

# Le Contre-Ciel

Empty Gallery  
18th & 19th Floor  
3 Yue Fung Street  
Tin Wan, Hong Kong

Organised by Olivia Shao

Yuji Agematsu  
Francis Alÿs  
Paul Chan  
Mel Chin  
Magalie Comeau  
Bruce Conner  
Liz Deschenes  
Trisha Donnelly

Agustín Fernández  
Guo Fengyi  
Richard Hawkins  
Kong Chun Hei  
Leung Kui Ting  
Mathieu Malouf  
Kazuo Ohno  
R.H. Quaytman

Julia Scher  
Michael E. Smith  
Vunkwan Tam  
Tang Kwok-hin  
Tom Thayer  
Stewart Uoo  
Antek Walczak  
Wucius Wong  
Yu Ji

Empty Gallery is pleased to present *Le Contre-Ciel*, a group exhibition curated by Olivia Shao including works by Paul Chan, Richard Hawkins, Mel Chin, Leung Kui Ting, R.H. Quaytman, Antek Walczak, Michael E. Smith, Julia Scher, Stewart Uoo, Yu Ji, Liz Deschenes, Wucius Wong, Vunkwan Tam, Francis Alys, Tang Kwok Hin, Mathieu Malouf, Yuji Agematsu, Tom Thayer, Kong Chun Hei, Magalie Comeau, Guo Fengyi, and Kazuo Ohno.

Inspired by a collection of writings by René Daumal, *Le Contre-Ciel* translates to “Against The Heavens” or “The Counter Heaven”. In these early poems, Daumal performs an inversion of symbolic conventions, positioning the sun and sky not as traditional bringers of vitality, order, and awareness, but as tyrannical elemental forces which obstruct the passage to metaphysical truth. The sun enacts a kind of originary violence on the living through its very properties of revealing and form-giving—its premature solidification of the generative flux of being. Instead praising states of blindness, sleep, and bewilderment, Daumal proposes a counter-poetics in which the liberation from false sovereignty can be found only within the undifferentiated realm of darkness—a refuge from the regime of fixed forms, stable identity, and enforced visibility. Shao’s title also calls to mind the contested notion of Tian [天] within Chinese philosophy as well as the so-called “mandate of heaven”.

*Le Contre-Ciel* touches on all of these themes, bringing together an iconoclastic selection of pieces from ancient Neolithic objects to contemporary artworks and modern ink paintings. The show stages a singular encounter between these artworks and the economic, cultural, and political circumstances of Hong Kong—treating them not as static objects but as animated palimpsests, at once determined by the historical and material circumstances of their own creation, whilst also being open to a kind of prismatic contextual re-reading. Some artworks—Tom Thayer’s sentient stones, Julia Scher’s guardian dogs—are endowed with unexpected resonances when read through the rich symbolic index of literati culture. Others, such as the self-reflexive photograms of Liz Deschenes and the meditative ink paintings of Wucius Wong, are brought together through a sympathetic relationship to material contingency, quasi-ritualistic practice, and reflexive contemplation. Shao finds in these diverse practices a shared approach to art-making predicated on a profound embrace of chance, the ceaseless play between disappearance and emergence, and the mediation of reality through the minimal gesture.

Resolutely cosmopolitan in its approach to cultural difference, *Le Contre-Ciel* proposes a speculative re-inscription of the place of traditional Chinese aesthetics within modern art history, while also challenging its historical and contemporary entanglement with power.





Michael E. Smith  
*Untitled*, 2023

Gazing ball

25.4 × 25.4 × 25.4 cm  
10 × 10 × 10 in

Unique

Michael E. Smith, *Untitled*





**Michael E. Smith**

*Untitled, 2023*

Michael E. Smith's sculptural practice reduces everyday objects into their most minimal form, altering or recombining them to mine traces of submerged social, economic, and cultural meaning. Through the dramatic juxtaposition of the natural and the artificial, the perverse inversion of expected modes of display, or the deliberate impairment of functionality, Smith calls attention to the absurd economies of circulation which define our contemporary era.

In *Untitled*, Smith appropriates a yard globe, a decorative mirrored sphere which was once a fashionable design element for suburban lawns. Both aspirational status symbols and curious signifiers of a certain regime of opticality, these objects themselves receded from visibility with the changing of aesthetic trends. With its reflective surface incorporating both the viewer and its environment and its reductive form, *Untitled* bears more than a passing resemblance to entire genres of modernist sculpture—though it also recalls a traffic mirror, surveillance device, or witch's scrying ball.



Antek Walczak, *Culture LV11*, 2017  
Silkscreen on copper sheet

93.4 × 81.99 cm  
36.77 × 32.28 in

Unique





**Antek Walczak,**  
*Culture LV11*, 2017

Drawing from his reading of Georg Simmel's *Philosophy of Money*, a text examining the psychological, social, and philosophical implications of currency on society, Walczak created his *Culture* series as part of an ongoing practice of reframing overdetermined cultural objects through engineered interplays of time, intentionality, and material pressure.

For this work, Walczak silkscreened both the recto and verso of American one hundred dollar bills in transparent ink on copper panel—a material evoking some of the earliest forms of standardized currency. He subsequently deployed corrosive liquids, such as cleaning fluid and acid, combined with heat treatments—both from the sun or devices like hair dryers—to materially “age” the piece towards a state of compressed decay. Finally, Walczak rinses the paintings in water to restrict his intentionally damaging process. Appearing simultaneously ancient and contemporary, with the aura of a found object rather than a created one, *Culture LV11* implicates

money as a social contract deeply embedded in cultural production, a constructed value system continually reified over vast periods of human history. However, unlike many of his contemporaries, Walczak neither demonizes nor deifies the existence of money or the capitalist system per se.

Although his mechanistic usage of silkscreen references Warhol, he does not find the death of art within its reduction to the status of commodity and circulated image. Rather, Walczak takes our existing social conditions and hierarchies of value as the necessary ground from which any genuine art must emerge—invoking contingency and the barest of gestures to wring meaning from the capitalist real. Walczak's approach is of particular interest in a territory much maligned (and misunderstood) as a “cultural wasteland”, in which the circulation of value takes seeming precedence over its creation.



**A Carved Turquoise Cong**

Western China, Neolithic Period, Qijia Culture (2300-1500BC)

5.1 × 5.2 cm

2 × 2.04 in

Unique



**A Carved Russet and White Mottled Nephrite Jade Cong**  
Western China, Neolithic Period, Qijia Culture (2300-1500BC)

13.9 × 5.6 cm  
5.47 × 2.20 in

Unique





**A Carved White and Russet Nephrite Jade 'Ribbed' Cong**  
Western China, Neolithic Period, Qijia Culture (2300-1500BC)

3.3 × 4.9 cm  
1.29 × 1.92 in

Unique

The earliest congs (琮), ritual objects taking the form of as circular tubes inscribed within rectilinear stone masses, are dated to the Liangzhu culture (3400–2250 BC). While their precise usage remains a mystery, they are typically associated with ritual practices. The three congs exhibited here, created from turquoise and nephrite jade respectively, are dated to the sophisticated Qijia Culture (2300-1500 BC)—a prehistoric culture near the upper reaches of the Yellow River, in modern day Guanghe, Gansu. Qijia culture was known for their oracle divination practices, and is considered to be one of the representative periods of prehistoric Western Chinese jades. As evidenced by these three pristine examples, congs were crafted in a variety of styles, though they all partake of a certain a totemic and spiritual quality.

**Bruce Conner**  
*Untitled, 1970*

Glass, photograph, dirt  
6.35 × 6.35 × 17.78 cm  
2.5 × 2.5 × 7 in





Bruce Conner, *Untitled* (detail)





**Liz Deschenes**  
*1928 - 1898, 2019*

Silver toned photogram  
mounted on aluminum

162.56 × 60.96 × 8.25 cm  
64 × 24 × 3.25 in

Unique





## **Liz Deschenes**

*1928 - 1898, 2019*

Liz Deschenes begins creating her silver gelatin photograms—produced without a camera—by exposing photosensitive paper to the night sky. Factors such as the positions of the stars, phase of the moon, and weather conditions all affect the final artwork, making it a unique document of a set of unrepeatable and contingent circumstances—an index of its own production. In an intensely physical and laborious process, Deschenes subsequently fixes silver toner onto the photograms, giving the works a unique metallic sheen. As the chemicals remain active even after the work is complete, the work can shift in subtle and unexpected ways over time. Challenging the idea of a photograph being a ‘fixed’ image of something, Deschenes relieves the medium from the burden of static representation and instead brings its focus to bear on its own materiality. Subtly changing in response to shifting light, atmospheric conditions, and the perspective of the viewer, Deschenes’s photograms present the viewer with the paradox of a phenomenologically rich experience conveyed by the most minimal of objects.





