

An abstract Guo Hua painting featuring a central, vibrant green, textured form that resembles a stylized mountain or a large, organic shape. This central element is surrounded by dark, earthy brown and black tones, with some lighter, misty green areas at the top and bottom. The overall composition is layered and textured, with visible brushstrokes and a sense of depth. The text is overlaid on the central green area.

# Guo Hua

DEFINING CONTEMPORARY CHINESE PAINTING

M. Sutherland Fine Arts  
NEW YORK, NY



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Defining Contemporary Chinese Painting

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This catalogue accompanies the exhibition

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## Guo Hua

Martha Sutherland

What makes a work *guo hua*? The literal meaning is “national painting”. That is, art painted in China and based on traditional Chinese themes of painting. But could the term be used to describe ink painting made by any ethnic Chinese artist working in other parts of Asia or in the West? Might *guo hua* also include oil painting, collage or another Western medium wielded by a modern Chinese artist whose philosophical viewpoint expresses traditional theories of Chinese painting? Our Asia Week NY 2017 exhibition illustrates the expansive definition of *guo hua* with the art of eleven artists: Fung Mingchip, Hai Tao, Hsia Ifu, Hsu Kuohuang, Hu Xiangdong, Hung Hsien, Jia Youfu, Liang Quan, Yang Mian, Zhu Daoping and Zhu Jinshi.

Fung Mingchip (born in Guangdong, 1950) describes himself as a calligrapher rather than a painter. His experimental calligraphy styles are diverse and wide ranging. At first glance, “Chan Reflection, Script B,” appears to be abstract ink play. Closer observation reveals that Ming has brushed 2 characters for “Chan” (Zen in Japanese for the meditative Buddhist philosophy) in faint gray regular script forms hovering above and just under a burst of sooty, swift horizontal brushstrokes. The work’s composition suggests a landscape -- the sun or moon and its’ rippled reflection on the water. The scroll uses traditional Chinese media and bears a subtle yet direct relationship to ink landscapes of the eccentric painters in the Qing Dynasty, such as Ba Da Shan Ren.

Hai Tao, a Nanjing-based painter (born 1959), paints surreal, fantastic images using layers of wash brushed in multiple layers to create abstract, sweeping veils of ink on paper. While Hai uses the traditional *mo-gu* (no bones) brushwork style that can be traced back to the Southern Song masters, the landscape forms bear a tenuous connection to reality. Hai listens to Western classical music while painting, causing him to fall into a meditative state. Certainly no Southern Song or Qing eccentric painter like Gong Xian, (another source of inspiration to Hai) would have been listening to Mozart in their studio! Yet Hai Tao’s paintings are unquestionably *guo hua*.

**Hai Tai**, *Genes of the Mountain*, 2012 – DETAIL



In October 2016, Hsia Ifu (born in Shandong, 1923), a quiet giant among ink painters, passed away peacefully in Taipei at the age of ninety two. Filled with creative vigor until the very end, Hsia's paintings are studies in painstakingly detailed brush and ink, taken to a near-obsessionist degree. Hsia used the *jia bi*, (squeezed brush) method of brushwork. Because of the range of ink tonalities in each work, several times during past exhibitions, viewers erroneously presumed that Hsia's works were prints and not original paintings. Unfortunately, Hsia's type of technical virtuosity has died with the man; the artist lamented to Sutherland (on more than one occasion during the near eighteen-year collaboration) that no students would take up the style due to lack of patience. Why spend 2 months on painting one mountain scene? Hsia Ifu was happy to do just that, producing fantastic landscape and seascapes on monumental scrolls as well as in tiny miniatures.

In his landscape "Seeking the Way in a Spring Mountain," 2016 (ink and color wash on paper), Taiwan-based artist Hsu Kuohuang (born in Taiwan, 1950), boldly uses splashed ink and color to create an ambiguously "contemporary" rendering of cliff-like peaks flattened against the painting surface in a way that recalls the closely cropped photographs of Edward Weston. The modern viewer would never mistake this for a copy of earlier Chinese work. Yet Hsu's work remains *guo hua* because he uses the same mineral powders that ancient Chinese artists brushed into their "blue and green style" landscapes in the 9th century. Hsu's creative vision is Chinese, but the artist grew up Taiwan, a much freer and less restricted environment than the People's Republic of China. Although produced in Taiwan, Hsu's landscapes remain in the scholarly tradition of Chinese classical landscape and, arguably, express more of the traits of *guo hua* than any other paintings in the show.

