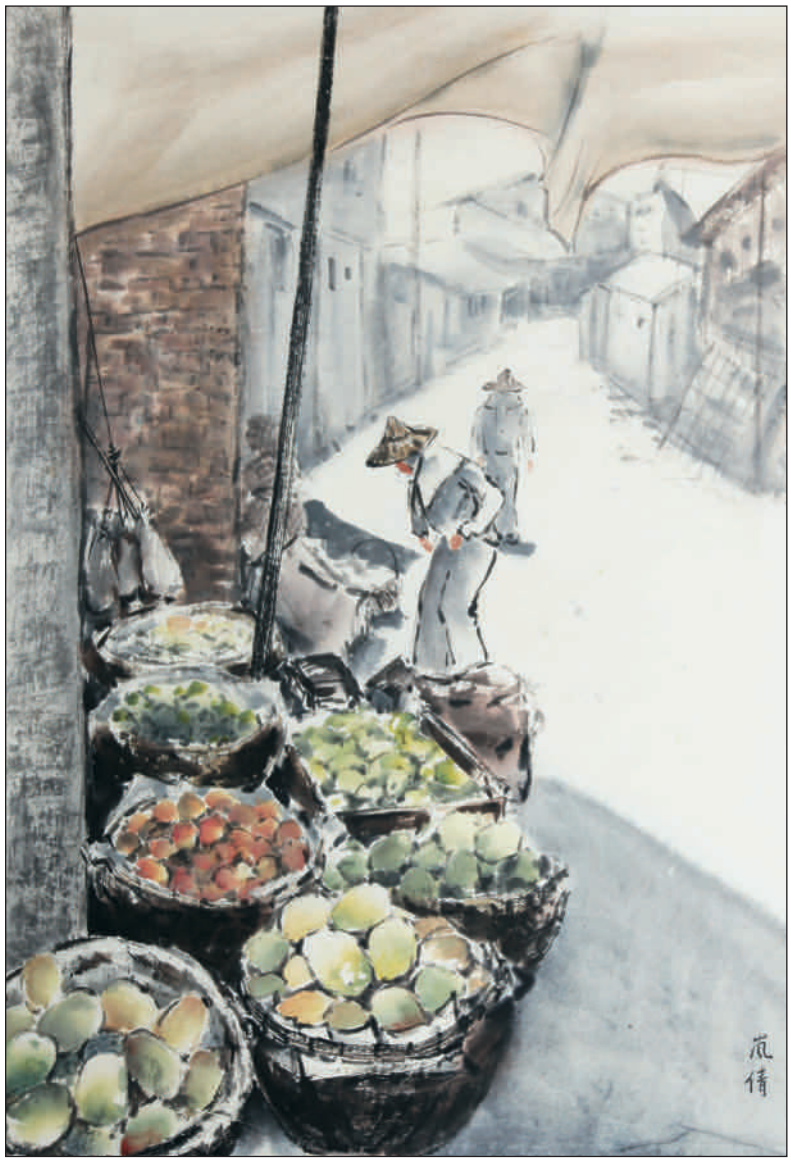
Ink, pencil and color pencil on paper
6 3/4 x 8 3/4 in. (17.2 x 22.2 cm.)

8. *Old Street in Sanxia* 1993 *(facing)*

Ink and colors on paper
25 3/4 x 19 in. (65.5 x 48 cm.)

9. *Water Village* 1993

Ink and colors on paper
15 3/4 x 21 in. (40 x 53.3 cm.)

