

The background of the entire cover is a traditional Chinese ink wash landscape painting. It depicts a series of steep, rugged mountains with dense, textured foliage. A misty or smoky atmosphere fills the valleys and the upper reaches of the mountains, creating a sense of depth and mystery. The style is characteristic of classical Chinese literati painting, with fine lines and varying ink tones used to create texture and light.

Hsia I-Fu

(1925–2016)

A Life in Ink

M. Sutherland Fine Arts
NEW YORK, NY

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Contents

This catalogue accompanies the exhibition

Hsia I-Fu
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Hsia I-Fu, A Life in Ink

M. Sutherland Fine Arts

Martha Sutherland met Hsia in Taiwan in the late 1990s through her graduate school professor, Chu Tsing Li. Although he had never traveled to the United States, the artist immediately welcomed the Mandarin-speaking gallerist and agreed to representation in the U.S. Opportunities for international recognition as a Chinese artist living in Taiwan were rare at the end of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, Hsia's works can now be found in dozens of major collections in the United States, from teaching museums at Cornell, Princeton and Harvard, to public museums and private collections across the United States.

Hsia was born in Shandong Province in the 1920s to an educated family. As a youth, he received private painting instruction in both bird and flower and landscape traditions. Even in his later years Hsia would laugh and claim that he owed his exacting, almost obsessionist painting style to the influence of his grandmother, an accomplished lacemaker. Hsia passed the strenuous qualifying exams to enter the prestigious Hangzhou Art Academy in 1947 but because of the political turbulence, he was forced to withdraw. In 1949, he escaped to Taiwan and started from scratch to build a new life in Taipei. He worked in advertising, photography, graphic design, and interior architecture until the late 1970s when he turned to painting full time.

Hsia's paintings harken back to the monumental landscapes of the Sung masters, such as Li Cheng and Xu Daoning. Yet on careful examination, his brushwork and inkwash style reveal a clearly contemporary vision. His unique brush technique demands thousands of minute strokes over the course of days, and sometimes weeks, to construct massive, weighty rocks and mist-wrapped mountains. The rock forms have a sensuous, anthropomorphic quality

with a high contrast of light and dark, more closely aligned to a Western concept of light and shadow. Hsia once remarked that he studied the masterworks of Nanjing 17th Century eccentric master, Gong Xian, in the collection of the National Palace Museum in Taipei. He tried to capture the essence of Gong in his own miniature landscapes and smaller album leaves, then moved up to table top and grand scale works. Hsia's dense brushwork, whether in a monumental hanging scroll or a miniature album leaf, is unmatched by contemporary ink painters. Around 2007, Hsia turned to a new brush vocabulary of repetitive 'fine lines for grasses as a counterpoint to the weighty rocks.

Hsia never lost his delight in the natural world, especially the mountains and seascapes of his adopted home of Taiwan. He hiked in the mountains well into his eighties, making rough sketches to enlarge and embellish back in his studio. He and his wife were devout Buddhists who supported religious charities by donating their time and proceeds from painting sales.

A year before the artist's death, Sutherland ventured to the port city of Keelung with Hsia and several other painters to see a contemporary painting exhibition. Although it was July and the heat and humidity were stifling, Hsia bounded up the stairs of the parking garage with joyful enthusiasm. Even at 90 years of age, Hsia had an infectious joie de vivre. His daughter, Summer Hsia, remembers that her father told the family several days before he died that he wasn't leaving them forever—that he was simply "going traveling" and would be reunited with them someday soon. Each painting in this exhibition offers a glimpse of Hsia's indomitable spirit.

Green Mountains, 2001 – DETAIL





Seascape No. 9, 2004
Ink on Xuan Paper , 11³/₈ x 12³/₈ in; 30 x 31¹/₂ cm





Trees on a Mountaintop
Ink on Xuan Paper, 30 x 36⁵/₈ in; 76 x 93 cm



Mountain Landscape No. 4, 2004
Ink on Xuan Paper, 11 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 12 $\frac{3}{8}$ in; 30 x 31 $\frac{1}{2}$ cm



Wintry Feeling in the Mountains, 2004
Ink on Xuan Paper, mounted as hanging scroll, 37½ x 33½ in; 95 x 85 cm





