

THE ART OF
YEO SHIH YUN

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INKPULSE

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THE ART OF
YEO SHIH YUN

2000 - 2005

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INKPULSE

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I dedicate this to my mum, an extraordinary woman, without whom this book would not exist.

Yeo Shih Yun

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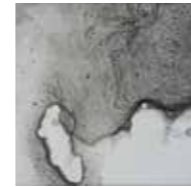
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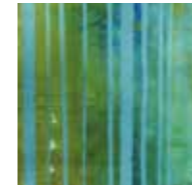


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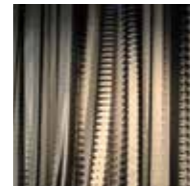


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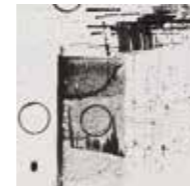
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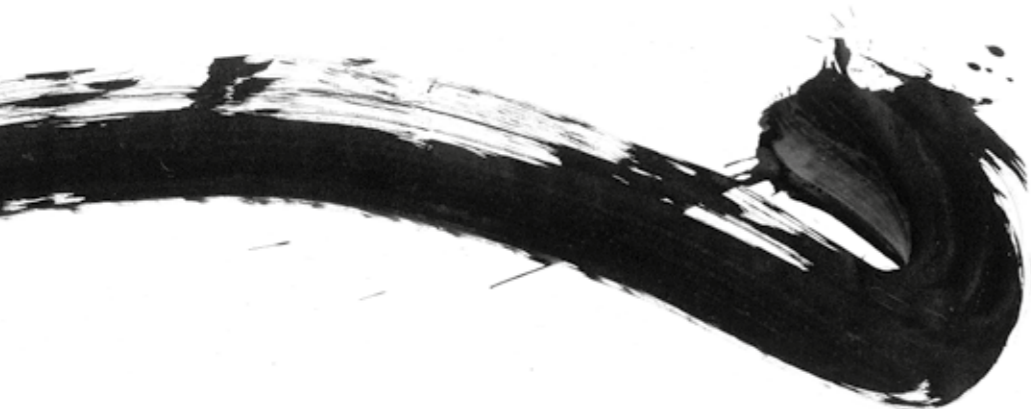
PREFACE

KELLEY CHENG
EDITOR/CREATIVE DIRECTOR OF
"INKPULSE: THE ART OF YEO SHIH YUN"

18 might be an unlikely number for most to mark an anniversary; multiples of tenths seem more the norm for most to celebrate. But what we forget is the importance of sixths in our lives. At the age of 6, we mark the end of the first phase of our education and get ready for Primary 1. At 12 years old, we complete our Primary education; not only does this signify the beginning of the next important phase of our education in Secondary School, it also marks the inauguration into adolescence and puberty where our body transforms and our minds open. In life, turning 18 marks a milestone of an official entry into adulthood, a mature phase of life. 18 is an important age where we prepare for university, and for most of us, it is the first step into the rest of our lives - what you study in university is a decision of deciding who and what you want to become.

There is a phrase in the Chinese language - "女人十八一朵花" - which literally translates as a woman turning into a flower at 18 years of age, a metaphor for a girl entering womanhood. Choosing to make this book at the 18th year for Shih Yun is a celebration of her journey as a female artist; this book commemorates the end of her "formative years" as an artist and marks her first step into a new phase of her artistic career as an established artist with a clear creative vision and a defined practice. After getting a degree in Business Administration and subsequently Graphic Design, Shih Yun unexpectedly won the "Highly Commended" title in the Abstract Category in the prestigious UOB Painting of the Year Award 1999, a turning point which affirmed her decision to become a professional artist. This led her to making the decision to study Fine Arts full-time at the San Francisco Art Institute. Coming back from the States, wide-eyed and idealistic about the art

world, Shih Yun encountered various obstacles as a young artist, but overcame the initial teething pain and went on to set up her own studio and gallery INSTINC. Today, she has built a consistent body of works and is a respected artist known for her abstract expressionist works made with Chinese ink. Driven by a predetermined methodology and process, her works arise from a conceptual framework that guides the intuitive execution, giving rise to results that are both unpredictable and energetic. Almost architectural in philosophy, Shih Yun is persistent in building a strong conceptual grounding in her works, with every seemingly arbitrary outcome having been fastidiously strategised and reasoned. A combination of the predetermined and the unpredictable - the act of combining reasons with chance is the very hallmark of Shih Yun's practice, and has since inspired the title of this book *Inkpulse* - a pun on the word "Impulse".



This volume of works - done between the year 2000 to 2017 - is divided into 3 parts based - at 6 years, 12 years and 18 years - on a grid of 3mm by 3mm and all the elements placed and designed based strictly on the numbers, as a tribute to the artist's conceptual approach to her works. "*Inkpulse: The Art of Yeo Shih Yun*" provides a comprehensive overview of the artist's creative journey through the evolution of her ink paintings, from her major series of works and her collaborative pieces with artists to isolated commissioned projects and also an exclusive peek into a number of experimental works that have never been shown. The essays are a collection of both curatorial texts from her previous shows as well as freshly commissioned writings from friends and associates who have worked with her, providing an insight into Shih Yun both as an artist and as a person. Her affinity with Chinese ink is evident right from the start, and this book documents how the simplicity of using a singular medium can give rise to complex and diverse works, through the use of a different narrative each time. This results in a different series of works each time, demonstrating clearly how concepts in art has a direct impact in driving the end product.

This book is akin to the rare occasion of an intimate invitation into Shih Yun's studio, whereby one is given the privilege to look into her mind and soul, and indulge in a visual journey with one of the most accomplished contemporary Chinese ink artists in Singapore.

LEFT
Inkpulse #1,
29.7 × 84cm,
ink on paper, 2017

RIGHT
Inkpulse #2,
29.7 × 84cm,
ink on paper, 2017



Diaries Bergen #1, 100 × 1000cm, ink on paper, 2009

"Art is a form of action, a drama, a process."

— Robert Motherwell

INFINITE POSSIBILITIES

KOH SEOW CHUAN
CHAIRMAN, VISUAL ARTS CLUSTER
ADVISORY BOARD



Piece of Silence,
80 x 80cm, mixed media on board, 2006
Collection of Mr Koh Seow Chuan

My first encounter with Yeo Shih Yun's work was in 2006 during an exhibition she held with fellow INSTINC artists Tan Wyn-Lyn and Valerie Ng at the Pan Pacific Hotel Art Space. After that first acquaintance with the artist's versatile and captivating work, several visits to the INSTINC Gallery at Emerald Hill Road followed, and today I am an avid collector writing the foreword for this latest exciting endeavour of hers.

Shih Yun began her love affair with ink in 1998 during her foundation year at the LASALLE-SIA College of the Arts. She continued her art studies at the San Francisco Art Institute where she obtained her post-baccalaureate in Fine Arts in 2000. Her earlier tutelage under the late Chua Ek Kay at LASALLE, and her enrollment into the San Francisco Art Institute sparked a deep desire to explore ink as a medium of her art practice and her admiration of "black" as a colour that is bold and possesses infinite possibilities.



Snow Days, 80 x 80cm, mixed media on board, 2006
Collection of Mr Koh Seow Chuan



Melodramatic, 80 x 80cm, mixed media on board, 2006
Collection of Mr Koh Seow Chuan

In 2004, she started an art gallery under the name of INSTINC, to promote a new language of art and to be a gallery that "makes a difference". INSTINC is a gallery that puts art and artists as its top priority. As there is a lack of affordable art exhibition spaces in Singapore, the gallery is a venue for young talented artists exploring and promoting the new language of art in installation art, performance art, and video art, creating a platform for both artists and the public to engage with contemporary art and critical art discourse.

I have watched Shih Yun grow and excel as an artist over the many years I have known her. Her skill and technique have come a long way since her art studies in the late 1990s. *Conversation With Trees*, a work commissioned by Singapore Art Museum, for instance, was an exemplary work of art that demonstrated both her expertise as well ingenuity.

Inspired by Tim Knowles' *Tree Drawings*, where he attached pens to the tips of tree branches allowing the movements with the wind to produce a work of art, Shih Yun adapted and made the concept her own by using different brushes and ink instead. The works thus produced were selected, scanned, digitised, and recomposed and transposed to silkscreens. Next, the silkscreens were used to print the compositions onto linen to create paintings. The entire process was a collaboration between the trees and the artist. The trees offered the initial marks, allowing Shih Yun to work with them to create new paintings with new compositions.

Shih Yun is an extremely dedicated and talented artist. I foresee that she will have a long and exciting journey in her future art making. ●●●●●

TO DO OR NOT TO DO

BOO SZE YANG
ARTIST



Untitled, 61 × 45cm, pigments and silkscreen on canvas, 2016

Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible.

— Francis of Assisi

Wang Deshun became an internet sensation at the age of 79 when he walked the runway at China Fashion Week in Beijing in 2015. He said in an interview that success for him is not an overnight thing; he had been preparing himself for the last 60 years. Born in 1936 in Shenyang, a northeastern city in China, he started out as a theatre actor at age 24, then at age 44, he started to learn English. At age 49 he founded his own pantomime troupe and started going to the gym at age 50. He created a form of performance art called “living sculpture” at age 57, where he worked out for four hours every day for three years so that his body would resemble a sculpture.

Art as a career was not something parents would encourage their children to pursue in Singapore. It takes a great amount of courage, determination and an extremely positive attitude for one to continue making art years after graduating from art school.

Shih Yun studied Business for her first degree in 1998, did a Diploma in Communication Design at LASALLE-SIA College of the Arts in 2001 and

went overseas to San Francisco Art Institute for a post-baccalaureate program in painting in 2002. Due to the lack of art spaces to exhibit in at that time, she founded INSTINC, an artist-run space in 2004. In 2009, Shih Yun launched INSTINC International artist-in-residence program and has since hosted over 65 artists from 20 different countries. She recently opened INSTINC STUDIOS which offers studio spaces for local artists on long-term rental. It's evident that she has put her studies in Business and Communication to good use, carving out a career as both an artist and a creative entrepreneur.

Her approach to ink painting; an amalgamation of Eastern and Western philosophy, coupled with the use of unconventional tools, revealed her openness to new ideas, new technologies and an amazing ability to innovate. What is admirable is that on her quest to self-actualisation, she could contribute to the arts community through her multi-faced involvement as a creative maker and an ardent advocate for artistic collaboration and cultural exchange between local and international artists.

While Wang proves that it's never too late to follow your dreams, Shih Yun testifies that the best preparation for tomorrow is doing your best today and to take responsibility for your own destiny. ●●●●



Blue trees, 76 × 56cm, mixed media and silkscreen on paper, 2016

YEO SHIH YUN'S JOURNEY WITH INK, BRUSH, PIGMENTS AND SILKSCREEN

MARJORIE CHU
GALLERY OWNER, ART FORUM

Yeo Shih Yun's art journey is filled with dynamism.

Her success as an artist is due to her focused love for the brush, ink, silkscreen technique and nature.

In 2003, I was so impressed by Shih Yun's vibrant brush strokes that I immediately invited her to show at the Art Gallery Association Singapore Group Show titled "New Finds". Her work is refreshing and easily understood by all.

Since then, Shih Yun has visited my gallery often; we talked about works by the artists whom she admired: the style of the late Chua Ek Kay (Singapore) and Toko Shinoda (Japan).

She has always "admired the basic yet strong quality of black as a colour, its boldness and infinite possibilities".

She was so obsessed by the movement of ink that she "merged traditional ink with Abstract Expressionism, dabbling in unorthodox methods of transferring ink onto a white surface using rollerblades, toy guns and watering cans."

She even filled a toy robot with ink and drove it around using a remote control and observed the effects of the spilt ink on paper.

However, Shih Yun was still not satisfied by her experiments. Whatever she did, the results still meant that she was in control, whether moving a robot or gliding a roller blade across a canvas.

In 2001, during her studies at the San Francisco Art Institute, she was acquainted with silkscreen printing and instantly became very fond of the medium.

Remembering her time in Japan where she interacted with nature, Shih Yun hit upon an idea to tie a brush to a branch of a tree and allow the breeze to "apply" ink from the brush onto paper. Thereafter, she applied her knowledge of printing and transferred the "brush images" created by trees and the breeze onto silkscreen. And thus began her *Conversation with Trees* series, which was presented at the Singapore Art Museum in 2012.



Flight, 70 × 50cm, mixed media and Chinese ink on Fabriano paper, 2003



Exuberance Blue, 100 × 170cm, silkscreen paint and ink on linen, 2017

Now I have brought Shih Yun's journey up to the present.

You will see very subtle yet major breakthroughs in Shih Yun's works in the years to come.

While Shih Yun's powerful brush strokes are still evident in her work, she has translated them into the medium of silkscreen. Layers of colours support the background to the screened brush strokes, adding new depth and dimension to her composition.

Congratulations, Shih Yun! ●●●●●



Connecting the wires, 97 × 88cm, ink and silkscreen on canvas, 2014

BRIDGING AND PAINTING IN THE WIND

IAN WOO
ART EDUCATOR / ARTIST

Yeo Shih Yun's artistic practice began with her interest in the genre of ink painting, but her inquisitiveness and curiosity led her to fuse its cultural language with concepts from Modernism and the Avant Garde. Shih Yun often embraced the act of painting with other possibilities beyond that of her embodied self. In her artistic evolution, she has "directed" and constructed paintings with mechanical devices, branches and the physical force of the wind as well as worked with groups of people, painting on cars and unusual surfaces and materials. She has also combined and extended printmaking and mark-making techniques to locate new context within the language of abstraction. Her fascination with the process can also be experienced in the form of her videos, providing a fresh perspective as to how the substance of ink can become a static image.

The above examples reflect her passion for communicating and sharing her art-making experiences with people. This important feature of her work can be linked to her entrepreneur spirit, serving as a creative director of artists' collaborations, curatorial projects and residencies.

It has been passion that led Shih Yun to establish her art residency INSTINC as a way to support artistic expression independent from established art galleries and spaces. It is also a space where Singapore artists can meet and work with international artists. Through the years, INSTINC has become an establishment that gives fuel to the developing identity of the Singapore art scene.

The artistic and residency work of Shih Yun is reminiscent of the infrastructure of Singapore. Singapore is an island that is efficient by means of a practical understanding of its limitations on natural resources. Therefore, it situates itself as a port of call, inviting others to exchange and trade. In doing that, it gains insight, knowledge and experience in how it can function and serve others as a model country. INSTINC came about due to difficulties in finding affordable art spaces, and it champions a model that focuses on encouraging vibrancy in artistic exchange and discourse while adding a unique perspective to the development of new Singapore Art, amidst a sea of international galleries, residences and, biennials.

Shih Yun is fascinated with painting, specifically the field of literati ink painting. Looking at her work, I am reminded of the lyricism and abstraction in the manner of Helen Frankenthaler, Chua Ek Kay and Morris Louis. Shih Yun's fusing of kinetic and natural media with painting was inspired by the eclecticism of Robert Rauschenberg who, in the turn of post-war art, together with composer John Cage, experimented rigorously, extending existing methods of artistic presentations by merging painting, drawing, printmaking, sculpture, photography and assemblage. The composer Cage was the great music visionary who suggested the validity of silence as ambient sound. Cage also explored printmaking and ink painting, using stones placed on top of paper as visual guides, creating enigmatic traces that were dictated by his interest in chance operations.



TOP
Reload,
142 x 83cm, mixed media
and ink on canvas, 2012



BOTTOM
Against the Wall,
60 x 90cm, mixed media
and ink on canvas, 2012



TOP
Man and Machine Series #4,
76 x 56cm, ink on Fabriano
paper, 2010

BOTTOM
Man and Machine Series #6,
76 x 56cm, ink on Fabriano
paper, 2010

The influence of these two mavericks can be seen in Shih Yun's "sound-treated" graphite on papers work, which were rendered by the sonic vibrations of the national song "We are Singapore". In the artwork, each piece of paper is pressed on the speaker cone loaded with graphite and water. The sound vibrations of the tune will later distribute the elements on the paper to complete each drawing.

Shih Yun has also made a series of works where each of her line paintings are "composed" by the multiple random printed "tracks" from the movement of a multitude of wind-up robots. One of the highlights of Yeo's career can be seen in her paintings *Conversations with Trees*, which was exhibited and supported by the Singapore Art Museum. In this series, she was inspired by the ideas of Tim Knowles, attaching brushes to tree branches for the wind to respond and compose the artwork via mark-making. Here, the marks made by the branches and the wind have relinquished human control, giving prominence to a random (visual) sign language that is associated with natural phenomena. The artist uses the collection of tree and branch "marks" as samples and recomposes them by way of printmaking, creating variations of painting compositions juxtaposed between chance and control.

TOP
Reborn, 148 x 122cm,
Chinese ink on canvas, 2012

BOTTOM
Relive, 140 x 80cm,
Chinese ink on canvas, 2012



Shih Yun's monograph is an important opportunity for the public to see the works she has made within the last two decades. It reveals the relationships between the history of ink painting, interdisciplinary experimentation and a rediscovery of painting's relationship to our world. Painting has its roots in cave paintings, before finding its way to the walls of buildings like temples, churches, cities and empires. As cities fall and become reconstructed spaces after going through two world wars, it has influenced the way our memory recollects patterns and perspectives. It has influenced our sense of sight to include the vocabulary of fragmentation, a juxtapositioning of imagery for the future. Hybridisation, interconnectivity and mutation are ways in which the alignment of natural and artificial aim to sustain life within our ailing environment. Today, the future, in turn, has been energised by electricity and digital combustion, where the machine plays superior in its influence on the speed of the world. Painting as both Eastern and Western ideas has been critiqued for its relevance to the way we see image as representation in this world of machines. Shih Yun's practice is a reminder of how the potential of painting and drawing can find relevance to the current evolution of image reproduction, where the human body is an active participant, at play and in correspondence with both nature and machine. ●●●●

TIMELINE

EDUCATION

- 2001–2002**
 San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco, California
 Post Baccalaureate Program (Painting)
- 1998–2001**
 LASALLE-SIA College of the Arts, Singapore
 Diploma in Communication Design (Distinction)
- 1995–1998**
 National University of Singapore, Singapore
 Bachelor of Business Administration (Merit)

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2014**
 Choreographed Collisions
 Galerie Steph, Singapore
- 2013**
 Learning From Trees
 Art Forum, Singapore


Conversations with Trees #14, 70 x 50cm, silkscreen and ink on Fabriano paper, 2010
Private collection
- 2011**
 Traces of Nature
 Community Wall, Esplanade, Singapore


Traces of Nature #3, 70 x 50cm, walnut dye and Chinese ink on Fabriano paper, 2010
- 2003**
 log:one03
 Block 43 Studio Gallery, Singapore
 New Finds
 Art Forum, Singapore


PROFESSIONAL WORKS

- 2004–PRESENT**
 Founder of artist-run space, INSTINC Singapore

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS


- 2017**
 Instinctive 1.0: (in)visible, ION ART, Singapore

- 2015**
 Scholars & Ink
 NUS Museum, Singapore


- 2014**
 Project6581
 Japan Creative Center, Singapore
 INSTINC10: Celebrating a decade of art and collaboration
- 2013**
 Robotic Love (Yeo Shih Yun and Justin Lee), Youkobo Art Space, Tokyo Japan

- 2012**
 墨 Mo
 Jendela Visual Arts Space, Esplanade, Singapore
 Lyrical Abstraction, Works by Jeremy Sharma and Yeo Shih Yun
 Singapore Art Museum, Singapore
- 2006**
 Parallel Journeys: Yeo Shih Yun, Wyn-lyn Tan, and Valerie Ng
 Pan Pacific Hotel, Public Art Space, Singapore

AWARDS

- 2012**
 Sovereign Asian Art Prize People's Choice Award
- 2011**
 Sovereign Asian Art Prize Singapore Top 20 Finalists
- 2007**
 26th UOB Singapore Painting of the Year Competition, Highly Commended Entry
 Abstract category
 26th UOB Singapore Painting of the Year Competition, Certificate of Distinction
 Abstract category
- 1999**
 18th UOB Singapore Painting of the Year Competition, Highly Commended Entry
 Abstract category


AUCTIONS

- 2012**
 Christie's Asia: Sovereign Asian Art Prize, Singapore


Teeming, 148 x 165cm, silkscreen on linen, 2012
Private collection

THE UNCERTAINTY OF CHANGE

LIM XIN YU

Yeo Shih Yun holds frequent conversations with chance.

Freed from her own hand and the refined controls of an artist; objects like robots, trees and toy cars skate over her canvases, trailing streaks of paint—which she adapts digitally or on silkscreens to create another one-of-a-kind artwork. By constantly relinquishing and regaining control in her artistic process, she brings on the element of chance as a collaborator in her artworks.

