



Hsu Kuohuang

Views of Taroko Gorge

M. Sutherland Fine Art

NEW YORK, NY

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[b.1950]

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This catalogue accompanies the exhibition

Hsu Kuohuang
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Views of Taroko Gorge

Martha Sutherland

I first met Hsu Kuohuang (b. 1950) in 1979 when I was fortunate to attend a private painting class given by the renowned painter, calligrapher and scholar, Chiang Chaoshen. We both participated in a seminar, the first of its kind by National Taiwan University, on connoisseurship of the Four Great Yuan Masters. It was a privilege to be taught by the leading expert in the field, Chiang Chaoshen, through studying original examples of paintings from the National Palace Museum collection. For Hsu, it was just the beginning. He learned not only the advanced skills of painting and calligraphy from Chiang but also profound connoisseurship of Chinese classical ink painting.

Hsu worked at the National Palace Museum for over 20 years where he continually studied the original masterpieces of Chinese painting in the former imperial collection. At the same time, he painted his own works, and practiced calligraphy of all script varieties. Who else practicing Chinese ink painting today has Hsu's deep background yet is also able to transcend this context in his personal work?

Hsu Kuohuang's fourth exhibition at M. Sutherland Fine Art draws its inspiration from the breathtaking peaks and gorges of Taroko Gorge. After retiring from the Palace Museum, Hsu moved back to his wife's hometown of Hualien, on the eastern coast of Taiwan, near the Taroko Gorge National Park. Based on years of sketching and photographing on hikes in the park, Hsu has completed a series of paintings inspired by the rare, extreme views of the Taroko Gorge scenery. The rushing blue-grey torrent of the river winds through a rocky gorge whose vertiginous angles seem to defy the laws of physics.

Hsu dramatizes the extreme landscape forms with cropped compositions and shimmering brushwork. His painting style has grown more confident and experimental through the years, as in the series "The Pen

