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The Poet's Brush: Chinese Ink Paintings by Lo Ch'ing

Lo Ch'ing 羅青 (pen name; born Lo Ch'ing-che 羅青哲) is one of China's foremost contemporary poet-painters. An inheritance and renewal of the Chinese ink-color painting and calligraphy traditions, Lo Ch'ing's art has been hailed as the starting point of postmodern poetry, as well as a significant milestone in a new phase of literati painting. Lo Ch'ing is recognized with critical acclaim both in mainland China and in Taiwan as one of the leading artists of his time. His poetry has been translated into English, Italian, French, German, Spanish, Russian, Hebrew, Dutch, Swedish, Czech, Japanese, and Korean. His paintings have been exhibited and collected in many countries, and are now in public museums such as the British Museum, the St. Louis Art Museum, the Royal Ontario Museum (Canada), Museum für Ostasiatische Kunst (Berlin), the Ashmolean Museum (Oxford), Asia Society (New York), the National Taiwan Art Museum (Taiwan), the National Art Museum of China, and the Origo Family Foundation (Switzerland). His paintings are also featured in standard college art history textbooks such as *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China* by Michael Sullivan (University of California Press, 1996) and *Art in China* by Craig Clunas (Oxford University Press, 1997).

Lo Ch'ing reinvented ink color painting and calligraphy in the twentieth century by mingling imageries and styles of the deep past with the poignant present, and has opened new windows for artists in the twenty-first century. His works of art have won him numerous national and international critical acclaim both in the East and the West. Despite their intimate bond with Chinese classical civilization, many of his ink paintings are more audacious and more idealistic than much of what is being produced by contemporary Chinese artists who are regarded as avant-garde.

Lo Ch'ing's paintings come across as visually astonishing, harmonious compositions devoid of any extravagant or superfluous elements. For the artist, the surface of the paper becomes a field where ink colors

and brushwork play a key role. His imagery consists of monochromatic colors (often primary). His works are segmented tactile compositions, often created with calligraphic brush strokes, which make for a restrictive compartmentalized work structure, reminiscent of the Windows operating system. The results are ambiguous spaces in which shapes resembling geometric diagrams are filled with all sorts of juxtaposed or contrasted scenes.

The struggle of contemporary Chinese artists to assert their relevance to the immensely long and culturally essential tradition of ink painting and calligraphy is fascinating, and has led to great ingenuity, imagination, and groundbreaking creativity. Indeed, this attempt to develop a new pictorial and graphic language meaningful to life today resembles the fundamental transformation of the art of the West, indeed its entire culture, at the beginning of the twentieth century. At that time artists, musicians, and writers were struggling to express the vast changes in society ushered in with the Industrial Revolution. By abandoning oil painting and traditional hierarchies of media, they manifested new ideas about representation and the very ontology of art.

So too in China. Despite being reviled and denigrated for many decades as symbols of the decline of Chinese civilization by many Chinese reformers, and neglected until recently by mainstream Western scholars, modern Chinese painting actually embodies the heroic story of the renewal and reinvigoration of Chinese civilization amid rebellions, reforms, and revolutions. Even if the process appears confusing and bewildering, it demonstrates the persistence of tradition and the limits of continuity and change in modern Chinese culture.

Chinese artists today continue to try to create pictorial and graphic languages that can capture the transformation of Chinese society, a transformation that has intensified in the last four decades. New ink painting and calligraphy seem to be gathering momentum and attracting increased attention because they so clearly embody fundamental values: highly accomplished pictorial and graphic techniques allied with serious conceptual content. This is in contrast to the often hasty, slapdash, and ostentatious productions of Chinese artists working in styles more obviously derived from contemporary global art.

Lo Ch'ing began his formal study of Chinese painting and calligraphy at the age of thirteen. He studied the traditional blue-and-green landscape style under Pu Hsin-yu 溥心畬 (1896–1963, a cousin of the Last Emperor of China, Pu Yi 溥儀), a master of the Northern School of painting. Later, under Juyu 入迂, a Ch'an Buddhist monk, he learned

the impressionistic "splashing ink" style of the Southern School (Lo Ch'ing's early work can be seen in figs. 277–318). At the same time, he began to write modern poetry with new calligraphy, trying to revitalize the time-honored poetry-calligraphy-painting tradition initiated in the eleventh century and to usher it into the postindustrial world.

The age-honored heritage of ink-color landscape painting that shaped Lo Ch'ing's training has also represented traditional China well. Before the twentieth century, Chinese landscape painting, one of the major graphic vehicles by which artists conveyed their philosophical ideas and lyrical sentiments, served as artists' spiritual self-portraits.

Lo Ch'ing is convinced that it is now time to reinvent Chinese landscape painting, with multiple new approaches that live up to the times. The solid mountains and peaks of old will have to travel around the world, even to outer space, being dismembered, disseminated, and reorganized into different constellations of floating rocks, what he calls the DNA of Chinese landscape painting, to reflect the newly born Chinas that have emerged from a worldwide mixture of agrarian, industrial, and postindustrial ingredients.

Lo Ch'ing employs multiple aesthetics and techniques to portray different historical phases experienced by the Chinese people over the past 175 years in mainland China, in Taiwan, and around the world. His symphony of linear movements is intertwined with carnivals of colors. His new ink-color landscape paintings are at once traditional, modern, and postmodern, parallel to Taiwan's experience over the past sixty years, a marvelous combination or overlap of agriculture, industry, and postindustry moving side by side, braving the turmoil and vicissitudes of different national and international climates. Pastoral lyricism melds with urban modernism, cynicism with good humor, and criticism and satire with universal love and understanding. The graphic language of his paintings mixes with the verbal language of calligraphy. The poetics of his inscriptions merge with the aesthetic principles of the compositions.

In the past 175 years, since the Opium War of 1840, China has been moving from an agrarian society to an industrial one, and, in the last two decades, has merged into a postindustrial one with dazzling speed. The "traditional China" that was nourished and hatched in an agricultural milieu was smashed in the late nineteenth century by an invasive Western industrial expansion. The dismembered pieces of this mirror not only scattered throughout China proper but followed the footsteps of overseas Chinese, and were disseminated across many countries all

over the world. In Lo Ch'ing's painting and calligraphy, examples of his internalization of the conflicting states of tradition, modernity, and postmodernity are abundant, and the mixing of realistic and impressionistic techniques to create groupings of surrealistic images is too conspicuous in his works for anyone to miss.

While reflecting external worlds, Lo Ch'ing's newly invented landscape painting also delineates sophisticatedly and faithfully his internal spiritual pilgrimage from an agrarian past to the postindustrial present. Just as many intellectuals advocated reforms in the social and political arenas, they also espoused changes in painting. Two main approaches to "new" Chinese painting emerged. One was the eclecticism offered by K'ang Yu-wei 康有為 (1858–1927), an influential Confucian scholar, an advocate of moral, economic, and political reform, and a central figure in the failed Hundred Day Reform of 1898. The other approach espoused total rejection of tradition and was propounded by Ch'en Tu-hsiu 陳獨秀 (1879–1942), founder of the influential iconoclastic journal *Hsin-ch'ing-nien* 新青年 (*New Youth*), cofounder of the Chinese Communist Party, and one of the most important figures in the May Fourth Movement, a "New Culture" movement that brought in a new era of modern Chinese cultural history.

For several decades following 1949, under the newly established and largely insular People's Republic of China, three approaches to painting contended for official recognition and support in mainland China: conservative traditional Chinese painting; Soviet-derived Socialist Realism; and a narrowly defined synthesis of Chinese and Western art based on earlier importations.

These three strains have continued to endure, in one form or another. Nevertheless, many modern Chinese painters, no matter their circumstances, share one common trait: contact with contemporary Western art. But they have not merely imitated it; instead, they have rediscovered the abstract and expressionistic possibilities in their own tradition. It is in this sense that they are heirs to the great tradition of Chinese painting. Many modern Chinese artists, having been trained in the Western tradition by studying abroad, have succeeded in transforming Chinese tradition and rejuvenating it without appearing "Westernized," exemplifying the excellence of a modern Chinese artist. Through their synthesis of the theories, techniques, and styles of traditional literati painting, they have been able to achieve innovation that enriches the tradition. Many great modern Chinese painters have shown ways to resolve the tension between the effort to modernize and the desire to retain a traditional cultural identity in modern Chinese history.