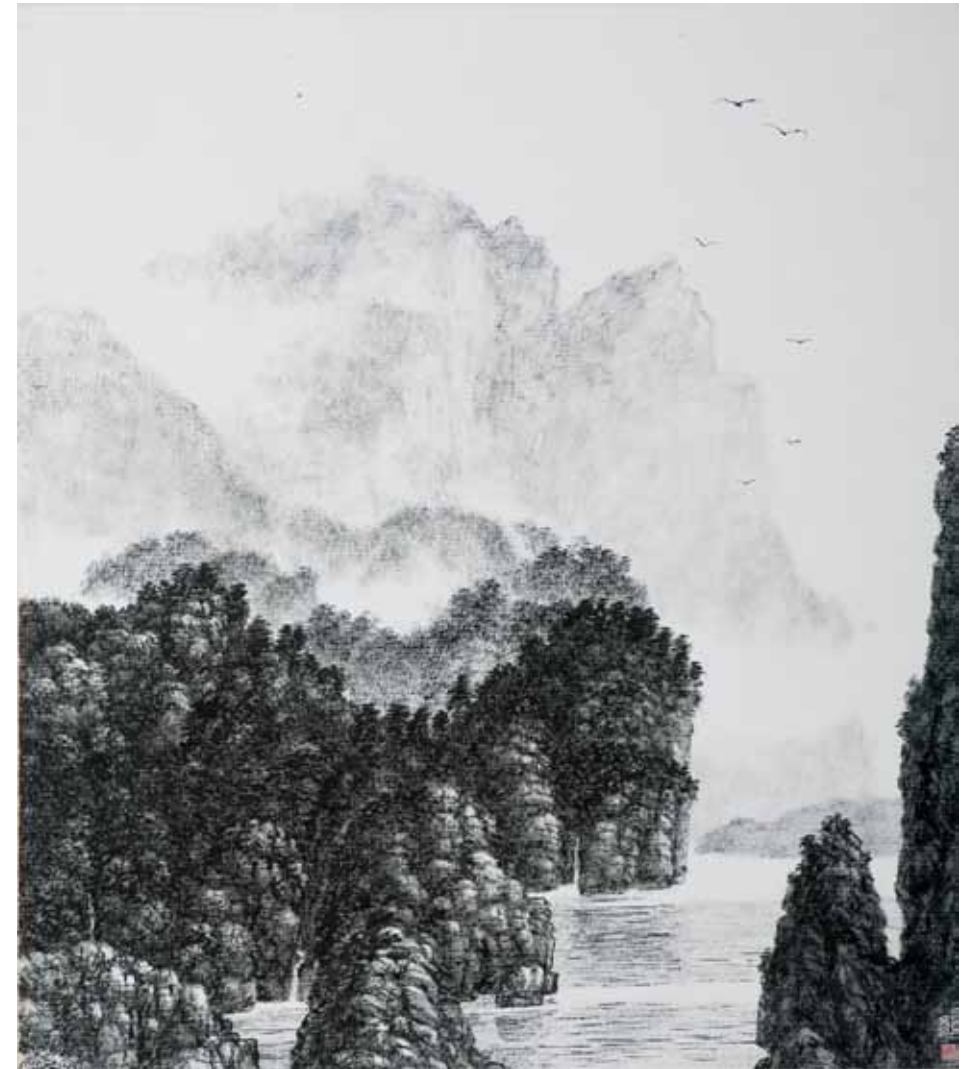
Taiwan Mountains, 1999
Ink on Xuan Paper, 27 1/8 x 38 1/2 in; 69 x 98 cm



Slight Chill in Early Spring, 2003
Ink on Xuan Paper, mounted as hanging scroll, 36 1/4 x 28 in; 92 x 71 cm



Mountain Landscape No. 1, 2004
Ink on Album Leaf, 8 1/4 x 7 in; 21 x 18 cm



Mountains and Lake, 2002
Ink on Album Leaf, 10 ⁵/₈ x 9 ¹/₂ in; 27 x 24 cm



Mountains Peeking Through the Fog, 1997
Ink on Album Leaf, 10 1/2 x 9 1/4 in; 26 1/2 x 23 1/2 cm



Landscape (untitled), 2007
Ink on Xuan Paper, mounted as hanging scroll, 34 x 35 ⁷/₈ in; 88 x 91 cm



Cliffs and Cascades: *Tiny Waterfalls*, 2000
Ink on Xuan paper, 20³/₄ x 20³/₄ in; 53² x 53 cm



Waterfalls, 2001
Ink on Xuan Paper, 13 ¹/₈ x 13 ³/₈ in; 33 ¹/₂ x 34 cm



Miniature Landscape Pair No. 1, 2006
Ink on Miniature Album Leaf, 3 x 14 ¹/₈ in; 7 ¹/₂ x 36cm, Each