Emboldened by the freeing childhood promise of choosing, becoming, or being anything at all, the artist passionately chose art as a young child. Blotted out by a competitive climate in Singapore, the pressure to excel and other challenges, Shih Yun did not become an artist by chance. But what drove her forward is a fascination with the randomness of life's occurrences, as she searches for certainty within uncertainty in her art—for the black and white in the absolute grey.

BEFORE, COLOUR

To the consternation of all those around her, Shih Yun enrolled in the LASALLE College of the Arts, majoring in graphic design, straight after her Business and Marketing studies at the National University of Singapore. It was in her foundation year when she fell in love with ink and its limitless possibilities: the way the whirls of ink puddled on paper, expanding into indistinguishable shapes as she ran a soaking brush over the still-wet surface.

Her first brush with recognition arrived during the UOB Painting of the Year competition in 1999, which she took part in at the urging of her lecturer. *Bamboo* culminated in the title of "highly commended"—an honour awarded to only 20 works in the competition—and its subsequent sale to an expatriate couple who worked at the bank.

The painting *Bamboo* offers a possible glimpse into the future art leanings of Yeo Shih Yun. Atop a wash of moss greens, bamboo yellows and army olives, are drips of blue that obscure and reveal the painting's namesake. The play of negative space and spontaneous verticality hints at an untethered, free spirit at work.

INK MEETS WEST

Immersed in her studies at LASALLE, Shih Yun's focus shifted to fine art, and even more resolutely towards painting and the medium of ink—eventually applying to the San Francisco Institute of Art (SFAI) and was accepted into its post-baccalaureate programme. Surrounded by Pollock and Rothko and many more in San Francisco, Shih Yun fully immersed herself into the realm of Abstract Expressionism.

Shih Yun was quickly drawn to the conceptual works of John Cage and Robert Rauschenberg, especially the work *Automobile Tire Print*. Then displayed on the walls of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), *Automobile Tire Print* is a streak of black against a ceaselessly long paper scroll—the result of Rauschenberg laying down the makeshift canvas along a street and Cage driving the inked rear tyre of a Ford Model A car over its surface. It was a certainty, a declaration—the sure mark of a wheel shearing across the canvas of the artwork—and a motion that encompassed themes of mark-making, performance art and the artistic process. Ultimately Shih Yun was intrigued by a single question: who, exactly, was the artist?



TOP
Flux, 100 × 70cm,
Chinese ink on paper, 2001



BOTTOM
Spirit, 70 × 100cm,
Chinese ink on paper, 2001



First course work
"Ambiguous Space"
in LASALLE using
Chinese ink, 1998

After her studies in San Francisco, Shih Yun returned to Singapore in 2002. Her first breakthrough arrived soon after in 2003: a group show with Marjorie Chu, gallerist of the Art Forum, at the MICA building (now known as the Old Hill Street Police Station). Gradually recognising a need for more affordable, artist-run spaces for artists to congregate and collaborate in Singapore, Shih Yun launched INSTINC in 2004. The artist-run institution serves to propagate a new language of art and offer a space for the realisation of a plethora of art forms: from installation art to performance and video art. INSTINC launched its international art residency programme in 2009, inviting contemporary artists from all over the world to pursue their art in a conducive space with ample support and flexibility. The space has expanded to two locations: INSTINC SOHO and INSTINC STUDIOS in Clark Quay and Kallang respectively.

IMPRINTS

During her LASALLE days, Shih Yun's appreciation for ink grew under the tutelage of Chua Ek Kay, an imminent Singaporean Chinese-ink painter whose work straddles the line between classical Chinese calligraphy and Western art influences. Her art evokes the same sentiment of East-meets West, drawing on the medium and the medium only from the East—Chinese ink. But everything else is contemporary: from the subjects of her artworks, her methodology of randomness, and the slew of objects like watering cans, speakers and trees serving as her collaborators in her works. The contrast is clearly black and white; her refreshing, contemporary ideas pair at odds with a medium that is rooted in tradition.

THE REAL ARTIST WAS...

The notion of collaborating with people—or even objects—is not new, previously echoed in art movements like Dadaism and the Fluxus art movement. Viewing from a different eye, Shih Yun's process seeks to unearth new depths in the endeavour.

In her strive for spontaneity, Shih Yun frequently invites the notion of collaborations into her art. The *Zerorize* project involves a collaboration with the Slovenian artist Katja Pal; separated by distance and cultural differences, the two artists came together to merge their styles into one, taking turns to make marks on a canvas.

Among her scrawled notes for the eponymous piece *Rollerblades*—its medium were a pair of rollerblades and a bucket of black ink—lies a quote by Robert Motherwell, the American abstract expressionist painter: "Art is a form of action, a drama, a process. It is the dramatic gesture itself in modern times, not a religious content that accounts for art's hold on minds of men." This quote has served as guidance for Shih Yun's interest in the "art for now"—to eternalise a fleeting moment, or a series of moments, by chance.

Drawing on her graphic design background, Shih Yun incorporates digital software and silkscreen into her art to complement her mark-making—a crisscrossing of disciplines most evident in her trees and robots series of artworks. The former, titled *Conversations with Trees*, was commissioned by the Singapore Art Museum (SAM); it appears like a traditional Chinese ink painting at first glance, but closer inspection reveals the spontaneity of the marks that form the leaves and lifeblood of the tree. By first tying brushes to the branches of trees, Shih Yun invites the trees to collaborate with her in the making of the artwork. The artist then selects which marks to incorporate into the silkscreens digitally, and applies them to the painting—with aspects of her process alternating between states of losing and gaining control.

At the exhibition "Lyrical Abstraction: Works by Jeremy Sharma & Yeo Shih Yun", Shih Yun publicly documented her process of making *Conversations with Trees* with videos of tree branches swaying in the breeze and making their marks on the canvas, and a framed portrait of the tree as an artist collaborator—a feat that elevates her artwork above the medium of painting and crossing into new media.



Shih Yun's works while she was in SFAI, 2002



Mr Chua Ek Kay was Guest-of-honour in Shih Yun's solo exhibition *log:one03* in 2003

THE QUESTION OF RANDOMNESS

After scrutinising the entire repertoire of Shih Yun's art, one would find that there are still questions to ponder, and things that are left unanswered. But it is clear that a meticulous process goes behind Shih Yun's handling of random phenomena: the dissecting of a single stroke into a thousand, and the compressing of a collection of marks amassed over time into a single moment. But only upon closer look behind the splatters and washes of paint, do the effortless appear efforted, the mundane becomes measured—and the spontaneous becomes imbued with purpose. ●●●●●

INSTINCT, Spirit, ink on paper, 28 x 21cm, 2001
INSTINCT, Gravity, ink on paper, 28 x 21cm, 2001
INSTINCT, Instinct, Chinese ink on watercolour paper, 41 x 224cm, 2001
INSTINCT, Diaries San Francisco #1, Chinese ink on sumi paper, 38 x 1800cm, 2001
INSTINCT, Diaries San Francisco #2, Chinese ink on sumi paper, 38 x 1800cm, 2001
INSTINCT, Diaries San Francisco #3, Chinese ink on sumi paper, 38 x 1800cm, 2001
INSTINCT, Diaries San Francisco #4, Chinese ink on sumi paper, 38 x 1800cm, 2001
INSTINCT, Diaries San Francisco #5, Chinese ink on sumi paper, 38 x 1800cm, 2001
LOG:ONE 03, Diaries Singapore, Chinese ink on wall, 76 x 2155cm, 2003
NEW FINDS, Flight, mixed media and ink on fabriano paper, 70 x 50cm, 2003
NEW FINDS, Defiance, mixed media and ink on paper, 65 x 50cm, 2003
NEW FINDS, Confine, mixed media and ink on paper, 65 x 50cm, 2003
NEW FINDS, Ambiguous, mixed media and Chinese ink on paper, 50 x 65cm, 2003
URBANSERIES, Up, mixed media and Chinese ink on board, 60 x 35cm, 2002
URBANSERIES, Construction #1, acrylic and Chinese ink on canvas, 60 x 46cm, 2003
URBANSERIES, Construction #2, acrylic and Chinese ink on canvas, 46 x 60cm, 2003
URBANSERIES, Three Rooms, Chinese ink and acrylic on canvas, 50 x 150cm, 2003
URBANSERIES, Unchanging, Chinese ink and acrylic on canvas, 60 x 92cm, 2003
URBANSERIES, District 03, mixed media and Chinese ink on canvas, 50 x 150cm, 2005
URBANSERIES, Urban Yellow, acrylic and Chinese ink on canvas, 72 x 31cm, 2003
URBANSERIES, Untangled Web, Chinese ink and acrylic on canvas, 46 x 120cm, 2003
URBANSERIES, Jungle, Chinese ink and acrylic on canvas, 51 x 75cm, 2005
URBANSERIES, Height, acrylic and Chinese ink on canvas, 175 x 50cm, 2006
URBANSERIES, Black Cream, acrylic and Chinese ink on canvas, 91 x 61cm, 2005
URBANSERIES, Blue, acrylic and Chinese ink on canvas, 91 x 61cm, 2005
URBANSERIES, Night, mixed media on canvas, 150 x 170cm, 2006
MINI ME, Mini Me Colour #1, mixed media on fabriano paper, 6 x 3.5cm, 2005
MINI ME, Mini Me Colour #2, mixed media on fabriano paper, 6 x 3.5cm, 2005
MINI ME, Mini Me Colour #3, mixed media on fabriano paper, 6 x 3.5cm, 2005
MINI ME, Mini Me Colour #4, mixed media on fabriano paper, 6 x 3.5cm, 2005
MINI ME, Mini Me Colour #5, mixed media on fabriano paper, 6 x 3.5cm, 2005
MINI ME, Mini Me Colour #6, mixed media on fabriano paper, 6 x 3.5cm, 2005
MINI ME, Mini Me Black #1, mixed media on fabriano paper, 6 x 3.5cm, 2005
MINI ME, Mini Me Black #2, mixed media on fabriano paper, 6 x 3.5cm, 2005
MINI ME, Mini Me Black #3, mixed media on fabriano paper, 6 x 3.5cm, 2005
MINI ME, Mini Me Black #4, mixed media on fabriano paper, 6 x 3.5cm, 2005

2000

MINI ME, Mini Me Black #5, mixed media on fabriano paper, 6 x 3.5cm, 2005
MINI ME, Mini Me Black #6, mixed media on fabriano paper, 6 x 3.5cm, 2005
MINI ME, Mini Me Black #7, mixed media on fabriano paper, 6 x 3.5cm, 2005
MINI ME, Mini Me Black #8, mixed media on fabriano paper, 6 x 3.5cm, 2005
MINI ME, Mini Me Black #9, mixed media on fabriano paper, 6 x 3.5cm, 2005
MINI ME, Mini Me Black #10, mixed media on fabriano paper, 6 x 3.5cm, 2005
MINI ME, Mini Me Black #11, mixed media on fabriano paper, 6 x 3.5cm, 2005
MINI ME, Mini Me Black #12, mixed media on fabriano paper, 6 x 3.5cm, 2005
MINI ME, Mini Me Black #13, mixed media on fabriano paper, 6 x 3.5cm, 2005
MINI ME, Mini Me Black #14, mixed media on fabriano paper, 6 x 3.5cm, 2005
MINI ME, Mini Me Black #15, mixed media on fabriano paper, 6 x 3.5cm, 2005
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URBANSERIES, Black Cream, acrylic and Chinese ink on canvas, 91 x 61cm, 2005
URBANSERIES, Blue, acrylic and Chinese ink on canvas, 91 x 61cm, 2005

2005

HI, I AM SHIH YUN. I AM AN ARTIST.

YEO SHIH YUN
ARTIST

HOW AND WHY I BECAME AN ARTIST

When I was young, my mother gave me the freedom to learn anything. While most other children at the age of five chose to learn piano or ballet, I chose art. Today, I can confidently say that art is, and has always been, my first love.

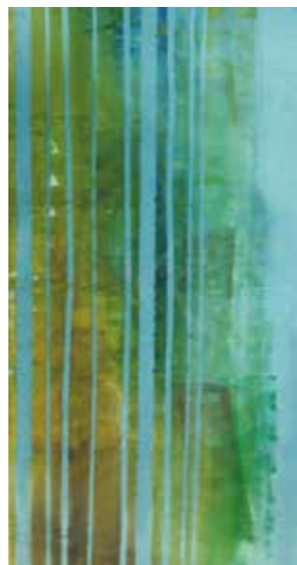
However, in Singapore's competitive climate, there was a great pressure to excel academically and financially; I could not pursue art until I had obtained my degree in Business and Marketing at the National University of Singapore (NUS). After my university studies, without even pausing for a breath, I enrolled at the LASALLE College of the Arts.

No one around me understood why. In their words, I had "downgraded" from a degree to a diploma. But I knew it was my calling and began my studies in Graphic Design at LASALLE. Encouraged by my professor in 1999, I took part in the UOB Painting of the Year competition. Eventually, my work was awarded "highly commended" – along with 19 other works honoured with this title – and exhibited at the UOB Plaza. This was the first time my work had been showcased in public. The work was sold for \$1,500 to an expatriate couple from the bank itself. As an amateur artist back then, I did not know how to price my work – scrawling a token figure on the dotted line. Nevertheless, that was one of the happiest moments of my life!

After my stint at LASALLE, my focus shifted to fine art, specifically painting. I wanted to pursue further studies at the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI). The decision was not easy; I had never been separated from my mother, who raised me as a single parent and predictably did not agree to let me go alone to the USA. I persisted and deliberately scared her with a bleak picture of growing old with regret. Eventually, she said, "Yes!". I was ecstatic!

In 2001, as I was in the midst of my studies at SFAI, the September 11 tragedy unfolded in New York City. My mother called me in a panic, demanding that I return home immediately, paranoid that there would be further attacks targeting landmarks like the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. Being halfway through my post-baccalaureate course, I reassured her that it was safe and convinced her to let me stay in San Francisco until graduation. The creative environment at SFAI inspired me greatly and reaffirmed my decision to become a professional artist.

Returning to Singapore in 2002, I painted at home, getting by with freelance design jobs and teaching art to children. It was in 2003 when I had a breakthrough; my first group show in Singapore at the MICA building with Marjorie Chu from Art forum. In 2004, I started INSTINC and the rest is history.



Bamboo, 180 x 90cm, acrylic on plastic, 1999
1999 UOB Painting of the Year, Highly Commended Entry, Abstract category
Private collection

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2 0 0 0 - 2 0 0 5

RIGHT
SFAI Studio 2001-2002
Study of ink
Collection of the artist



GENRE OF ART

My genre of art falls under Abstract Expressionism and conceptual art, evident by the *Trees* and *Robots* series.

Experimentation with silkscreen printing and linen materials became a part of my process as early as 2007 and I have not stopped since. I have pursued this technique relentlessly – even collaborating with trees and robots and subsequently digitising and silk-screening them to produce the desired results. The technique gave me the liberty to go beyond the traditional media of ink and paintbrushes and explore materiality to its maximum. It even allowed me to incorporate technology into my works. The same sort of intrinsic and transcendent judgement that created the impulsive marks in my paintings also guided me through the digital process.

One of the most critical aspects of my art is mark making – how can I get the most interesting marks without using my hands or body to create them? I am too accustomed to my own gestures. Sometimes, I like to use my non-dominant hand to paint with my eyes closed. By engaging unrelated external parties like trees and robots, I surrender control. Then, I regain control by choosing which marks to scan and lose control again while silk-screening due to my spontaneous and unorthodox approach that eschews the use of registration marks. What I ultimately seek is the imperfections that come with this method of execution. Finally, I command control when I use all the elements to compose the final artwork.

Additionally, I also embrace action painting as one of my processes and manipulate the resulting marks in creative ways. I work the same way action painters work, but that is only the starting point of a long process. Essentially, my art is always about the process.



ART HEROES

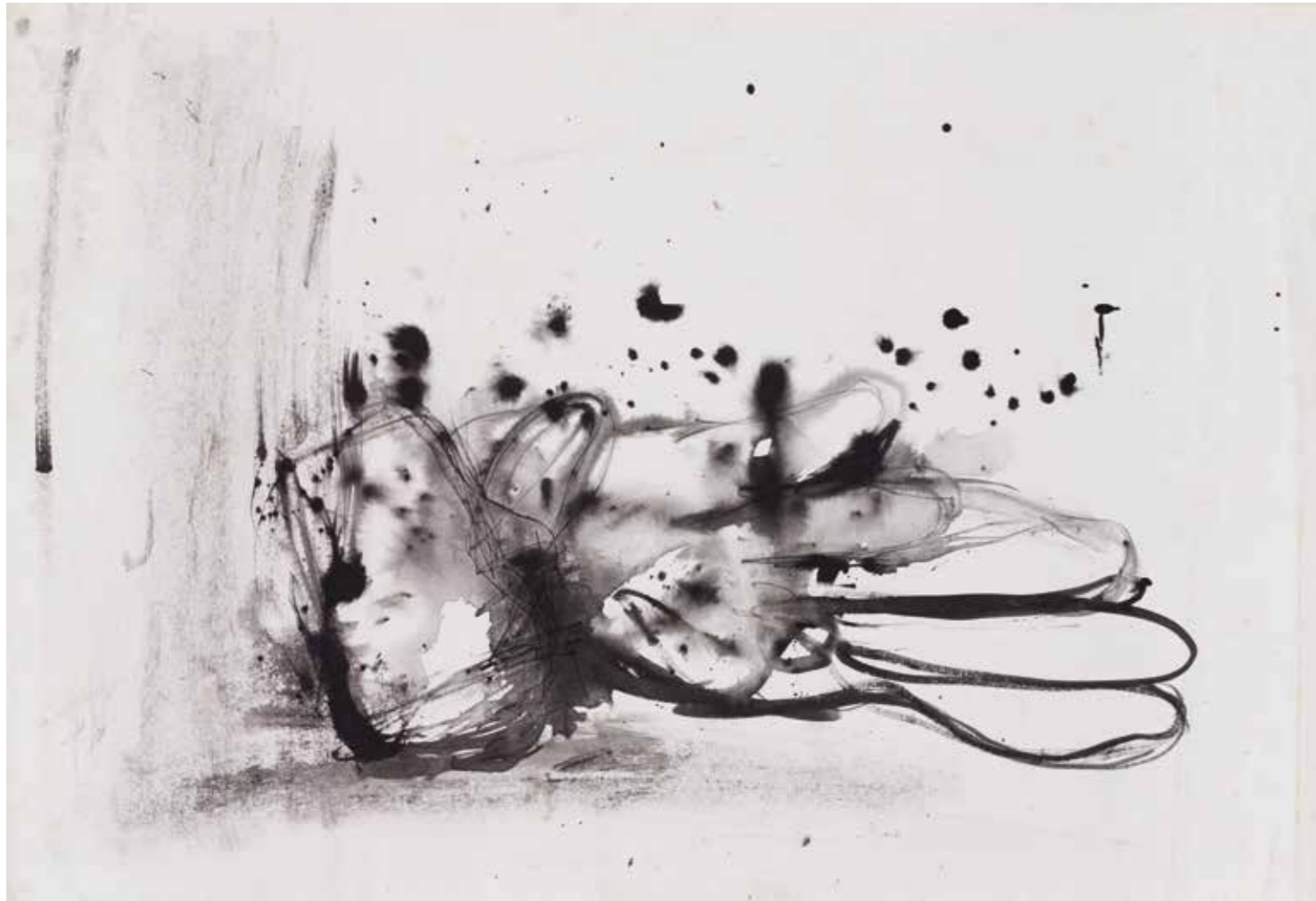
Before my studies at LASALLE, I was in love with Wassily Kandinsky's work – the way he played with colours, shapes and lines in his paintings. While studying at SFAI, I was introduced to the world of the Abstract Expressionists. SFAI was also where I first discovered Jackson Pollock, which opened the door to a trove of other artists like Robert Motherwell, Yves Klein, Mark Rothko, Frank Stella, and subsequently Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns. I was also drawn to some of the art that the Gutai group did, which involved shooting paint from strange contraptions. The work of Fluxus intrigued me greatly as well. In particular, I find John Cage's works very interesting, especially his collaboration with Robert Rauschenberg in the piece *Automobile Tire Print*. Rauschenberg joined 20 sheets of drawing paper into a scroll, laying them down on the road outside their Fulton Street Studio. He inked the rear tyre of the Ford Model A before Cage drove the car to ink a straight line with the tyre along the length of the paper. It was that piece of work that inspired me to do my rollerblade painting in 2000. Amongst them all, Gerhard Richter is my all-time favourite artist. Other artists who inspired me are Pierre Soulages, Cy Twombly, Zao Wou-Ki, Cai Guo-Qiang and lately, Christopher Wool. At different stages in my life, I am intrigued and inspired by different artists and their works.