Lo Ch'ing owes much of the internalization and the naturalization of his experimental ink work to the facts that he practices it in Taiwan and that his subject matters are distinctively Taiwanese. The "Chinese tradition" takes a not-so-subtle turn in the Taiwanese environment. Indeed, Taiwan was the most fascinating place for experimentation, particularly during the late 1970s to 1980s, when Lo Ch'ing rose to fame. The rise of industrialization, postindustrialization, and the intriguing issue of Taiwan's cultural identity created a nurturing and controversial ground for creative talents.

As a Newly Industrialized Country (NIC), Taiwan has been regarded as one of the Four Little Dragons (along with South Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore) because of her recent economic "miracle." Her economic success helped to place the small island on the international map as the import-export gateway to East Asia. When Taiwan was under Japanese rule (1895–1945), struggling to maintain a sense of authenticity and Taiwanese cultural integrity, it was not nearly as problematic for the island to include foreign (Western) cultural experiences and influences that accompanied the rapid exchange of goods. In the aftermath of Japanese rule, that straightforward self-expression became at once more difficult and promising. In fact, Taiwan's complicated political and cultural past is directly related to its ability to thrive economically under the international spotlight. Whether accepting nonnative culture, repelling it, or both, the island is at its best when it pays attention to newness, changes, and differences.

Her cultural development has also received international scholarly attention, particularly in literature, film, music, and dance. Her visual arts in general and painting in particular, however, have received little, if any, attention in comparison with those on mainland China.¹ During the second half of the 1940s and throughout the 1950s, painting from Taiwan tended to be conservative and reflected strong government control in cultural policies, mainly because of postwar economic hardship, political instability, and military threats from mainland China. The controversy over the orthodoxy of a "national painting" (*kuo-hua* 國畫) exemplifies the tension between the legacy of Japan's fifty-year colonization of Taiwan and the assertion of power and legitimacy of the Nationalist government.

Cut off from the legacy of the modern art movement initiated by Hsu Pei-hung 徐悲鴻, Liu Hai-su 劉海粟, Lin Feng-mien 林風眠, and others who remained on mainland China, painting from Taiwan in the

1 Jason C. Kuo, *Art and Cultural Politics in Postwar Taiwan* (Taipei: SMC Publishing, 2000).

late 1950s and throughout the 1960s was characterized by the rise of a modernist movement in which young artists of the "Fifth Moon (*Wu-yüeh* 五月) Group" sought to combine Chinese tradition of ink painting with Abstract Expressionism and other currents of contemporary Western art. This movement paralleled a modernist tendency in poetry and fiction, seen in the work of the writers associated with the literary periodical *Hsien-tai wen-hsueh* 現代文學 (*Modern Literature*). Some of these writers in their critical essays lent their support to modernist painters, but the cultural establishment, still dominated by formal and informal state control, was not supportive and the modernist movement in painting, despite support from a handful of intellectuals and some foreign patrons residing in Taiwan, declined toward the end of the 1960s.

Taiwan experienced tremendous economic growth in the 1970s, but at the same time was frustrated by diplomatic setbacks with her expulsion from the U.N. and derecognition by the United States. A heated debate on a nativist literature (*hsiang-t'u wen-hsueh* 鄉土文學 or Literature of Hometown and Soil) developed as a middle class arose, as the social and economic structure changed, as Taiwan underwent a crisis of identity within the international community, and as a political opposition emerged. Similarly in painting, a search for nativist roots was launched; folk arts and local antiques became the sources of inspiration, and depiction of the land and the people of Taiwan became fashionable. The work of the Japanese-trained, first generation of western-style painters began to be rediscovered and aggressively marketed just as interest in local history grew and political power became Taiwanized.

In the 1980s, with increasing liberalization of state cultural policies and the tendency toward pluralism in social, economic, and political arenas, art in Taiwan experienced a parallel instability, fragmentation, and commodification. Genres became blurred, and art suffered the loss of a grand metanarrative, as was the case in many other postindustrial, late capitalistic, and postmodernist societies. Interest in marginality, otherness, and difference can be found in Taiwanese intellectuals' questioning of the role of art museums, the cultivation of a nativist cultural identity, the emergence of alternative spaces for exhibiting art, and the heterogeneous pastiche in emergent art. The emphasis on the primacy of form in the modernist movement of the 1960s was replaced in the 1980s with an emphasis on social and political content.

Taiwan's industrialization and postindustrialization are central subjects in Lo Ch'ing's work. His painting shows a heightened awareness in its presentation of subjects and their modern and postmodern

environments. Certainly, there is an oddity in Lo Ch'ing's depiction of alien saucers and floating rocks and mountains, yet precisely for that very reason his work presents a fresh curiosity that had not been explored in the practice of ink painting.

Lo Ch'ing is probably one of the few contemporary Chinese artists to combine their own poems with ink paintings. Sometimes, inscribing titles or poems on painting can provide more information for viewers, but the inscription can be overemphasized, thereby demoting the painting into a mere illustration. From the Ming-Ch'ing dynastic periods (1368–1911) onward, such phenomena are numerous through Chinese art history (of course, this criticism is seldom applied to the well-known painters who are considered masters). Lo Ch'ing is aware of this problem. He believes that not every painting should have a title inscribed, and not every title should be extended to a poem; the most important thing is to explore the principle of the poetry-painting link in representations of "ideas beyond images" and "ideas beyond words."

Several scholars have commented on Lo Ching's poetry as well as the relationship between his poetry and painting. Joseph Allen has observed:

[Lo Ch'ing's] creative strength lies in interpretation that yields an accessible but dynamic poetic language. Here is perhaps the height of that integration. Poem and painting interact in a synchronic stasis and diachronic flow, at once a moment and a progression, offered by the poet-painter but assembled by the reader-viewer. Lo Ch'ing has embraced traditional sensibilities and integrated them with non-traditional elements, offering us poetic configurations that are innovative and aesthetically harmonious.²

Perhaps one of the most important and well-known poems by Lo Ch'ing is "Six Ways to Eat a Watermelon," written in December 1970:³

2 Joseph R. Allen, "Lo Ch'ing's Poetics of Integration: New Configurations of the Literati Tradition," *Modern Chinese Literature*, 2, no. 2 (fall 1986): 143–69, at 165.

3 Translation taken from idem, "The Postmodern (?) Misquote in the Poetry and Painting of Lo Ch'ing," *World Literature Today* 65, no. 3 (summer 1991): 421–26, at 421. A slightly different translation is in idem, *Forbidden Games and Video Poems: The Poetry of Yang Mu and Lo Ch'ing* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1993).

Six Ways to Eat a Watermelon

The Fifth Way: Watermelon Lineages

No one would confuse watermelons and meteorites
Watermelons have nothing in common with starry nights
But we must admit that the earth is a satellite of sorts
Thus it is difficult to deny that watermelons and stars have
No family ties

Since watermelons and the earth are not only
Parent and child, but also love each other like
Brother and sister, that love is as
The sun and moon, the sun and us, us and the moon
A
Like

The Fourth Way: Watermelon Origins

We live on the surface of the earth obviously
And obviously they live in their melon interior
We run to and fro, with our thick skin
Trying to stay on the surface
Digesting rays of light into darkness
That envelops us, envelops our cold-craving warmth
In Zen meditation they concentrate on one thought
Inside sculpting it into calm concrete passion
Always seeking their own fulfillment, their personal development
But in the end we cannot avoid being pushed into the watermelon
And they sooner or later will burst out

The Third Way: Watermelon Philosophy

The history of watermelon philosophy
Is shorter than that of earth
And longer than ours
No way
Not practicing see no evil, hear no evil, say no evil, Having nothing to do with each other
The watermelon haves and have-nots
No envy for ovum, no disdain for egg
Neither oviparous, nor viviparous
Comprehending the principle of finding life in death

The watermelon does not fear invasion, nor cringe
Before destruction

The Second Way: Watermelon Domains

If we were to smash a watermelon
It would be for jealousy, for
Smashing a watermelon is the same as bashing a global night
And that is to dash the stars from the starry sky
And to mash the entire universe, flat
And as a result we would be more jealous
Yet, because then
The relationship of meteorite and melon seed,
The friendship of melon seed and universe
Would be even clearer, and would again sink its
Blade deep into our
Domain

The First Way: Let's Eat and Then We'll Talk

(translation by Joseph R. Allen)