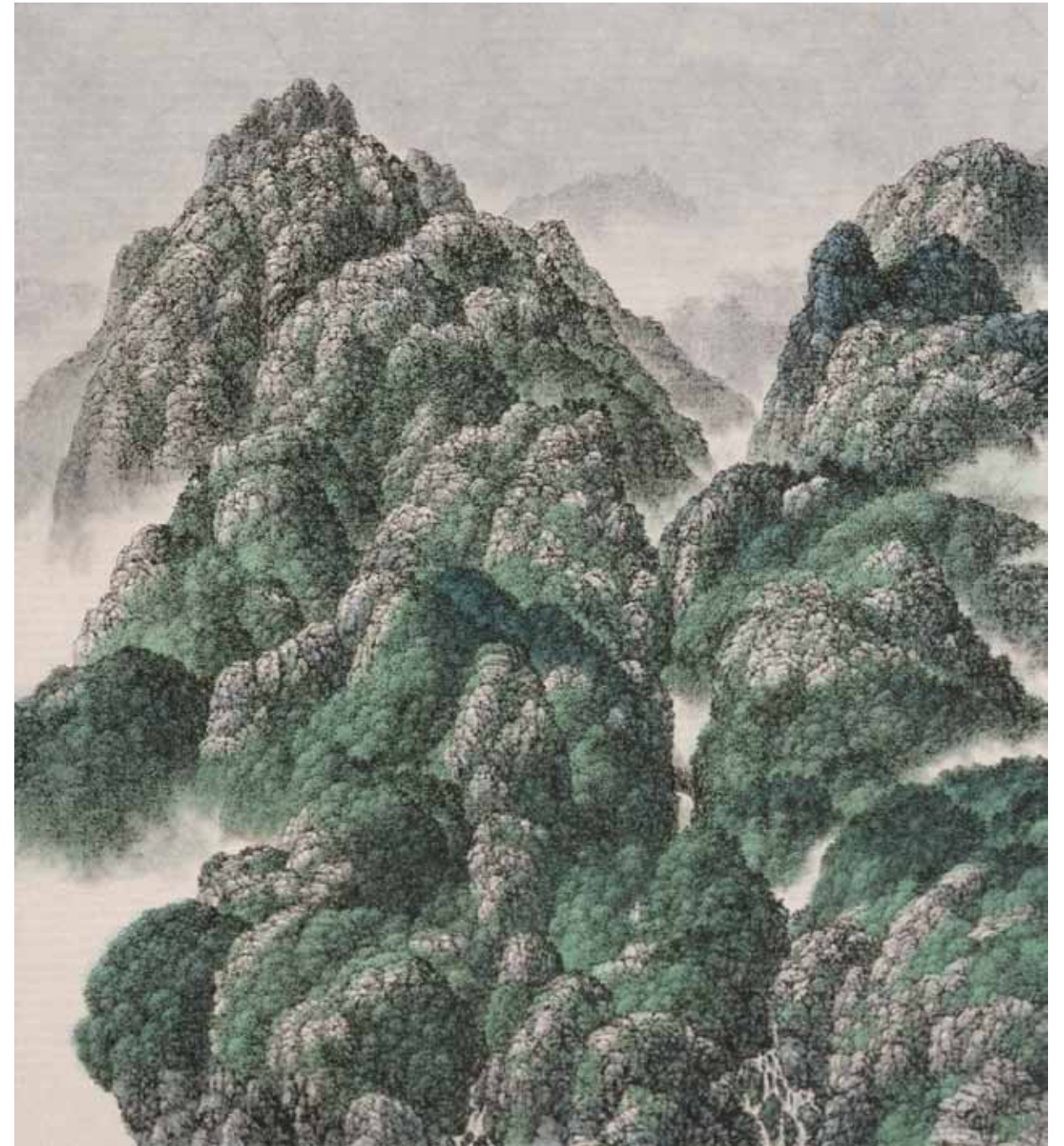
Miniature Landscape Pair No. 3, 2006
Ink on Miniature Album Leaf, 3 x 14 $\frac{1}{8}$ in; 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 36 cm, Each



Miniature Coastlines Pair, 1997
 Ink on Miniature Album Leaf, 3 x 14 ¹/₈ in; 7 ¹/₂ x 36 cm, Each



Waterfalls, 1999
Ink on Xuan Paper, 19 1/2 x 19 1/2 in; 49 1/2 x 49 1/2 cm



Green Mountains, 2001
Ink and Color Wash on Xuan Paper, 19 ³/₄ x 18 ¹/₈ in; 50 x 46 cm



Green Mountains, 1999
Ink and Color Wash on Xuan Paper, 9 ³/₈ x 10 ⁵/₈ in; 24 x 27 cm