DEFINITION OF MY ART

I define my works as energetic, spontaneous and playful. Usually, I like to use the colour black because, in its limitations, it has limitless possibilities.

Due to my background in graphic design, lines, shapes, textures and tones intrigue me. When I am creating my painting, I play with qualities like asymmetrical balance, gradation, repetition and contrast. This is truly the most fascinating aspect of art for me.

A good friend of mine, Jennie Kwok once described me as a simple person, which I agree with to a certain extent. We live in a negative world where there is too much noise and clutter. If I were a musician, I would have composed classical music instead of pop music. If I were a photographer, I would have chosen black-and-white film rather than digital. Art should be timeless. Beauty is timeless. You can look at a Kandinsky painting from 1910 today and still be awestruck. I seek to create art that is timeless. ●●●●



Study of Marks, 30 × 42cm, Chinese ink on paper, 1998



TOP
Untitled #1,
 100 × 100cm, oil on board, 2001
 Collection of the artist

BOTTOM
Untitled #2,
 100 × 100cm, oil on board, 2001
 Collection of the artist



SFAI Studio 2001-2002

Art is a
 form of action,
 a drama (a process).
 It is \bar{e} dramatic
 gesture itself in
 modern times, not
 a religious content
 that accounts
 for art's hold
 on minds of me.

giant Brush.
 Have not
 used it yet.



(William Baziotas
 Dana Hare.
 Barney
 Newman
 Adolph)

my materials 7/2/2002
 1:56pm

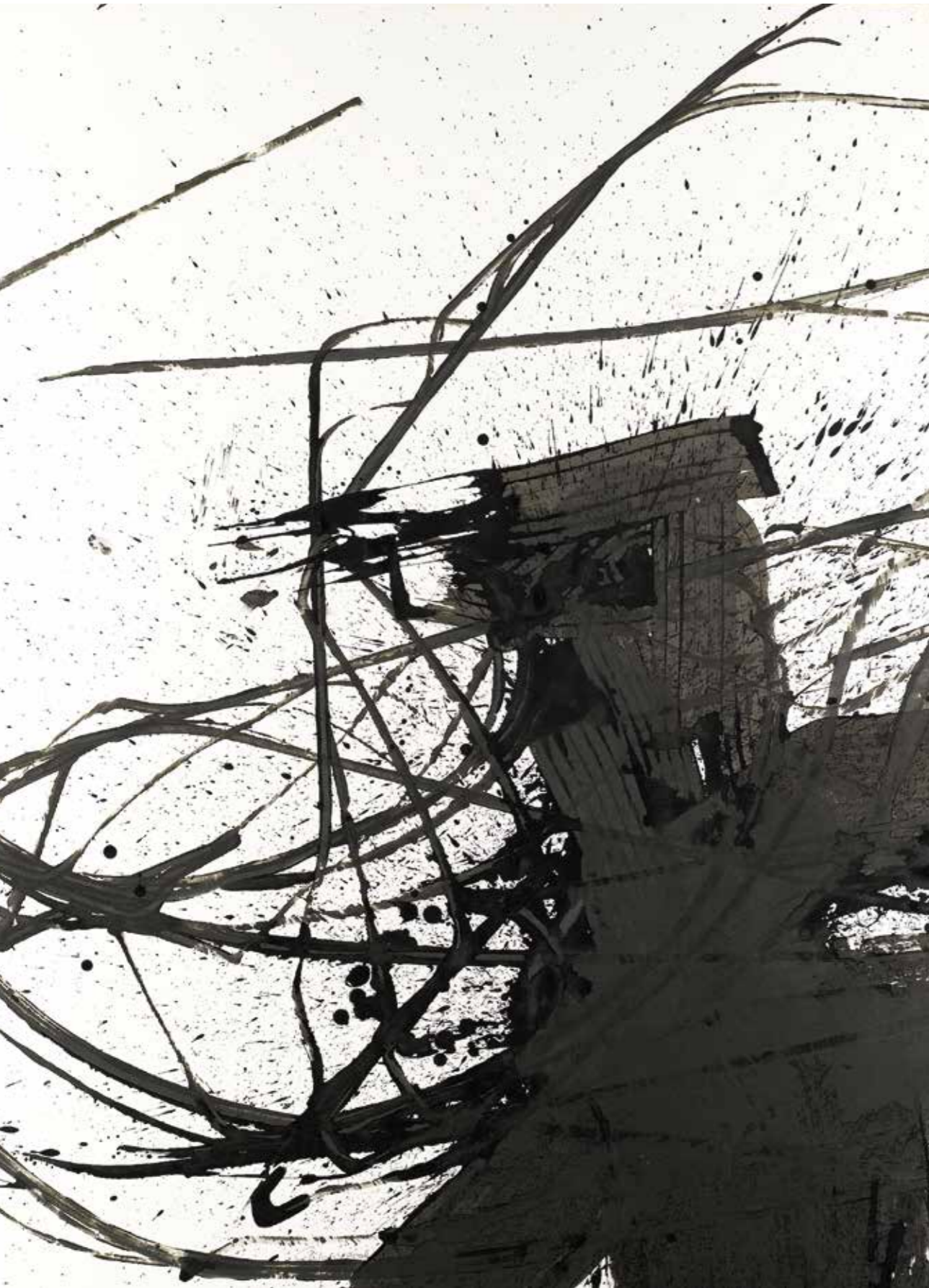
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"If I were a musician, I would have composed classical music instead of pop music. If I were a photographer, I would have chosen black and white film rather than digital. I like what is timeless. Beauty is timeless. I seek to create art that is timeless."

— Yeo Shih Yun

Rollerblade #1, 120 x 80cm, Chinese ink on rice paper, 2004



Rollerblade #2, 120 x 80cm, Chinese ink on rice paper, 2004





2001

I N S T I N C T

SINGAPORE

Following her instincts about the fascinating medium, Yeo Shih Yun decided to explore ink painting further at the San Francisco Art Institute. Using a monochromatic palette and a range of different paintbrushes, she experimented with several techniques. The artist's earliest works, perhaps unintentionally, showcase a captivating balance between the traditional method of Chinese Ink Painting and abstraction - the interplay of conventional and modern elements that broadly defines her body of works till today. ●●●●

OPPOSITE

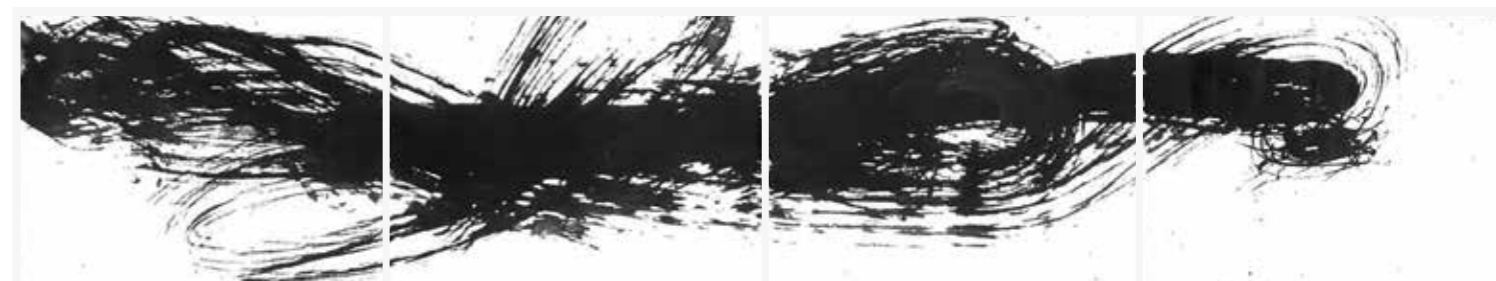
Spirit,
28 x 21cm, ink on paper, 2001



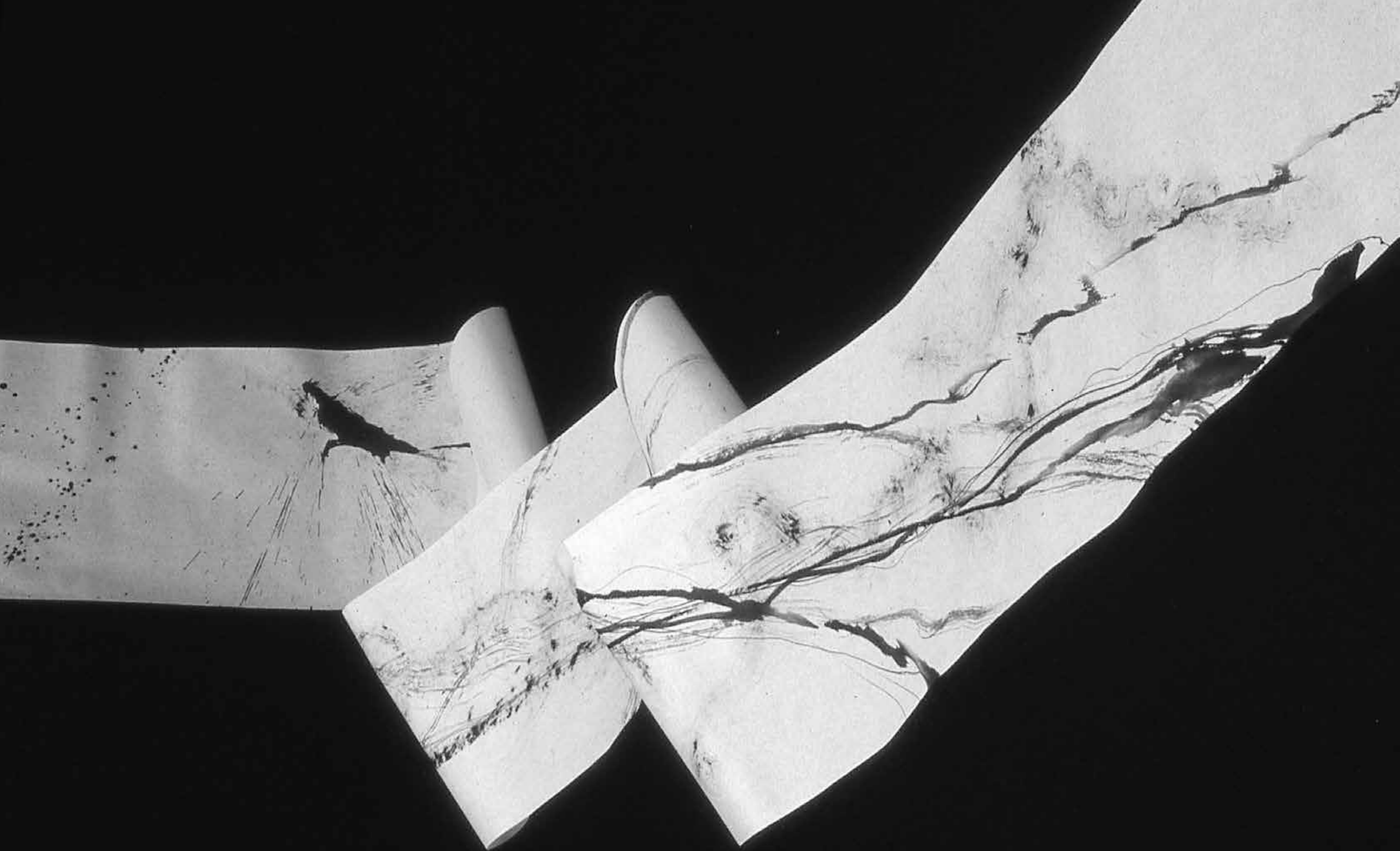
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OPPOSITE

Gravity,
28 x 21cm, ink on paper, 2001



Instinct, 41 x 224cm, Chinese ink on watercolour paper, 2001, Private collection



2003

LOG:ONE03

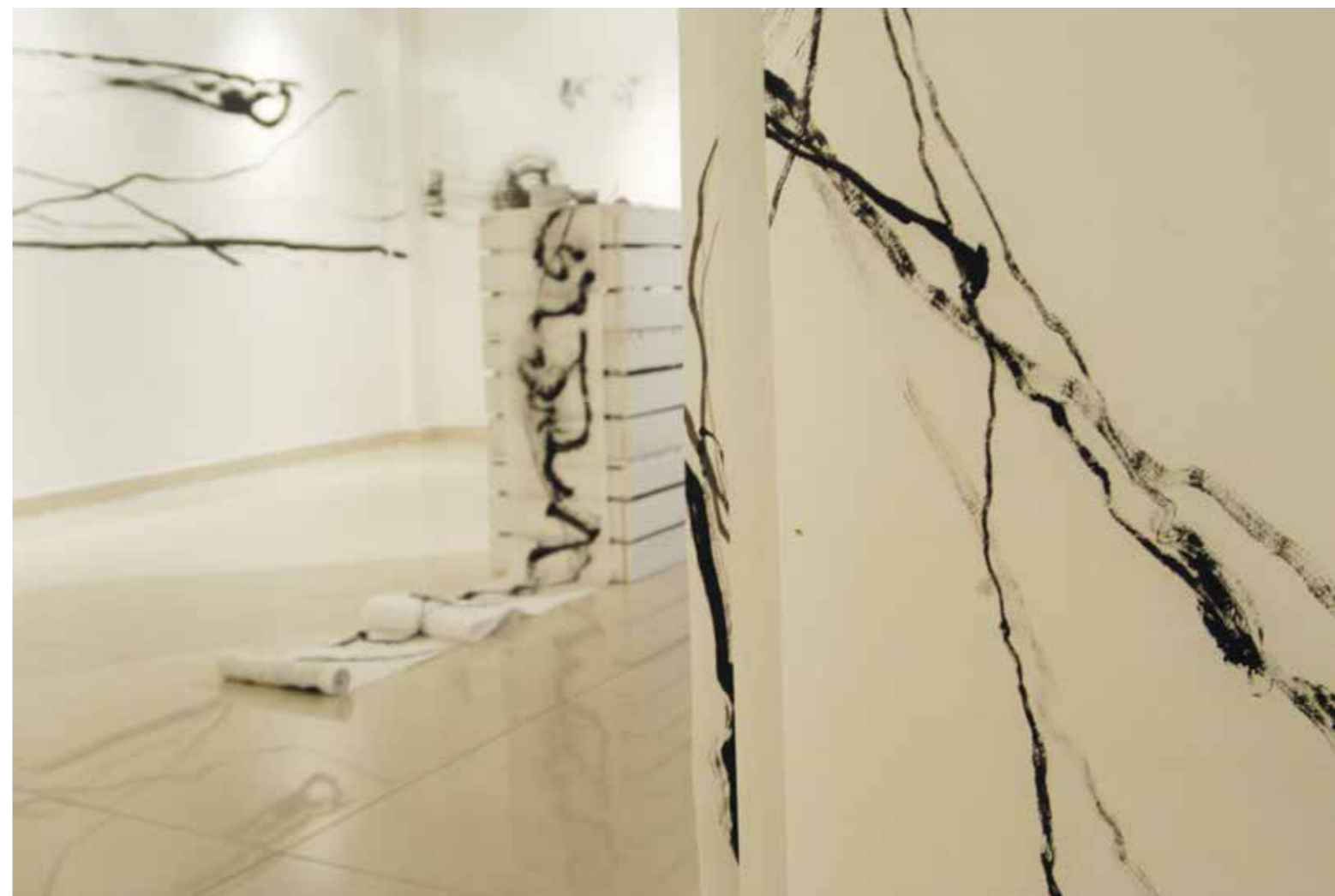
SINGAPORE

log:one03 is a collection of abstract paintings in Chinese ink produced over a two-year period and exhibited as a multimedia presentation of scrolls, journals, wall paintings and video installations. A documentation of events and observations, log:one03 is Yeo Shih Yun's personal diary, recorded from 2001 to 2003 across San Francisco and Singapore. To add multiplicity to the documentation, the artist looked beyond the conventional medium of paper and extended her collection of scrolls and journals to include wall paintings and video installations.

With the goal of uncovering the subconscious mind, she chose to document her experiences and emotions through every drip, mark and splatter of ink using Chinese ink on Sumi paper scrolls, creating 16mm films and even painting directly on the walls. Each brush stroke was executed instinctively and spontaneously - without the constraints of a limited artistic vocabulary - creating works of absolute freedom and honesty. Only certain rules govern the works, for instance, she would paint a section of the Sumi paper scroll every day in her studio and record the date and time.

"Time is a mystery that confounds yet intrigues me," says the artist. Time, in its familiar increments of seconds, minutes, hours, days and years serves a utilitarian function—a common unit that helps the world operate in a systematic way. People equate time with money and are always in a perpetual rush so that none is ever wasted. Computers are rendered obsolete in a wink and companies are trying to build technology that can increase processing speed to a few nanoseconds. And yet, time has not changed - one second from the past millennium is still one second now - but people continue to complain, "I have no time!"

"To me, time is fleeting and every moment is temporal and unique. I hold a desire to capture the ephemeral quality of things around me using the most raw and direct ways," explains the artist. Shih Yun seeks to capture that which cannot be captured. Her art tracks, documents, questions, investigates, challenges and "freezes" time. She experimented with different mediums and used non-traditional tools like roller-blades to capture marks on paper; the start of the work was when the first mark was made and the end was when no more ink can be transferred to the paper. The work thus captures a moment that cannot be repeated. ●●●●



Installation view "log:one03", block43 studio gallery, Singapore, 2003



Diaries Singapore (over 5 days), 76 x 2155cm, Chinese ink on wall, 2003



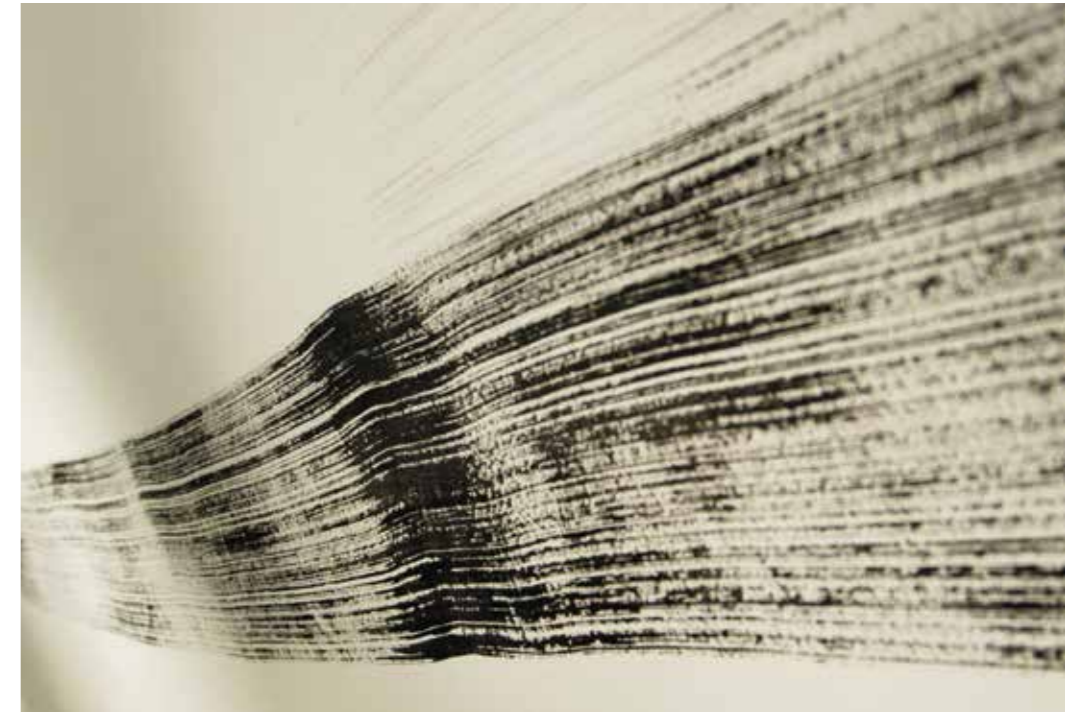
Diaries Singapore (over 5 days), 76 x 2155cm, Chinese ink on wall, 2003



Diaries Singapore (over 5 days) - detail, 76 x 2155cm, Chinese ink on wall, 2003



Diaries Singapore (over 5 days), 76 x 2155cm, Chinese ink on wall, 2003



Diaries Singapore (over 5 days) – detail, 76 x 2155cm, Chinese ink on wall, 2003



Diaries Singapore (over 5 days) – detail, 76 x 2155cm, Chinese ink on wall, 2003

VOICE OF THE FUTURE

INK ABSTRACTIONIST YEO SHIH YUN

KAY LIU
ART CRITIC

ONE GIANT MYSTERY

Ancestors in their times were all avant-gardes, Particularly if one artist is a creator, Then avant-garde is their exact destination.