吃西瓜的六種方法

第五種 西瓜的血統

沒人會誤會西瓜是隕石
西瓜星星，是完全不相干的
然我們卻不否認地球是，星的一種
故而也就難以否認，西瓜具有
星星的血統

因為，西瓜和地球不止是有
父母子女的關係，而且還有
兄弟姊妹的感情——那感情
就好像月亮跟太陽太陽跟我們我們跟月亮的
一，樣

第四種 西瓜的籍貫

我們住在地球外面，顯然
顯然他們住在西瓜裡面
我們東奔西走，死皮賴臉的
想住在外面，把光明消化成黑暗
包裹我們，包裹冰冷而渴求溫暖的我們

他們禪坐不動，專心一意的
在裡面，把黑暗塑成具體而冷靜的熱情
不斷求自我充實，自我發展
而我們終究免不了，要被趕入地球裡面
而他們遲早也會，衝刺到西瓜外面

第三種 西瓜的哲學

西瓜的哲學史
比地球短，比我們長
非禮勿視勿聽勿言，勿為一
而治的西瓜與西瓜
老死不相往來

不羨慕卵石，不輕視雞蛋
非胎生非卵生的西瓜
亦能明白死裡求生的道理
所以，西瓜不怕侵略，更不懼
死亡

第二種 西瓜的版圖

如果我們敲破了一個西瓜
那純粹是為了，嫉妒
敲破西瓜就等於敲碎一個圓圓的夜
就等於敲落了所有的，星，星
敲爛了一個完整的宇宙

而其結果，卻總使我們更加
嫉妒，因為這樣一來
隕石和瓜子的關係，瓜子和宇宙的交情
又將會更清楚，更尖銳的
重新撞入我們的，版圖

第一種 吃了再說

On this poem, Silvia Marijnissen has perceptively observed: The way he deals with the Chinese tradition, through his efforts to combine the techniques from different arts, gives him his own specific voice. Luo Qing's [Lo Ch'ing's] approach is essentially a parodic one, both in a serious and non-serious sense of the word: he uses the logic of a certain vocabulary, he plays around with a certain way of thinking and applies it in a different, new way. At the same time this poetry is, in approach and effect, linked with postmodern literature, although the combination of the tradition and postmodernism may sound paradoxical, since postmodernism has often been said to go beyond all borders, and thus to mark the end of all tradition. However, as seen in the above examples it is clear that [Lo Ch'ing] is reworking Chinese tradition, and that his work has several postmodern characteristics. These include autoreflexion, meaning that the poem is dealing with the process of its own creation; fragmentation, the idea that unity cannot be attained in our shattered world;

parody; and of course playfulness and irony, in the sense that writing is seen as a game.⁴

In October 1979, Lo Ch'ing wrote the poem "Dew" in the lyrical tradition of Chinese poetry, but with a clear modern sensibility:

They say
I should not dwell in mountains so high
should not work in the scorching gorges so deep
They say
I should not hide
Secluded within my many different rooms
With my dead branch like fingers
Painting white clouds, dream fantasies
All over the floor, the walls.

But they don't know
When darkness returns
From where I come,
Those many-splendored clouds
Will silently float out
Hovering above the most drought places
Transforming into sounds
Of intermittent showers.

(translation by Nancy Ing)

4 Silvia Marijnissen, "Digesting Tradition: The Poetry of Luo Qing," in *The Chinese At Play: Festivals, Games and Leisure*, ed. Anders Hansson et al. (London: Kegan Paul, 2002), 197-98.

甘露

他們說我不該隱居在那麼高冷的山上
 更不該工作在那麼深熱的谷底
 說我不該整天關在不同的屋裡
 用瘦如枯枝的手掌
 畫如夢如幻的白雲
 畫得滿牆滿地都是

他們卻不知
 當黑夜從我去的那個地方回來時
 牆上地上那些多采多姿豐滿無比的白雲
 便會悄悄飄了出去
 在最苦最早的地方
 化做雨聲陣陣

As a poet, Lo Ch'ing is keenly familiar with the long Chinese tradition of integrating poetry and painting. In the Northern Sung Dynasty (960–1126), poets and critics such as Su Shih 蘇軾 (1037–1101) insisted on the unity of poetry and painting. Su Shih said: "Poetry and painting are the same; both should be natural and fresh." He also said: "When one savors Wang Wei's 王維 (701–78) poems, there are paintings in them; when one looks at Wang Wei's paintings, there are poems."⁵ Fang Hsun 方薰, an eighteenth-century critic, pointed out: "Inscribed paintings began from Su [Shi] and Mi [Fu], and flourished in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties. Put inscriptions on paintings, so the paintings can benefit from inscriptions and have more lofty sentiments and elegant thoughts; the inscriptions also make up for weaknesses in the paintings. Later periods were influenced by this phenomenon."⁶

5 Quoted in Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting: Su Shih (1037–1101) to Tung Ch'i-ch'ang (1555–1636)* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 188.

6 Quoted in Yu Chien-hua, *Chung-kuo hua-lun lei-pian* (Taipei: Ho-lo, 1975), 241.

In the history of Chinese painting, the earliest to put inscriptions on paintings was the Yuan painter Chao Meng-fu 趙孟頫 (1234–1322). For example, in his short handscroll *Sheep and Goat* (ca. 1300–1305, now in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), the painter inscribes on the left: “I have painted horses, but never painted goats. Because Chung-hsin requests such a painting, I playfully paint it from life. Although this piece cannot compare with ancient masters’ art, they more or less match up in spirit.”⁷ This inscription not only points out the painter’s intention and gives viewers hints about the painting’s meaning but also organizes the composition. Two goats form a circle on the right side of the painting, and the inscription fills the empty space on the left.

Obviously, Lo Ch’ing has made an effort to place inscriptions on his paintings as well. For example, *Life, a Taxi Ride*, a work in his series *Asphalt Road Variations*, is composed of two wide ink lines, fading from the bottom upward, that form the asphalt road. Two trees scatter and spread to either side, and a red taxi at the bottom left is the focus (fig. 124). He inscribes his poem:

Life is a bumpy, dark road.
 The scenery to the sides sometimes is incomplete, and sometimes complete.
 But we are all guests in the taxi;
 Cannot control our own fate, constantly moving forward.
 The distance is calculated;
 The time is also calculated;
 But the taxi fee must be paid with our lives.

命運是一條顛躓灰暗的路
 兩旁的風景有時殘缺有時圓滿
 而我們都是計程車中的過客
 身不由己，不斷向前進行
 距離計程
 時間也計程
 車費則一定要用生命來支付

Lo Ch’ing cleverly inscribes the sentences “the distance is calculated; the time is also calculated” opposite to the red taxi, thus allowing the adorning poem to be part of the whole composition, as well as an integral part of the whole meaning. His depiction of the movement of

7 Conveniently reproduced in Norinda Neave, Lara Blanchard, and Marika Sardar, *Asian Art* (New York: Pearson, 2015), 188.

an asphalt road represents the pulse of modern urban life in Taipei. In such works, the phenomena of "images inside images" and "worlds inside worlds" exemplify the great fusion of his rationality and sensibility.

Chinese literati painting is part of a glorious tradition that has lasted around nine hundred years. But nearly all old customs become unavoidable burdens for artists. After such a long time, what should be said has been said, and the potential for a painter's creativity has decreased. However, the hope for innovation is not lost. If we do not treat creation as the most important and necessary tool of the aesthetic process, but rather if we regard creation as the painter's interpretive prerogative when he faces all external phenomena of his world and the artistic traditions that preceded him, then we are unlikely to use the concept of creation as a synonym for art. Furthermore, we will not feel disheartened or discouraged by the burden of tradition, or even unnecessarily submit to its perceived authority and significance.

Lo Ch'ing's work provides us with an opportunity to think about this issue. With a consistently experimental spirit, he attempts to broaden the subjects of Chinese ink painting and poetry. For example, Lo Ch'ing has written many poems on the palm trees seen everywhere in subtropical Taiwan, including "The King Palm," written for the 2001 "Markers: Outdoor Banner Event of Artists and Poets" in Venice:

If it were in daytime
 I should have been a dark green brush
 With golden sunshine painting my gossamery dream
 Ascending and transforming into white clouds
 It will soar up to the zenith of the world
 Descending and dissolving into spring rain
 It will visit the lowest ditch on earth.

If it were in nighttime
 I should have been a pale green torch
 Slicing and burning the darkness into ashes of fireflies
 Ascending the firefly radiates into a meteor
 Scratching to awaken a sky of timid stars
 Descending the firefly concentrates into an ebony match
 Striking to light up the smallest stove in the world.

However, it is now
A thick misty smoggy day
I am, alas, nothing but
A broken green bloom.
Leaning against
A lonely forsaken wall
Cobwebbed with refuse and dust.