**Magalie Comeau, *Impossibles Enfouis*, 2014**  
Oil on canvas

137.16 × 137.16 cm  
54 × 54 in

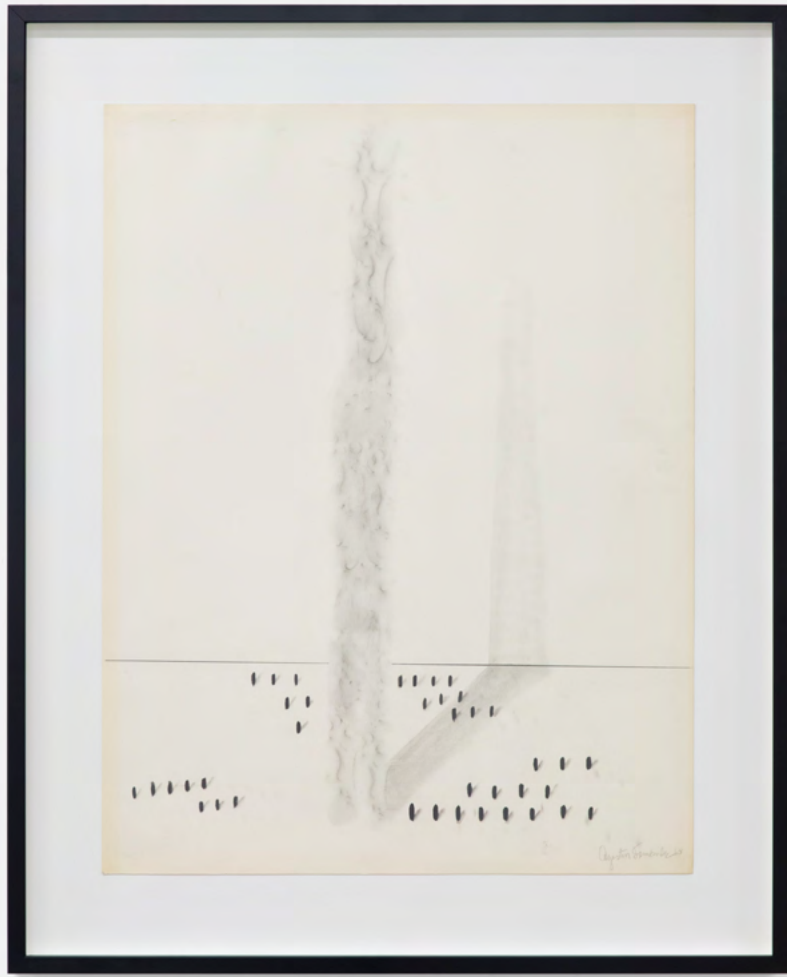
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## **Magalie Comeau**

*Impossibles Enfouis*, 2014

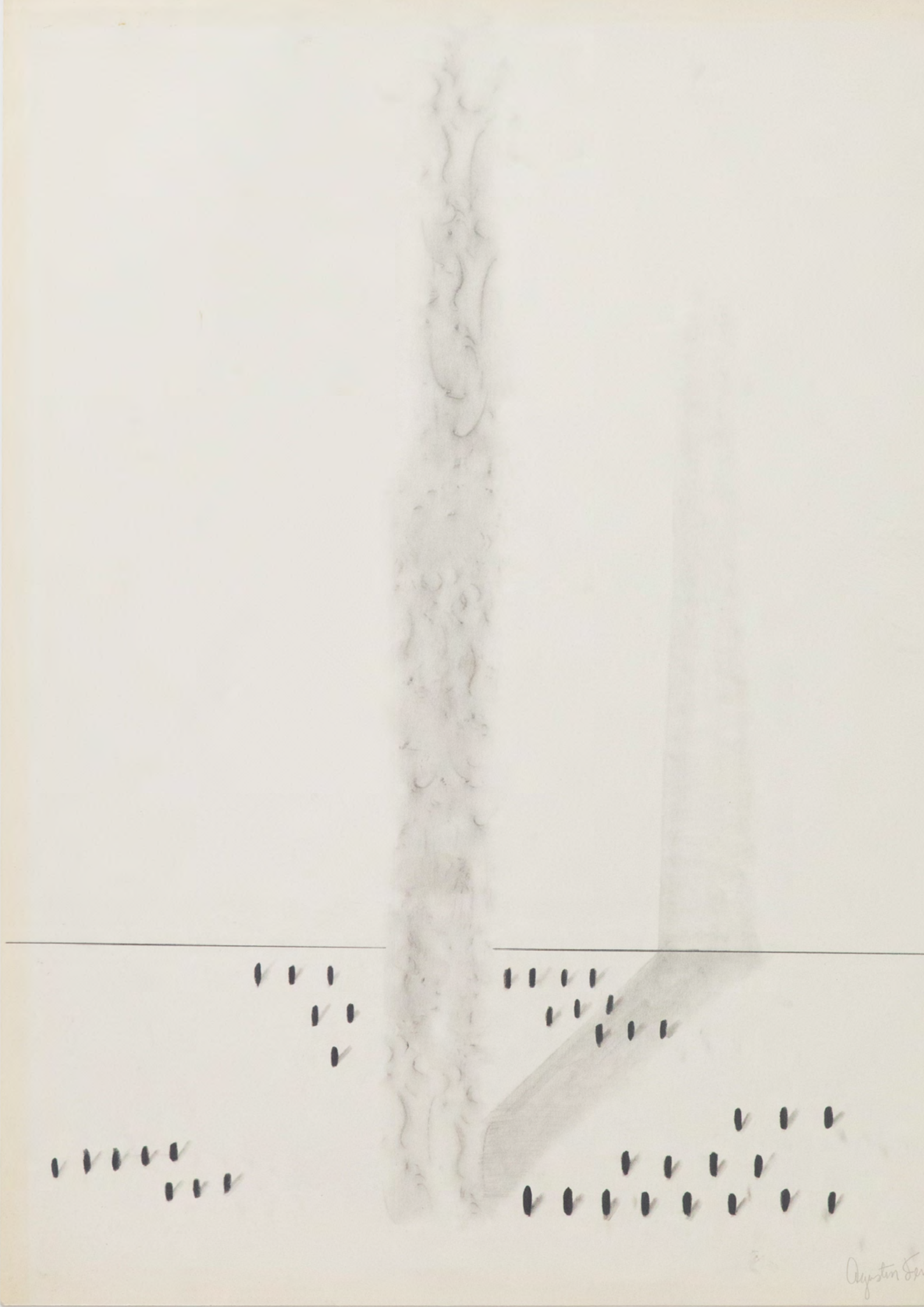
*Impossibles Enfouis* depicts a folded, geometric form set against a monumental black ground. Upon closer observation, this enigmatic form reveals itself to be a sort of exploded diagram depicting domestic interior space. Its structure twisted and convoluted as if through mathematical transformation, this architectural object partakes simultaneously of the glassy coldness of digital renderings and the inward-turning luminescence of religious art. Referred to by Comeau as “archiatrices”—a portmanteau of “architecture”, “matrice” and “actrices”—these objects recur throughout her painting practice—sentient volumes afloat within the vastness of the inanimate void. Combining elements of minimalism, surrealism, and science fiction, Comeau’s paintings radically problematize subjective perspective, constructing self-generated image-worlds which operate beyond a priori notions of space and time.



**Agustín Fernández**  
*Untitled, 1968*

Graphite on paper  
81.28 × 5.08 × 3.81 cm  
32 × 26 × 1.5 in





August 20

## Agustín Fernández

*Untitled*, 1968

While Fernandez would become primarily known for erotically charged abstractions evoking the sexual body, these early drawings manifest a more delicate and playful side of the artist—though as in his later work, there is always a sense of latent violence lurking underneath their placid surfaces. *Untitled* depicts an enigmatic stele towering over rows of black, oval-shaped forms. Resembling little pips or beans, these dots are perhaps meant to function as sardonic representations of the hoi polloi or unknowing masses.

This arrangement of shapes immediately calls to mind the social dynamics of religious, governmental, or ideological power. Fernandez endows the composition's central pylon with a distinctive sense of animation and inner movement—its delicately shaded surface appearing to seethe and pulse hypnotically like a column of incense smoke—in marked contrast to the relative immobility of the drawing's other forms.

While Fernandez renders the pillar itself with a kind of wispy organicism, he depicts its shadow with a sense of static linearity which is quite at odds with its source.

As in Fernandez's other drawings, the viewer is prompted to reflect on the inherent strangeness of certain deliberate inconsistencies in his representational strategies; to solve the perceptual puzzles which Fernandez proffers. In *Untitled*, this meditation centers around the absurd relationality between worldly power structures and empirical truth claims. Despite the seriousness of its subject matter, *Untitled* thus functions as a kind of spiritual or metaphysical game for the viewer, prompting the viewer to recognize and reflect on the inconsistencies within its representational world and then apply this vision to their own experience.



**Richard Hawkins**  
*Ankoku 12 (Index Infected Flower)*, 2012

Collage

64.77 × 48.89 cm  
25.5 × 19.25 in

Unique

## Richard Hawkins

*Ankoku 12 (Index Infected Flower)*, 2012

Since the beginning of the 1990's, Richard Hawkins has developed a hermetic and highly personal practice of collage, sculpture, and painting influenced by the legacy of Brion Gysin's cut-ups—in which chance procedures enable radical de-contextualization and aesthetic transformation of existing materials.

The *Ankoku* series, which was first shown in the 2012 Whitney Biennial, originates from Hawkins's discovery of the scrapbooks of Tatsumi Hijikata—one of the pioneers of Butoh. In these scrapbooks, Hijikata arranged clippings from Japanese art magazines—often of Western modernist masterpieces—along with his personal notes on how these visual cues might be translated into physical choreography. Inspired by Hijikata's obsessive process of reference-gathering as well as the fundamental strangeness of this cross-pollination between painting and dance—Hawkins began creating an imagined continuation of these notes.

In *Ankoku 12*, Hawkins arranges clippings of artworks sourced from monthly Japanese art glossies—often of well-known European artists such as Bellmer, Moreau, Redon, or Fontana—as a series of rectilinear windows against a neutral ground. These formally divergent artworks are juxtaposed with a specific term of Hijikata's—in this case “infected flower”—as a sort of resonant nexus from which to approach their visual profusion. Transposing the formal and affective processes of cruising to the domain of the archive, Hawkins creates delirious surfaces in which the pleasure of looking and recognizing, as well as the perverse intertextuality of art history are brought to the fore.