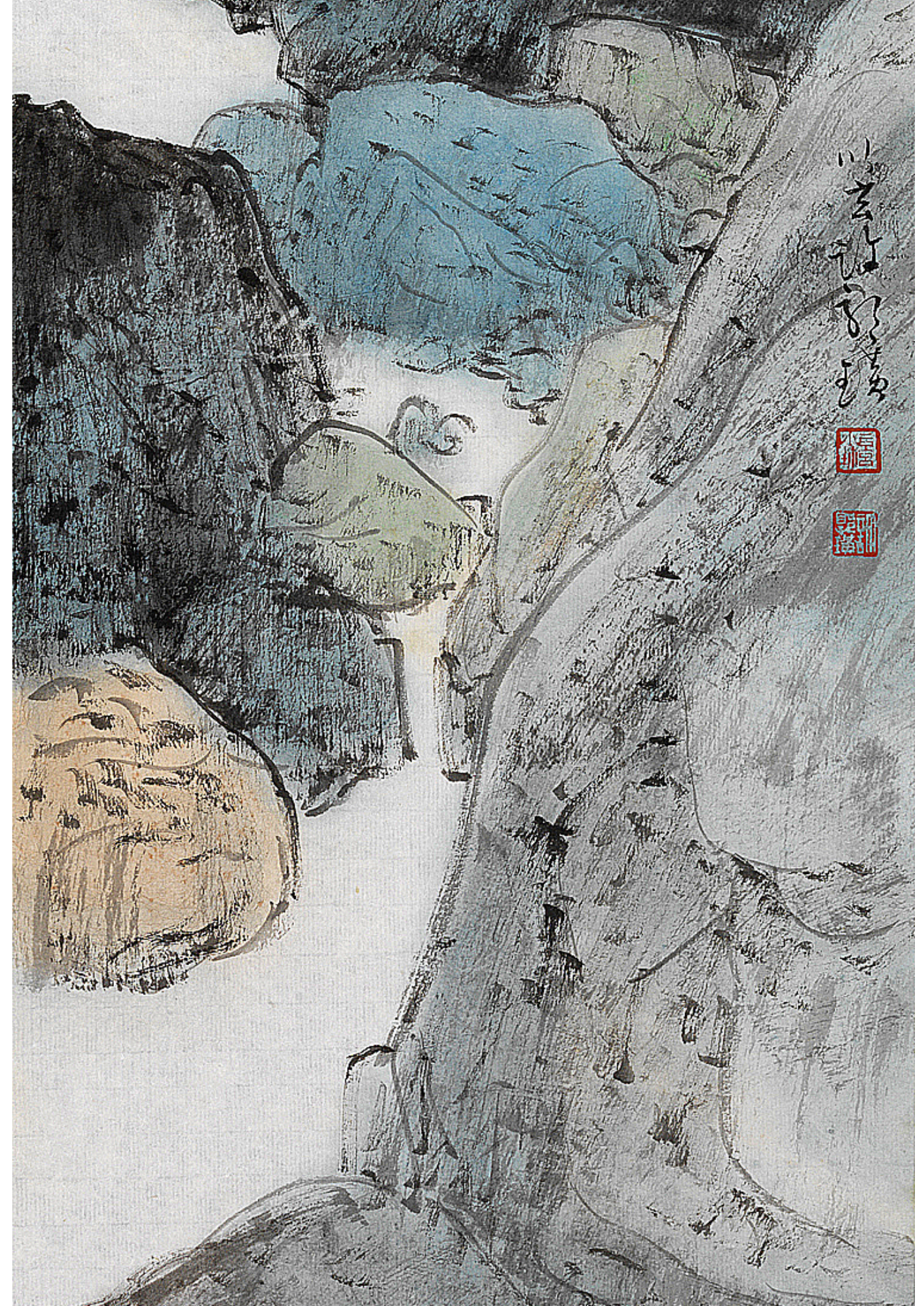
Stream of No Return, 2013 – DETAIL

Follows *Where the Mind Wanders*,” where Hsu paints in abstract drip and drops. These recent works display the inner strength and freshness of an artist at the pinnacle of his creative powers. He is not afraid to lend ambiguity to rock and landscape elements to suspend reality in the scenery, thereby encouraging the viewer to linger over the virtuosity of his brushwork as abstract technique. Students of Chinese painting history can see the links between Hsu and early 20th Century Shanghai School artists, back to Nanjing Eccentrics of the 18th Century, and then to Late Wu School masters. The difference is, Hsu uses these traditions as a springboard from which he embraces a modern fantastic realm, but one with subtle classical and figurative references. Hsu’s paintings don’t “shout” at the viewer, but deftly convey a reverence of Nature, in keeping with the artist’s strict Buddhist beliefs.

I believe that when the hype about contemporary Chinese oil painting fades away, Hsu Kuohuang will be considered as one of the great masters of Chinese Ink Painting in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. I am honored to show this collection of recent works, *Views of Taroko Gorge*.

Martha Sutherland
Autumn 2014

Stream of No Return, 2013 – DETAIL





A Conversation with Hsu

MARTHA SUTHERLAND [MS]: When did you start serious study of painting? How/why did you decide to concentrate on ink painting?

HSU KUOHUANG [HK]: Ever since I was a teenager, I've been fond of the arts and laid a solid foundation in learning painting and art design, both in Chinese and Western media. Then, around 1970, I came to realize that traditional ink painting would be my lifelong devotion; I have loved it even more because of my fondness for calligraphy.

MS: Why did you choose Taroko Gorge as your inspiration for these paintings?

HK: In fact, as early as in the 70s, I visited the Taroko Gorge in Hualien. And I was also intrigued by the early works of my teacher, Mr. Chiang Chao-shen, one specifically called "An Album of Travels to Hualien", painted in 1968. After seeing that, I went to see the towering peaks and hills of Taroko's unique landscape quite a few times. In the summer of 2004, I decided to settle down in Hualien after my retirement from the National Palace Museum in Taipei. Quite naturally, I get to transform what meets the eyes into artworks through my direct contact with the beautiful landscape views of Hualien.