The inclusion of the pastel-toned landscape oil, "Estranged No. 3" by Hu Xiangdong, a Beijing-based painter (born 1961), certainly stretches the definition of *guo hua*. Hu described the scene parenthetically as a view from *Diao Yutai*, a former

imperial garden in western Beijing (now a state-run guest compound reserved for high-level foreign dignitaries). The view is of a recognizable scenic area, much like the tradition of Ming literati painters brushing well-known scenic views around West Lake. But Hu depicts the classical scene in a pop-like realism, as if the painting were a giant postcard wrapped in cellophane. While the media is not traditional, the painter is Chinese, the subject matter is a famous Chinese landscape spot and the work was done in Beijing.

The paintings of Hung Hsien, (born in Yangzhou, Jiangsu, 1933), reflect the rigorous traditional ink painting training of her youth in Taiwan and her post graduate training in abstract expressionism in Chicago. After studying with Prince Pu Hsinyu in Taiwan as a teen, Hung ventured into abstract oil painting as an adult at Northwestern and the Art Institute of Chicago. In the late 1960's she returned to painting in ink on paper, using pastel color washes. One of the pieces in our 2017 show, "Floating Without End," is painted across the expanse of two hanging scrolls, with swooping ink lines like fine tensile wire, combined with spontaneous ink dots and pastel washes. There is a quiet grandeur of Hung's style. Are these abstract forms an evocation of windblown clouds or a tidal eddy from the Pacific Northwest coastline? Hung commented that it is more of a meditation on the cosmos, yet drawn from her experiences in nature, much like the Chinese literati painters in the past who painted "the mountains in their mind."

Just as Hung is master of the fine controlled brushline, Jia Youfu (born in Hebei, 1942), is renowned for his mastery of ink wash. At first glance Jia's work appears dark and foreboding, but close observation reveals the subtle manipulation of layers of ink, laid on the paper like silk veils over a woman's face. A former head of the Painting and Calligraphy Department at the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) in Beijing, Jia is now reclusive and very difficult to contact. Sutherland first showed Jia nearly fifteen years ago in one of the gallery's first shows. Jia Youfu paintings are extremely rare and we are proud to have had a strong relationship with him, beginning with Sutherland's study at CAFA in the 1980's.



Liang Quan (born 1948), another Central Academy of Art graduate, creates highly theoretical, abstract works that push the boundaries of traditional Chinese painting media. Instead of ink, Liang has used loose wet tea leaves to create the colors on the paper. Liang piles tea leaves onto the traditional *xuan* paper as a meditative process. He changes the size and tonality of each of the stains by differing amounts of tea leaves and differing lengths of time to stain the paper. Liang describes the process as a type of meditation, just as reciting a Buddhist sutra. Although tea replaces ink in Liang's work, the creation of art as result of a meditative process is closely aligned to *guo hua* theory from centuries ago.

Working in his Chengdu studio, Yang Mian (born in Sichuan, 1970) “reproduces” recognized masterworks of traditional *guo hua* with a high-tech digital pointillism. Using computer and painstaking manual techniques, Yang distills the elements of the original image into a completely new artistic vocabulary. Instead of ink and color wash on paper or silk, Yang's acrylic on canvas technique creates a parallel universe by hand and machine. Yang first posed the question, “what is *guo hua*?” to Sutherland last year when he challenged her to prove his new CMYK series was not *guo hua*. The AsiaWeek 2017 show was inspired by these lively discussions.

Seemingly untouched by the vast changes in China of the past decades, Zhu Daoping (born in Nanjing, 1949), has flourished as a painter in traditional media, in pure *guo hua* style, that is, using ink and color wash on paper to depict landscape-based themes. Zhu paints shimmering dream worlds of Daoist fantasy that inspire a sense of melancholy, as if peering into a Shangrila now only accessible through his work. These ethereal worlds are the artist's veiled commentary against the turbulent rat-race of present society. But just as with Hsu Kuohuang, Zhu Daoping successfully communicates dialogue with the past while displaying “modern” twists. Lotus blossoms float in a flattened close up view, vibrating in silver and cool grey-blue washes, from a frog's eye view. Zhu pays homage to Shi Tao, the master of *dian* or dotting from the early Qing Dynasty, but takes the same brushwork and color and amps it up.