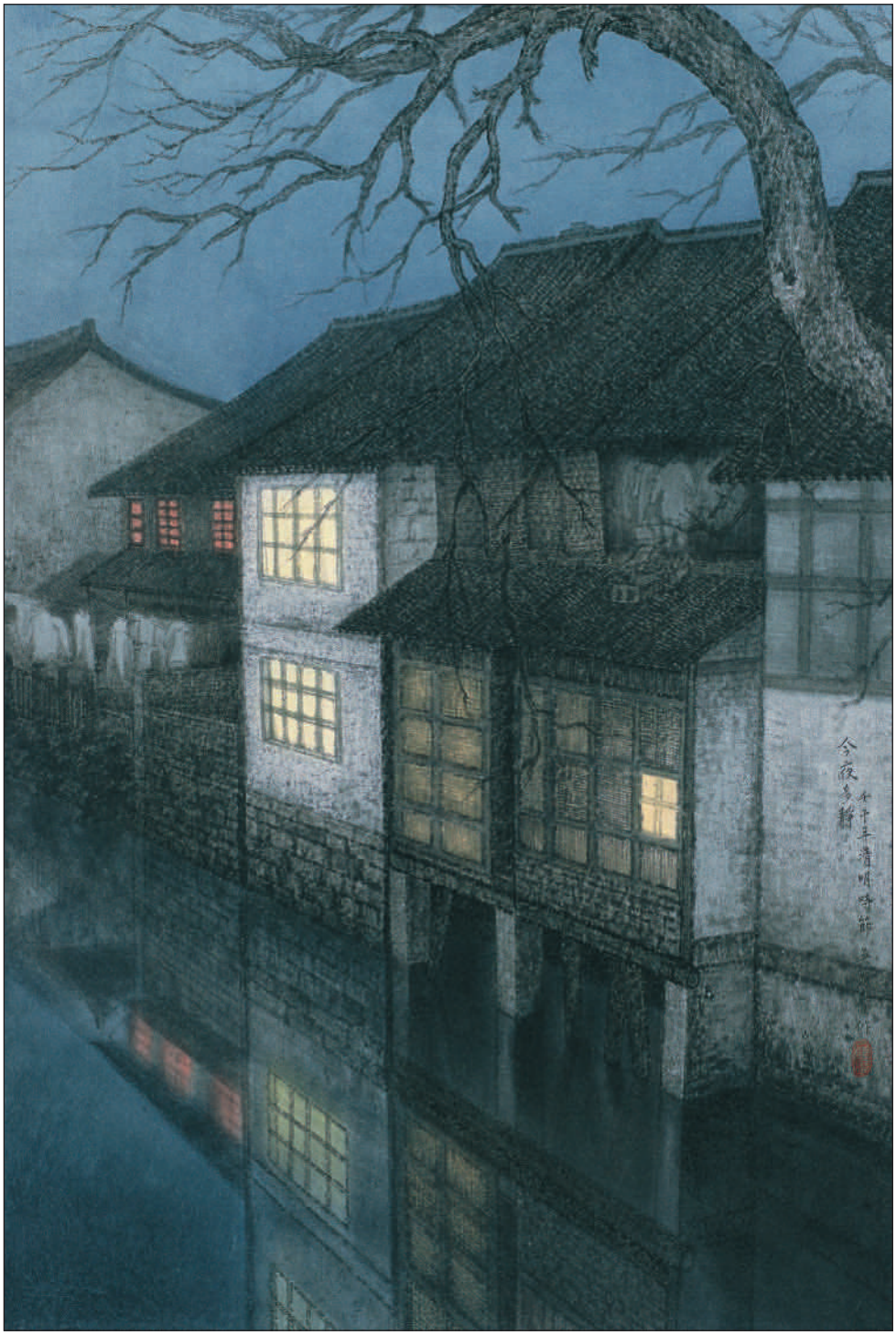


10. *Fruit Market* 1993

Ink and colors on paper
19 1/4 x 28 1/4 in. (49 x 72 cm.)