MS: What method do you use to compose your art? Do you first photograph the views or sketch? Do you ever paint "plein air?" What is the process for creating these landscape paintings?

HK: Normally, on my regular hikes in the mountains, I gather my ideas through my sketching. Sometimes I use a paint brush to do the sketching. But mostly I prefer to use either a pencil or a pen, or even a felt-tip pen for the sketches because carrying painting brushes and ink stones are not as convenient. After I

(at left) Martha Sutherland and Hsu Kuohuang at Taroko Gorge, Summer 2014

get back to my studio, I often need to recompose the original sketches when I apply them onto the paper. For instance, I need to consider the dimensions, think about taking a horizontal or vertical composition, things like that. When I paint, I prefer to use light ink to decide an overall composition. Then, I would use different shades of ink to paint the hills, trees, houses, etc. Then come the applying of colors several times after the ink work has become totally dry and solid. Finally, I add the inscription and use the seal to complete it.

MS: This exhibition highlights a range of brushwork techniques in your work. The most abstract and loose series, “The Pen Follows where the Mind Wanders” is a departure from even the loosest brushwork from previous works. What prompted this new and exciting brushwork?

HK: The truth is, the idea of “The Pen Follows Where the Mind Wanders” series came from my practice of calligraphy. I used free, continuous, calligraphic lines to paint the rocks and hills, without a definite shape in mind. It’s rather about “a playful wandering/wondering of mind”. What is worth noticing is that in these four-piece series, I used quite a variety of brush techniques, longer and shorter linear expressions. The ink applications are so diverse—wet or dry, heavy or light, and dense or sparse, along with the choice of colors. They can be viewed as a complete set of four works or seen individually.

MS: You are one of the few artists I know that is highly proficient at numerous calligraphy styles as well as ink landscape painting. How does your practice of calligraphy influence your paintings -- and vice versa? When you get up in the morning, do you know that the day will be dedicated to calligraphy or to painting? Is brushing calligraphy done everyday as a warmup to working on ink landscapes? Or is it the opposite?

HK: I spend more time on the practice of calligraphy than on painting. It could be that I like the abstract beauty of calligraphic brushwork better. Doing calligraphy offers me a sense of freedom from the restriction of the figurative image and framework of objects. Also, different calligraphy styles result in triggering different sensations and inspirations. To me or many other artists who still cling to traditional art forms of ink landscapes, there is an intertwined and inseparable relation between calligraphy and Chinese painting.

When I do calligraphy, there are two kinds of scenarios. When I practice after a model work (of an ancient calligraphy master), I try to capture the subtle brushwork as well as the thoughts of the previous masters. At this point, calligraphy can be seen as a warm-up for my creation of paintings. On the other hand, when I create my own calligraphic works, the process is no different from creating a piece of painting. I need time to dwell upon the dimensions of the work and the calligraphy style that fit my sentiments at that moment in time and the need of the work. I like to write about Tang poetry or passages of some great literary works that I like. Aside from the standard scripts that are about 1 square centimeter in size which usually require several tries to complete with full concentration (and to my full satisfaction), I usually finish most calligraphy each pieces in one sitting within a certain amount of time; I need to finish a work with that momentum and the fit of my feelings.

Stream of No Return, 2013
ink on paper mounted as hanging scroll, 53 1/8 x 9 7/8 inches