(Translation by Stefan Hyner and Lo Ch'ing)

大王椰子

要是在青天白日下
我一定是一支墨綠色的毛筆
蘸金色的陽光畫透明的夢幻
夢幻上昇化做白雲
飛臨世上最高的頂峰
夢醒下降化做春雨
拜訪地下最低的溝渠

要是在冷風夜晚裡
我一定是一支青綠色的火把
焚片片黑暗成點點螢火
螢火向上猛衝 化成火柴一根
用力化亮漫天膽怯閃躲的星斗無數
螢火向下浪遊 化做流星一顆
輕輕點燃違章建築中小小的爐火一個

可是現在 現在卻是一個
陰雲迷霧紅塵污染人人發昏的黃昏
而我也只能是一支
斜靠在廢牆角的慘綠掃把
任由一大群語言律法的蜘蛛
在體內體外穿梭編織
一襲修辭華麗的壽袍

Lo Ch'ing's experimental spirit is also reflected in the interaction of painting and inscription, especially in his poetry-painting album *Ode to Palm Trees* (plates 1-8).

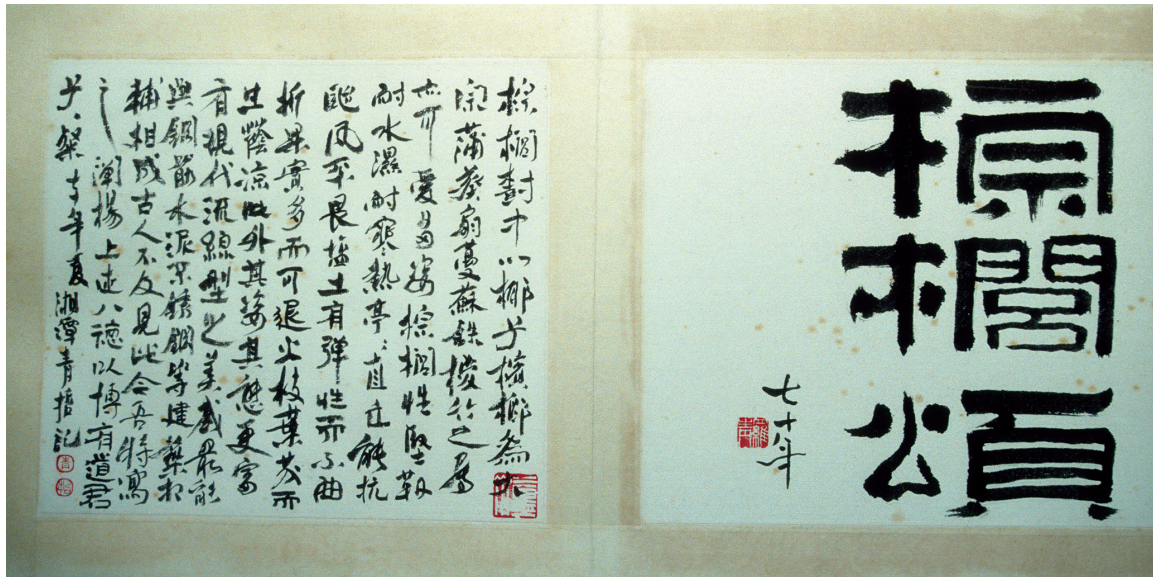


Plate 1. Cover, *Ode to Palm Trees*, poetry-painting album, 1981



Plate 2. "Door God," *Ode to Palm Trees*



Plate 3. "Fishing Reclusion," *Ode to Palm Trees*

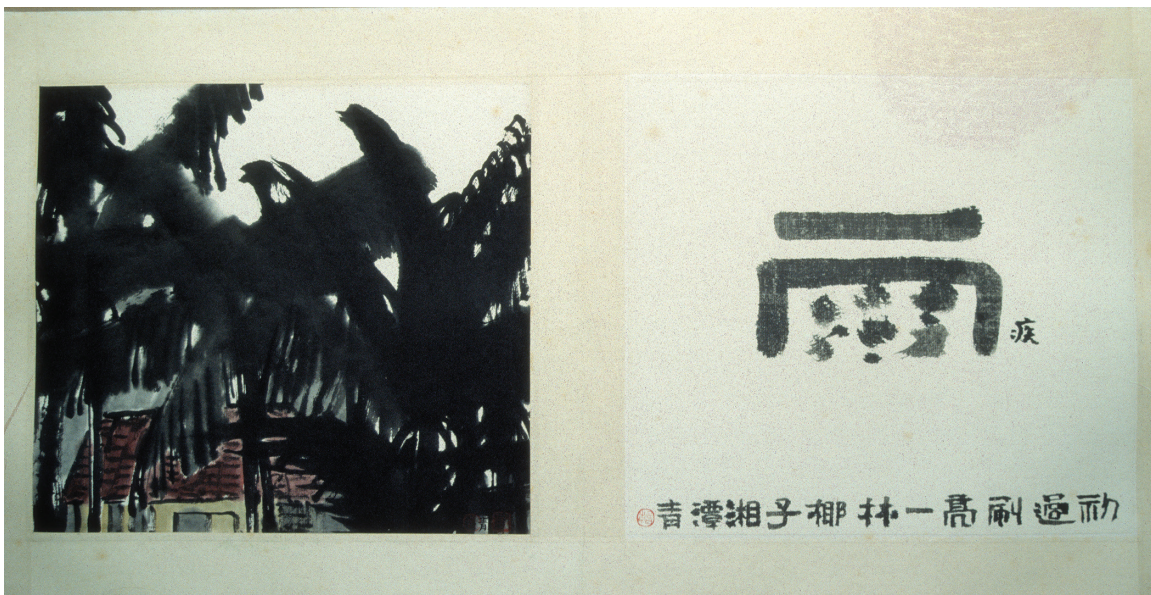


Plate 4. "Rapid Rain," *Ode to Palm Trees*



Plate 5. "A Palm Tree as Pavilion," *Ode to Palm Trees*



Plate 6. "Beauty," *Ode to Palm Trees*



Plate 7. "Cave," Ode to Palm Trees



Plate 8. "Sunset," Ode to Palm Trees

When a painter inscribes thoughts, reflections, or praise on a painting (no matter if it is a word, a sentence, a poem, or a prose poem), the viewer cannot miss these non-pictorial symbols. The text influences the viewer's aesthetic process, becoming part of the painting's meaning. Unless the viewers ignore or fail to understand these inscriptions, their feelings about this painting are unavoidably affected by the inscriptions' contents and placement.

For example, in Lo Ch'ing's *Ode to Palm Trees* poetry-painting album, most images and words correspond to each other. Particularly in "Door God," "Fishing Reclusion," and "Rapid Rain" (plates 2-4) as well as some others, the relationship between images and words is quite close, thereby shaping the whole meaning.

Sometimes, the tension in Lo Ch'ing's painting derives from his subtle juxtaposition of different images, not just from his realistic representation of images themselves. What he really cares about is how to attribute new relationships and new meanings to individual images that are seemingly unrelated, as seen in his paintings from the 1980s and 1990s, such as *Moon Worshippers* (fig. 151). Therefore, if we agree that one of art's aims is to broaden the horizon of our mind, to strengthen our life experience, or to reorganize our chaotic daily life into order, then we should admit that Lo Ch'ing's works have in fact made advancements in this field. Such works illustrate again the spirit of exploration in his paintings.

In many of his paintings, poems, and written artist's statements published in the past four decades, we realize and understand his ambition to pursue new painting languages and subjects. On the one hand, when we deal with a painter like Lo Ch'ing, who is still developing and exploring, it is unwise and irresponsible to predict his future direction. On the other hand, as for the painter's artistic aims (such as how poetry and painting might stimulate each other, how to adopt and surpass traditions, how to represent modern life experiences, and so on), Lo Ch'ing has accomplished much. Based on his keen sensibility as a poet, and his ability to shape the relationships between objects and concepts, complemented by his spirit of adventure and discovery, if he could continue to work in this way, Lo Ch'ing would definitely realize a new road for modern Chinese ink painting, and impart new vigor to the glorious tradition of Chinese literati painting.

Lo Ch'ing's artistic production consists primarily of landscape, figures, birds, flowers, and animals. His painted imageries that portray, illustrate, and reflect the aesthetic changes over the past 175 years from

the Opium War to the present are fundamentally different from traditional representations. His new ink-color practice attempts to reestablish a balance between the spiritual past and the material present, between the decorative color tradition before the T'ang dynasty (618–906) and the pure ink tradition after the Five dynasties (907–960), and above all between the Neolithic Chinese pottery patterns (5000–3000 B.C.) and the postmodern computer chip board. Lo Ch'ing's art can be regarded as a poetic record of his meditation on the transformation of an age-old agrarian culture into a modern or postmodern world: he innovates and renovates conventional patterns and forms and creates fresh conversations with the past in order to remove traditional clichés. Through different processes of serialization and varieties of themes, multipurpose conversations have been developed as characteristic of Lo Ch'ing's art.