— Ching Fu Lu¹

On 26 September 2016, I travelled to Singapore for work as an art critic. Stepping out of Changi Airport, greeted by a warm blast of air and a glittering night skyline, all the signs pointed to the fact that I have arrived in Singapore: a garden city that is one of most prosperous and energetic capital cities in Asia.

My scant four-day trip, with its tightly packed schedule, soon passed in the blink of an eye.

Art, undeniably, is a reflection of the times. When we examine it too closely, we see nothing. This is especially evident when working with an international artist like Yeo Shih Yun because I believe that a little more time, as well as distance, is required to perceive and explore the intricacies of her art. Therefore, on my return flight home, I made up my mind to set this essay aside for a while. After which, I would re-open the document, contemplate, and write.

Initially, Shih Yun's art left me with a lot of astonishment and confusion.

Born in 1976, Shih Yun oversees INSTINC, which conducts residency projects with artists from all over the world. The passionate artist is busy, extremely talented and fully devoted: she not only paints and works full-time but is also the mother of a young child and the wife of the president of an animation school.

The first time I stood inside her studio, I heard every word that Shih Yun said to me about her artwork clearly, and yet I could not fully comprehend any of it. Shih Yun speaks perfect English and Chinese, and so do I. But I was halted by the disconnect between the narrative and the work. Each time she showed me a painting, what I sensed from the picture was infinitely much more than Shih Yun's kind explanations.

From this divide, the answer naturally surfaces: if an artist could put across their thoughts easily and eloquently, then he or she may no longer need to paint.

This genuine quality in her art could be an incidental chance. Singapore contemporary abstract expressionist painter Shih Yun adopts a media of high conflicts and contrast, with an intense manner that she is unaware of. But somehow, she is still able to achieve a dominant synergy of beauty and harmony on the screen. This phenomenon, to me, is one giant mystery.

To understand her art, we must begin with an investigation into the invisible segments hidden behind her paintings: dissecting her background, ideas, techniques and process to formulate the bigger picture of her work.

THE END OF CONTEMPORARY ART AND ITS REBIRTH

Many people say that art can change the world, And I think that is bullshit.

Art cannot change the world.

All we can do is live for the moment.

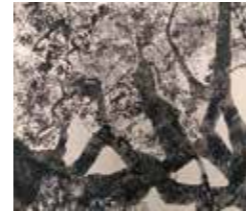
— Yeo Shih Yun²

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¹ Ching Fu Lu's words, see Si Hsien Lee, *A Theoretical System for Chinese Contemporary Calligraphic Art in Taiwan*, Taipei: Artco Books, 2011, p. 170.

² *Artist Interview* on Sep. 28, 2016 at artist's studio in Singapore.

³ Arthur C. Danto, Ya Chi Lin and Hui Wen Cheng trans., *After The End Of Art-Contemporary Art And The Pale Of History*, Taipei: Rye Field Publishing Co., 2014, p. 28.



Teeming, 148 × 165cm, silkscreen on linen, 2011
Private collection



Three Rooms (triptych), 50 × 150cm, Chinese ink and acrylic on canvas, 2003
Private collection

THE EVER-CHANGING WORLD OF CONTEMPORARY ART

It was almost 40 years ago, in the 1980s, when heavyweight European and American art critics told us the same thing: art has reached its end. The German art historian Hans Belting (1935–) and the American art critic Arthur C. Danto (1924–2013), developing their arguments from iconology, style and form investigations, believed that the content and practice of art has been exhausted. From the viewpoint of classical art critics, they reached the same conclusion: one practice structure had been replaced by another, but the new school of thought remains ambiguous and cannot be identified.³

As I stood listening to Shih Yun describing how she creates her art, I came to an immediate conclusion that she resided firmly in the generation when Danto and Belting had argued that art was reaching its end. The creation of contemporary art has departed from representational and religious purposes, as well as any style or traditional restraints; artists now create art for mostly spiritual and conceptual purposes in a bid to reflect the times that they lived in - serving as modern philosophers or critics of society at large.

Pioneer critics have proclaimed the end of the production of contemporary art more than 30 years ago, and less can be said in 2017. I believe that the classical art criticism framework can no longer serve the needs of contemporary art. There is also no possibility for art criticism to have a focused vision, as the quantity and quality of global art being produced today have significantly outpaced the rate at which art criticism is being dispensed. It is the current consensus that the production of art has come out far ahead of the criticism of art.

From an “end-of-art” perspective, Shih Yun's mix-and-blend techniques become natural and reasonable. Four decades ago, contemporary art production was forecasted by professional critics to be reaching its end; paintings are no longer produced solely on the basis of commissions nor serving as iconological depictions. In general, the growth of artworks has overtaken the demand of art museums, galleries and the art market at large. Thus, there is no single specific authority or institute that would be able to influence or shape the contemporary art scene. In other words, it is agreed upon that artists are simply moving forward on their own paths.

The question of why - why an art piece is considered oriental ink art, or abstract expressionism, or even why they can both co-exist—offers no clear answer. The continuous introduction of new orders, manners and schemes would thus become the regular climate in contemporary art.

ANXIETY OF CULTURAL AFFILIATION AND TIES TO THE PHYSICAL WORLD

Singapore established independence in 1965, following its separation from Malaysia. Under the strong leadership of Lee Kuan Yew, the young nation rapidly developed its political and economic power. During its short term of 50 years, Singapore has been recognised as one of the Four Asian Tigers for its miraculous economic growth, financial development, international trade and social security. As a relatively new nation, Singaporean's prosperity perpetuates a wildly successful reality.

Singapore's history has inevitably produced a community that values practicality more than spirituality. The urge to earn and maintain a dignified existence within the international society has strongly influenced civil aspirations to lean towards a very realistic realm.

Although the art schools in Singapore steer towards providing a westernised form of modern art education, this is not enough to determine that there is an imminent possibility for Singaporean contemporary artists to succeed within the western art world and its classical foundations. Likewise, Chinese culture, amidst a mix of multiple cultures in Singapore, is not the only factor influencing Singaporean young artists.

Consequently, we see Shih Yun fusing her art with subjects like readymade objects and plants, turning to abstract painting rather than representational drawings - which are more likely to succeed within iconology traditions - and expressionism rather than calligraphy or fine brushwork. To treat all elements of civilisation as readymade subjects is an extremely secular concept. In comparison with those who chose to reject existential anxiety by producing spectacles rather than making art, seeing Shih Yun's liberal pursuit for her art is a breath of fresh air - a persistence that reached a peak during her studies in San Francisco Art Institute.

Early in her life, Shih Yun was promised a golden future due to her stellar performance in school. But when she expressed her wish to study art at the LASALLE College Of The Arts in Singapore, her mother reluctantly allowed her to do so. It was only when Shih Yun decided to further her art studies abroad in San Francisco, at the San Francisco Art Institute, that her mother strongly objected.

To pursue her art in spite of a family disagreement - this is where we start to realise the explosive force and pure absoluteness in Shih Yun's art.

GLOBALISATION AND STYLE EVALUATION

After many exhibitions and commissions throughout the years, Shih Yun has been labelled an abstract expressionist. This development and outcome, I believe is an incidental inevitability.

Ever since planes became a prevailing mode of transport, the international movement of people and exchange of information has accelerated. Technologies like the Internet and cloud computing facilitate and strengthen the impact of globalisation. In the art world, globalisation has eradicated territorial borders between artistic styles or school divisions; in other words, an artist could be a part of any school or considered a member of any "ism" regardless of their nationality, cultural identity or geographic location.

Encompassed by this trend of globalisation, Shih Yun was deeply influenced by American abstract expressionism, as well as the works of avant-garde composer and music theorist John Cage (1912–1992); her work process also carries the concept of Marcel Duchamp's readymade. She captures the formal beauty of oriental ink work but eschews deeply-held calligraphy and ink painting traditions - eventually transitioning into her distinguished style of ink expressionism.

REFERENCES

¹ Traditional artworks usually are prepared with a certain overture or atmosphere on screen, but Dadaism aims to break this rule by painstakingly bringing offence to the eye as well as the state of mind. Oddness is its exact intention.

² Aleatory this word comes from the Latin word *alea*, meaning "dice".

³ The Sovereign Asian Art Prize is sponsored by banks and auctioned by professional art auction unit for charity; it is established to continuously encourage Asian art talents. 2012 was sponsored by Standard Chartered Bank Singapore and the charity auction was performed by Christie's Asia. Yeo Shih Yun won the People's Choice Award and emerged Top 20 Singapore finalists.

THE REVOKING OF DIRECTION, AND DRIP PAINTING TECHNIQUES

Revoking the direction of paintings is one of the major achievements of Jackson Pollock (1912–1956), leaving his mark on art history.

To revoke the direction of paintings, one has to first revoke the presence of light and shadows in paintings, and the purpose of revoking light and shadow is to deconstruct the concrete forms of objects in pictures. Yet we need to emphasise that this consequence is not reversible, which means that deconstructing contours and revoking light and shadows will not necessarily lead into revoking the direction of paintings. For example, Henri Matisse's art abolished light and shadows; both Wassily Kandinsky and Pablo Picasso's art deconstructed objects, but there are clearly defined directions in their artworks; man cannot re-imagine the paintings and arbitrarily appreciate them. But you can do so with Pollock's paintings, as with Shih Yun's works.

Most of Shih Yun's original print works can be seen as complete artworks on their own, but her specific process of creation compels her to apply various techniques by hand to achieve a new constitution of artworks.

Shih Yun also enjoys employing drip painting techniques in the making of her art. It is simple to understand that, once the direction of painting has been eliminated, a technique that incorporates drips and flows grants an interesting uncertainty to the making of the art. In contrast to Pollock's drip painting technique occurring in multiple layers, Shih Yun prefers to work with a single layer or a singular colour. It seems that Shih Yun maintains a Dadaist sentiment⁴ throughout her drip painting techniques, rather than achieving a depth of field like Pollock. From this perspective, Shih Yun's use of drip painting is the perfect footnote of Dadaism.



Robots Print, 30 x 30cm, manipulated offset print, 2013

CHASE FOR THE UNCONSCIOUS, THE INCIDENTAL, AND SPONTANEITY AS AN ART REQUIREMENT

In many of her projects, Shih Yun has chosen to preserve and pursue randomness as the overarching element in her artworks. Some say that her art is experimental, but in actual fact it does not deal with experimentation, but with the spontaneous spirit that John Cage sought to reflect in his music: we tend to ignore the environment around us, hence allowing the happenings and variables to slip beneath our radar - which are spontaneous factors that artists wish to record and leave to chance.

Robots, trees, music and other elements are Shih Yun's collaborators in her art. Sometimes she attaches delicate ink brushes to robots or mobile toy cars and steps back to watch them draw. She has tied ink brushes to tree branches, inviting the wind and trees to collaborate on her paintings and employed graphite powder and water placed onto a blasting speaker to catch the spills and vibrations on paper - all of these setups are in accordance with her philosophy of randomness.

In her project, *Conversations With Trees*, commissioned by the Singapore Art Museum (SAM), Shih Yun embraced her spontaneous spirit with amazing creativity and willpower. An audience stood around her and witnessed the artwork in its making, which eventually won her the 2012 Sovereign Asian Art Prize⁵.

INK AS A SINGULAR MEDIUM INSTEAD OF A GENRE

I asked Shih Yun why she likes the medium of ink. Her response was: "I love the visual of ink spreading out on paper, with its airy effect and image. And I also particularly enjoy the unique strokes and traces produced by an ink brush". With a single conversation, it is obvious that the abstract expressionist is well acquainted with the beauty and strengths in the medium of ink.

Although several Chinese contemporary art critics may not agree that it could still be called calligraphic art once the written form has been taken out from ink writing - as Shih Yun merely picked out elements from inked strokes and marks - I would categorise her paintings as Abstractionism instead of ink art. In other words, in Shih Yun's art world, it is evident that ink is a medium rather than a genre, particularly in her technique. There is no evidence of established scripts like *Zhuan* (Seal Script), *Li-Shu* (Clerical Script), *Xing-Shu* (Semi-Cursive Script), *Cao-Shu* (Cursive Script) or *Gongbi* (Meticulous painting) skills.

Examining the medium alone, Shih Yun has often been mistaken as a contemporary ink artist. And yet after some profound appreciation and examination, we would begin to understand that the relation between her art and oriental ink works is actually quite distant. Even though she constantly adopts ink as a medium, she remains an abstract expressionist.

Of course, I admit that after seeing many of Shih Yun's artworks, it remained a mystery to me how an abstract expressionist who subscribes to randomness manages to produce oriental art that is more intense than oriental ink, a style that is more Zen than Zen paintings and a calligraphic execution that is more evident than genuine calligraphy.

After much thought, I have decided to suspend my disbelief with Husserl's phenomenology brackets: we acknowledge the existence and authenticity of this phenomenon and accept the undefined consciousness origin of it.

ARCHITECTURAL AND MUSICAL CHARACTER

Lastly, I feel obligated to point out the architectural and musical traits in Shih Yun's art.

Concerning the architecture in Shih Yun's paintings, it deals with her habits of composition and colour tendencies. When the artist confronts a blank canvas, she has probably already done fifty percent of the work in her mind - researching, preparing materials, conceptualising, structuring and planning the visual strategy of the painting. Over and above these, the artist needs to think about the colour palette, the use of contrast to build walls and corridors; to create depth of field and two or three-dimensional elements - qualities that will eventually result in the derivation of the form in the final art piece.

Many collectors and institutions - including the Four Seasons Hotel in Hangzhou, China and the Marina at Keppel Bay Yacht Club - are drawn to the structured processes behind Shih Yun's works and acquired her paintings because of that. They like the architectural process she often employed in her paintings - on one hand, it implies a certain progressive spirit, while on the other hand, it is stylish and blends in well with the cityscape.

Music is an art consisting of rhythm and melody, and in Shih Yun's paintings, there is an excellent control of composition and ink density. Some critics compare the contours and lines in her art to phrase and melody in a musical score. And in this musicality, she has demonstrated the diversity of her repertoire - rock and roll, jazz, partitas or even oriental arias.

VOICE OF THE FUTURE

The contemporary art market, due to several reasons, has reached a turning point. The continuous rise of insurance costs, the prevailing trend of falling interest rates and the frequent movement of international capital between states - they all result in the transformation of art collection behaviour from mere appreciation to wealth management.

For Shih Yun, one of the several contemporary artists in Singapore, there are strong factors that will lead her artworks in the global collection circle. These factors include the recognition she has received in the regional art market - she is constantly invited to various countries to make art and host exhibits and, benchmarked against other Asian artists who are often overpriced, it is evident that there is still plenty of legitimate space for the price of her art to appreciate.

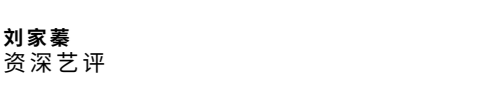
Now I wish to return to the perspective of art, concluding my essay with the title of "Voice Of The Future". Shih Yun pursues art with a powerful will and an infinite imagination; she breaks boundaries between the East and West, abstaining from stylised schools such as any calligraphic styles, "isms", "Zen" or anything else. In her pursuit of randomness, she invites every possible element of chance to collaborate with her. And this seems like a suitable proposition for the future of art in an uncertain world.

Apart from this exact place and moment, there will always be things that are unexplainable. There is nothing we can hold on to forever, both desirable or undesirable. If you can hear the voice of the future, you will be able to understand Shih Yun's art.

I admire Shih Yun's absolute surrender and acceptance of the unknown. Underneath the circumstances of zero intervention, the purity and spontaneity of art continues to exist and will continue to persist. ●●●●

未来之声

水墨抽象女艺术家姚诗韵



Ambiguous Series #6, 60 × 60cm, silkscreen and acrylic on canvas, 2017 Private collection



Youkobo Studio Process Robot Series #1-3, 23 × 27cm each, photo transfer on wood, 2013 Collection of Mr Justin Lee



Robots Print installation, 150 × 240cm, manipulated offset print, 2013

追求无意、偶然、机遇的创作条件

在许多作品中，姚诗韵刻意规划、刻意构想，追求作品完成的工序里，纳入「机遇主义」的作风。有人说她这是实验风，其实不然，这一点也不是实验，而是凯吉的机遇音乐所封存的「环境精神」：我们常常忽略所处的当下环境，其实当下的这一刻，也是有许多状态与变数在发生当中，机遇主义尝试捕捉并纳入环境因子，让无意间不断流转变化的环境状态被记录、成为作品的一部分。

机器人、树、音乐...这些都是姚诗韵会设计进来她创作艺术的环境条件。她会在机器人或动力装置上安装可作画的小零件，随着机器人移动而留下墨水的轨迹。她把粗细不同的毛笔绑在户外随风摇曳的树枝上，让树枝画画。她把墨粉平置在声道上方，让墨粉随着音频震动而留下震动的状态...。这是她对机遇主义的认同，转而实行的实践表态。

在新加坡国立美术馆的委制计划《与树对话》中，我们看到姚诗韵以惊人的毅力与魄力，完成这个作品系列。不仅创作过程中引起驻足围观，在美术馆展览期间也深获回响，并在2007年的UOB大华银行艺术奖、2012年索福伦亚洲艺术奖(The Sovereign Asian Art Prize)⁵写下辉煌纪录。

水墨作为媒材而非类种

我问姚诗韵，为什么喜欢水墨这样的媒材，她回答「我喜欢水墨那种晕开的、透气的空气感。还有它毛笔的触痕，毛笔刷过画面的那个痕迹，非常吸引我。」这位抽象表现主义艺术家，倒是把水墨的卓越之处掌握得一清二楚。

尽管好几位中国当代艺评家并不认同剥除文意后的水墨书写可被称为书法艺术，但反正姚诗韵只是采撷了书法的笔触特性与水墨之美，我认为姚诗韵的水墨抽象是抽象画，而非水墨画。换言之，在姚诗韵的艺术创作中，很明确地，水墨是一个媒材，而非指涉到东方书画类属。姚诗韵的技法基础里头，并不包括篆隶行草、工笔、水墨等等素养。

从媒介角度来看，虽然常有人误认姚诗韵为当代水墨艺术家，但其实仔细了解，我们会知道她与当代水墨、当代书画的关系是疏远的。就算她经常采取水墨这个媒材，但她依然是抽象表现主义画派。

当然在看过她许多的作品之后，我也承认这实在是一道无解的难题与矛盾。我们还是无法解析，为什么一位采取机遇主义、以抽象表现精神做创作的艺术家，最后画面却能生成比水墨更水墨的东方底蕴、比禅宗更禅宗的极简修练、比书法更像书法的矫健作品。

思考了很久，我决定把这个谜放入现象学式的括号中：我们承认这个现象的真实与存在，但一时间还无从追溯其意识根源。



We are Singapore series - Future, 30cm diameter, UV print on Plexiglass, 2015 Edition of 5

建筑性格、音乐特性

最后，作为一篇总体艺评，我感觉还有义务指出姚诗韵作品中的建筑性格及音乐特性。

关于建筑性格，这与姚诗韵的构图惯性及配色倾向有直接强烈相关。姚诗韵面对平面的空白画面时，并没有办法把平面当成平面，而是不自觉地进入三维空间在构想。因为在她坐到这个二维平面之前，她的前置准备与创作工序已完成了太多动态准备，延伸自这样的空间举动，当她最后在平面上完成作品时，画面早已融入太多空间特性，加以她喜欢明暗对比强烈的配色，板面、块体、廊柱、景深...仿佛都呼之欲出，因而形成她作品中独特的建筑特性。

许多收藏机构对姚诗韵作品的建筑性格很有感应，就是爱她作品中的建筑性。例如中国五星级酒店四季连锁品牌就采用了姚诗韵作品来定调空间的素质与品味。新加坡的高尔夫球俱乐部、玛莉港贵宾俱乐部...都认同这种建筑走进画面的风格，一方面暗示了入世积极的精神性，另一方面也深具都会时尚的利落感。

音乐是时间单位与音频旋律所构成的艺术，在姚诗韵作品中，她构图组件与水墨浓淡控制地疏密有致，轮廓类似乐句、线条具旋律音质，因而艺评家认定音乐性也是姚诗韵艺术的特征之一。尤其她曲目变化也大，有时可以听出摇滚、爵士，有时是古典小品、乃至东方咏叹调。

未来之声

当代的艺术市场，由于全球保险成本攀升、普遍的降息趋势与国际间资本移动的需求，已经进入到一个迥异于过往收藏历史的转戾区间，进入2010年之后，人类文明的收藏行为似乎有从「审美与保值」，转变为「资产配置与投资」的趋势。

姚诗韵作为新加坡这个亚太营运及金融枢纽的当代艺术家，有若干的正面迹象，显示她未来极有可能进入全球收藏圈的配置选项。一是她已在收藏界取得一定的认同与成功，二是她仍持续应邀到世界各国发表创作与展览，三是比起其他已被过度高估的当代艺术家，姚诗韵的价格仍有充裕且正当的补涨空间。

因此我希望回归到艺术本质，以《未来之声》来总结这篇姚诗韵创作专论的探讨。姚诗韵以无比的魄力、无限的想象，超越东西藩篱，率性告别技法规约，姚诗韵在无意识的创作坚持中、在刻意擦除「意义」、「书法」、「禅与抽象」、「任何主义」的状态下，让各种环境机遇与她一起完成创作，这正是未来世界的模态。

除了当下与现况之外，我们的周遭其实是一大片的未知、无可攀执；未知的千里之外还是未知，现况的百年之后依然面貌模糊。如果你听得见未来之声，你就看得懂姚诗韵艺术。

我深深赞叹姚诗韵对未知的臣服与顺从。在零干预的创作情境下，艺术的纯粹与自发，欣然展开!●●●●

参考书目

⁵ 这个奖是由银行界赞助、由专业拍卖公司执行，为关注亚洲艺术新星、经激烈竞争与严格评选而诞生的项。2012年该届奖项由新加坡渣打银行赞助，并由佳士得亚部门执行慈善义拍。



2003

NEW FINDS

SINGAPORE

The perfect moment is one where time stands still. It is a fully present moment where the past is left behind and the future is set aside. It is a special time of focused attention and heightened awareness. Interruptions and distractions are consciously excluded. All that matters is this moment—the “conversation” between the artist and the painting.