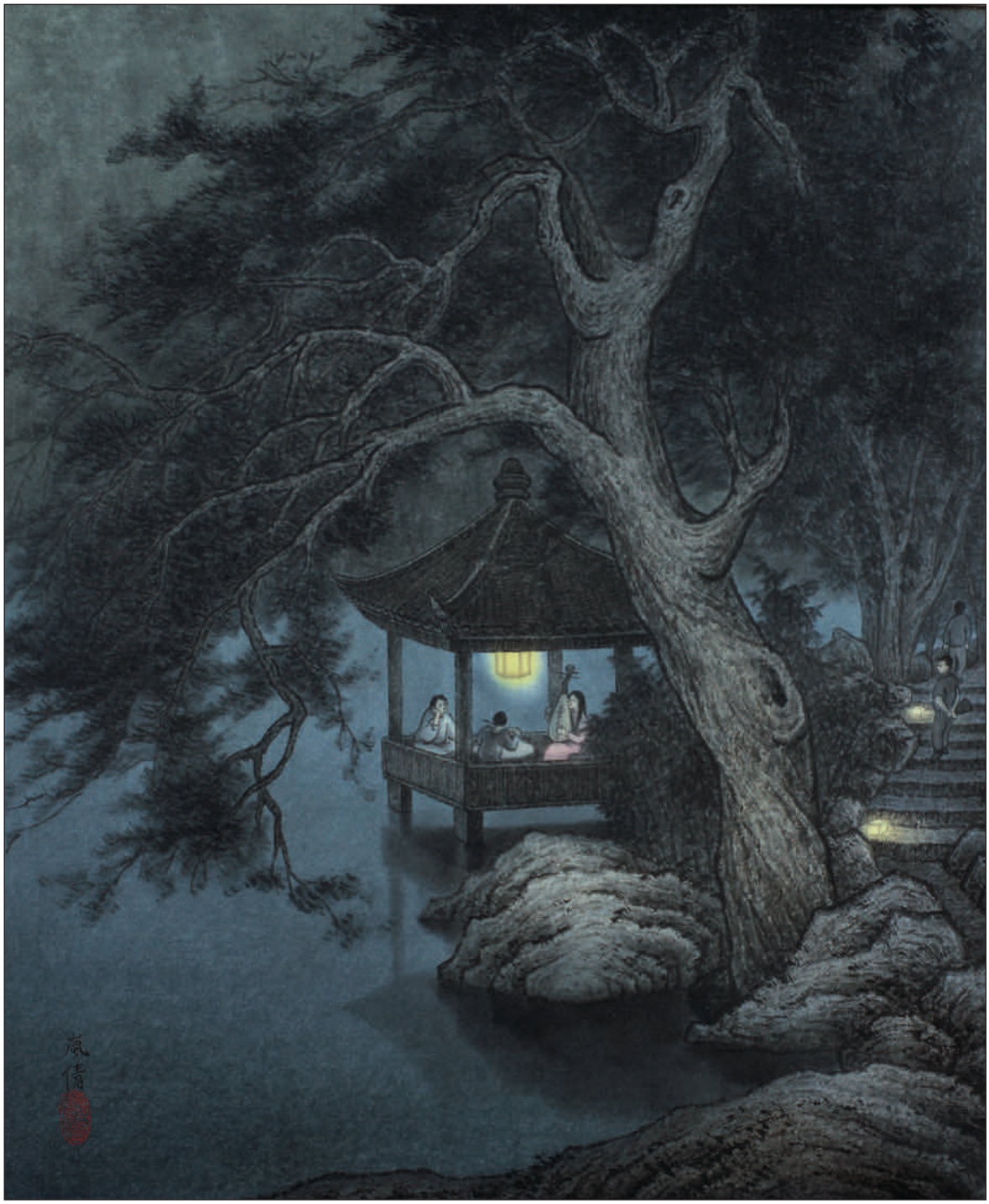
11. *Coral Lake* 2000

Ink and colors on paper
34 x 22 ½ in. (86 x 57 cm.)



12. *Tranquil Night* 2002

Ink and colors on paper
26 3/4 x 17 3/4 in. (68 x 45 cm.)