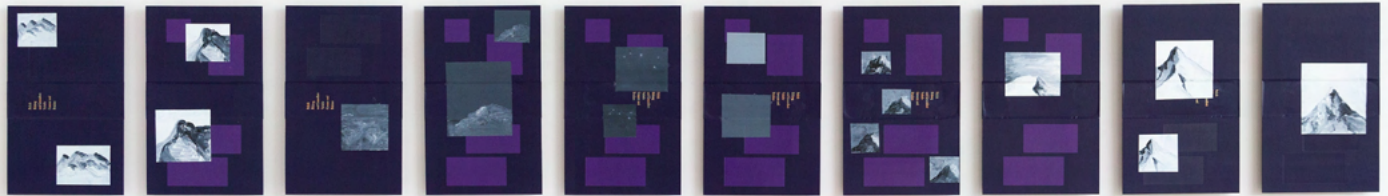
**Paul Chan**  
*Hogarth's Progress*, 2013

Painting on book cover  
35.56 × 23.81 cm  
14 × 9.37 in

**Paul Chan**

*Hogarth's Progress*, 2013

As part of Chan's Volumes series of paintings created from destroyed books, *Hogarth's Progress* utilizes a salmon-colored worn hardcover edition of Peter Quennell's biography of the English painter and satirist, William Hogarth. The work's title references Hogarth's painting series *A Rake's Progress*, which tells the fictional story of a scandalous heir Tom Rakewell who gambles his inherited funds away. As in other works from Volumes, Chan masks his micro-oil painting with sharp edges, rendering abstract cool-colored marks that could be interpreted as landscapes or hazy skies. This single work proposes an intertextual lexicon, drawing together Hogarth's creation of Rakewell, Quennell's fascination with Hogarth, and Chan's contemporary desire to both remove texts from their context and empty them of content in order to evoke the vastness of current media landscapes. This relay of sorts also brings to mind the endless stream of citations between cultural texts over time—a kind of endless creation and destruction.



**Paul Chan**

*Big Trouble in Little China Vol.1*

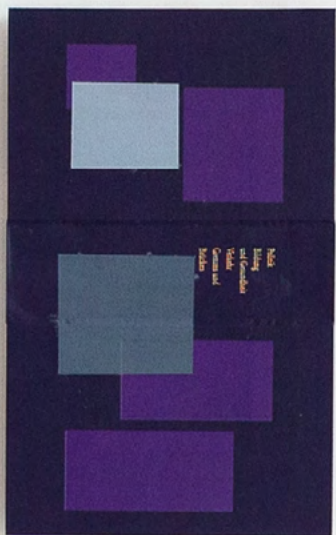
*by John Carpenter and Eric*

*Powell, 2016*

Painting on book cover

17.25 × 124.5 in.

43.82 × 316.23 cm



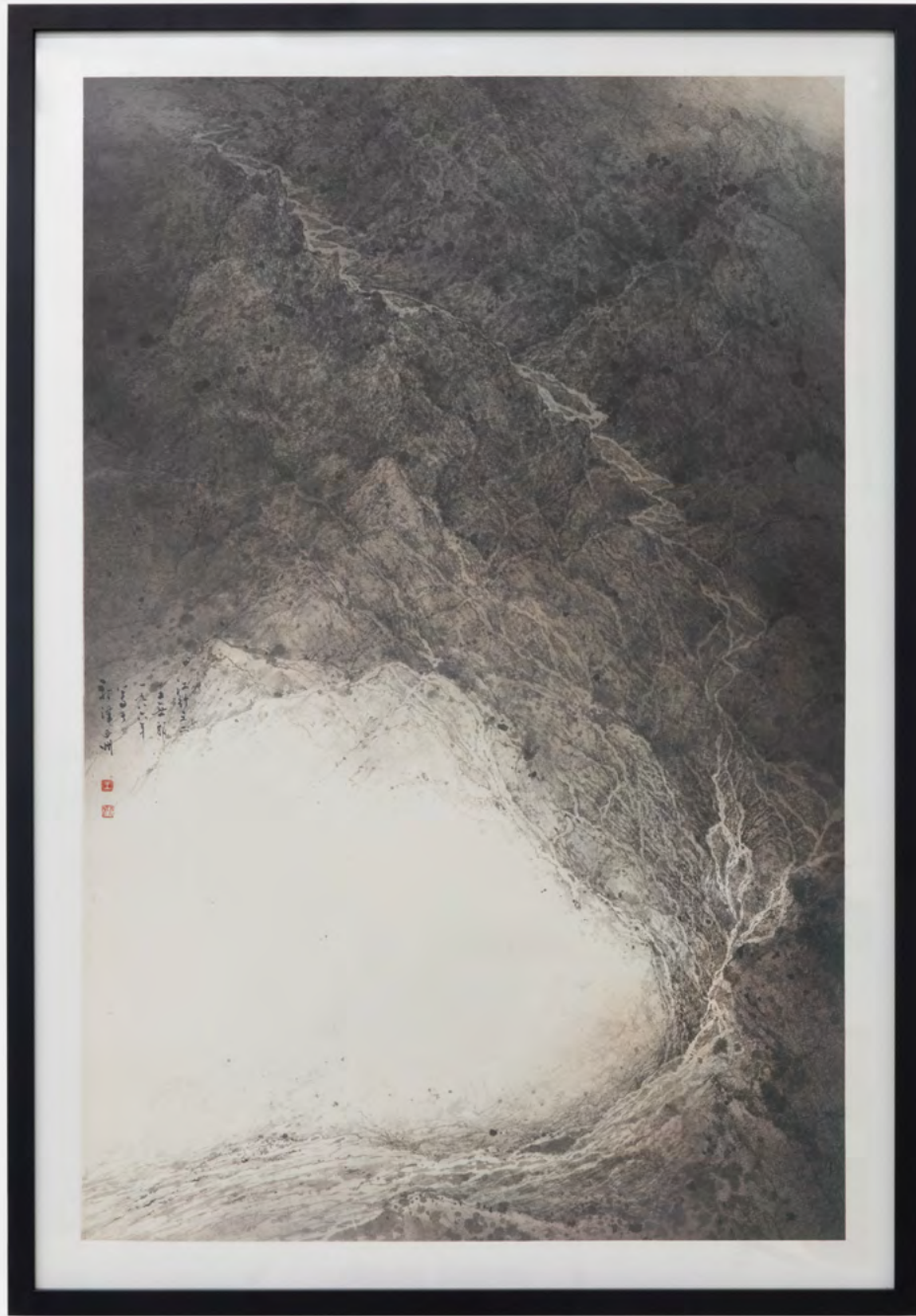


## Paul Chan

*Big Trouble in Little China Vol.1* by John Carpenter  
and Eric Powell, 2016

Since beginning his practice in 1999 with a website distributing fonts and single-channel videos, Paul Chan has been exploring text-based experiences and the quality of attention conjured by reading—often implicating the processing and distribution of information in the formation of the political subject. While presenting at a book fair, Chan witnessed two visitors argue about whether producing digital texts was akin to destroying physical books. Chan later decided to destroy one of his favorite books, Schopenhauer's *Parerga and Paralipomena*, by removing its pages and using its cover as a kind of alternate canvas. Exhilarated by this simultaneously destructive and regenerative process, he has since transformed over one thousand books, forming his series *Volumes* (2012-).

This particular work from *Volumes* involves a tightly layered set of cultural texts which take on unexpected resonances within the regional context. Chan's choice of book, a German hardcover nonfiction publication on "Politics, education and health, transport, borders and bridge" brings to mind the business of territorial administration. This contrasts sharply with the series of unashamedly orientalist pulp novels—*Big Trouble in Little China*—from which the work draws its title. As elsewhere in this series, Chan has rendered rudimentary landscapes and blocks of color in loose brushwork at intervals along the sequence of book covers. Resembling floating computer windows or semiotic portals, these interventions foreground the simultaneous fullness and emptiness of the Chan's book paintings and their ambiguous, perpetually open groupings of signifiers; the repurposing of a physical object into a charged field of virtual links.