Each work in this series is about the dramatic sense of “now” that each moment—both real and surreal—possesses. As John Cage once described it, “Art for now-moment rather than for posterity’s museum civilisation.” The development and execution of this series are gesturally instinctive and the resulting forms and images are never premeditated. Where and how an impulsive mark is made is always final—never questioned or doubted. ●●●●



Flight, 70 × 50cm, mixed media and Chinese ink on Fabriano paper, 2003



Defiance, 65 x 50cm, mixed media and Chinese ink on paper, 2003



Confine, 65 x 50cm, mixed media and Chinese ink on paper, 2003



Ambiguous, 50 x 65cm, mixed media and Chinese ink on paper, 2003



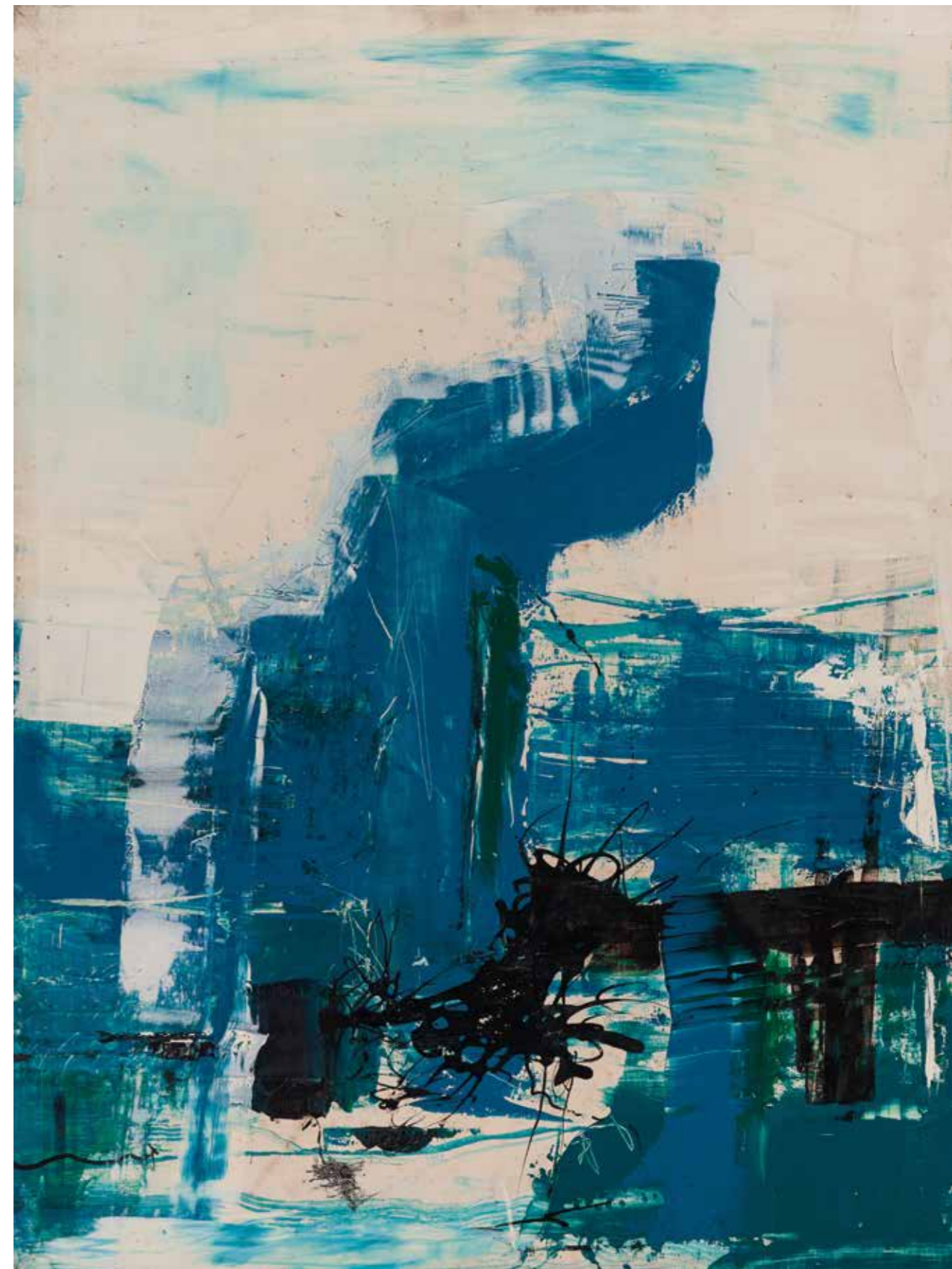
2003 URBANSERIES

SINGAPORE

The Urbanseries, created using Chinese ink on canvases, depicts the spontaneity of the medium while complimenting the life and energy of the city.

Stirred by the city's ever-changing nature, the form and content of the Urbanseries is in itself a visual labyrinth. With construction and de-construction – the spontaneous spawning of new estates, shopping malls, train stations; the vibrant, ever-energetic city life; and the noise of the traffic or renovation of the neighbour's apartment – these simultaneous happenings form a composite, a puzzle or a slice of the city experience.

For this series, Yeo Shih Yun created abstract paintings of random elements that are part of the engine of modern society, recording moments and situations through her subconscious mind. The urban environment, its structure and mechanism inspired her to express the mixed feelings city life invokes in different cities. ●●●●



Up, 60 × 35cm, mixed media and Chinese ink on board, 2002



Construction #1, 60 x 46cm, acrylic and Chinese ink on canvas, 2003



Construction #2, 60 x 46cm, acrylic and Chinese ink on canvas, 2003



Three Rooms (triptych), 50 x 150cm, Chinese ink and acrylic on canvas, 2003
Private collection



Unchanging (diptych), 60 x 92cm, Chinese ink and acrylic on canvas, 2003
Private collection



District 03 (triptych), 50 x 150cm, mixed media and Chinese ink on canvas, 2005



Urban Yellow, 72 x 31cm, acrylic and Chinese ink on canvas, 2003



Untangled Web (diptych), 46 x 120cm, Chinese ink and acrylic on canvas, 2003



Jungle (triptych), 51 x 75cm, Chinese ink and acrylic on canvas, 2005

Height, 175 x 50cm, acrylic and Chinese ink on canvas, 2006
Collection of Mr Koh Seow Chuan





Black Cream, 91 x 61cm, acrylic and Chinese ink on canvas, 2005



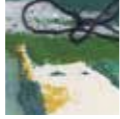
Blue, 91 x 61cm, acrylic and Chinese ink on canvas, 2005
Collection of the artist



Night, 150 x 170cm, mixed media on canvas, 2006
Collection of Mr Koh Seow Chuan

"In act of painting, these painters become themselves, truly and purely, prolonging the act from one painting to the next, they reveal the flux of their identities."

— Harold Rosenberg



2005 MINIME

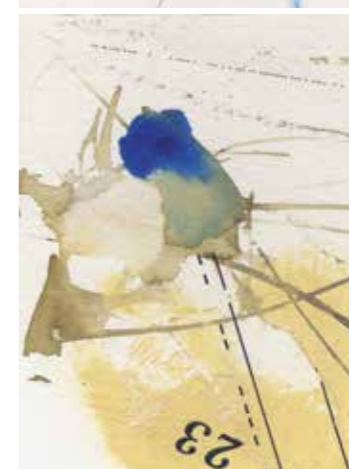
SINGAPORE

Mini iPods, mini Coopers, mini credit cards... everything seems to be shrinking these days! Less is more and compact is cool. Inspired by the world of mini things, Yeo Shih Yun produced a set of 20 miniature artworks in 2015.

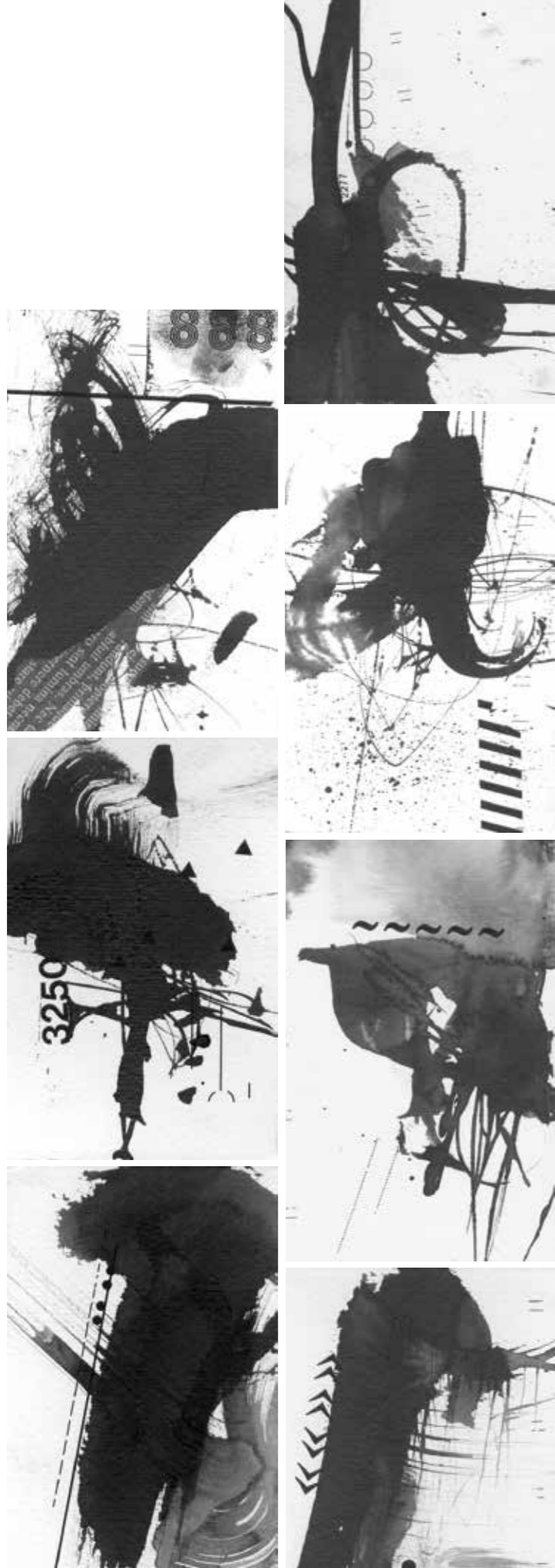
The paper used here is "Cartiere Miliani Fabriano Paper", a high-quality, acid free watercolor paper of archival quality made in Rome. The works, each one of them 6cm by 3.5cm in size, were executed using a number of different techniques and mediums including Chinese ink, acrylics, watercolours and letter transfer. The ready-to-use quality paper complimented the artist's spontaneous painting process.

"The physical energy of spontaneous mark-making intrigues me," says the artist. Working intuitively, the work was gradually developed and the resulting forms were as much an unexpected surprise as they were reflective of the artist's state of mind. During the process, spatial balance was explored to give the elements in the drawing space a natural form—they move and breathe with time. ●●●●

*Mini Me Colour Series #1-6,
6 x 3.5cm, mixed media on
Fabriano paper, 2005*



Mini Me Black Series #1-7,
6 x 3.5cm, mixed media on
Fabriano paper, 2005

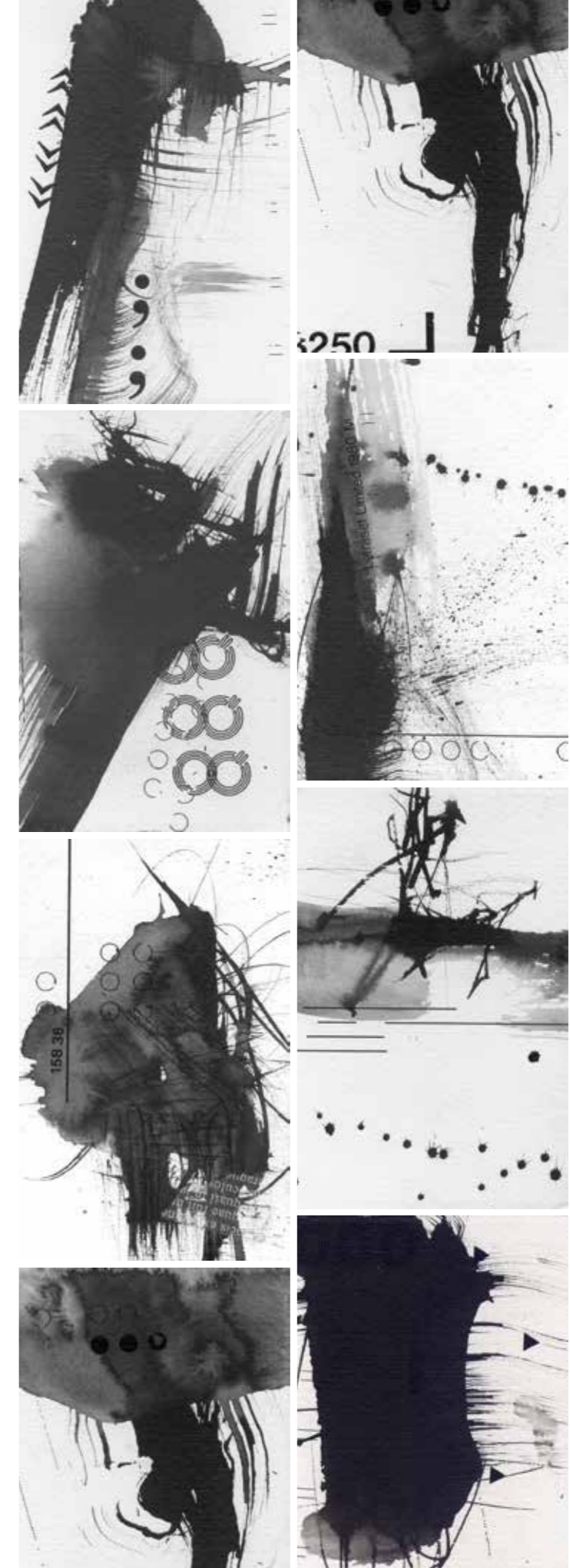


2000-2005

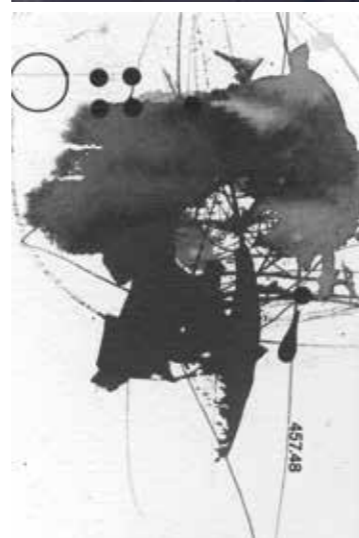
2000-2005

MINI ME

MINI ME



Mini Me Black Series #7-13,
6 x 3.5cm, mixed media on
Fabriano paper, 2005



Mini Me Black Series #13-15,
6 x 3.5cm, mixed media on
Fabriano paper, 2005

"For the act to be spontaneous, the will must be pure. The authenticity of the painter's act unites art and artist in a bond untouched by the demands of history or criticism or the marketplace."

— Harold Rosenberg



THE ART OF
YEO SHIH YUN

2006 - 2011

韵

THE ART OF
YEO SHIH YUN
2006 - 2011

韵

- IN THE RAW, Raw Canvas Series #1-5, mixed media on unprimed canvas, 150 x 80cm each, 2007
- IN THE RAW, In the Raw Linen Series #1-3, mixed media on linen, 150 x 80cm each, 2007
- IN THE RAW, In the Raw Wood Series #1-2, mixed media on wood, 150 x 160cm, 2007
- IN THE RAW, In the Raw Series #1-4, mixed media on canvas, 61 x 46cm each, 2007
- WORKS ON PAPER, Chaos Currents, acrylic and ink on paper, 59 x 42cm, 2007
- WORKS ON PAPER, In Between Spaces, acrylic and ink on paper, 59 x 42cm, 2007
- WORKS ON PAPER, Defiant, acrylic and ink on paper, 59 x 42cm, 2008
- WORKS ON PAPER, Looking Through, acrylic and ink on paper, 59 x 42cm, 2008
- WORKS ON PAPER, Duo Space, acrylic and ink on paper, 59 x 42cm, 2008
- WORKS ON PAPER, Force Within, acrylic and ink on paper, 59 x 42cm, 2008
- WORKS ON PAPER, Radiation, acrylic and ink on paper, 59 x 42cm, 2008
- WORKS ON PAPER, Light #2, acrylic and ink on paper, 59 x 42cm, 2007
- WORKS ON PAPER, Double, acrylic and ink on paper, 59 x 42cm, 2008
- WORKS ON PAPER, Approaching North Pole #1, acrylic and ink on paper, 59 x 42cm, 2007
- WORKS ON PAPER, Approaching North Pole #2, acrylic and ink on paper, 59 x 42cm, 2007
- WORKS ON PAPER, Approaching North Pole #3, acrylic and ink on paper, 59 x 42cm, 2007
- WORKS ON PAPER, Beautiful Destruction, ink on paper, 60 x 50cm, 2008
- WORKS ON PAPER, Ephemeral, ink on paper, 60 x 50cm, 2008
- BERGEN, Norway Series #1, ink and pigment on paper, 76 x 56cm, 2009
- BERGEN, Norway Series #3, ink and pigment on paper, 56 x 152cm, 2009
- BERGEN, Norway Series #4, ink and pigment on paper, 76 x 168cm, 2009
- BERGEN, Norway Series #5, ink and pigment on paper, 56 x 76cm, 2009
- BERGEN, Norway Series #6, ink and pigment on paper, 76 x 112cm, 2009
- PAINTINGS, Twist, acrylic and Chinese ink on canvas, 130 x 150cm, 2007
- PAINTINGS, Biology of Black and White, acrylic and Chinese ink on canvas, 161 x 52cm, 2008
- PAINTINGS, Klein Blue, acrylic and Chinese ink on canvas, 161 x 52cm, 2008
- PAINTINGS, Defy #1, mixed media on canvas, 100 x 76cm, 2009
- PAINTINGS, Defy #2, mixed media on canvas, 100 x 76cm, 2009
- PAINTINGS, Defy #3, mixed media on canvas, 152 x 100cm, 2009
- PAINTINGS, Impossibility of Repetition, silkscreen ink on linen, 165 x 148cm each, 2007
- PAINTINGS, Composition Alpha, silkscreen ink on linen, 165 x 148cm each, 2007
- PAINTINGS, Urban #3, mixed media on canvas, 100 x 150cm, 2007
- PAINTINGS, 11 Aug 2009, mixed media on canvas, 147 x 2013cm, 2009
- PAINTINGS, Growing, ink and thread on canvas, 87 x 163cm, 2007
- PAINTINGS, Sprawling #1, ink and thread on canvas, 86 x 186cm, 2007
- PAINTINGS, Sprawling #2, ink and thread on canvas, 86 x 186cm, 2007
- PAINTINGS, Flow #4, Chinese ink on canvas, 46 x 46cm, 2009
- PAINTINGS, Flow #1, Chinese ink on canvas, 46 x 46cm, 2009
- PAINTINGS, Flow #2, Chinese ink on canvas, 46 x 46cm, 2009
- CONVERSATION WITH TREES, Teeming, silkscreen ink on linen, 148 x 165cm, 2011
- CONVERSATION WITH TREES, Tree Drawings #1-29, Chinese ink on paper, 42 x 29cm, 2011
- CONVERSATION WITH TREES, Compositions from Tree Drawing #1-#12, black pigment on transparent film, 53 x 35cm, 2011
- CONVERSATION WITH TREES, Self portraits by Tree Series #1-8, silkscreen ink on linen, 50 x 50cm, 2011
- CONVERSATION WITH TREES, Freedom, silkscreen ink on linen, 165 x 148cm, 2015
- CONVERSATION WITH TREES, Conversations with Trees Series, silkscreen and ink on fabriano paper, 70 x 50cm, 2011
- CONVERSATION WITH TREES, Dancing Wind #1, silkscreen ink and ink on glass, 54 x 44cm, 2014
- CONVERSATION WITH TREES, On a Velvet Day, silkscreen ink and ink on glass, 54 x 44cm, 2014
- CONVERSATION WITH TREES, Tree of Life, silkscreen ink and ink on glass, 54 x 44cm, 2014
- CONVERSATION WITH TREES, Dancing Wind #2, silkscreen ink and ink on glass, 54 x 44cm, 2014
- CONVERSATION WITH TREES, Conversation with Trees, silkscreen ink on linen, 150 x 450cm, 2012
- CONVERSATION WITH TREES, Painting for the Wind, silkscreen ink on canvas, 80 x 70cm, 2015
- STUDIO KURA RESIDENCY, Man and Nature, ink on fabriano paper, 70 x 50cm, 2010
- STUDIO KURA RESIDENCY, Racing Time #2, Chinese ink on fabriano paper, 152 x 112cm, 2010
- STUDIO KURA RESIDENCY, Man and Machine Series, ink on fabriano paper, 76 x 56cm, 2010
- STUDIO KURA RESIDENCY, Out of the Blue #2, ink on fabriano paper, 150 x 65cm, 2010
- STUDIO KURA RESIDENCY, Losing Time Series, mixed media and silkscreen on Fabriano paper, 70 x 50cm, 2010
- STUDIO KURA RESIDENCY, The K, mixed media on Fabriano paper, 70 x 50cm, 2010
- STUDIO KURA RESIDENCY, My World, silkscreen and ink on Fabriano paper, 70 x 50cm, 2010
- 43200 MINUTES, Chance Robot Painting #1, pigments on paper, 40 x 40cm, 2011
- 43200 MINUTES, Chance Robot Painting #6, pigments on canvas, 80 x 80cm, 2011
- 43200 MINUTES, Black Pigments Test, pigments on paper, 40 x 40cm, 2011
- 43200 MINUTES, Chance Robot Painting #2 Walnut Process, pencil on paper, 40 x 40cm, 2011
- 43200 MINUTES, Chance Robot Painting #10 Walnut Process, pigments on paper, 40 x 40cm, 2011
- 43200 MINUTES, Chance Robot Painting #10 Walnut Process, pencil on paper, 40 x 40cm, 2011
- 43200 MINUTES, Study of Robot Movements Series, pigments on paper, 40 x 40cm, 2011
- IN THE RAW, In the Raw Canvas Series #1-5, mixed media on unprimed canvas, 150 x 80cm each, 2007
- IN THE RAW, In the Raw Linen Series #1-3, mixed media on linen, 150 x 80cm each, 2007
- IN THE RAW, In the Raw Wood Series #1-2, mixed media on wood, 150 x 160cm, 2007