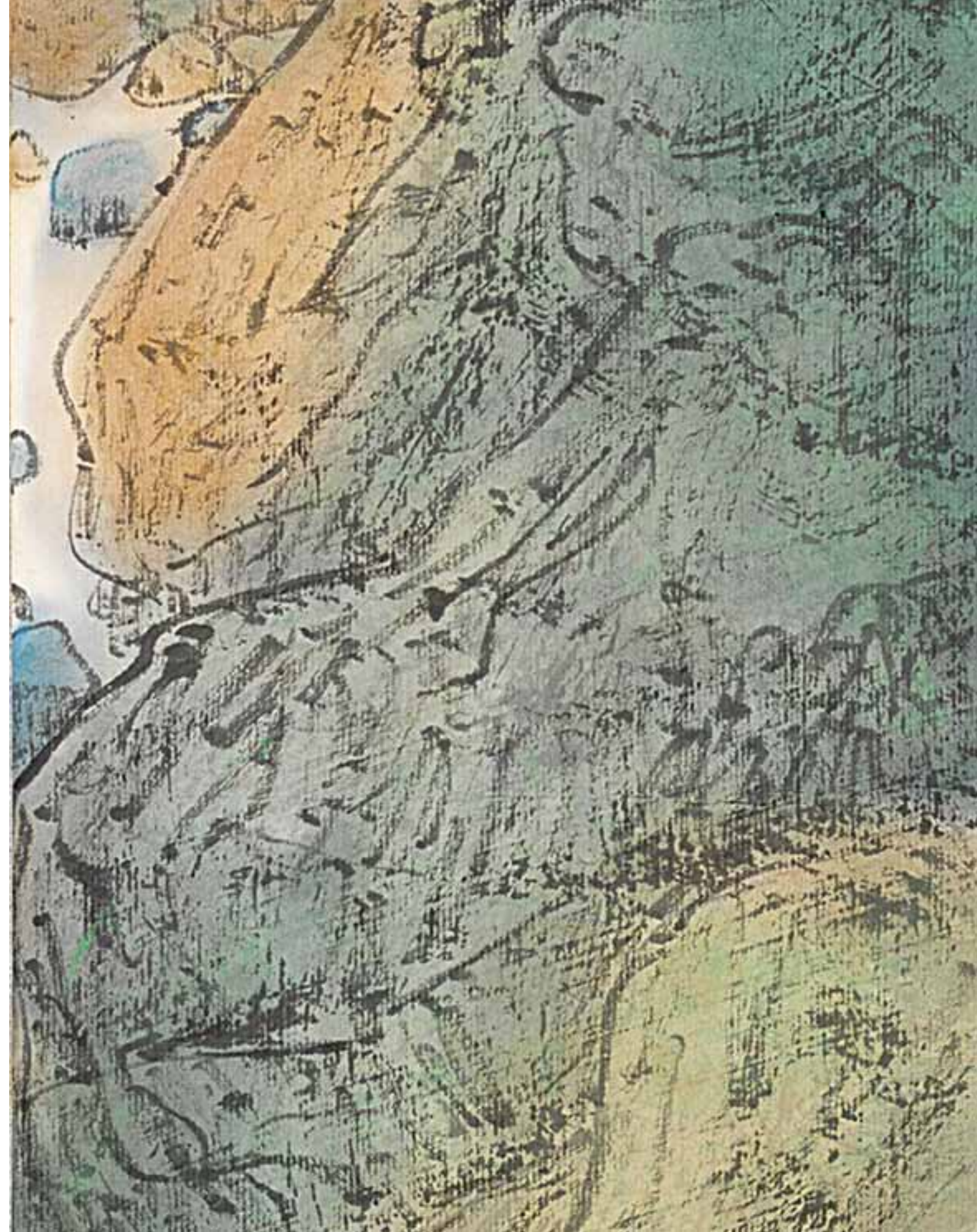


The Pen Follows Where the Mind Wanders no. 1 (left) and ***no. 3*** (right), 2013
ink on paper mounted as hanging scroll, 53 ¹/₈ x 13 ¹/₂ inches



The Pen Follows Where the Mind Wanders no. 4 (left) and ***no. 2*** (right), 2013
ink on paper mounted as hanging scroll, 53 ¹/₈ x 13 ¹/₂ inches

***Ode to a Wild Stream*, 2013 – DETAIL**



Ode to a Wild Stream, 2013
in ink on paper mounted as hanging scroll, 67 x 7⁷/₈ inches