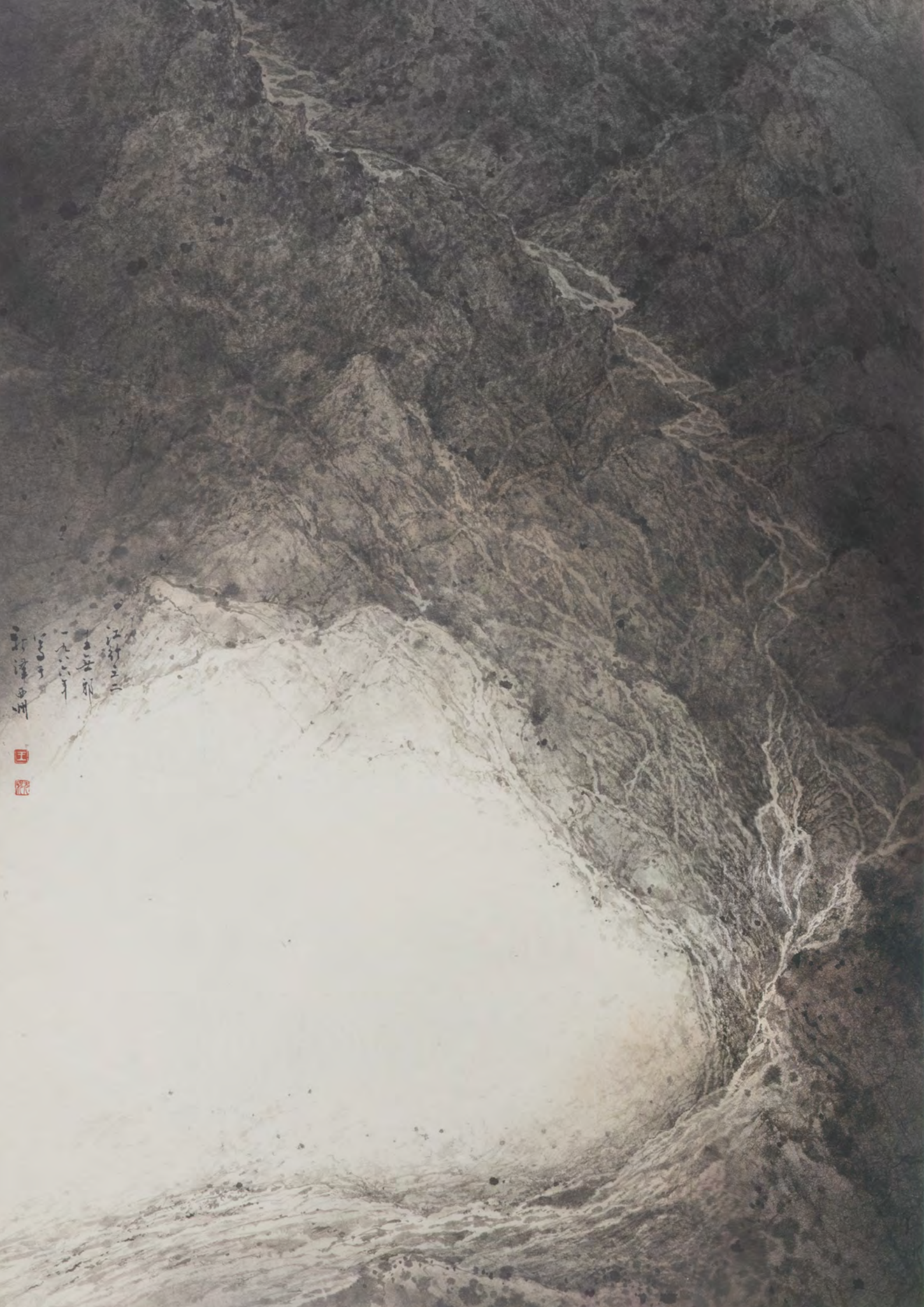


**Wucius Wong**, *River Journey #2*, 1986  
Ink on paper

102.23 × 71.12 × 3.81 cm  
40.25 × 28 × 1.5 in

Unique





江行之二  
壬午年  
丁巳



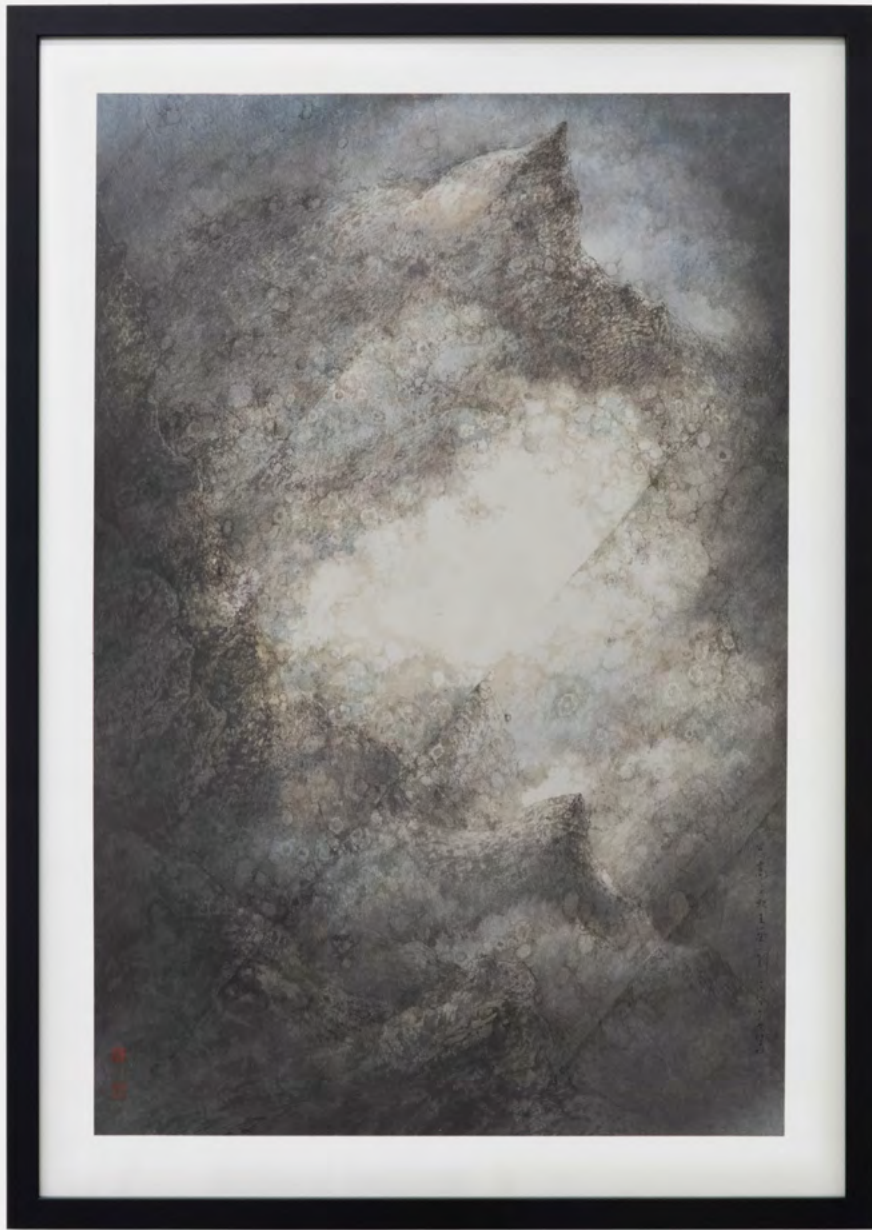
## **Wucius Wong**

*River Journey #2*, 1986

In 1958, Wong began studying under the New Ink Movement founder Lui Shou-kwan and started his professional painting practice in earnest. Created two years after Wong's temporary emigration to the United States, *River Journey* is one of Wong's mature paintings following a heady and sustained period of education and cultural exposure in Hong Kong.

Wong's *River Journey #2* evokes Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127) paintings in its meticulous rendering of textured mountainsides. Utilizing a traditional vertical scroll format, the work's composition layers Wong's masterful blending of dry brush textures with various gradations of wet ink shading. By centering the work around a clear river, denoted with negative space using the "leave-white" 留白 technique, Wong showcases his rare ability to blend a baroque sense of compositional drama with traditional Chinese subject-matter. As elsewhere in his oeuvre, the play between light and dark, appearance and disappearance serves to stimulate reflection on the dynamic nature of the cosmos.





**Wucius Wong**, *Lofty Thoughts #9*, 1980s  
Ink on paper

78.74 × 55.88 × 4.06 cm  
31 × 22 × 1.5 in





山高水長  
壬午年  
畫



## **Wucius Wong**

*Lofty Thoughts #9*, 1980s

Wong's monochromatic works are characterized by a delicate balance of light and dark achieved through a range of varied traditional brush techniques. In the *Lofty Thoughts* series he forgoes even the barest of representational gestures entirely, pursuing the limits of his contemplative painting practice through a pure interplay of layered ink washes.

In this painting, Wong conjures a sort of sentient miasma animated by a subtle interplay of many smaller forms. Resembling an internal landscape or celestial formation, Wong's composition oscillates with a sense of profound internal movement achieved through his modulation of light and shadow. Even more so than in his landscape paintings, *Lofty Thoughts #9* shows a Daoist metaphysics given microcosmic shape through embodied technique—with the formal dialectic between presence and absence, black ink and white paper, representing yin and yang as interpenetrating opposites whose dynamism serves as the source of all phenomena.





**Leung Kui Ting**  
*Landscape and Geometric  
Structures No. 1, 2008*

Ink on paper

164.5 × 94.62 × 3.81 cm  
64.75 × 37.25 × 1.5 in

Unique





## **Leung Kui Ting**

*Landscape and Geometric Structures No. 1*, 2008

A veteran of Hong Kong and Taiwan's 1960s New Ink Movement, Leung Kui Ting's paintings embody an artistic practice spent continually seeking to expand the aesthetic vocabulary of traditional ink painting and unify its developmental trajectory with that of Western art history. Taking cues from the spirit of art informel and abstract expressionism, Leung transmutes these influences through his training in the formal methodologies, techniques, and thematics of shanshui—rendering them strangely hybrid. As a student of Wucius Wong at the Ching Ying Institute of Visual Arts, Leung's practice was also influenced by the burgeoning discipline of modern graphic design, which led him to incorporate hard-edged geometric figures as well as a distinctive cartographic flatness into his work.

*Landscape and Geometric Structures No. 1* is an example of the culmination of his artistic process. An arrangement of broken ink lines suggest the contours of tall rock formations, whilst others float in an ambiguous space that recalls the forms of looming mountain peaks amidst the clouds. Foregrounding negative space, the work appears almost like a chance-based composition or performance score. Leung's use of broken ink lines simultaneously recalls the “ink dot texture strokes” used in traditional literati paintings and the diagrammatic contours of data visualisations.