CONVERSATIONS IN INK

CHANG YUEH SIANG
CURATOR, NUS MUSEUM

*What people have been arguing about is simply ink as a painting genre, not ink as medium, without really exploring the concept of ink. In fact, ink and ink painting is not the same thing. Ink represents a culture, and is a medium, while ink painting is but an art genre. There are fundamental differences between the two.*¹

SCHOLARS AND INK

In 2015, NUS Museum organised an exhibition titled “Scholars and Ink”. The exhibition featured some works borrowed from Yeo Shih Yun’s *Conversation with Trees* series, which demonstrates the various phases and techniques in the artist’s works. Shih Yun’s works were among those included in order to prompt ideas of contemporary approaches to the classical Six Principles, a potentially intriguing prospect as Shih Yun does not explicitly engage with questions of “ethnicities of ink”.

“Scholars and Ink” utilised *The Conversation* (2011, Digital Video (Colour, Sound, 10:47); Edition: 5) as an opening piece, to initiate (so to speak), a question about what defines a work of art made with ink? The fact that *The Conversation* has in its centre a moving Chinese ink brush, and that the artist is of Chinese descent, lends to the temptation to narrow the work into being categorised with Chinese ink works. Paradoxically this provides us a starting point to discuss ink practice.

Influenced by concerns about the reductions to Chinese culture brought about by Singapore’s language policies (perceived and real), the need in Singapore to define ink (and its ethnicity) often stems from some kind of cultural anxiety, mostly on the part of members of the Chinese populace. The context of Scholars and Ink, which included artists who acknowledge cultural affinity with traditional Chinese ink, may have contributed to the impression that “ink” is a predominantly Chinese medium.

It is true that the Chinese ink tradition, and a category of paintings that belong in this classification, has caused the *genre* to become somewhat synonymous with the *medium*; but the dominance of Chinese ink paintings in the canon of ink works creates a false sense of monopoly of the medium. One would do well to challenge the cultural pre-conception, borrowing Denis Dutton’s commentary on the exceptionalism found in the self-regard of Western art and art history writing:

In the first place, the claim that a cultural form is unique, or that the concept that denotes it in our culture is useless or inapplicable in another culture, requires that the person making the claim has a firm command of the potentially comparable practices or meanings in [one’s culture of origin²] with which [an] alien meaning might be analogised.³

In East Asia, it is not only the Chinese who has employed ink as a pigment: the Japanese and the Korean also have their ink traditions, as well as a discursive process about their respective modernisations and contemporary practice. Not only that, ink in East Asia is not only always applied with the brush: it is also applied onto woodblocks to be printed. It is for this reason, that outside of the specific genre of “Chinese ink painting” (with its specific connotations), it is widely accepted that “ink is simply a medium;” and its cross-cultural applicabilities is that which Shih Yun has taken advantage of in her practice.

In this respect, Shih Yun has always been clear that despite her ethnic descent, her work isn’t to be solely defined by her ancestral roots:

“... you can say that my works do operate as a means of appreciating the old heritage. However, my subject matter, or the lack of one, is a stark contrast to the rich history of themes in Chinese paintings.”⁴

Here, she echoes Robert Motherwell, one of the artists she respects, in his words (pertaining to his collages): “The part of my vocabulary that is not from inner pressure, but that is drawn from the external world, is from the social world.”⁵

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CONVERSATION WITH TREES

Shih Yun was first introduced to ink as a medium, through classes taught by Chua Ek Kay, when she was a student at LASALLE-SIA College of the Arts (2001). But her appreciation for the potentials and applications of the medium expanded with her exposure to the Abstract Expressionist movement and the New York School (principally through the works of Motherwell), during her studentship in San Francisco Art Institute (2002). Much of Shih Yun’s experimentation and interaction with ink and the surface it is applied on, enters through a door opened earlier by Motherwell and other artists.

The *Trees* series selected for Scholars and Ink unfolds in a few stages, which also trace the development of Shih Yun’s thoughts. The process begins as shown in *Conversations*, where the “drawing” is first made by brushes suspended on tree branches, “wielded” by the breeze. Here Motherwell is joined by Tim Knowles as kindred spirits expressing automatism with slight variation: “In automatist practice, the first fortuitous mark—line or drip or stain—on the surface initiates a creative dialogue between the artist and his medium.”⁶ Automatism offered Motherwell “an *active* principle for painting, specifically designed to explore unknown possibilities⁷,” where he remained the ‘artist’ in his productions. Knowles was rather more ecumenical in who or what creates the mark: “... drawing is all about movement, it is always the result of an action, a record of motion as a result of force exerted over time. Whether it be the artist’s hand or body seismic movement, the motion of a tree branch or the path followed by the wind through the landscape is always the result of movement.”⁸ Shih Yun’s automatistic rendering is only a part of the artist’s process, yet one that is significantly open, and meaningful, in the artist’s allowance of Nature to intervene in the production process.

Without any ostensible intention for it to be so, *The Conversation* allowed for comparisons with and an imagination into the genre of the Chinese ink landscape: while with the traditional landscape, the viewer contemplates and idealises the mountains or the further shore from afar, the close-up movement of the brushes lead us into the heart of a physical location, and to imagine in *medio loci* the outward surroundings. The movement of the brushes (and hence the drawing) indicates the presence of wind, while the soundtrack evokes the imagery of a bustling urban landscape.

REFERENCES

¹ Zhang Yu, from the transcript of *Modern Chinese Ink Painting: From a “Dooming” Future to its Extermination -- A Dialogue between Zhang Yu and Zhijian Qian*, 9. http://zhangyu.artron.net/news_detail_246181, Last retrieved 5 Feb 2015.

² Dutton’s original words here are “Western culture”.

³ Dutton, *The Art Instinct, Beauty, Pleasure and Human Evolution*.: Bloomsbury Press 2010, pp. 74-75

⁴ Interview by Iola Lenzi, “New Readings,” Jendela Artspace, Esplanade. Accessed from www.shihyunyeo.com/images/yeoshihyuninterview.pdf. Last retrieved 5 July 2016.

⁵ Quote reproduced on <http://www.theartstory.org/artist-motherwell-robert-artworks.htm>; last retrieved 3 July 2016.

⁶ Rosand, David; “‘My I’: Toward an Iconography of the Self”, in *Robert Motherwell on Paper*” (ed. David Rosand), New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997; p. 14

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ “Taking a line for a Walk – Tim Knowles”, Maslen, Mick, and Southern, Jack, *Drawing Projects: An Exploration of the Language of Drawing*. London: Black Dog Publishing, 2011.

While the inspiration for the specific method of suspending brush from trees is acknowledged by the artist to have come from Knowles, it is Shih Yun's own initiative to engage further with the *Trees* series. In *Conversation with Trees #9* (2013), the marks made in the method detailed before are taken and scanned, then transferred to the printing screen, which is then inked, then impressed onto another surface. What might not be apparent is that this engineers a second layer of "automatism" by varying the texture and amount of screenprinting ink, and experimenting with the effects of the interaction between ink and paper: the resulting tones are achieved purely by the communication between material and media. Motherwell famously played and observed the free movement of ink on Japanese paper, even beyond the artistic act,⁹ but past this second stage, one may begin to see ideas and experimentations acknowledged by Shih Yun to be inspired by Japanese ink artist Toko Shinoda: the play of lines and "yohaku (empty space),"¹⁰ and the experimentation with different backgrounds. *Freedom* (2014) was an application of the second screenprinting phase on linen, and *Tree of Life, Dancing Wind* saw the marks first silkscreen-printed on glass, which was framed against an unvarnished wooden board, symbolically returning the drawn and printed marks back to the material which first led to their creation: wood from a tree.

In discussing Xie He's Six Principles in "Scholars and Ink", achievement of the principles of "suitability [of categories] to type" and "correspondence to the object" depends on the technical success of 'mimesis' to achieve a representation of the likeness of forms; hence the importance of the principle of "transmission by copying". Typically, the principle of "transmission" is associated with the academic discipline of learning by emulation. In *Freedom*, as with another version of *Conversations with Trees* (2012, private collection), the principle of transmission takes a technical turn in the direct transference of brush marks via screen printing, and impressions are made to recreate the forms and likenesses of trees. *Freedom*, in particular, again evokes (and inverts) the device of the Chinese ink landscape: rather than to view the tree from afar, the viewer is brought deep into Nature, to consider the tree, again not from an external, bird's eye perspective, but from the position of the root (what the artist humorously calls, the "worms-eye view").

CONCLUSION

Motherwell, Abstract Expressionism and the New York School were born out of a movement to assert the artist's identity, but also of a national characteristic in art. As Alfred L Copley described the situation in American art of the 1940s, "A taste for painting is too much wanting, ... art itself could claim no secure place within the social world; it could establish neither its foundations nor its credentials by an *appeal to tradition*. Every strong American painter has had to reinvent the art of painting for himself, ("to start from scratch, to paint as if painting had never existed before")¹¹. Similarly, should Chinese ink practitioners insist that Chinese ink painting remains an elite, ethnic tradition without possibility of evolution, and without possibility of accommodating contemporary expressions? Shih Yun's works were not included in "Scholars and Ink" for iconoclasm against tradition—as we have discussed, even when adopting the principles of diverse international art movements, her ink works have newfound relevance to the Chinese ink genre. To borrow Copley's keyword, her practice actively "reinvents" her foundational influences, and synthesises the different cultural references into new ways of practising "ink". ●●●●●

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Dancing Wind #2,
54 x 44cm, silkscreen ink
and ink on glass, 2014



LEFT
The Conversation,
10:47, video installation, 2011

RIGHT
Tree of Life,
54 x 44cm, silkscreen ink and
ink on glass, 2014

Dancing Wind,
54 x 44cm, silkscreen ink and
ink on glass, 2014



Entrance to Scholars & Ink exhibition,
NUS Museum, 2015

REFERENCES

⁹ Rosand, *Motherwell on Paper*, p. 28.

¹⁰ Tolman, Mary and Norman, "Eloquent Lines – The Visual Poetry of Toko Shinoda", in *Toko Shinoda – Visual Poetry*, Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 1996, p. 5.

¹¹ Rosand, *Motherwell on Paper*, p. 13; citing Alfred L. Copley, *Letter of 1767* in McCoubrey, *American Art, 1700 – 1960*, p. 18.



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In the Raw explores the radical conflict between the two colourless colours, black and white, as well as their interaction and interdependence. Black and white paints are applied straight from the tubes, creating spontaneous marks; the negation of colours dramatises the experience of viewing, showing through the rawness of the medium used. The only colour in the works comes from the wood, canvas or linen that has been employed in the artworks.

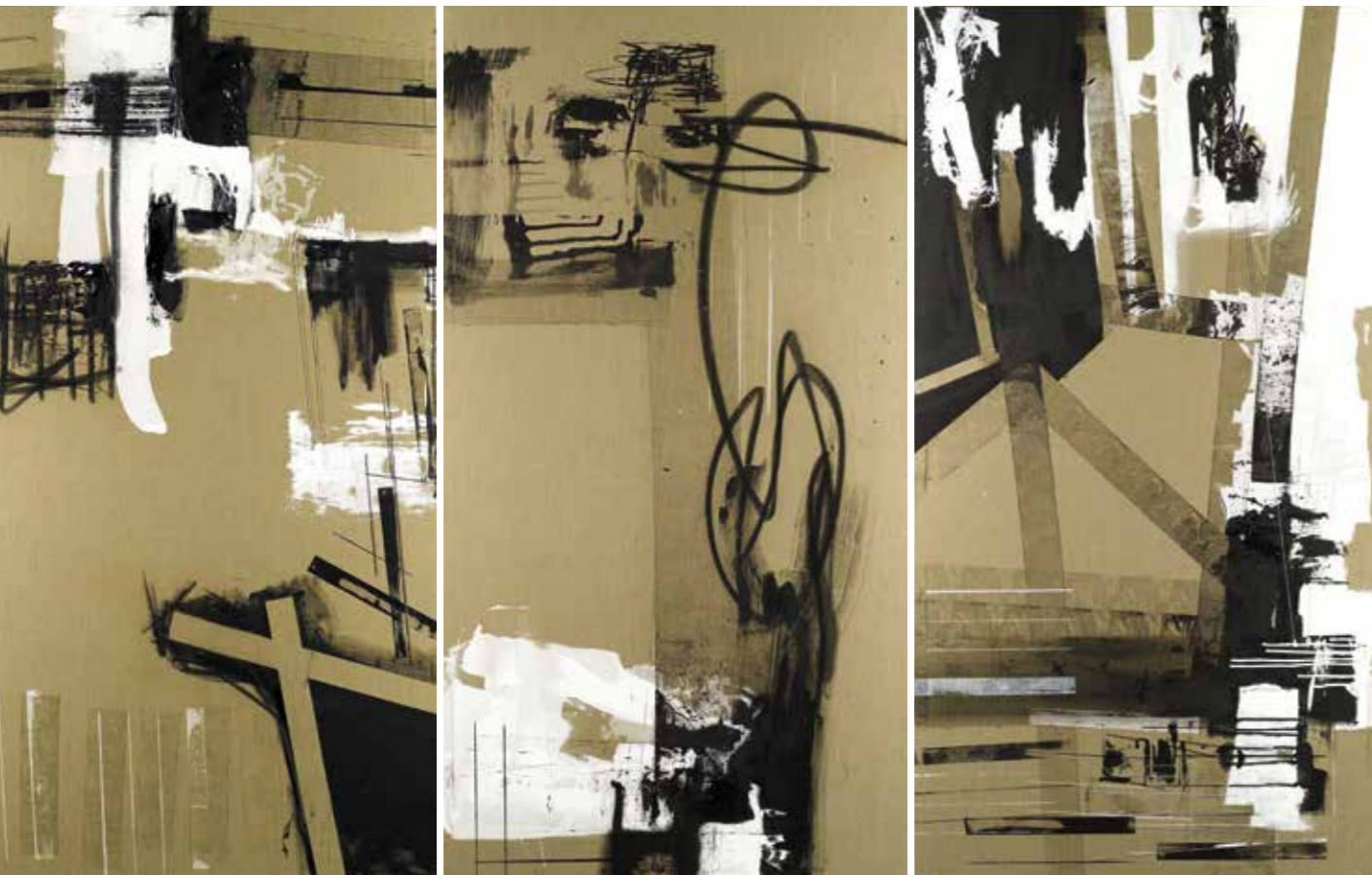
Besides acrylic paint, charcoal was also used to draw directly on the raw surface and silkscreening as well as sewing was incorporated to provide an added dimension. As Edgar Degas puts it, "Drawing is the artist's most direct and spontaneous expression, a species of writing...". ●●●●

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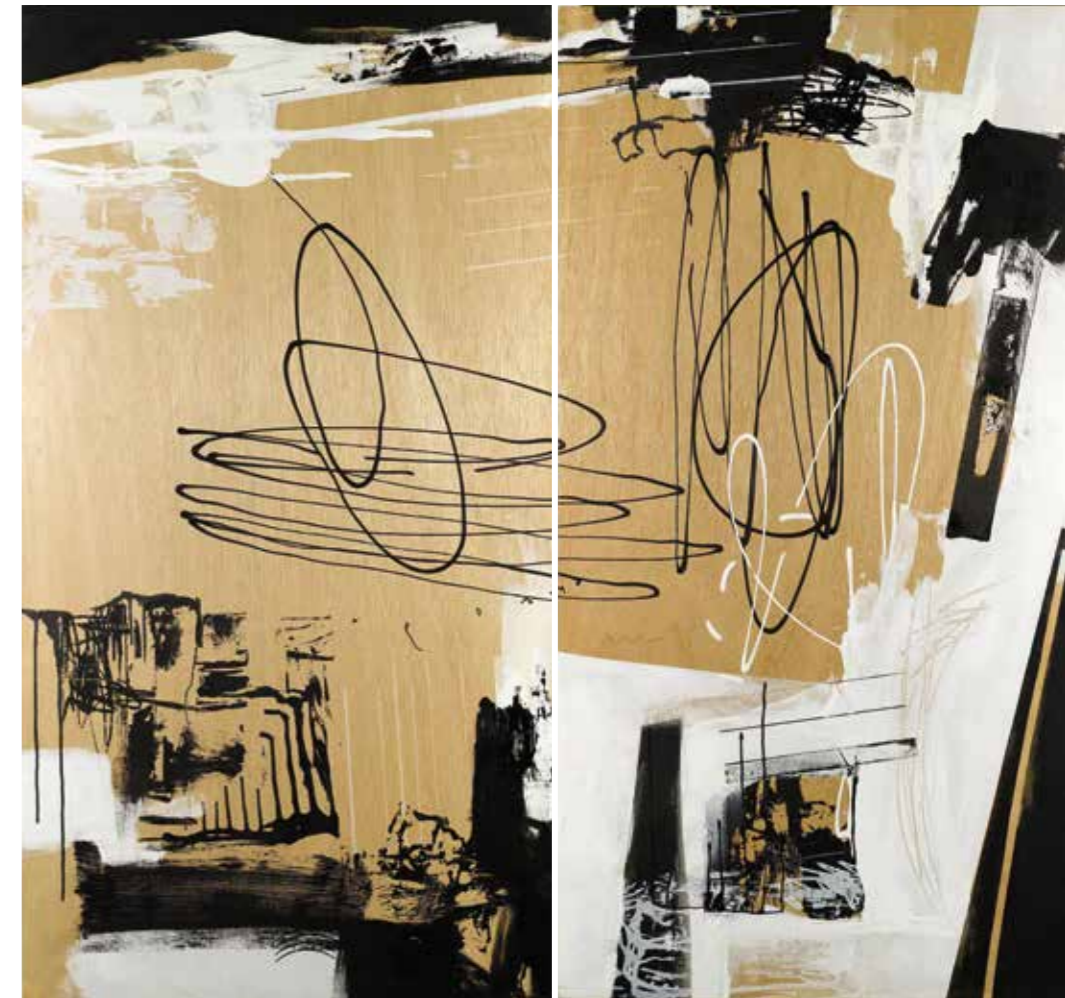
Studio view of In the Raw Canvas Series #1-5, 150 x 80cm each, mixed media on unprimed canvas, 2007



In the Raw Linen Series #1-3, 150 x 80cm each, mixed media on linen, 2007

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In the Raw Wood Series #1-2, 150 x 160cm, mixed media on wood, 2007



In the Raw Canvas Series #3,
150 x 80cm, mixed media on
unprimed canvas, 2007

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In the Raw Series #1-4, 61 x 46cm each, mixed media on canvas, 2007
Private collection

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This series of works presents an exploration into the multi-dimensional relationship and interaction between time and living energy. A moment in time infused with living spontaneous energy conjures a powerfully unique and mysterious landscape.