13. *Impromptu Concert by Coral Lake* 2004

Ink and colors on paper
16 3/4 x 13 3/4 in. (43 x 35 cm.)

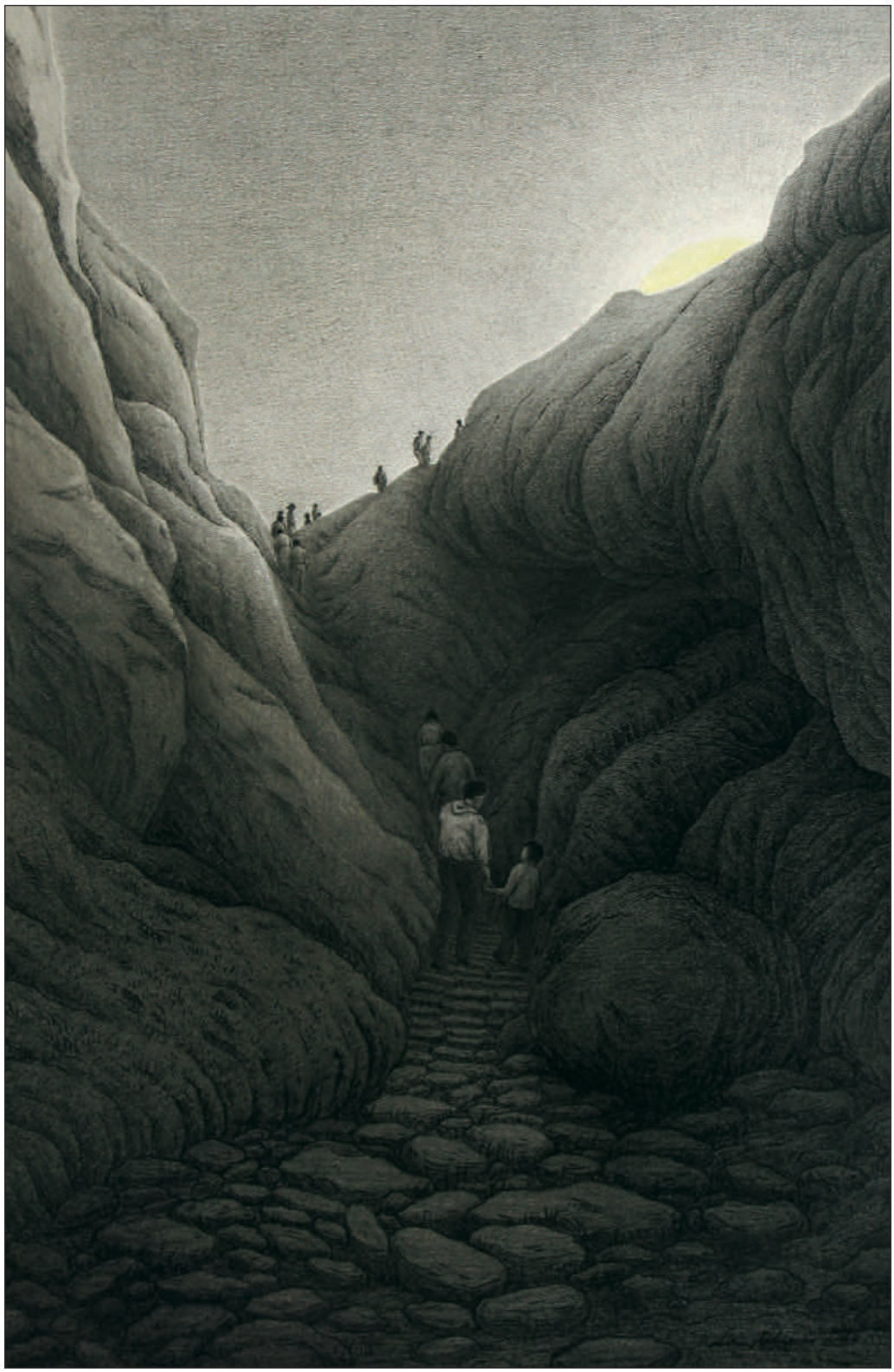
14. *Fireflies at Nightfall* 1999

Ink, colors and gold powder on paper
19 1/4 x 14 1/2 in. (49 x 37 cm.)