**A Bamboo-Root Carving Of A Finger Citron**

17th Century

4.5 × 2.43 cm  
1.79 × 0.95 in





## A Bamboo-Root Carving Of A Finger Citron

17th Century

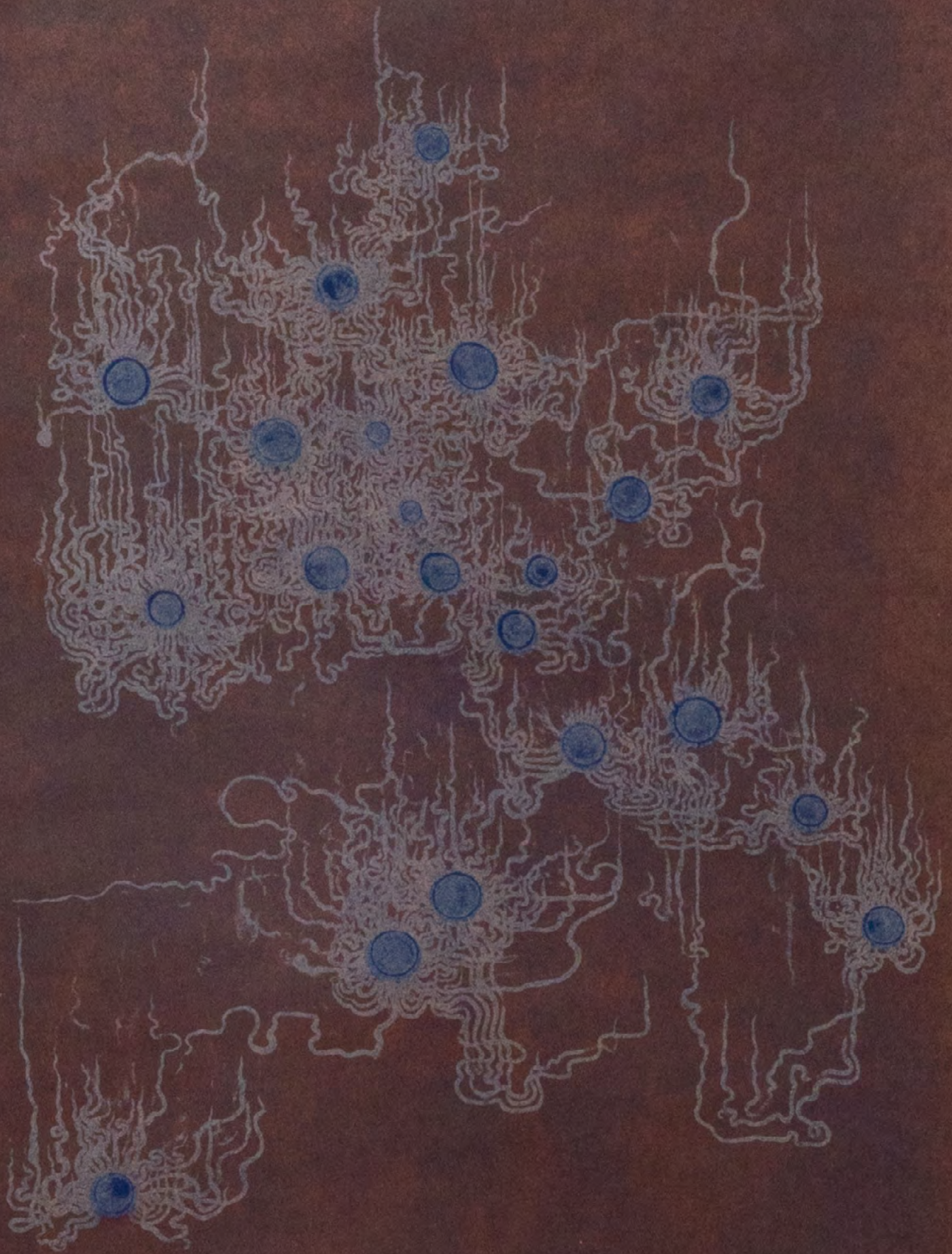
Skilfully carved following the natural form of the bamboo root, sculptures such as this were favoured objects for appreciation and contemplation adorning the scholar's desk. These carvings were valued both as plays on form—ripe fruits and leaves rendered immutable in wood—and for the auspicious nature of their subjects. In China, the finger citron is known as the “Buddha's hand” due to its resemblance to the idealised fingers of the Buddha, and the word itself, foshou, sounds similar to the characters fu, meaning ‘blessings’ or ‘riches’, and shou, ‘longevity’. This piece from the 17th Century is defined by distinctly gnarled tendrils which extend from the main body in two concentric circles, with hook-like ends curling inward to resemble a pharyngeal jaw. Imbued with a distinct sense of the grotesque, this bamboo carving marks out a counter-aesthetic within the literati tradition described above—in which the dynamic chaos of the composition comes to reflect the self-generative nature of the cosmos.



**Mel Chin**, *Imperfect Pearls in the Ether of Infinite Labor*, 1998  
Woodcut and lithography

144.78 × 60.96 cm  
57 × 24 in







## **Mel Chin**

*Imperfect Pearls in the Ether of Infinite Labor*, 1998

During his collaboration with Vinalhaven Press—a historically important printmaking workshop known for its work with artists—in Maine during the mid-1990s, Chin found himself contemplating the afterlife after listening to Nirvana’s Lake of Fire. Reflecting on the meticulous labor of the master printers’ working alongside him, he invited them to press their fingerprints onto the lithographic stone, eventually combining these with his own. Surrounding these marks with silver tendrils of flame, Chin ultimately created a composition that visualizes flickering embers of human effort and ambition amidst the void of the unknowable moral universe. As with other works in *Le Contre-Ciel*, Chin’s work combines a materialist regard for embodied labor with a metaphysical interest in the non-dualist cosmology present in many Eastern religions.

Chin was also inspired by the tonally rich palettes of Tibetan Thangkas which depicted the warm, red underworld with arresting colors. To achieve a contrast between the foreground and background, he employed woodcut to render the blues and reds in the background in a more mottled and aged fashion, whereas he used a lithograph stone to achieve the finer details he sought in his ‘pearls of labor.’





Mel Chin, *Polycentric Multi-Polar Paradigm*, 2005  
Oil on steel

112 × 112 cm  
44 × 44 in

Unique

## Mel Chin

*Polycentric Multi-Polar Paradigm, 2005*

One of the most important Chinese American artists of his generation, Mel Chin's diverse practice has consistently been rooted in intellectual, political and social inquiry across various mediums. In *Polycentric Multi-Polar Paradigm*, Chin takes global conflict and arcane military languages as points of departure to create a philosophical reflection on geopolitics. Working in oil on steel panel, Chin renders three circular poles representing Saudi Arabia, China and the United States respectively. Pink tones evoke human populations, while military budgets are denoted with green washes and overlapping white veils evoke zones of ideological influence.

In the mid 2000s, trade volume between China and Saudi Arabia increased astronomically, exacerbating tensions between the United States and China over access to natural resources. Chin endows a map of strategic relations between the three countries with a strange beauty and sense of religiosity. In doing so, he critiques the technocratic logic of global imperialism, showing how the blinkered pursuit of rational ends has its terminus in a kind of violent mysticism.



**Vunkwan Tam**  
*Days of Generosity, 2024*

Steel and electrical motor

35 × 35 × 4 cm  
13.77 × 13.77 × 1.57 in



**Vunkwan Tam**

*Days of Generosity, 2024*

Tam's practice operates akin to a sort of found poetry or cento, assembling groupings of readymade objects and linguistic fragments—often encountered online—into reduced spatial narratives. Site-sensitive and semi-improvised, these fugitive arrangements repurpose the deracinated stuff of semiocapitalism in order to perform an archaeology of communal affect—a type of emotional excavation of the present.

*Days of Generosity* consists of an ashen metal dome which rotates slowly on its own axis. This glacially orbiting disc—salvaged in part for its resemblance to the moon—is possessed simultaneously of a sense of totemic mystery and monotonous facticity. Perhaps used to incinerate refuse or burn symbolic offerings in its previous life as a brazier, the work's scarred and pitted surface seems to point to an existence of bleak practicalities and heavy usage—evidence of accrued mourning. Endlessly circling, *Days* summons the concept of the naturalised cycle as a trajectory for resolution and becoming, growth and decay. Capturing something of the inherent absurdity of duration, the sculpture's tireless rotation treads the borders between promise and pessimism, mystic plenitude and material abjection.





**Mathieu Malouf, *Untitled*, 2012**  
Mushrooms, oil on canvas

53 × 43 × 8.4 cm  
20.86 × 16.92 × 3.30 in

Unique







## **Mathieu Malouf**

*Untitled, 2012*

Sardonically combining elements of pop art, neo-expressionism, and German critical painting, Mathieu Malouf positions himself as something of a court jester operating at the end of art history. His paintings often aim to be deliberately crude, ugly, or offensive in the spirit of “bad painters” such as Werner Buttner but carry this approach through the point of self-parody and out the other side—challenging the degree to which a self-conscious appropriation of a can still function as “high art”.

*Untitled* is part of an early series of works in which Malouf embedded dried shiitake mushrooms, spider webs, and other objects into paintings which he then subjected to a chroming process—endowing his minimally gestural groupings of bric-a-brac with a sort of chintzy dime-store radiance.

Perhaps a reference to the phrase, “popping up like mushrooms” (as in, “figurative painters are popping up like mushrooms”), a purposefully dumb take on the contemporary trope of visualising “the network”, a knowing jab at contemporary curators’ overreliance on mycelium, or none of the above—Mathieu’s usage of dried mushrooms has become a kind of enigmatic signature within the artist’s eclectic oeuvre.