The transient, catalytic patterns of time and energy are beyond preconception and comprehension. Each work illustrates a play with chance augmented by the artist's intuition. As Henri Matisse once said, "The things that are acquired consciously permit us to express ourselves unconsciously with a certain richness". ●●●●

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Chaos Currents, 59 x 42cm, acrylic and ink on paper, 2007

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TOP
In Between Spaces,
59 x 42cm, acrylic and ink on paper, 2008
MIDDLE
Defiant,
59 x 42cm, acrylic and ink on paper, 2008
BOTTOM
Looking Through,
59 x 42cm, acrylic and ink on paper, 2008

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TOP
Duo Space,
59 x 42cm, acrylic and ink on paper, 2008
MIDDLE
Force Within,
59 x 42cm, acrylic and ink on paper, 2008
BOTTOM
Radiation,
59 x 42cm, acrylic and ink on paper, 2008





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TOP
Light #2,
59 x 42cm, acrylic and ink on paper, 2007

BOTTOM
Double,
59 x 42cm, acrylic and ink on paper, 2008



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TOP
Approaching North Pole #1,
59 x 42cm, acrylic and ink on paper, 2007

MIDDLE
Approaching North Pole #2,
59 x 42cm, acrylic and ink on paper, 2007

BOTTOM
Approaching North Pole #3,
59 x 42cm, acrylic and ink on paper, 2007



Beautiful Destruction, 60 x 50cm, ink on paper, 2008

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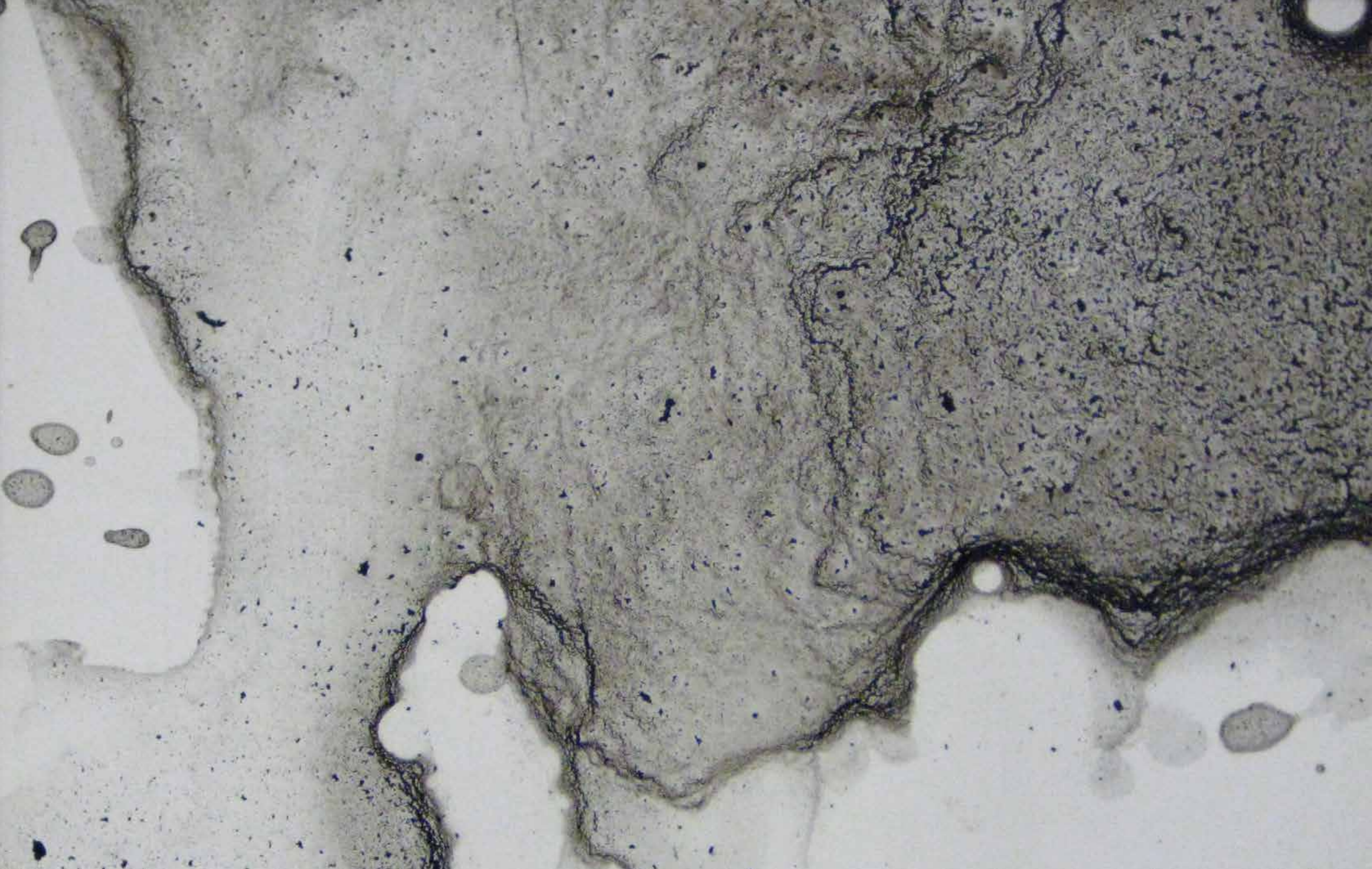
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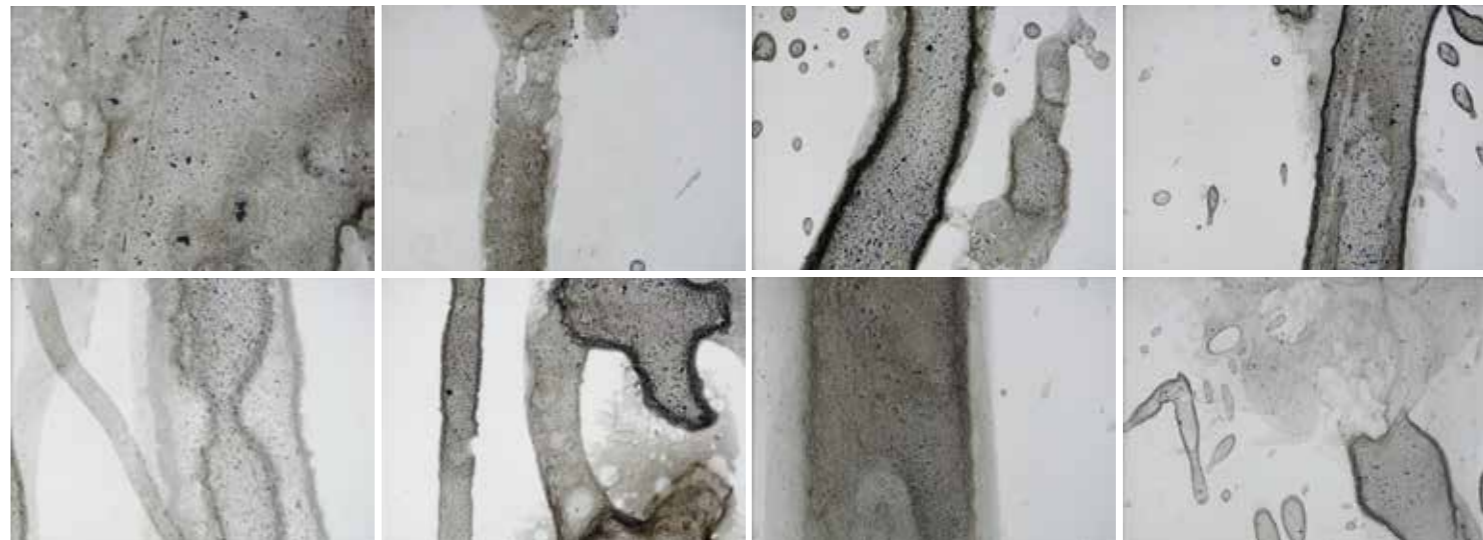
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Ephemeral, 60 x 50cm, ink on paper, 2008







Stills from 'Puddefjorden' (Fjord), 5:45, Chinese ink on 16mm film, 2009



Installation view of 'Puddefjorden' (Fjord) in Stiftelsen 3, 14 Gallery, Norway

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Every day from April 4 to 15 while Yeo Shih Yun was in Bergen, Norway, she hand-painted a section of a 16mm film with Chinese ink and rubber-stamped the date on it. The resulting artwork is a film in its rawest form without any digital enhancements.

What happens when time is compressed? In this film, the two weeks of time spent on the painting is collapsed into a mere three minutes. In doing so, this work dilates real time thus rendering one's sense of action in time disjointed.

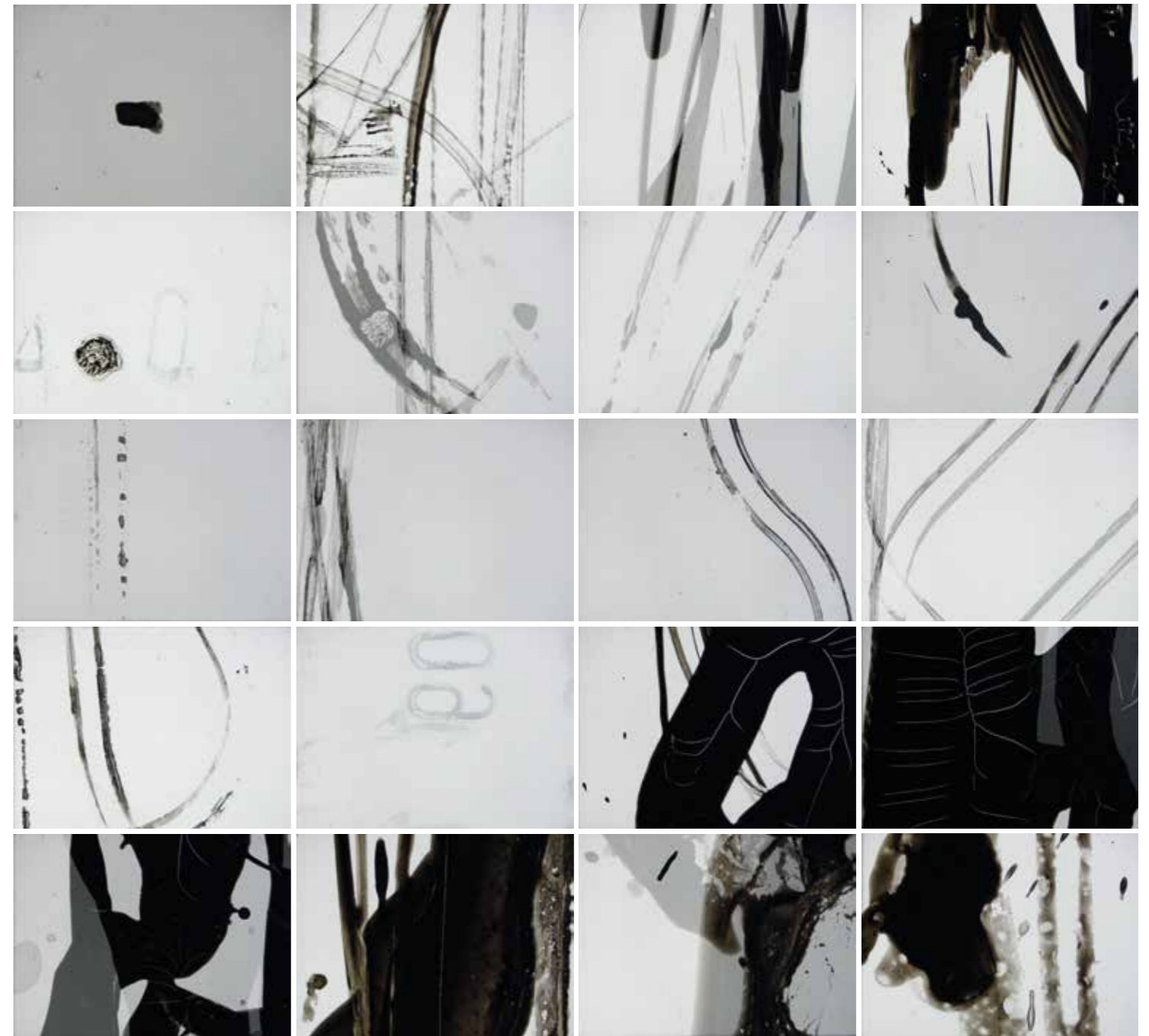
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Stills from 'Puddefjorden' (Fjord), 5:45, Chinese ink on 16mm film, 2009

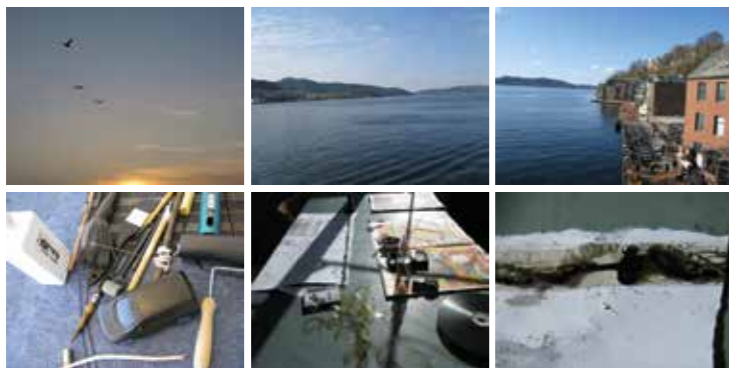


Stills from 'Puddefjorden' (Fjord), 5:45, Chinese ink on 16mm film, 2009



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Yeo Shih Yun was chosen to be the artist-in-residence at USF in Bergen, Norway in 2009. The centre is gorgeous and every artist's dream studio, measuring at least 1000 square feet with an amazing view of the ocean, called the fjord. Bergen is the 'capital of fjords'. Shih Yun was inspired by the view of the ocean and the surrounding trees. The works she created during this residency are not done using brushes but instead twigs collected from the area. The process involved the artist using the twigs as a paintbrush and moving them through pools of ink on the paper to form unique, interesting marks. ●●●●



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Norway Series #1, 76 x 56cm, ink and pigment on paper, 2009

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Norway Series #3, 56 x 152cm, ink and pigment on paper, 2009



Norway Series #4, 76 x 168cm, ink and pigment on paper, 2009



Norway Series #5, 56 x 76cm, ink and pigment on paper, 2009

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Norway Series #6, 76 x 112cm, ink and pigment on paper, 2009

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UOB Painting of the Year, Certificate of Distinction, Abstract category, 2007



Twist, 130 x 150cm, acrylic and Chinese ink on canvas, 2007
Collection of Marina@Keppel Bay

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Biology of Black and White,
161 x 52cm, acrylic and Chinese ink on canvas, 2008
Private collection

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Klein Blue,
161 x 52cm, acrylic and Chinese ink on canvas, 2008
Private collection



TOP
Defy #1,
100 x 76cm, mixed media on canvas, 2009

BOTTOM
Defy #2,
100 x 76cm, mixed media on canvas, 2009

OPPOSITE
Defy #3,
152 x 100cm, mixed media on canvas, 2009
Private collection



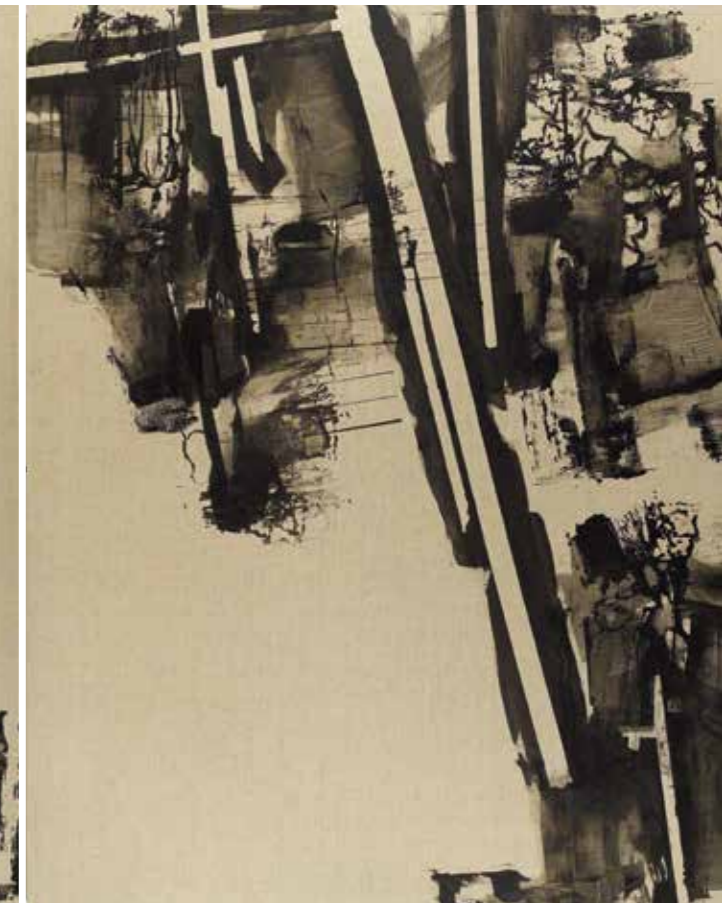
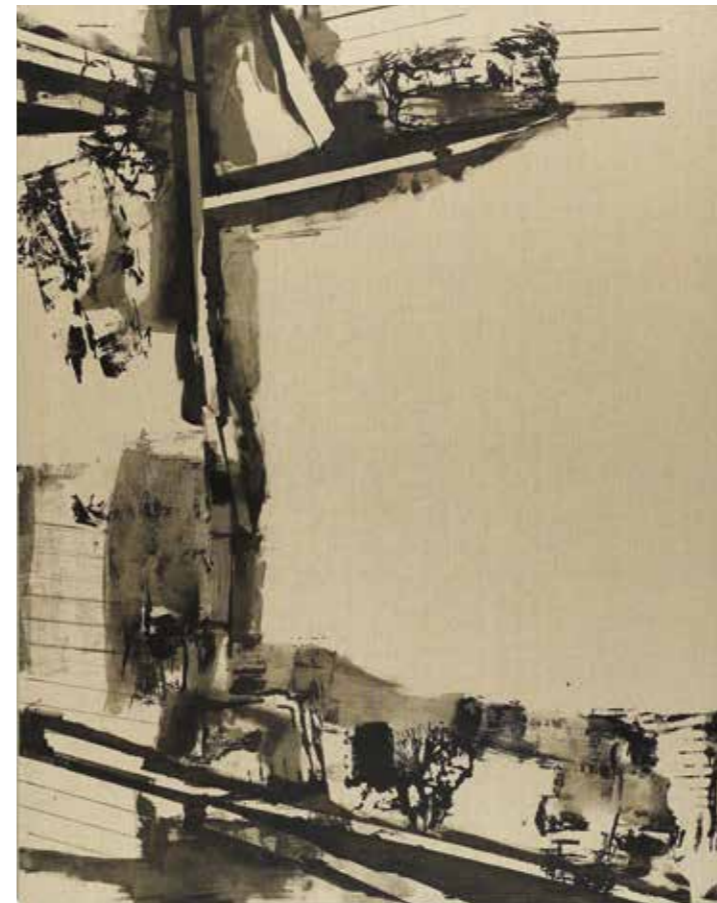
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UOB Painting of the Year, Highly Commended Entry, Abstract category, 2007