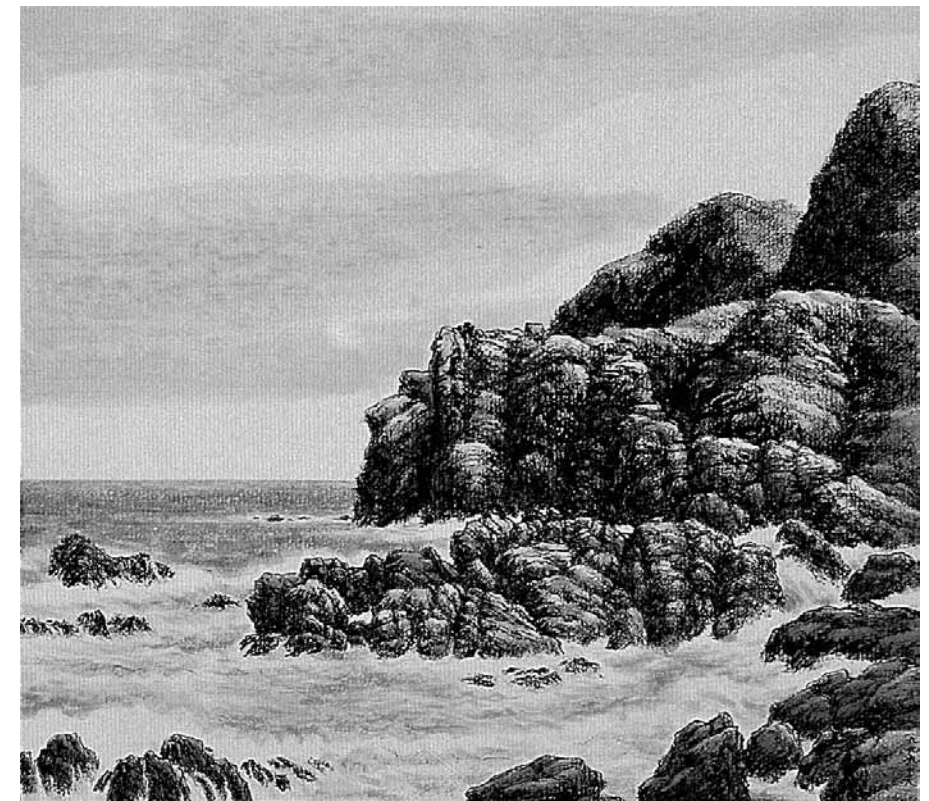


Misty Cliffs with Mountain Grass, 1998
Ink on Xuan Paper, $10\frac{3}{8} \times 18\frac{7}{8}$ in; $26\frac{1}{2} \times 48$ cm





Grand Seascape, 2003
Ink on Xuan paper, 20 1/2 x 23 5/8 in; 52 x 60 cm



Seascape No. 8, 1999
Ink on Album Leaf, 9 ³/₈ x 10 ⁵/₈ in; 24 x 27 cm



Mountain Landscape No.2, 2005
Ink on Album Leaf, 7 x 8 1/4 in; 18 x 21 cm



Mountain Landscape No. 7, 1999
Ink on Album Leaf, 16 x 12 1/2 in; 41 x 32 cm



Mountains in the Mist, 2004
Ink on Xuan Paper, 19 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 17 $\frac{3}{4}$ in; 49 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 45 cm

Biography

Hsia I-Fu (1925–2016)

Hsia I-Fu was born in Shandong Province in the early 1920s. Hsia passed the strenuous qualifying exams to enter the prestigious Hangzhou Art Academy in 1947 but because of the political turbulence, was forced to withdraw. He eventually escaped to Taiwan with Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Army. Until the late 1970's, Hsia took on numerous art-related jobs from advertising to textile and interior design. In fact, the well-known package design of Taikoo sugar, a fixture in nearly every kitchen in Taiwan to this day, was created by Hsia in the 1950's.

Since 1978, Hsia has devoted himself solely to painting. While Hsia's paintings harken back to the monumental landscapes of the Sung masters, a careful examination of his brushwork and inkwash style reveals his work as clearly contemporary. His brush technique is unique, consisting of layering minute strokes over the course of days, and sometimes weeks, to construct massive, weighty rocks and mountains.

Hsia has held numerous solo exhibitions in Taiwan over the years and has a strong following throughout Asia. In 2002-2003, Hsia was given a retrospective show by the Taiwan National History Museum. Several U.S. museums, including: the Nelson-Atkins Museum in Kansas City, The Norton Museum of Art, Florida, the Princeton Art Museum, the Newark Museum of Art and the Sackler Museum at Harvard, hold works by Hsia in their permanent collections.