**Yang Mian**, CMYK - Five Dynasties, Xu Xi, Auspicious Magnolia Painting, 2016 – DETAIL

At the far end of the spectrum, looms Zhu Jinshi's expressionist landscape "The Scenery of Cézanne" (2007), an oil on canvas slathered with a thick impasto that oozes vibrant, luscious color. Zhu (born in Beijing, 1954), received no formal training but was tutored clandestinely by an older oil painter during the Cultural Revolution. Zhu eventually went to Berlin where he earned fellowships for further concentrated study. He returned to China to create large abstract canvases, many of them bearing titles that reference European literature, philosophy, and art. "The Scenery of Cézanne" may be European in inspiration, but this homage to the past relates to the practice of ancient guo hua ink painters who honored famous ancient painting masterpieces or passages from Tang or Song poems.

Now celebrating its 18th year as a gallery, M. Sutherland Fine Arts is pleased to display this rare selection of contemporary Chinese paintings during Asia Week New York 2017 at its new location at 7 East 74th Street (Third Floor). After Asia Week, the exhibition remains viewable by appointment only through Saturday, April 29st. Please call 212-249-0428.

**Zhu Jinshi**, The Scenery of Cézanne, 2007 – DETAIL









**Hsu Kuohuang**, *Seeking the Way in a Spring Mountain*  
2016, Ink and color wash on paper, mounted as hanging scroll  
53.15 x 27.15 inches









**Hsu Kuohuang**, *Waterfall Hidden Among Cloud Veiled Hills*  
2016, Ink and color wash on paper, mounted as hanging scroll  
53.15 x 27.15 inches