Solitary Thoughts Among the Hills, 2011
ink on paper mounted as hanging scroll, 73¼ x 19 inches



The Chenyoulan River, 2012
ink on paper mounted as hanging scroll, 53 x 27¼ inches





Meditating at Mountain Pavilion, 2012
ink on paper, 24½ x 37¾ inches



Literary Gathering at an Autumn Pavilion, 2009
ink on paper, 19 1/2 x 37 3/4 inches

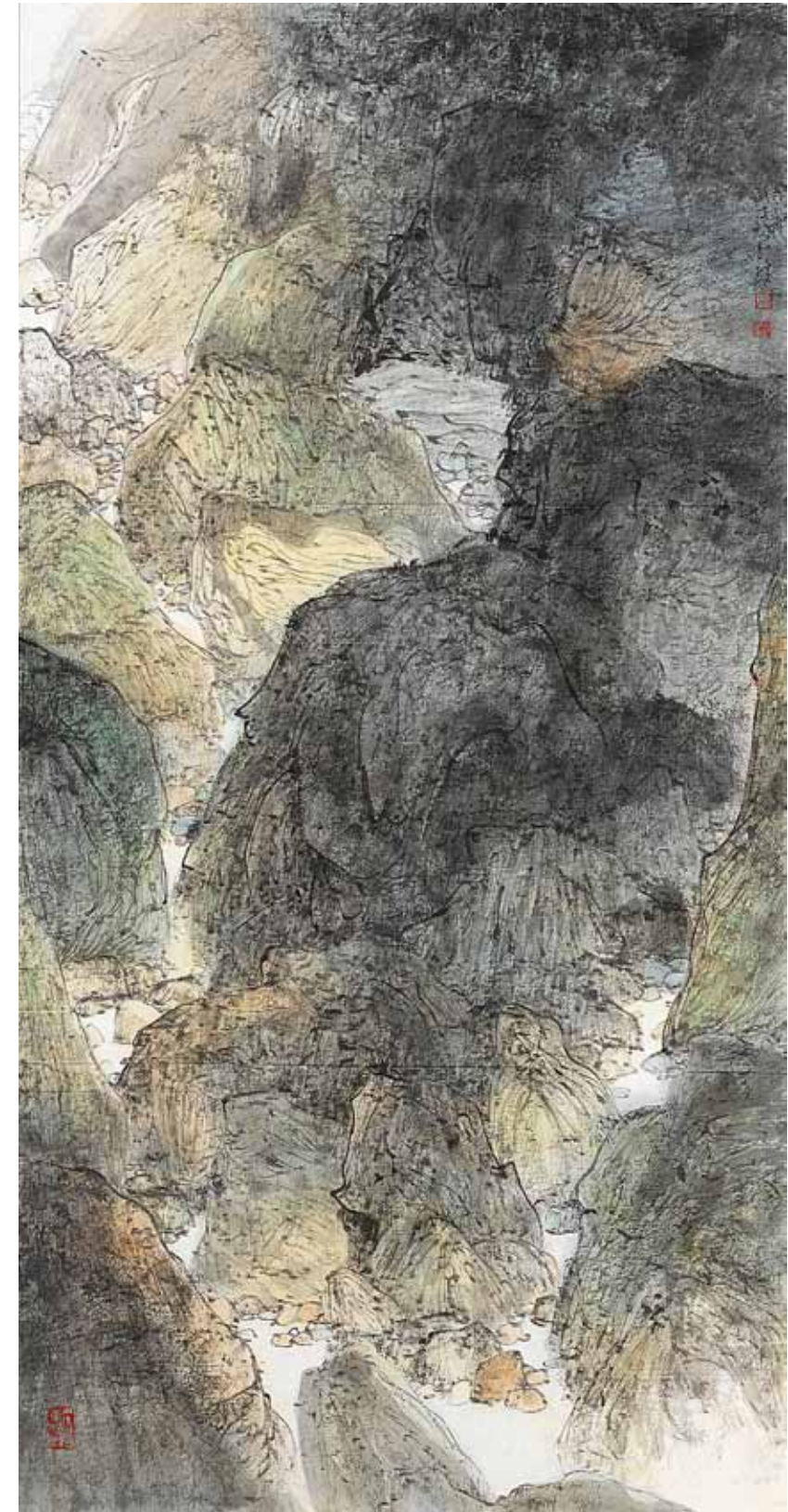
Lingering in the Autumn Mountains, 2012
ink on paper mounted as hanging scroll, 53¹/₈ x 27¹/₈ inches