15. Detail of *Fireflies at Nightfall*

16. *Summer Night* 2013

Ink, colors and gold powder on paper
16 ½ x 25 ½ in. (42 x 65 cm.)



17. *Journey of Life* 2010

Ink, pencil and color pencil on paper
14 3/4 x 10 in. (37.5 x 25.4 cm.)

18. *Firefly Dream* 2000

Ink and colors on paper
31 x 27 in. (79 x 68.5 cm.)

19. *Girl at the Pond* 1998

Ink and colors on paper
12 x 27 1/4 in. (30.5 x 69 cm.)

20. *House of Souls* 2000

Ink and colors on paper
19 x 24 ½ in. (48 x 62 cm.)

21. *House of Souls II* 2009

Ink and colors on paper
13 1/8 x 28 1/2 in. (33 x 72 cm.)

22. *House of Souls II* 2008

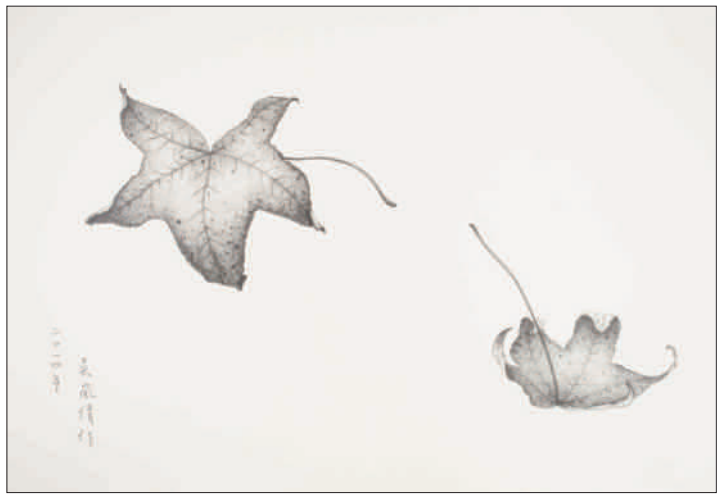
Ink, pencil and color pencil on paper
8 x 15 in. (20.3 x 38.1 cm.)

23. *A New Dawn* 2013

Ink and colors on paper
25 ¼ x 36 ¼ in. (64 x 92 cm.)

24. *Precious Light* 2012

Ink and colors on paper
23 x 29 in. (58.5 x 73.5 cm.)



25. *Full Moon* 2014

Ink, colors and gold leaf on paper
29 1/2 x 112 in. (75 x 284.5 cm.)

26. *Study of Leaves* 2014 *(top)*

Pencil on paper
11 x 14 in. (27.9 x 35.6 cm.)

27. *Study of Floating Leaves* 2014 *(top facing)*

Ink and pencil on paper
13 1/2 x 11 in. (34.3 x 27.9 cm.)

28. *Study of Water* 2014 *(bottom facing)*

Pencil on paper
13 3/4 x 17 in. (35 x 43 cm.)