**Zhu Jinshi**, *The Scenery of Cézanne*  
2007, oil on canvas  
39.5 x 27.25 inches





**Zhu Daoping**, *Lotus Fragrance Goes on for Miles*  
1996, ink on xuan paper  
26 x 52 inches





**Hu Xiangdong**, *Estranged No. 3, Fisherman's Rest*  
2007, oil on canvas  
47.25 x 59 inches



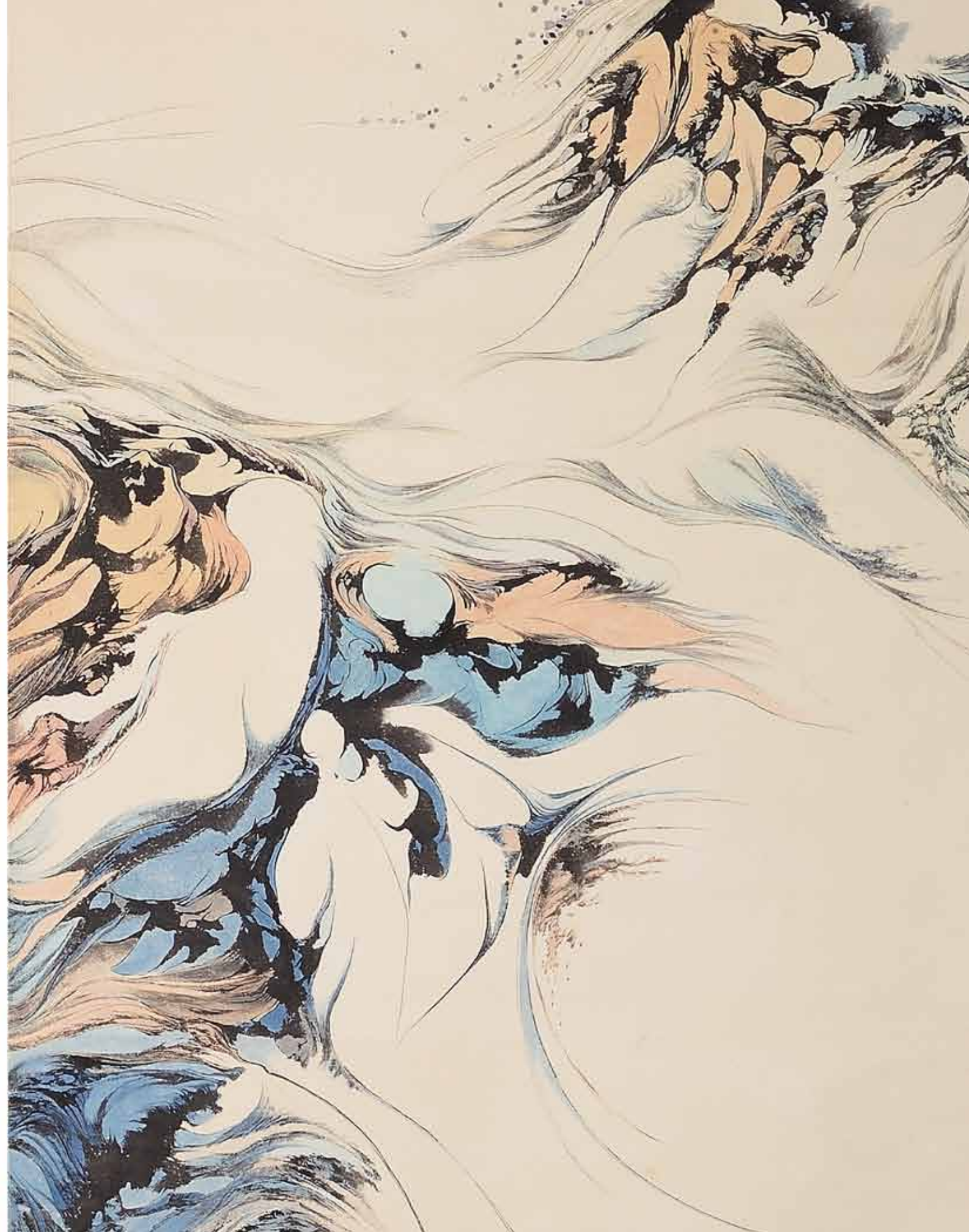