In literati culture, various mushrooms were often idealised and thought to bestow wisdom, immortality, or other benefits—their depiction in both ink painting and other media was common. In the context of *Le Contre-Ciel*, *Untitled*’s gloomy palette and absence of figurative material summon associations with a sort of gothic decay, the reduction of art history (and perhaps idealism itself) to compost and mulch.

Julia Scher, *Gert*, 2022  
Marble

40 × 76 × 30 cm  
15.75 × 29.92 × 11.81 in

Unique





Julia Scher, *Gert*, 2022



Julia Scher, *Gretel*, 2022  
Marble

40 × 76 × 30 cm  
15.75 × 29.92 × 11.81 in

Unique



Julia Scher, *Gretel*, 2022



## Julia Scher

*Gert*, 2022; *Gretel*, 2022

For the past twenty years, American artist Julia Scher's research has revolved primarily around surveillance culture and related technologies of social control. Her multifaceted practice aims not only to address the ideology of security but also to expose its sociopolitical, as well as psychological dangers. These green-marbled greyhounds were originally conceived as a set of five for a larger installation at Kunsthalle Giessen.

Greyhounds have been heralded throughout history for their loyalty and chivalry; their status illustrated through not only their depictions next to kings but on the coat of arms of British royalty. *Gretel* and *Gert* embody such undying faithfulness to a higher regime. Carved lying down with their front paws crossed and tails curled in, the dogs appear alert and ready to accept any directive from their master. Immortalized in marble, a material that is likewise associated with power, Scher's greyhounds exude a sense of discomfort, their watchful eyes,

like CCTV cameras in major cities, surveilling the gallery space and perhaps even beyond. Displayed as a pair in *Le Contre-Ciel*, *Gretel* and *Gert* are reminiscent of Chinese Guardian Lions—highly stylized creatures typically placed in front of residences to ward off evil.





**Kong Chun Hei** , *Shell Laminate*, 2019  
Ink on paper

38.1 × 28.24 × 3.81 cm  
15 × 11.12 × 1.5 in

**Kong Chun Hei**

*Shell Laminate*, 2019

Since Kong Chun Hei graduated from the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 2009, drawing has been a core part of an artistic practice which often explores notions of duration, repetition, and embodied perception.

For this work, in meticulous strokes of black ink on watercolor paper, Kong renders the swirling textures of shell laminate, an artificial material mimicking the iridescent swirls of abalone shell. Known as Chinese symbols of good fortune, the ideogram for abalone functions as a homonym for treasures or riches. Its historical position as a desirable material in imperial times coupled with its contemporary scarcity, has led to an elite aesthetic status within the context of Hong Kong as a wealthy shipping port. By painstakingly rendering an industrial reproduction of a natural phenomenon—which also happens to be a mass-produced copy of a rare luxury material—Kong complicates perceptions of authenticity and value, calling attention to the self-generative dialectics of cultural transmission.



**Stewart Uoo**

*Runway to the Vampire Castle Spacecraft (after Yoshiaki Kawajiri), 2019*

Sumi ink, watercolor on  
polypropylene paper

27.43 × 35.05 cm  
10.8 × 13.8 in

Unique



## Stewart Uoo

*Runway to the Vampire Castle Spacecraft* (after Yoshiaki Kawajiri), 2019; *Vampire Transfusion* (after Yoshiaki Kawajiri), 2019

Uoo's diverse practice spans sculpture, installation, and works on paper—often playfully examining the fraught relationship between identity, performance, and consumption in the creative class.

*Runway to the Vampire Castle Spacecraft* and *Vampire Transfusion* are part of a long series of watercolors inspired by various manga and anime series, with these specific pieces referencing Yoshiaki Kawajiri's 2000 film, *Vampire Hunter D: Bloodlust*. Cyborgs, zombies, and other creatures have long inhabited a prominent place in Uoo's practice as signifiers for the decay of classical humanist individuality and the post-modern process of intertextual (and intersubjective) bricolage which composes the modern "self". In these two works, Uoo engages with the figure of the vampire—an undead being caught in an endless cycle

of desire for blood—as a metaphor for the cyclical and parasitic nature of cultural production.

Painted on polypropylene paper evoking the shiny gloss of animation cells, the rich earth tones and expressive brushwork of both works create a haunting in media res that evokes their two-dimensional source material whilst transposing them into a romantic painterly mode. Bearing witness to the continuous recirculation which defines culture, Uoo's paintings represent both a critical archaeology in which the genesis of manga style is founded in the of reduction of romantic and symbolist aesthetics to the level of kitsch and an almost mystical transformation of those same mass-cultural materials (anime) back into the realm of elite culture (European painting).



**Stewart Uoo**  
*Vampire Transfusion (after Yoshiaki  
Kawajiri), 2019*

Sumi ink, watercolor on  
polypropylene paper

35.05 × 50.29 × 3.81 cm  
13.8 × 19.8 × 1.5 in

Unique



Guo Fengyi, *Untitled*, 1989

Ink on paper  
87.63 × 64.14 × 3.81 cm  
34.5 × 25.25 × 1.5 in

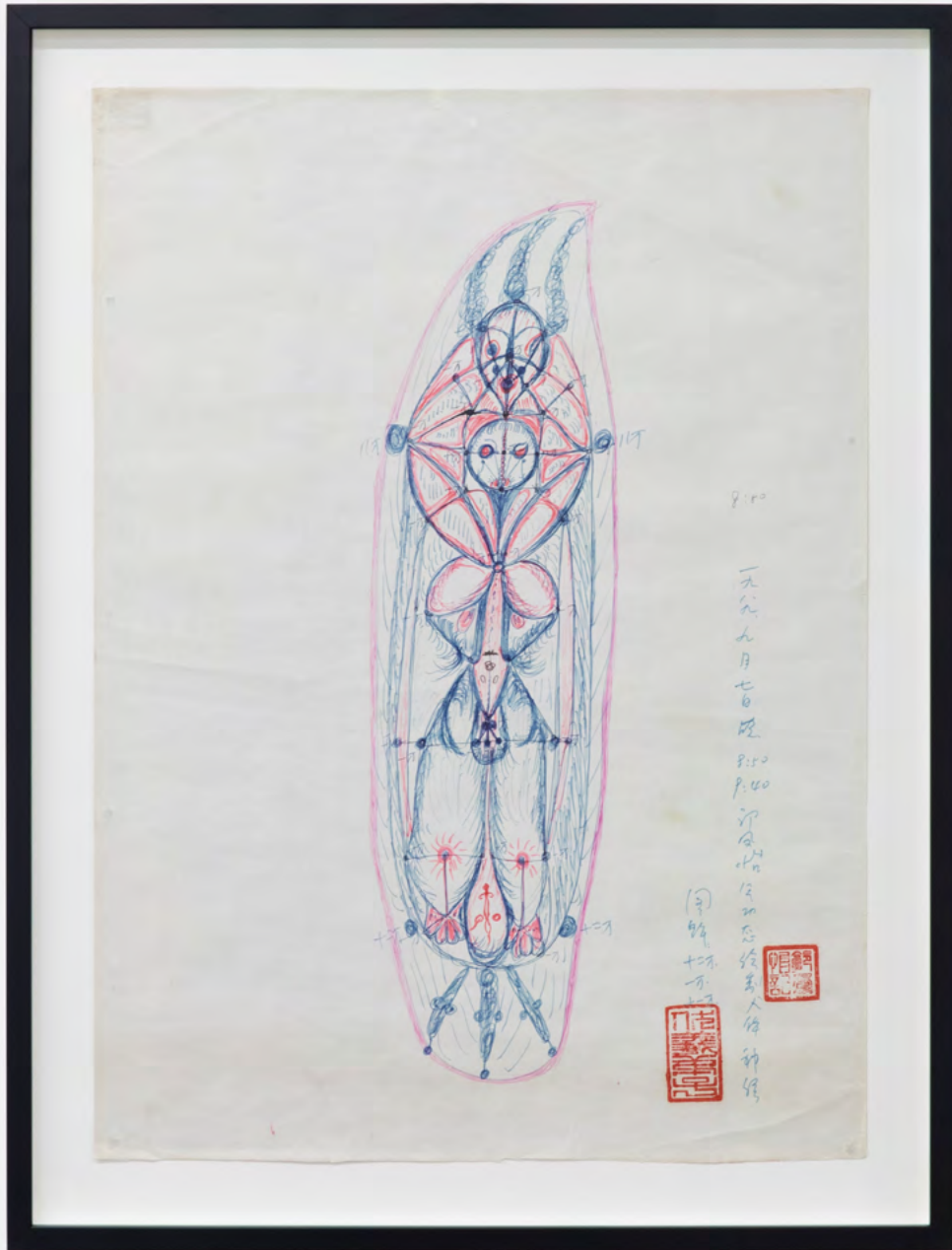


## **Guo Fengyi**

*Untitled, 1989*

*Untitled* is one of Guo's drawings from the year she began art-making. During this early period in her qigong infused practice, she incorporated numbers and text in her work to dazzling effect as in this composition. A diaphanous blue swirl of numbers encircles a vivid orange and green core, where an abstract form with rotund shapes, recalling the lotuses of Buddhist cave paintings, pulsates with Guo's careful shading and interwoven number chains.

Guo was known to describe her drawing and qigong sessions as a form of self-healing, and these numbers have been interpreted by scholars as references to cosmological theories such as Yin-Yang/ Five Phase Theory correlations. Guo herself often left the particular trigrams behind her number sets unidentified, as she considered the creation of the works part of a personal process of healing and discovery. In addition to her drawing practice, Guo also practiced her own branch of qigong which she taught and lectured on widely throughout China.