As a leading scholar of art and literature of Taiwan, Lo Ch'ing is one of the most prolific writers on art in contemporary China. His writings provide us with insightful comments on his creative intention and his understanding of art history. For example, in his essay on "See a Cosmos in a Vignette," he writes:

About painting, size would be the least thing of one's concern. The clarity of an artistic mind should be fundamental. When the essence of things are captured and the humor of the subjects disclosed, when wordy descriptions spared and gaudy colors avoided, a unique atmosphere and celestial realization is to be revealed upon even the most ordinary scene. Things that touch the deepest part of your heart are indeed often found unexpectedly lurking around behind you, waiting for a serendipitous eye to detect. This is especially true in the vignette practice of Chinese ink-color painting.

Chinese vignette has been popular since the eleventh century of the North Sung Dynasty in the forms of round fan and album-leaf, covering subjects of all sorts, including the popular idyllic landscape, poetic flower-and-bird, and recluse figure. Its composition is simple and concise, one single scene depicted in one single painting with a sharp focus that is reminiscent of short and terse lyrical poetry. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, echoing the trendy Neo-Confucianism of its period, believing that correct knowledge could be obtained only through the scientific investigation of the principles of things,

the Sung painters took the lyrical vignette to its peak by combining poetry and painting organically while realistically painted images expressed and evoked lyrical meaning beyond colors and lines. The inscribed words beyond followed the same principle: implementing the part to suggest the whole, the less to symbolize the more.

After the Sung dynasty, from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, in the field of vignette, besides the round-fan and album-leaf, the painted folding fan emerged to dominate the scene. And at the same time, artists launched a search for new aesthetic approaches. On the one hand, they conducted a graphic conversation with past masterpieces and demonstrated an unprecedented strong historical sense, and on the other, they followed the philosophy of intuition advocated by Wang Yang-ming 王陽明 (1472–1529), the renowned Neo-Confucian idealist who affirmed that true knowledge should occur within the mind rather than through actual objects and that knowledge and action are codependent. A great variety of art styles therefore burst out during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, witnessing the second phase of flourishing lyrical vignette.

Now three hundred years have passed since the end of the seventeenth century. Contemporary Chinese ink-color painting now is developing in a threefold context of agrarian, industrial, and postindustrial societies. Signs of postmodern conditions have been emerging everywhere in China. With novel artistic experiments, Chinese contemporary artists will indeed reach out with wide open arms to welcome a third phase of lyrical vignette, yet to come.⁸

Like many artists in Chinese history, Lo Ch'ing has a strong sense of and appreciation for tradition, but he also recognizes the tyranny of tradition in the creative process, seen in one of his most important essays, "The Chinese Language and Chinese Landscape Painting." Among the many insights in this essay are the following comments:

The principle followed by the editors of painting manuals can be best illustrated with Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic the-

8 Lo Ch'ing, "See a Cosmos in a Vignette," in *See a Cosmos in a Vignette: Lo Ch'ing's Lyrical Vignette* (Shanghai: Degas Gallery, 2010), n. p., with minor modifications.

ory. The laws of making landscape compositions are defined with rules and examples which equal the paradigms produced by the interactions of the syntagmatic axis and associative axis. Under the category of trees, pine and cypress are designated as "hosts" and others as "guests." The position of mountains and peaks is classified with the same principle, the big one is "master," and the small ones are "guests" or "servants" that should wait on the host. The relationship between nature and time is also defined with model examples: red maples appear only in autumn, green willows are signifiers of summer, peach and plum blossoms decorate the spring scenes, pines and cypresses stand against snowstorms in winter.

The significance of Wang Kai's [active ca. 1677–1705] manual [*Chieh-tzu-yuan hua-chuan* or *Painting Manual of the Mustard Seed Garden*] is that it offers a thorough categorization of all the elements necessary for a landscape painting, including details such as five different ways to depict pine needles and trunks, and twelve different ways to portray waterfalls. Furthermore, the manual gives copies of both contemporary and ancient paintings through somewhat simplified woodcarving reproductions. Landscape composition is divided into seven parts: (1) mountains, peaks, hills, rocks, pebbles; (2) trees, groves, woods, grass; (3) rivers, creeks, waterfalls, lakes, ponds; (4) all kinds of clouds; (5) cottages, boats, bridges; (6) figures; (7) colophons and seals. The beginner is asked to memorize them, just as writers learn and store morphemes, words, word groups, and clauses in their memories from the associative axis. Writers organize the signifiers they acquire into a composition according to given rules based on the grammar of the syntagmatic axis to accommodate or portray the target situation with semantic coding. At the same time, the painter will employ different quality of lines such as broken, continuous, thin and thick, and different tone of inks such as dark, light, dry, wet to express his feelings. This is similar to the writer's use of phonemes, syllables, rhythmic groups and tone-groups. The painter can quote and reorganize the relatively simplified pictorial reproductions of the works of the masters, ancient and contemporary, and then, on the blank space of his painting, write down his own or another's poetry or prose as colophons with beautiful calligraphy to reinforce the message he wants to convey. Painting language and written language become equal signifiers and can be mixed and utilized

to serve painters. It is indeed a "dictionary" of Chinese landscape painting containing both synchronic and diachronic information to meet the needs of artists, connoisseurs, art critics, and general audiences.

Seventeenth-century painters spent considerable time systematically learning and digesting painting traditions from the past. To them, nature was not the only source from which artists receive inspiration: if one wanted to be a successful painter with one's own style, to imitate nature was not the only approach nor the necessary step to adopt. Art should be judged according to a historical perspective. The audience should face and trace not the original material from which the painting was derived, but the meaning conveyed and signified through the arrangement of the signifiers. This explains the appearance of numerous new styles in the seventeenth century: painters of that era enjoyed a freedom never experienced before in Chinese art history. They had the freedom to use a fully fledged painting language endowed with a rich vocabulary and flexible grammar.

The publications of painting manuals, on the one hand, freed innovative painters from the bondage of reality to create individual styles as they desired.⁹

Toward the end of the essay, Lo Ch'ing writes:

The true treasure house of art signifiers is in art history. Most seventeenth-century painters, like Tung, were convinced that artistic creation should depend upon ingenious applications of signifiers either inherited from the past or of one's own innovations. Only with a pictorial language blending individual and conventional signifiers can an artist rediscover the essences of reality and nature without any hindrance and create novel compositions that convey profound thoughts and feelings. When content has been separated from form, the generative process of styles begins, and a kind of artistic transformation thus ensues.

This not only happened in the evolution of Chinese landscape painting, but also in the development of Chinese architecture. The famous Ming dynasty (1368–1644) garden design, which combines poetry, painting, miniature rockery and build-

9 Lo Ch'ing-che, "The Chinese Language and Chinese Landscape Painting," *Studies in English Literature & Linguistics* (May 1987): 77–104, citation from 92–93, slightly adjusted.

ings into an organic whole, clearly demonstrates that when signifiers acquire their independence and autonomy, they can float freely from one genre of art to another. The ingenious designs of Ming gardens, demonstrating the synthesis of all arts, will serve as inspiring examples for postmodern architects to meditate upon and assimilate into their own creations.¹⁰

Lo Ch'ing's creative use of tradition can be seen in the series of paintings based on Fan K'uan's masterpiece "Travelers amid Streams and Mountains," from the late tenth to the early eleventh century and now in the collection of the National Palace Museum in Taipei.¹¹ The series is entitled "Calling for Fan K'uan." (figs. 70, 72, 79). According to Lo Ch'ing:

I started the "Calling for Fan K'uan" series in 1997 and have finished 7 paintings so far and am about to finish the 8th one in 2015. My inspiration for the series is derived from the 1979 National Palace Museum Taipei publication on Fan K'uan's "Travelers amid Streams and Mountains."¹² The book is the first of its kind, devoted to one single painting with full page color plate and black and white photo details reproducing and enlarging the various parts of the painting, now rearranged, regrouped, segregated, and compartmentalized.

This is unprecedented in the history of Chinese art since the Neolithic times and is a perfect example demonstrating how the mode of thinking of industrialization has influenced the way of looking at and viewing classical Chinese landscape painting. Thirty years have passed since the publication of this pioneering book and no one so far has recognized its significance visually, aesthetically, or culturally. I am probably the first to take advantage of the publication of the book to conduct a "profound multilayer conversation" with the art of Fan K'uan at the juncture of the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries.¹³

Another good example of Lo Ch'ing's creative dialog with the Chinese cultural tradition is his "Peach Blossom Spring" Series (figs. 73, 78, 83).