**Yang Mian**, *CMYK - Five Dynasties, Xu Xi, Auspicious Magnolia Painting*  
2016, Acrylic on canvas  
70.75 x 23.5 inches











**Hung Hsien**, *Floating without End*  
1970, ink and color wash on paper  
70.75 x 35.75 inches each, diptych









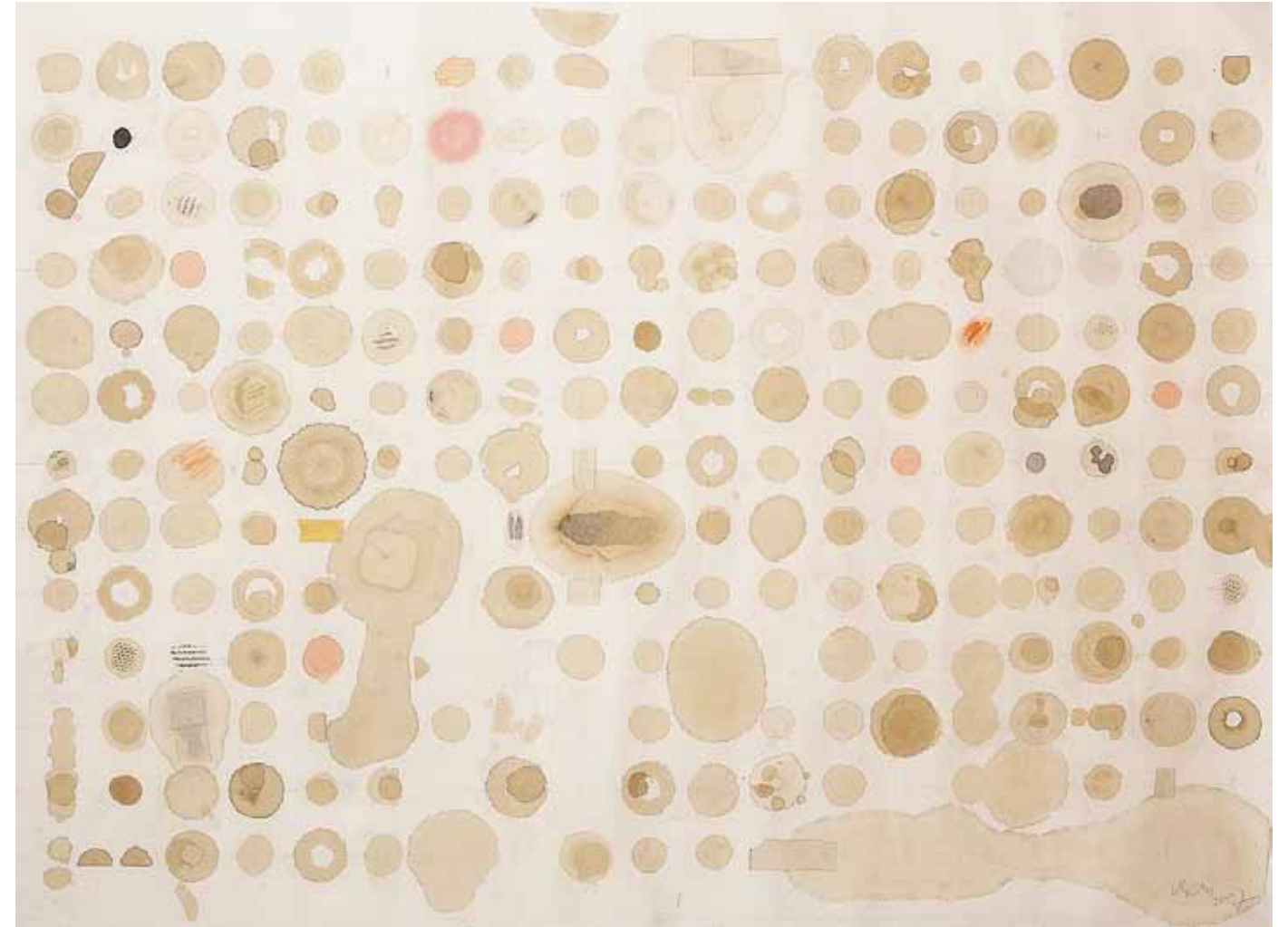
**Jia Youfu**, *Taihang Tall Clouds*  
2004, ink and colored wash on xuan paper  
14 x 40.75 inches