A Quiet Stream Runs Deep, 2013 – DETAIL



***A Quiet Stream Runs Deep*, 2013**
ink on paper mounted as hanging scroll, 53¹/₈ x 27¹/₈ inches



Bridges Hidden in a Bamboo Grove, 2012
ink on paper mounted as hanging scroll, 53 ¹/₈ x 27 ¹/₈ inches



Yue Fei Pavilion in Taroko National Park, 2010
 ink on paper mounted as hanging scroll, 53 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 27 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches





A Glimpse of Wenshan Hot Spring, 2012
ink on paper, 27 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 53 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches

Chronography

Hsu Kuohuang (also *Yi-hsuan*)

- 1950 Born in Keelung, Taiwan
- 1967 Studied Calligraphy & the “Four Gentlemen” (Plum, Orchid, Bamboo, Chrysanthemum)
- 1972 Graduated from National Taiwan Art Institute with a degree in Art Design
- 1974 Taught at Tou-cheng Middle High School, I-lan County
- 1975 Commenced studying with Mr. Chian Chao-shen
- 1978 Employed at the Cathy Art Museum
- 1982 Solo Exhibition at the Kan-cheng Gallery, Taipei
- 1984 Employed in the Dept of Painting & Calligraphy, The National Palace Museum, Taipei
- 1985 Solo Exhibition at Hsiung Shih Gallery, Taipei
- 1987 Solo Exhibition the Lindau Municipal Museum, Germany
- 1988 Solo Exhibition at Caves Gallery, Taipei
- 1989 Solo Exhibition the Kaohsiung Municipal Social Education Hall
- 1990 Solo Exhibition at Ching-hua Gallery, Taipei
- 1991 Joint Exhibition-Chiang Chao-shen and Hsu Kuo-huang, Teacher and Student, organized by Pu-Chuang Gallery
- 1992 Solo Exhibition at Caves Gallery, Taichung
- 1994 Solo Exhibition at Caves Gallery, Taichung
- 1996 Solo Exhibition at Taipei Hanart Gallery
- 2000 Joint Exhibition of Hsia I-fu and Hsu Kuo-huang, M. Sutherland Fine Arts Ltd
- 2002 Joint Exhibition of Chen Chi-kuan & Hsu Kuo-huang at the Institute of East Asian Studies, Charles University, Prague
- 2003 Solo Exhibition, M. Sutherland Fine Arts Ltd
- 2004 Solo Exhibition at the National Gallery, Prague
Retired from the Dept. of Painting and Calligraphy, the National Palace Museum
Taught “The History of Chinese Painting” as an invited professor at Univerzita Karlovav Praze
- 2005 Solo Exhibition, “Art on and of the Gentle Sheen of Paper” at Taiwan Forestry Research Institute, Taipei
- 2006 Solo Exhibition at Hong-jah Museum, Taipei
Solo Exhibition at M. Sutherland Fine Arts, Ltd.
- 2008 Invited as a connoisseur by the Department of Asia of The British Museum to study and evaluate their collected Chinese paintings and calligraphy
- 2010 March: Modern Calligraphy Masterworks, M. Sutherland Fine Arts, Ltd.
- 2013 Solo exhibition at the Art Gallery of the Cultural Affairs, Bureau, Keelung City
- 2014 Solo Exhibition at National Dr. Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall, Taipei City
Solo Exhibition at M. Sutherland Fine Art, New York, United States