10 Ibid. 101–2, slightly adjusted.

11 Conveniently reproduced in Yang Xin, Nie Chongzheng, Lang Shaojun, Richard M. Barnhart, James Cahill, and Wu Hung, *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 103.

12 *Fan K'uan Hsi-shan hsing-lu-t'u* (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1979).

13 Lo Ch'ing, unpublished paper, "My 'Calling for Fan K'uan' Series," slightly adjusted.

Explaining why he painted it, he states:

The original story is from the "Preface" to the poem "Peach Blossom Spring" by the great fourth-century poet Tao Ch'ien [365–427].¹⁴ In the past, the preface has been regarded as a piece of prose work and is edited for numerous text books for high school students to read and memorize. Traditional scholarship and interpretations of the piece have always been related to the idea of Shangri-La or utopia, which many have tried to identify with remote regions of China, most of them supposedly in Hunan, my father's home province.

I wrote a paper years ago to argue that the piece is not an essay but a standard piece of short story in which (a) long and (b) short seemingly irrelevant events (characterizations of a sly fisherman and an upright Confucian gentleman) are juxtaposed to suggest a (c) realization or revelation to the readers that the peach blossom spring is not a concrete real place of any sort but only a state of mind that could be discovered and attended solely through accident without any conscious deliberation. There is a hidden *Chan* Buddhist message in the story without the influence of *Chan*, before the birth of the idea of *Chan* Buddhism in China.

My parents fled to Taiwan from Mainland China after 1949 while I was still a little baby. Originally they were planning to take me back to Hunan from the beautiful harbor city Tsingtao to see my grandma, but the journey was interrupted by the civil war and they arrived at Taiwan, provisionally coincidentally still hoping that they could return home within a few months. However, the separation between Taiwan and China was abrupt and complete and lasted for forty grim years, communication between family members on both sides of the strait had been absolutely impossible and poisonously dangerous. The irony is that my father's mainland family thought that my father was lucky enough to be able to escape to Taiwan, the new Peach Blossom Spring, evading the Communist rule and the Cultural Revolution once and for all. Nevertheless my father was constantly yearning to return home to his mother, to his childhood, to his home town, to his memories. Sadly, he didn't

14 Cyril Birch, ed., *Anthology of Chinese Literature from the Earliest Times to the Fourteenth Century* (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 167–68.

realize that he could never go home again. His first and last trip back home after a forty-year separation was a series of disastrous and tragic disillusionments. The ideal Peach Blossom Spring can be discovered and visited only contingently by fortuity in one's dream.¹⁵

Now in his late sixties, Lo Ch'ing produces compositions full of discipline, rigor, and precision. Lo Ch'ing translates representation or narrative into poetic conversations. He also emphasizes the pure, clean expressive methodology of the process of production and its serialization, or repetition of themes. Lo Ch'ing therefore creates a self-referential world that follows an inner logic. Silence comes to powerfully address the intimacy between the artist's mind and material society.

As I have pointed out earlier, Lo Ch'ing is one of the few modern Chinese painters who has united modern poetry and ink-color painting with profound ingenuity and dexterous techniques. Utilizing traditional, folk, and modern pictorial signifier systems, he forges a new graphic language of his own, which is deeply rooted in a surrealist symbolism with a postmodern touch. His fresh compositional arrangements of novel subject matter, along with unique perspectives, penetrate into the relationship of his carefully selected and painted subjects, allowing him to present his ideas and feelings with profound, dramatic tension. Despite the cold, desolate, and tragic imaginations apparent in some of his paintings, Lo Ch'ing also quite adeptly expresses his humorous attitude toward the incongruities experienced in the hustling-bustling urban lives of cosmopolitan metropolises. Wittiness and a lofty conceit are evident in all his works.

The ultimate concern of Lo Ch'ing's painting and calligraphy is to reflect his own *Weltanschauung*—a comprehensive conception or image of the universe and of humanity's relation to it. This worldview, from Lo Ch'ing's standpoint, enables him to reflect on, discuss, and represent urgent social, political, as well as aesthetic issues. Above all, with a historical perspective, he is on a quest for new sensibilities mirroring the dilemmas faced by China over the past centuries, when Chinese culture underwent different phases of predicaments, confronted unprecedented national and international challenges, and suffered kaleidoscopic changes. This traumatic transformation may be best summarized in three stages—from the agrarian period to an industrial one, and finally to a postindustrial phase, all overlapping. The consequent

15 Lo Ch'ing, unpublished paper, "My 'Peach Blossom Spring' Series."

aesthetic complexities that have arisen have affected almost every single aspect of the life and art of Chinese artists.

With his painting and calligraphy, and with semiotic and postmodern approaches, Lo Ch'ing tries to tackle the problems inherited by modern Chinese intellectuals of the past and present by utilizing signs, symbols, metaphors, and a new vocabulary of techniques. He has taken it upon himself first to develop new techniques and forms. These take shape in his iron-web textural-strokes, seal-paste coloring methods using thick, dense applications of color, and the creation of a collage of multiple imageries with a deliberate scattering of gold flakes. Second, he has coined new graphic vocabularies and idioms, such as his portrayal of cracked surfaces with near and distant perspectives, and his play of 2-D and 3-D inconsistencies. Third, he has created a brand new system of graphic signifiers expressing his feelings and ideas, voicing his arguments and contentions. Last of all, he negotiates with current issues, both East and West, and converses with artists, both ancient and modern. For example, he sprinkles and pastes gold flakes onto images in his *UFO* series, combining a style of surface enhancement from the folk art tradition with modern subject matter.¹⁶

His dynamic use of ancient technique, on the other hand, is seen in his Extraordinary Arhats (or Eighteen New Arhats) Series (figs. 187–216).¹⁷ He has integrated the radiant, glowing, intensely bright colors of the cave art of the Tang Dynasty with subtle ink tonal variations of the Sung and Yuan Dynasties. He uses this technique to illustrate scenes of Chan Buddhist enlightenment reinterpreted in the context of contemporary living in an urban environment. He demonstrates the wonder of this new approach by fusing Chinese characters (the *Heart Sutra*), calligraphy, and willow leaves into a magnificent combination that integrates verbal, graphic, and natural signifiers into one whole.

Lo Ch'ing's reinvented graphic language of ink and color enables him to express novel content with new compositions, to explore unfamiliar or uncommon subjects with new techniques, and to present a new aesthetic posture to the artistic spirit and environment of his contemporaries.

16 See for example in Jason Kuo, ed., *Lo Ch'ing hua-chi* (Taipei: Tung-ta, 1990), 53.

17 In Buddhism, an *arhat* (Sanskrit; *lohan* in Chinese) is a being who has attained the state of enlightenment. See Wen Fong, *The Lohans and a Bridge to Heaven* (Washington, D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art, 1958). See, for example, the set of sixteen *arhats*, attributed to Kuan-hsiu (832–912) and now in the Japanese Imperial Household Collection in Tokyo.

The following topics and titles of Lo Ch'ing's paintings exemplify well his range of interests:

The Postmodern Turn

Self-Portrait Series (figs. 1–30)

Landscape Deconstructed Series (figs. 31–64)

Windows Landscape Series (figs. 65–118)

One Man's Cultural Revolution Series (figs. 50, 54–57, 208–9)

Modernism Revised

Asphalt Road Series (figs. 119–33)

Flying Series (figs. 134–41)

Nocturnal Scene Series (figs. 142–57)

Iron-and-Steel Landscape Series (figs. 158–66)

Classical Renovation

Birds and Flowers (figs. 167–86)

Extraordinary Arhats Series (figs. 187–216)

Calling for the Ancients Series (figs. 217–52)

Palm Tree Series (figs. 253–61)

Multiple Collages (figs. 262–76)

Other Series

Finding the Recluse Series

Cityscape Series

Here Comes the UFO Series

Broken Mirrors of China Series

The Traveling Stones Series

Ten-Thousand Landscape Series

Anecdote of Jars Series

Early Work (figs. 277–318)

The loose-leaf book project developed by the American artist Thomas Rose and Lo Ch'ing is a case in point of Lo Ch'ing's ability to combine Western iconographic architectural images and link them to a larger cross-cultural poetic narrative. This and Rose's history of working with and curating contemporary Chinese artists provided a basis for the back-and-forth discussions that, in 2012, resulted in their enigmatic work, *Secrets* (plates 9–18), now in the collection of the



Plate 9. Thomas Rose and Lo Ch'ing, *Secrets*, book closed

Whitney Museum of American Art in New York and other public and private collections).¹⁸

¹⁸ Minneapolis: Indulgence Press, 2012. Portfolio. Ten copies were produced, signed and numbered by Thomas Rose and Lo Ch'ing. This is one of several books produced by Wilber "Chip" Schilling, owner of the Indulgence Press, in collaboration with Rose. The eight photographic prints are originals by Rose and were printed at Digi-Graphics, and Lo Ch'ing wrote the interpretive poems for this book, with his original brushwork and translations. They were letterpress printed from plates by Schilling. Each image is printed in color on fine woven paper. Each poem is printed in Chinese and English along with the striking black brushwork on a light and semi-transparent paper that slightly reveals the image beneath. The elephant folio sized sheets are housed in a green and black cloth portfolio with diagonal boards fastened with a black bone closure. Binding assistance was provided by Mary Ila Duntemann.