29. Detail of
Full Moon
2014

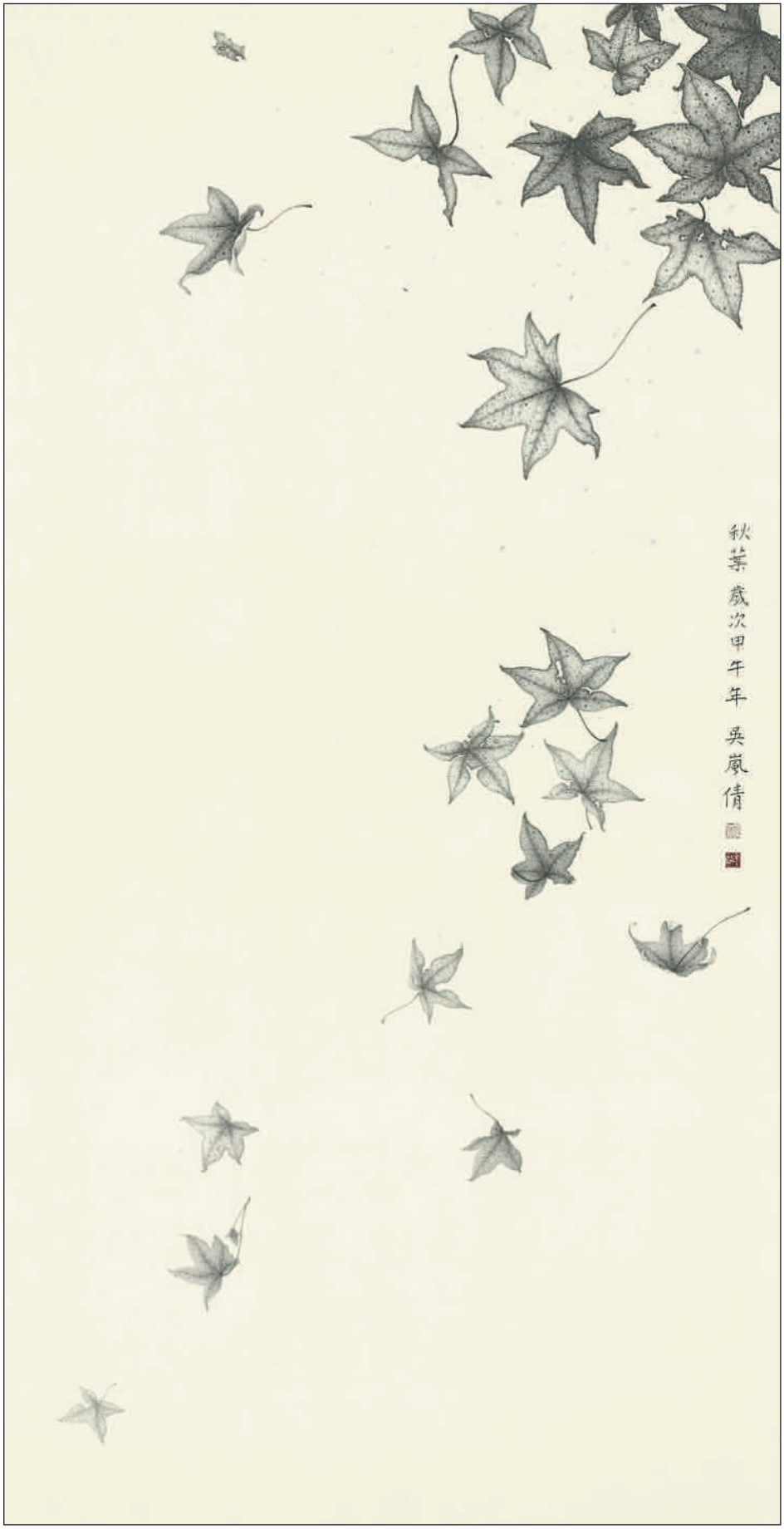
30. Detail of
Full Moon
2014

31. *East Wind* 2015

Ink and metal leaf on paper
38 x 42 in. (96.5 x 106.6 cm.)

32. *West Wind* 2015

Ink and metal leaf on paper
38 x 42 in. (96.5 x 106.6 cm.)



33. *Autumn Leaves* 2014

Ink and metal leaf on paper
38 x 74 in. (96.5 x 188 cm.)
Christie's Images

34. *Before the Storm* 2015

Ink and metal leaf on paper
73 5/8 x 38 in. (192.2 x 96.5 cm.)

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