**Hai Tao**, *Genes of the Mountain*  
2012, ink on paper mounted as hanging scroll  
51.25 x 26 inches



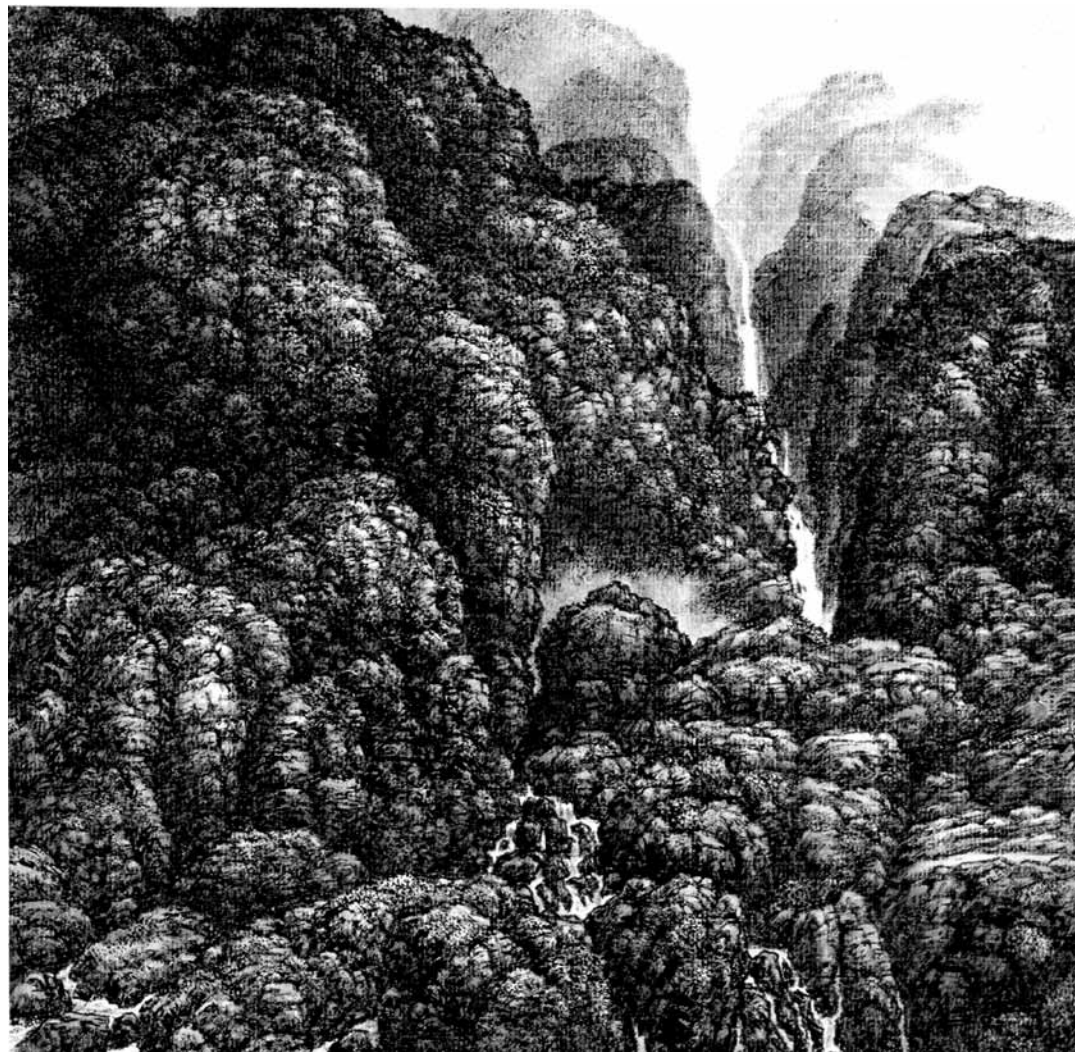




**Liang Quan**, *Tea Stain No.2*  
2007, Wulong and Puer tea on xuan paper  
35.5x47.75 inches

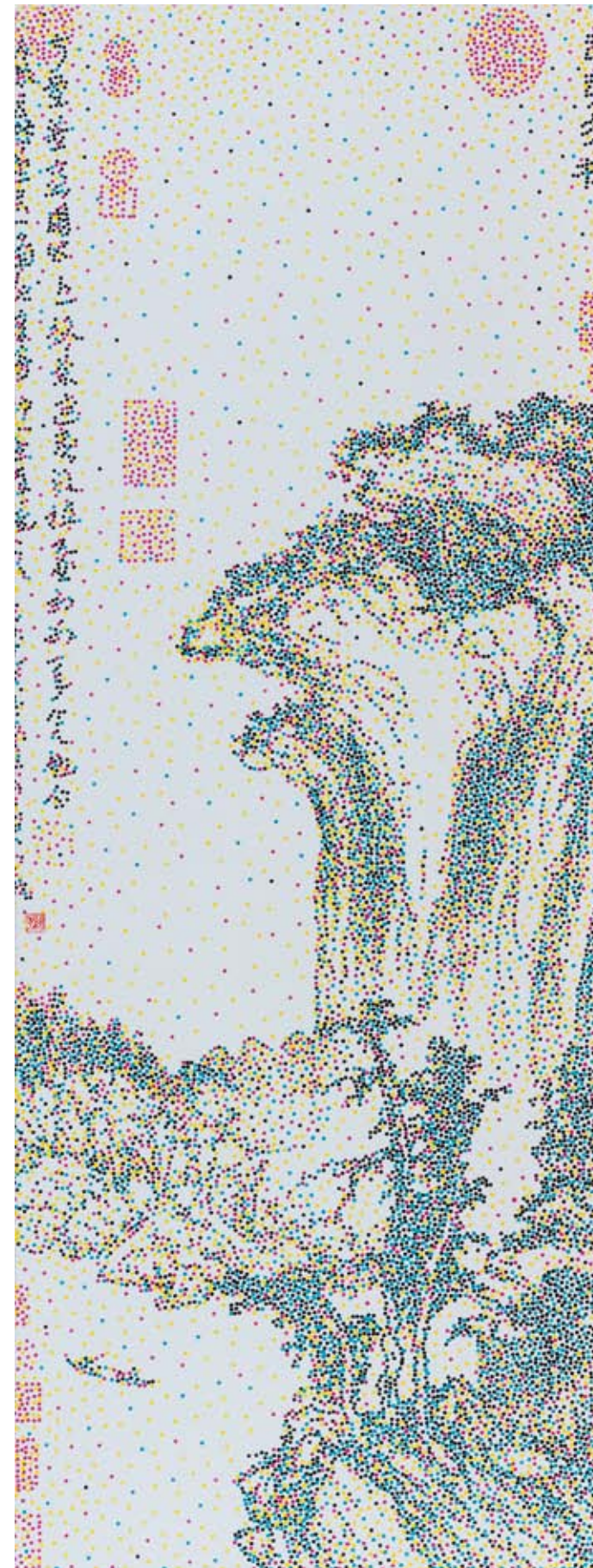


**Hsia I-Fu**, *Waterfalls*  
2001, Ink on Xuan paper  
13.15 x 13.25 inches





**Yang Mian**, *CMYK - Yuan Dynasty, Fang Congyi, Sailing in Wuyi*  
 2013, Acrylic on canvas  
 63x23,5 inches





**Fung Ming Chip**, *Chan Reflection Script*  
 2009, ink on paper, mounted as hanging scroll  
 27 x 13.75 inches