Plate 10. Thomas Rose and Lo Ch'ing, *Secrets*, title page

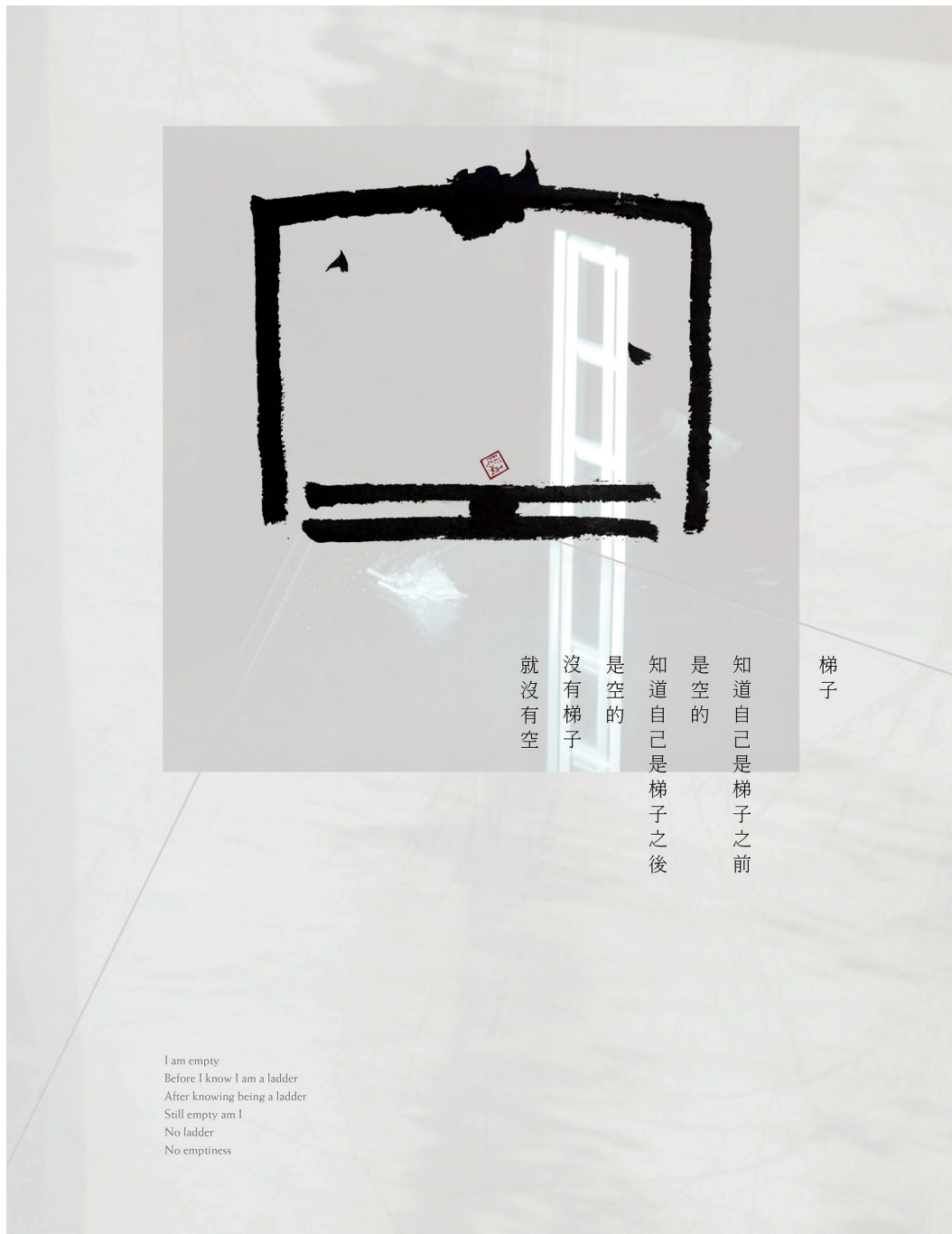


Plate 11. "Ladder"

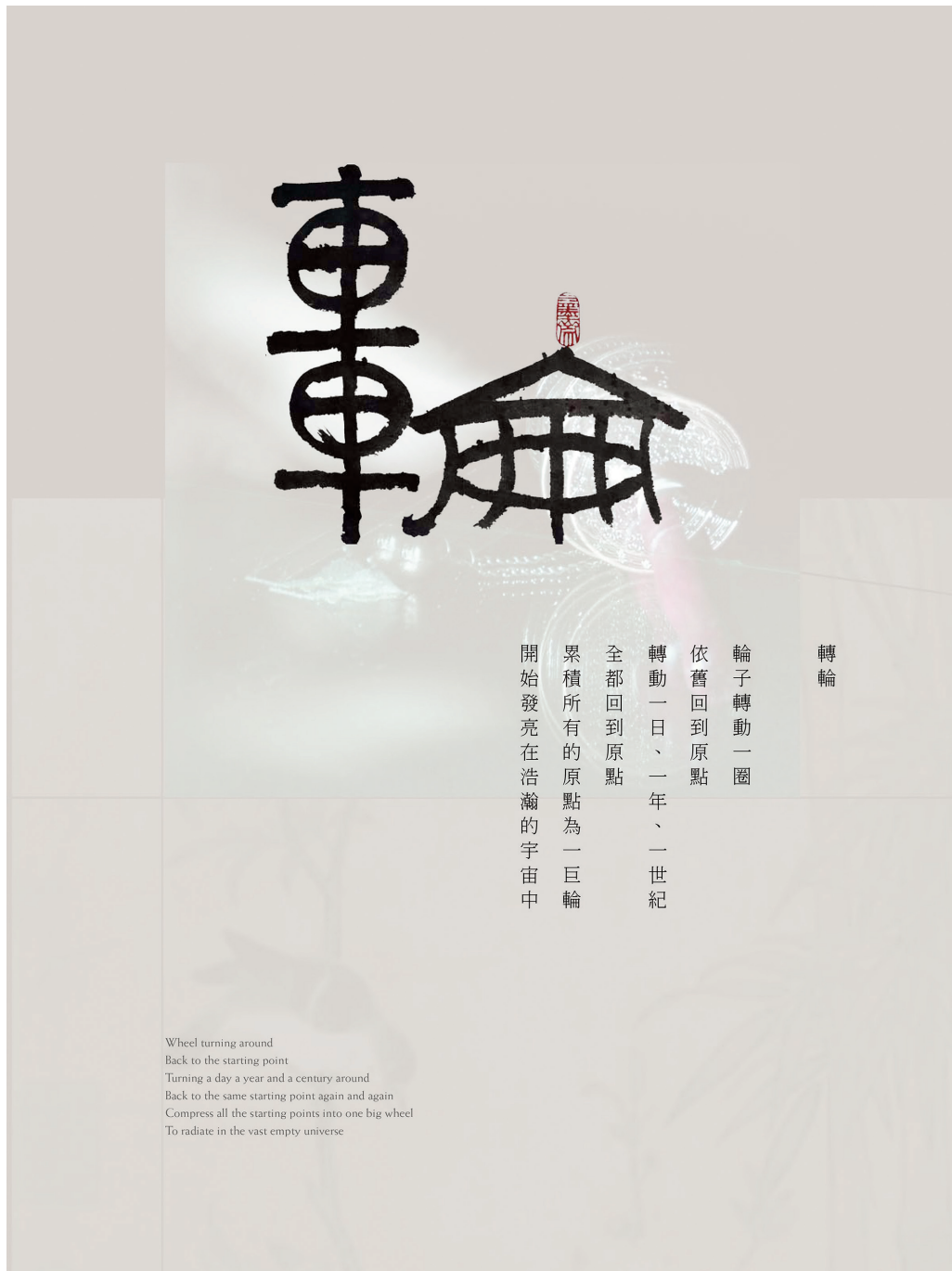


Plate 12. "Turning Wheel"