Guo Fengyi, *Diagram of the Human Nervous System*, 1989

Ink on paper  
81.28 × 57.15 × 3.81 cm  
29.5 × 22.5 × 1.5 in

Unique

**Guo Fengyi**

*Diagram of the Human Nervous System, 1989*

Up until her mid-forties, Guo Fengyi worked in Xi'an as a chemical analyst in a fertilizer factory. After developing a chronic illness and seeking early retirement, she directed her attention towards the practice of qi gong, a Chinese tradition combining movement, meditation and breathing to relief one from physical pain through the movement of internal energy known as “qi”. This physical and mental practice induced vivid visions in Guo's imagination, inspiring her to draw on a myriad of found surfaces—including printer paper and old calendars—using ballpoint pens and colored ink. A self-taught artist, she produced over five hundred drawings in her lifetime, most of which center on surreal beings inspired by her qigong practice and study of Taoist cosmology, as well as the biological–energetic inner workings of the body.

In *Diagram of the Human Nervous System*, Guo draws a narrow, rounded form with a curved end and a sharp tip, filled with symmetrical overlapping shapes in bright blue with light pink accents. Here, Guo considers the human nervous system as a vessel for qi: frenetic and fantastical, with looping arabesques and repeated short marks which elicit the vibratory effect of energetic circulation. Even for one familiar with esoteric taoist practices, Guo's drawings contain an enigmatic array of possible readings. Incorporated into the body of her drawings are various handwritten annotations and numerological citations indicating things such as the work's title, date drawn, and even time completed (in this case 8:50 - 9:40). Reading the work through these notes, Guo's work takes on a greater sense of intimacy, situating her creative practice inside of a daily propulsion towards somatic healing and spiritual transcendence.



**Yu Ji**

*Flesh in Stone- Ghost #2, 2018*

Cement, plaster, iron

111 × 28 × 61 cm

43.70 × 11.02 × 24.01 in



## Yu Ji

*Flesh in Stone - Ghost #2*, 2018

Based primarily in Shanghai, Yu Ji scavenges urban locations to gather material for her sculptures, installations, and other works. She explores the body politic of cities as she infuses resources associated with construction, gentrification, and societal change with a haunting sense of corporeal animacy and existential exhaustion.

For her *Flesh in Stone* series, the artist translates live sittings with male models into studies which eventually inform her anthropomorphic sculptures. Models are asked to reach the limits of their physicality, dexterously contorting for extended stretches of time. Yu notably does not photograph or sketch her model collaborators, retrospectively conjuring their poses afterwards, as a kind of ritualistic exercise and fashioning them into sculptures composed of her signature concrete and steel—perhaps intending to infuse her finished works with a certain spiritual or affective potency. *Flesh in Stone - Ghost #2* depicts a right hand with outstretched fingers and a missing thumb. With its monumental scale and formal resemblance to classical Buddhist sculpture fragments, *Ghost #2* seems to express a contemporary poetry of cosmic absence—a futile longing for some principle of benevolent order to offset the chaotic processes of global capitalism.

**Trisha Donnelly,**

*I Am Taking Your Morning*, 2003

3:03 minute audio recording

In 2003, Donnelly presented *44 Days to Hanoi* at the CCA Wattis Institute of Contemporary Arts in San Francisco, a project inspired by a libretto by Russian composer Alexander Scriabin. During one of her demonstrations, Donnelly requested that visitors read from Scriabin's libretto. After the reading ended, she extinguished the lights in the space and played "Classical Gas" by Mason Williams, relaying to visitors that she had discovered the sound which a solar eclipse makes. She ended her lecture by informing the audience she would "take" their next morning, a statement which became the basis for this audio piece.

*I Am Taking Your Morning* begins with Donnelly intoning "when the sun rises, your morning will be mine. When the sun rises for your eyes, or your eyes rise for the sun, everything you see—it will be mine". She goes on to narrate the sequence of events—

getting out of bed, drinking coffee, going to the car—which compose the average listener's morning, punctuating her description of each mundane experience with the exclamation, "that's mine". The hypnotic insistence of Donnelly's performance imbues an absurd scenario with a sense of intimate and genuine menace, as she describes possessing not only the listener's physical assets, but their emotional and psychic ones as well. The idea of light or "morning" here suggests the horizon of perception, that inviolable internal space of the individual soul. The violence of this experiential displacement—this taking, or hollowing—reverses the traditional dynamic between viewer and performer, artist and patron, calling attention to the relations of domination and submission which determine the structure of our most mundane moments.

**Francis Alÿs,**  
*Cuentos Patrióticos* (still), 1997

25:36 minute video on loop







Francis Alÿs, *Cuentos Patrióticos* (still)

**Francis Alÿs,**

*Cuentos Patrióticos*, 1997

25:36 minute video on loop

Belgian artist Francis Alÿs' practice has been largely defined by the artist's paseos (or 'strolls' in Spanish). His strolls, which usually involve a trek from one destination to another while also carrying out an absurd task (such as pushing a block of ice), are not merely direct engagements with Performance Art in and of itself; they oftentimes negotiate with or critically respond to the location's political historicity as well.

In *Cuentos Patrióticos*, Alÿs' journey is non-linear. Instead, the artist is seen circumambulating the flagpole in the Zócalo, Mexico City's central square, with a flock of sheep in a single file. A bell ringing rhythmically in the background acts not only as a cue for the sheep, who join the queue with Alÿs one by one, but evokes the sound of a Buddhist gong, transporting the viewer into a meditative state. Eventually, the sheep and Alÿs form a uniform circle, blurring the role between

follower and leader. Alluding to the events of 1968 when civil servants, forced to gather in the Zócalo to welcome the new government, bleated like sheep in protest, Alÿs' poetic re-enactment addresses the concept of the hive mind. The artist's performance challenges the meaning of complacency in the face of bureaucracy while simultaneously highlighting the strength that comes from ritualistic mass gathering.



Francis Alÿs, *Cuentos Patrióticos* (still)





Kazuo Ohno, *Mr. O's Book of the Dead* (still)



## **Kazuo Ohno**

*Mr. O's Book of the Dead*, 1973

32:36 minute video on loop

*Mr. O's Book of the Dead* is the third and final film collaboration between the famous co-founder of butoh dance, Kazuo Ohno, and experimental filmmaker Chiaki Nagano. Starting and concluding with shots of sunlight reflecting off the ocean, the film stars an ambitious troupe of heavily costumed dancers who perform amidst arid mountainsides, grassy fields, muddy pig pens, majestic temples and elaborate stage sets. The leader of this motley crew is Ohno himself, performing in a series of brightly patterned dresses, robes, and wigs. Each of the elaborately dressed characters deploy their own distinctive movement styles, which causes the film to brim with ritualistic, erotic and playful encounters and gestures. It is as if Ohno and the other dancers are attempting to create an entirely new form of spiritual expression from the most basic and impoverished of substances—the pre-linguistic human body and its environs.

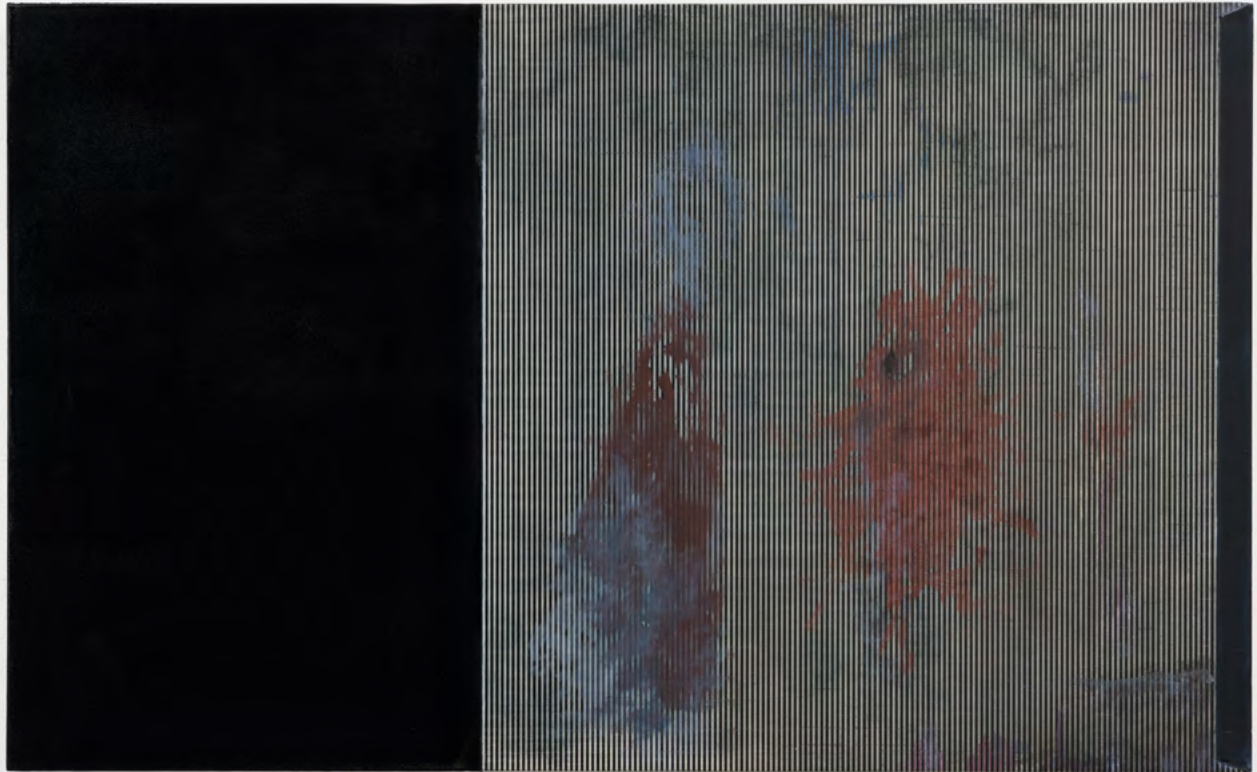
In one sequence leading up to a somber funerary procession, they all tumble freely down a mountainside, limbs akimbo, as if they were rolling stones. In another, they writhe together in a pig pen after pushing a frozen Ohno in a rusty wagon through the stable. This feature-length film represents the collaborators' desire to explore all the fundamental tenets of butoh in an expressive and dynamic way, wordlessly conveying the essence of sexuality and mortality.