Plate 13. "Quicksilver"



入口

入口總是黝黑
出口常是光明
進去焚燒黑暗成為光明
出來在光明中分析黑暗
守白之道全在知黑
入口就是出口

The entrance is always dark
While the exit always shining
Enter to burn the darkness into brightness
Exit to analyze darkness in light
Knowing blackness is the only way to keep whiteness
To make entrance exit

Plate 14. "En-trance"



Walkers should move around
 While the world stops gracefully
 With endless changing facades
 Travelers should stay put
 Let the world spins dazzlingly
 Into nothingness

Plate 15. "Journey"



Plate 16. "Dream 1"



Plate 17. Thomas and Lo Ch'ing, "Dream 1"



Plate 18. "Dream 2"

Initially, neither artist had a specific idea or end result in mind; both were comfortable with the ambiguity of a free-flowing process. Both began by discussing various possible directions for the problems that arise from working across miles and cultures. Rose was working at the time with spatial reflections in glass of doll house furniture and other small objects, his interest being the vague and blurred image that resulted when the reflection was photographed, these appearing to float in the space of the photograph, corresponding to dreams and memories emanating from his literary interest in Proust and Flaubert—interests in domestic interiors. Lo Ch'ing responded with calligraphic works and poems. These first exchanges continued, ultimately to arrive at a selection of eight images, accompanying poems and calligraphy. The pairings of the photographs and poems are open-ended and intentionally ambiguous, allowing for conjecture as to how the images and text meet. As Rose eloquently observes in his "Foreword" to *Secrets*:

Lo Ch'ing's poems give these images the depth and richness that brings to mind narrative scrolls as well as the Medieval tradition of the devotional Book of Hours. The intention here is to place the poems in the context of the images without the image being illustrative or the text being explanatory. Rather than the specificity of the devotional, these pairings are open-ended and resist any specific reading. The ambiguity of the connections allow for conjecture as to how the image and text meet. As art is the embodiment of meaning in form, my hope is that the placement of the objects, the tone of the text, the proscenium opening in the page and the color tonalities reflect the contemplative character of our dreams.

Each aspect of these images, and the poems, has been enhanced through the precise orchestration of idea and material by Wilber Schilling—his exquisite sense of a unified whole foregrounds the work's fundamental narrative of the transit of life.

1 書桌 Desk

我是一張書桌
但一直以獨腳站立
讓三隻腳微微懸空
準備用秘密飛翔
抵抗世俗的地心吸引力
而無人察覺
(calligraphy: 懸空 dangling air)

I am a desk
Standing but with only one leg
the rest of the three slightly dangling in the air
ready to take a secret flight
fighting against the mundane gravity
Nobody has ever detected this

2 椅子 Chair

我是一把椅子
以自我克隆的方式
繁殖成千萬隻自己
然後藏身其間
不斷微微變色移形換位
而無人察覺
(calligraphy: 換位 change seat)

I am a chair
by self-cloning
I multiply myself into hundreds and thousands
to hide myself among them perpetually
changing colors subtly and positions, shapes slightly
Nobody has ever detected this

3 木床 Wooden Bed

一張一腳獨立的床
 上面必定有一個
 倒立的人
 站在空無一物的空氣裡
 站在地球的反面
 以一張床舉起全世界
 (calligraphy: 反面 opposite side)

On any wooden bed erecting in one leg
 Must there be an invisible headstand man
 standing at attention
 upon the air of nothingness
 the opposite side to the solid earth
 lifting the whole world with a crane like bed

4 梯子 Ladder (plate 11)

知道自己是梯子之前
 是空的
 知道自己是梯子之後
 是空的
 沒有梯子
 就沒有空
 (calligraphy: 空 empty)

I am empty
 Before I know I am a ladder
 After knowing being a ladder
 Still empty am I
 No ladder
 No emptiness

5 轉輪 Turning Wheel (plate 12)

輪子轉動一圈
依舊回到原點
轉動一日、一年、一世紀
全都回到原點
累積所有的原點為一巨輪
開始發亮，在浩瀚的宇宙中
(calligraphy: 輪 wheel)

Wheel turning around
Back to the starting point
Turning a day a year and a century around
Back to the same starting point again and again
Compress all the starting points into one big wheel
To radiate into the vast empty universe

6 水銀 Quicksilver (plate 13)

可以蓄電發光、測溫度、量血壓
可與金或銀化合成大時代的熔爐
等待奇警文字的加入
配合滾燙眼淚的調味
用想像力的火焰煮沸
可以為記憶與夢防腐千年萬年
(calligraphy: 銀 silver)

Be in a battery to radiate to measure temperature or blood pressure
Be amalgamated with gold or silver to cast melting pots
Where glorious eras are ready to be mixed with miraculous words
Seasoned with drops of burning tears
Boiled by the fire of imagination
To coat and preserve dreamy memories into eternity

7 入口 En-trance (plate 14)

入口總是黝黑
 出口常是光明
 進去，焚燒黑暗成為光明
 出來，在光明中分析黑暗
 守白之道全在知黑
 入口就是出口
 (calligraphy: 黑 black)

The entrance is always dark
 While the exit always shinning
 Enter to burn the darkness into brightness
 Exit to analyze darkness in light
 Knowing blackness is the only way to keep whiteness
 To make entrance exit

8 行旅 Journey (plate 15)

行者轉動
 萬物莊嚴不動
 呈變化相
 旅者不動
 萬物圍繞轉動
 呈寂滅相
 (calligraphy: 變 change)

Walkers should move around
 While the world stops gracefully
 With endless changing facades
 Travelers should stay put
 Let the world spins dazzlingly
 Into nothingness

9夢之一 Dream 1 (plates 16 and 17)

你把我
從我的夢中
喚醒
只不過是要
帶領惺忪的我
走入你的夢中
(calligraphy: awake 醒)

You awake me up
From my own dream
In order to
Usher misty me
Half awaken
Into your dream

10夢之二 Dream 2 (plate 18)

我可以輕易的
從你的夢中
衝了出來
但卻永遠
無法衝破
我自己的夢
(calligraphy: 破夢 break dream)

I can easily
Escape
From your dream
Never can I, nevertheless
Be able to breakthrough
My own dream

Lo Ch'ing's art is permeated by an innovative painting language, new forms and content, and new grammar and composition. These factors record and reflect the multiple aspects of various developments in Chinese culture over the past scores of years. One might apply the

linguistic theory of "topic-comment" to Lo Ch'ing's painting in general. (In linguistics, the topic, or theme, of a sentence is what is being talked about, and the comment is what is being said about the topic.) Lo Ch'ing's painting allows him to become a conversationalist in art, constantly initiating dialogues not only with the past and present of Chinese culture, but also with that of the West and other cultures.

In a recent essay on his "Windows Landscape" series, Lo Ch'ing writes:

"Window Landscape Series" or "Email@ landscape.com series" enables the landscape artist to incorporate various views and perspectives of mountains and waters simultaneously into one composition, and at the same time, to offer juxtapositions of the imageries extracted and digested from traditional heritages and contemporary novelties. In this milieu or setting, then, there are parallels of scenes seemingly related and yet not related; ostensibly not connected yet connected, such as agrarian scenes and industrial ones; political and idyllic. Urban construction and mythological Shangri-la could be comfortably nestled against each other to reflect a world of multiple choices offered by post-modern conditions and internet technologies; there is an endless variety of choices and possibilities.

With the application of calligraphic strokes in a composition, the structure of the painting becomes configured by segregated linear compartments, whose formal features echo a Windows program, the most welcome computer operating system around the world. The pictorial scenes, poetic texts, and electronic signs that are brushed in to fill in the irregular linear compartments constitute multi-leveled linkages to each other, and enable the painting to mean much more than what is shown on the surface. Consequently, the artistic methods and creative strategies employed, and their compatibility with the subject matter in the painting, reflect not only the spirit of the new century, but also the aesthetic attitude of the artist in the present time.¹⁹

This new aesthetic stand allows him on the one hand to continue to create exciting new works of art for his contemporaries to enjoy and meditate on and, on the other hand, to reinterpret Chinese art traditions with a new historical perspective and understanding.

¹⁹ Lo Ching, "Windows Landscape," unpublished paper.