Kazuo Ohno, *Mr. O's Book of the Dead* (still)



Kazuo Ohno, *Mr. O's Book of the Dead* (still)



**R.H. Quaytman**  
*Empty Gallery*, 2017–2023

Oil, lacquer, silkscreen  
ink, gesso on wood

50.8 × 82.2 × 1.9 cm  
20 × 32.37 × 0.75 in

Unique



**R.H. Quaytman**

*Empty Gallery*, 2017-2023

American artist R.H. Quaytman is best known for her wood panel paintings which she organizes into distinct yet interrelated series that she refers to as “chapters”. Each chapter represents an inquiry into the history of her medium—and related questions of representation and perception—as mediated by the particular artistic, social, and architectural legacies of the specific site. Her practice merges the separate but related lineages of abstract painting and institutional critique. On the level of material and process, Quaytman executes her works through the nesting and interpenetration of three distinctive techniques: silkscreen printing of an image or pattern, gesso and/or lacquer application, and oil painting; a sort of palimpsest of modernist painting routines.

*Empty Gallery* is neither part of a numbered chapter nor a direct response to the exhibition venue per se, but emerges from the artist’s earlier series, *An Evening*, Chapter 32 which was developed for the

Vienna Secession. The left-half of the panel is covered in luminous black lacquer whose reflective surface expands the painting to include both its spectators and the surrounding environment, whilst on the painting’s other side, a sort of spectral miasma of oil paint emerges out of the vibrating field of one of Quaytman’s signature optical patterns. Situated within the context of the titular exhibition space, *Empty Gallery* seems to reflect on the aleatoric perceptual phenomena—the ceaseless play of appearance and disappearance—proper to the darkness of the black-cube.



**Tom Thayer**  
*Rock Symphony*, 2024

Stones, metal lid, bowls, wood,  
mixed media, and electronics

91.44 × 91.44 × 40.64 cm  
36 × 36 × 16 in

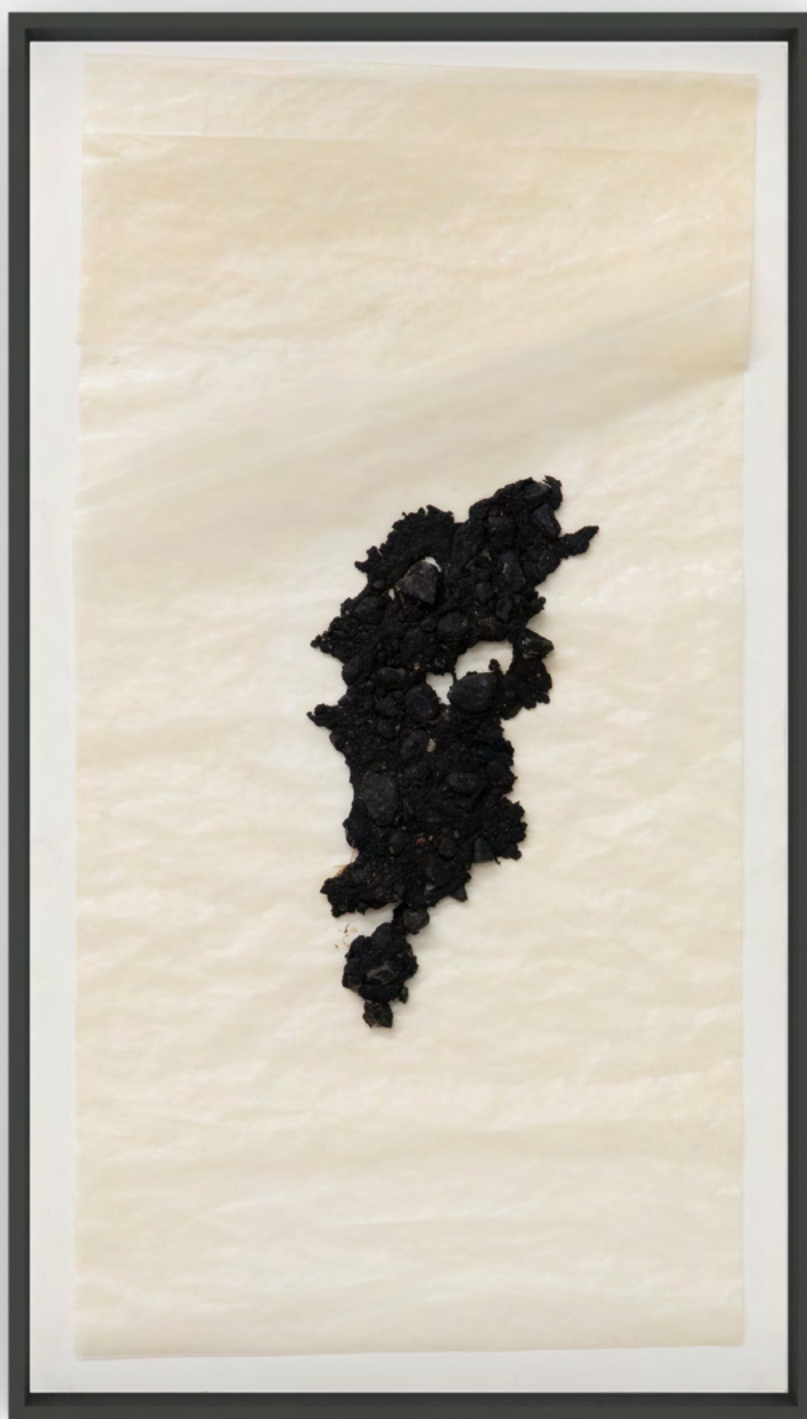
Unique

**Tom Thayer**

*Rock Symphony, 2024*

Thayer's artworks always exist in relation to durational performance, with paintings or sculptures functioning as actual (or imagined) scenographic elements to be manipulated in stop-motion animations or live happenings. When activated, these objects create spaces of dream-like suspension populated by eccentric figures and strange creatures—a deeply personal internal mythos rendered palpable.

Assembled using domestic objects from Thayer's own home, *Rock Symphony* is composed of three rock "instruments" which articulate subtle rhythms on a set of resonant metal lids and bowls. Originally created to accompany Thayer in performance as a sort of mechanised collaborator or golem, the artwork synthesises a host of influences from a quasi-shamanistic interest in the animism of objects to the mundane yet transcendent sound-worlds of early Fluxus performance.



Yuji Agematsu, *No Time, No Location*, 2014  
Rubber, tar, glassine mounted on foamcore

44.45 × 25,4 × 3.81 cm  
17.5 × 10 × 1.5 in

Unique



## **Yuji Agematsu**

*No Time, No Location, 2014*

In 1980, the artist Yuji Agematsu moved from Kanagawa, Japan to New York. Influenced by both the surrealists and the situationists, he began going on ritualistic and meticulously documented walks and following his childhood instinct of simply picking things up from the street. This accumulated archive of urban detritus serves as the raw material for his sculptural practice, in which he reconfigures bits of trash, food waste, and infrastructural materials into compositions of almost impossible fragility and formal elegance. Agematsu's sculptures betray something of a proto-photographic impulse, treating a discarded lollipop, or a fragment of packaging material as moments of found poetry.

In *No Time, No Location*, Agematsu deploys material forms likely sourced from a construction site or decaying urban street. Recalling an ink painting in its vertical orientation, the black hue and gritty roughness of rubber and tar evoke immediate associations with tires and pavement—a micro-topography positioned on a delicate translucent sheet of glassine.

Tang Kwok Hin, *Riddles of Light* (still), 2015



Tang Kwok Hin, Riddles of Light (still)



## Tang Kwok Hin

*Riddles of Light*, 2015

02:57 minute video on loop

<https://vimeo.com/926551891/0222a875e4>

Tang Kwok Hin's mixed-media artworks often reflect on and deconstruct his own cultural heritage through the lens of everyday encounters and objects. In his meditative black-and-white video *Riddles of Light*, Tang recreates the experience of moon-viewing from the rooftop of his village home during his family's annual Mid-Autumn Festival reunion.

Tang films a tea-filled cup from above, showing an artificial light source reflecting on the surface of the liquid. Resting atop a worn domestic table top, the artist's hand swirls the cup in circular motions, causing the reflections within the tea to oscillate back and forth. Ultimately, Tang empties the cup entirely, its final traces of moisture reflecting the last glimpses of a waning moon. Tang's video pays homage to time-honored Chinese artistic themes of material ephemerality, human longing, and the generative interdependence of light and darkness, while simultaneously offering commentary on the artifice of their perpetuation as modes of cultural affect.



**Olivia Shao** is the Burger Collection & TOY Meets Art Curator at the Drawing Center in New York. She has also organized exhibitions and projects at independent spaces, galleries, and institutions in New York City and Los Angeles, as well as in Europe and Asia.

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