Impossibility of Repetition, 165 x 148cm, silkscreen ink and thread on linen , 2007
Private collection

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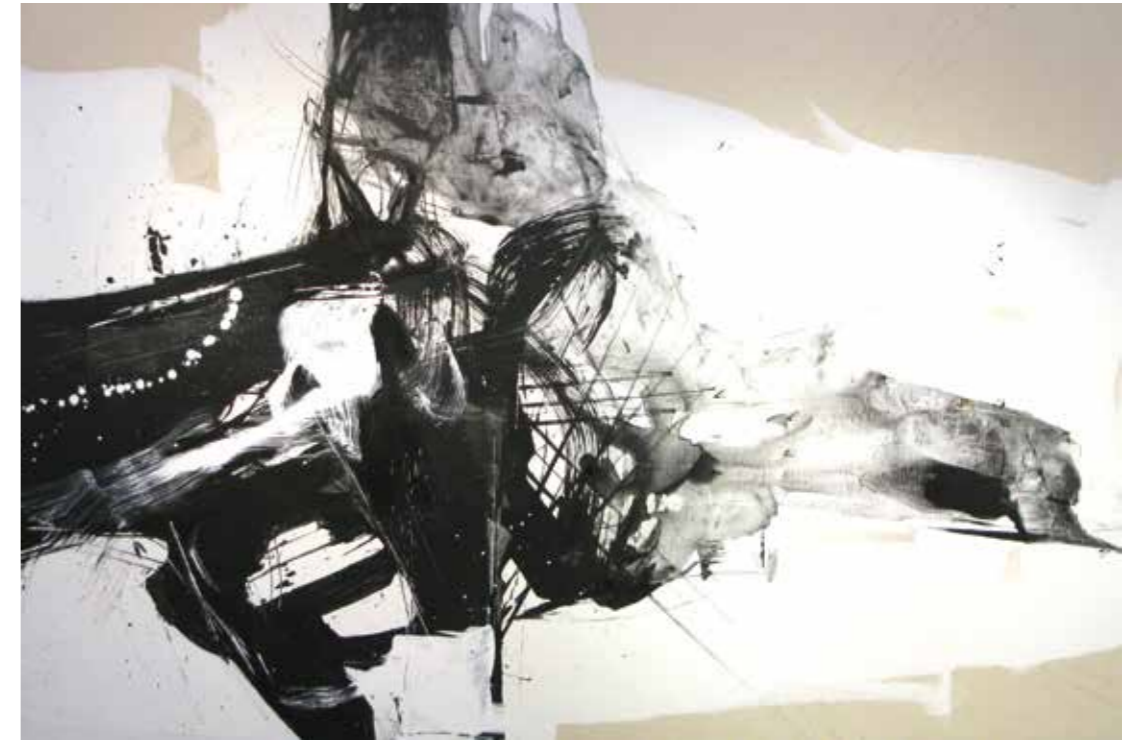


Composition Alpha (diptych), 165 x 148cm each, silkscreen ink on linen, 2007
Private collection



Urban #3, 100 x 150cm, mixed media on canvas, 2007

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11 Aug 2009, 147 x 2013cm, mixed media on canvas, 2009

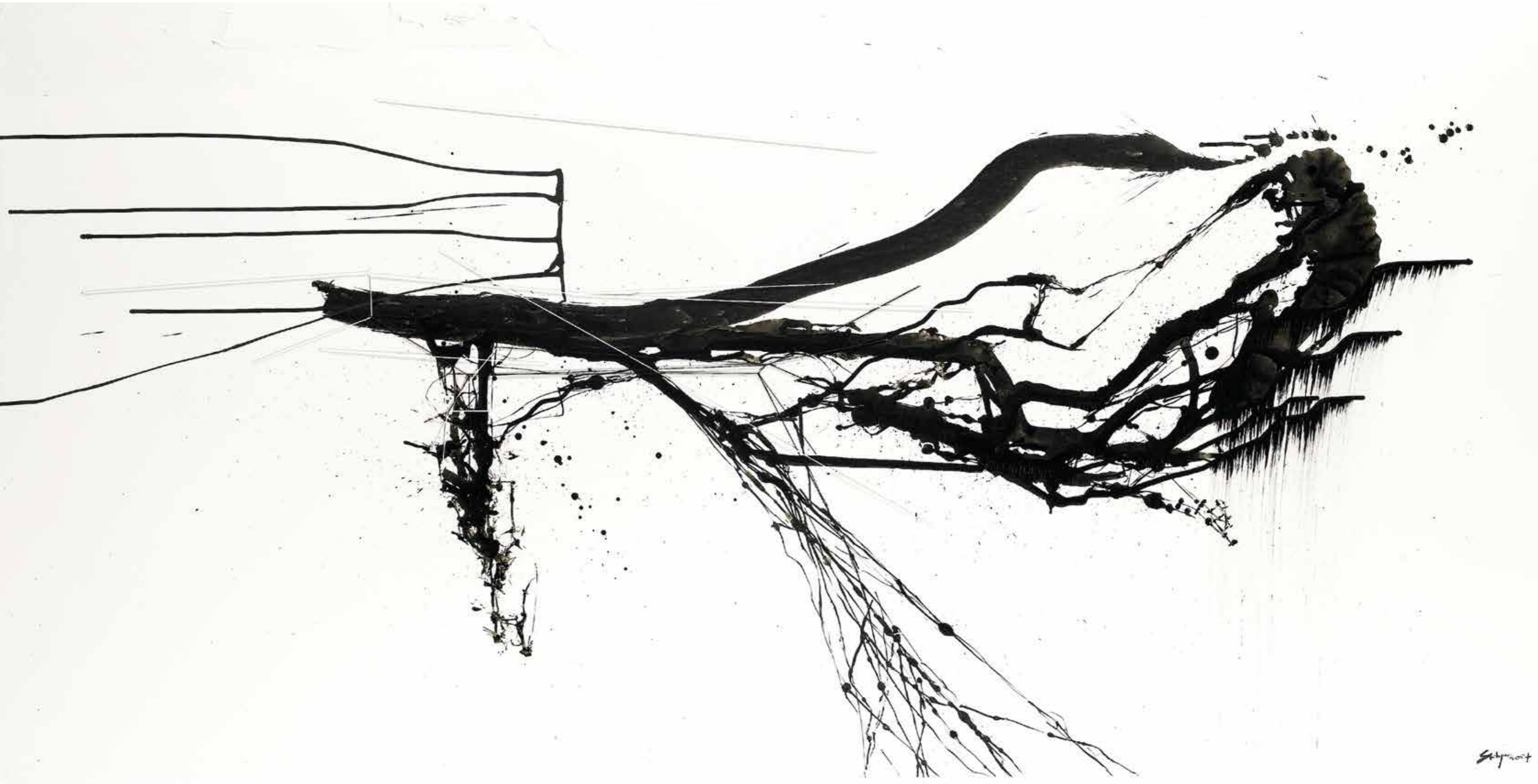
"In reality, there is no repetition, everything including ourselves, is in the process of continual change, reality is dynamic, not static. The tree makes no two leaves, exactly alike."

— John Cage

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Growing, 87 x 163cm, ink and thread on canvas, 2007



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Sprawling #1, 86 x 186cm, ink and thread on canvas, 2007

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Sprawling #2, 86 x 186cm, ink and thread on canvas, 2007



Flow #4, 46 x 46cm, Chinese ink on canvas, 2009
Private collection

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Flow #1, 46 x 46cm, Chinese ink on canvas, 2009
Private collection



Flow #2, 46 x 46cm, Chinese ink on canvas, 2009
Private collection

NEW READINGS: CHINESE INK AND ITS AESTHETIC IN THE 21ST CENTURY

IOLA LENZI
CURATOR

Ink on paper is one of civilisation's oldest artistic media, emerging in China over two millennia ago. In recent decades, as social and economic change engulfed China and globalisation popularised alternative expressive techniques, Western styles have increasingly been embraced by the country's artists, with ink and its aesthetic eclipsed in the process. As a result of this challenge, artists working with ink are actively renewing their medium while others seek new voice for its aesthetic. In conversation with Iola Lenzi here, Yeo Shih Yun—whose acrylics are inspired by the ink tradition—discusses the ancient medium and her faith in its ability to move forward expressively and conceptually.

Iola Lenzi: What initially drew you to ink and its particular visual language?

Yeo Shih Yun: I fell in love with ink in my 1998 Lasalle foundation year, as I've never used ink before. We had a class and the lesson was to use ink to depict ambiguous space. During the lesson, I experimented with ink, getting different effects by mixing ink and water on watercolour paper. This first experience with ink excited me so much that when I went to the San Francisco Art Institute for my post-baccalaureate Program (Painting), I had a deep desire to explore ink as a medium. Through that one year, I grew to appreciate it even more, admiring the basic yet strong quality of black as a colour.

IL: On the topic of using ink as your main medium: do you feel you are swimming against the tide of contemporary art fashion, and if so, does that affect your practice?

YSY: I do not think so. In fact, I feel that only the ink medium in my works is traditional. Everything else is contemporary. I am working with new ideas using old materials. I am excited by this contrast.

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IL: These days, many contemporary practitioners move back and forth across a vast spectrum of media. Do you see Chinese ink and its aesthetic characteristics as fitting comfortably into this varied spectrum?

YSY: Yes, I have painted with ink on canvases, incorporated ink in my hand-painted films by painting on them directly, and created videos using a block of ice and just ink. These works fit into the spectrum quite comfortably; I do not feel that my audience notices that I am using ink but rather, sees interesting forms that move in time and space. The ink medium itself compliments the works, playing a great supporting role instead of the lead role. The work, painting or film, on the other hand, plays the lead role.

IL: Ink is much more versatile than what many people think. This is particularly obvious in your works. Please explain the characteristics of ink and how this medium can be made to communicate on many registers.

YSY: By leaving the ink out longer in the bowl, the ink becomes thicker and results in a very intense black. Ink can also be diluted to very light washes of grey, to almost nothing. I appreciate this wide range. In addition, I feel that the spontaneity of the medium compliments life and the energy of city life, as well as my style of painting.

IL: Documented as far back as the 8th century, abstraction has been a part of China's ink repertoire for over a millennium, seen as the most potent communicator of the visually and emotionally sublime. In your works, you pushed the random aspect of Chinese painting to its extreme, strapping a brush to a waving tree branch such that when wind stirs the branch, a mark is made on the paper below. Please explain the purpose of this method and where you got the idea from.

YSY: Since 2001, I have been exploring the creation of marks using non-traditional tools other than brushes. I have used household brooms, frozen ink cubes, balls, water guns, spinning tops, rollerblades, watering cans filled with ink and poured from a distance, and lately, remote control cars and toy robots. Somehow all these various tools are interesting but still I use my hand to create the marks. I want to remove the gesture from it all. I am very influenced by the Abstract Expressionists and noticed the macho gesture has dominated this movement. I came across interesting works by Tim Knowles one day—he did a series of drawings using pens attached to the tips of tree branches. I was inspired by this idea and wanted to do it my way by using different types of brushes and ink instead. By tying the brushes on the trees, and at the mercy of the wind only, I gave up control totally. In return, the rewards are beautiful marks of absolute freedom and honesty of the moment. These marks created are then selected by me, scanned and digitised, re-composed and then transposed onto silk-screens. The silk-screens are then transferred onto linen to create paintings. This second stage becomes a collaboration between the trees and me. The trees offered the initial marks, and I work with them to create new paintings with new compositions.

IL: There are other ways of engineering automatic writing. Please explain why you have selected trees as your conduit for your work *Conversations with Trees*.

YSY: Trees are full of life. Research and experiments have revealed that they have emotions. Also, I like the varying aspect of trees: they have a random number of branches, leaves and roots. I like this randomness. Like human beings, no two trees are alike. Each one is unique.

IL: Your selection of the tree as a vehicle for your automatic art is presumably not random: do you choose the tree as a reference to the central role of nature as a subject of traditional Chinese painting?

YSY: In many traditional Chinese paintings, different types of trees and bamboo are depicted. In these works of mine, artists are not representing trees or bamboo but the trees are making their own representation of themselves. I like this paradigm shift.

IL: Younger Chinese may not be familiar with traditional painting. Do you consider your works as a means of appreciating the old heritage or do you view it as independent?

YSY: In my works, I like to play with positive and negative space, just like in traditional ink paintings. Also, I play with negative space a lot in my works and that is influenced by traditional Chinese paintings. This is termed as "white" or "empty space". In a Chinese painting, the empty space is as important as the parts that are painted. The saying "less is more" is particularly apt. Therefore, you can say that my works operate as a means of appreciating the old heritage. However, my subject matter, or the lack of one, is a stark contrast to the rich history of themes in Chinese paintings. ●●●●



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“The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the eyes of others only a green thing that stands in the way. Some see nature all ridicule and deformity, and some scarce see nature at all. But to the eyes of the man of imagination, nature is imagination itself.” — William Blake, 1799

Conversations with Trees is a collaboration between artist Yeo Shih Yun and trees across Singapore. The works were first presented at Esplanade’s Jendela Visual Arts Space in Singapore in February 2011 and subsequently at the Singapore Art Museum in 2012. The exhibition featured a multi-media presentation of drawings, photographs, films, silkscreen paintings and a video installation.

In this project, Shih Yun tests the influence of external physical and metaphysical forces –wind and chance – on the glorious mark-making process. At random intervals, she attaches Chinese brushes dipped in Chinese ink to the tips of branches of trees in various settings across Singapore and allows the movement of the wind to create the marks. The resulting “tree drawings” are then selected and transferred onto silkscreens. The silkscreens are subsequently used to create abstract paintings on linen of various sizes.

This series of works continues to explore the mystical aspects of the drawing process (accidental and impermanent manifestations) in her works. Each work in Conversations with Trees celebrates nature, the medium, and playfulness. It invites contemplation of the process and what the viewer imprints onto them. ●●●●



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Working with trees at Labrador Park



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The silkscreens that are used for the making of the series “Conversations with Trees”



“Three things I learnt from trees:

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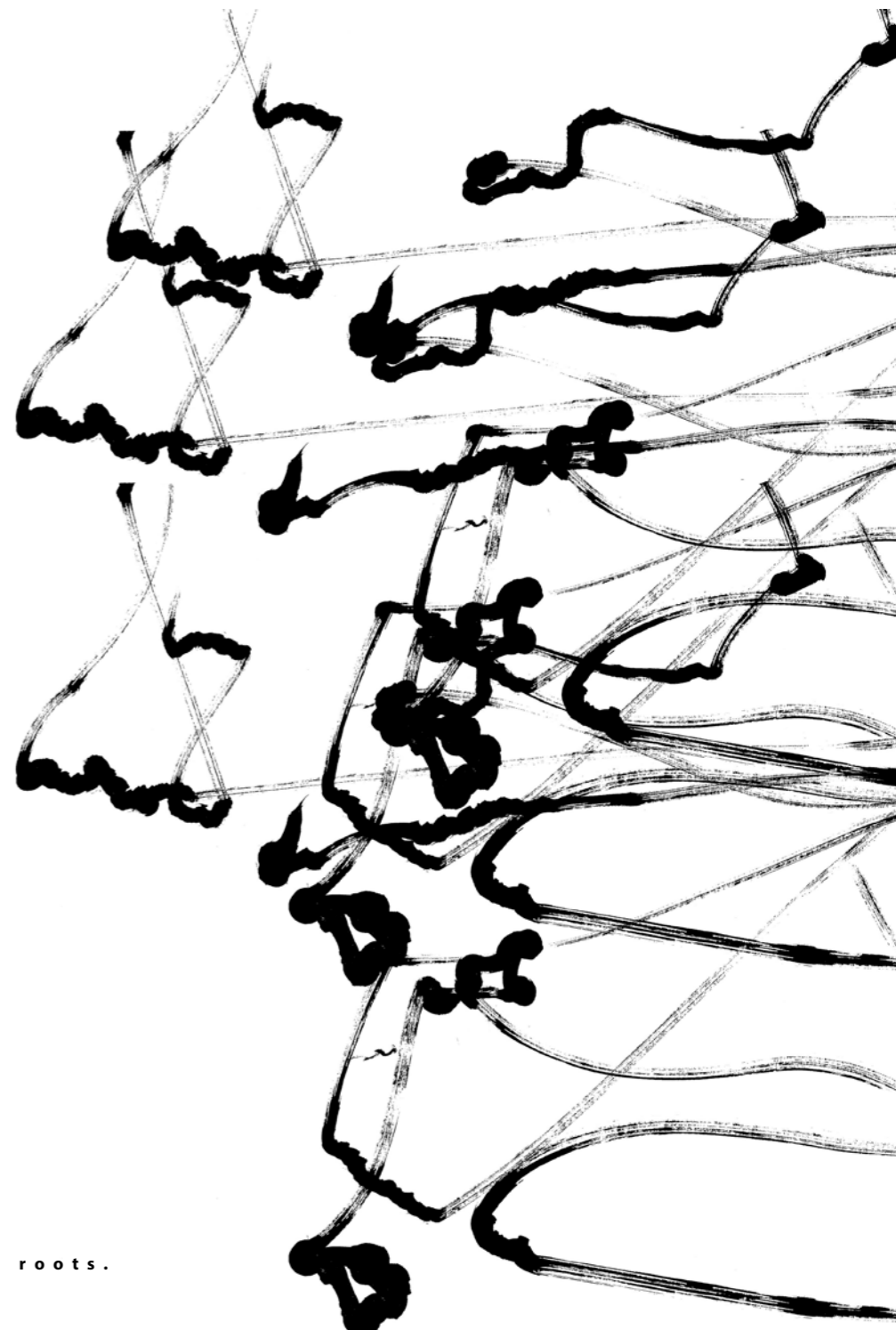
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It is important to have roots.





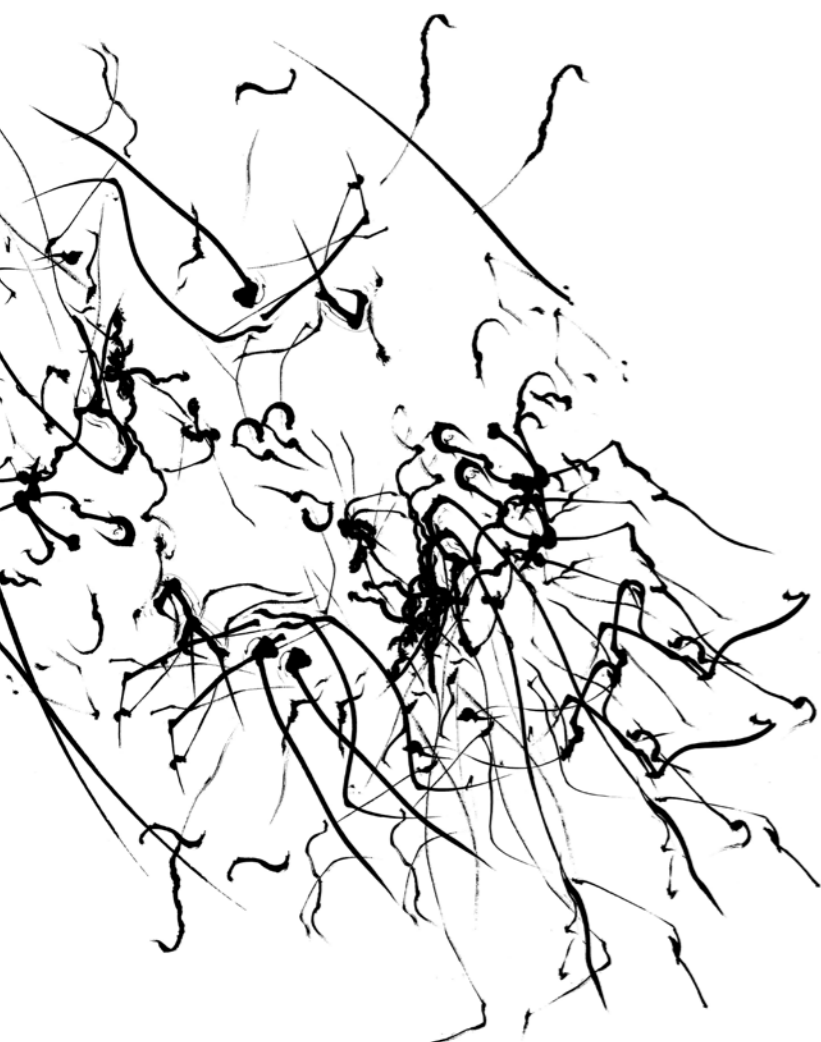
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Be flexible

so you won't break
when rough wind blows.



Grow where you are planted."

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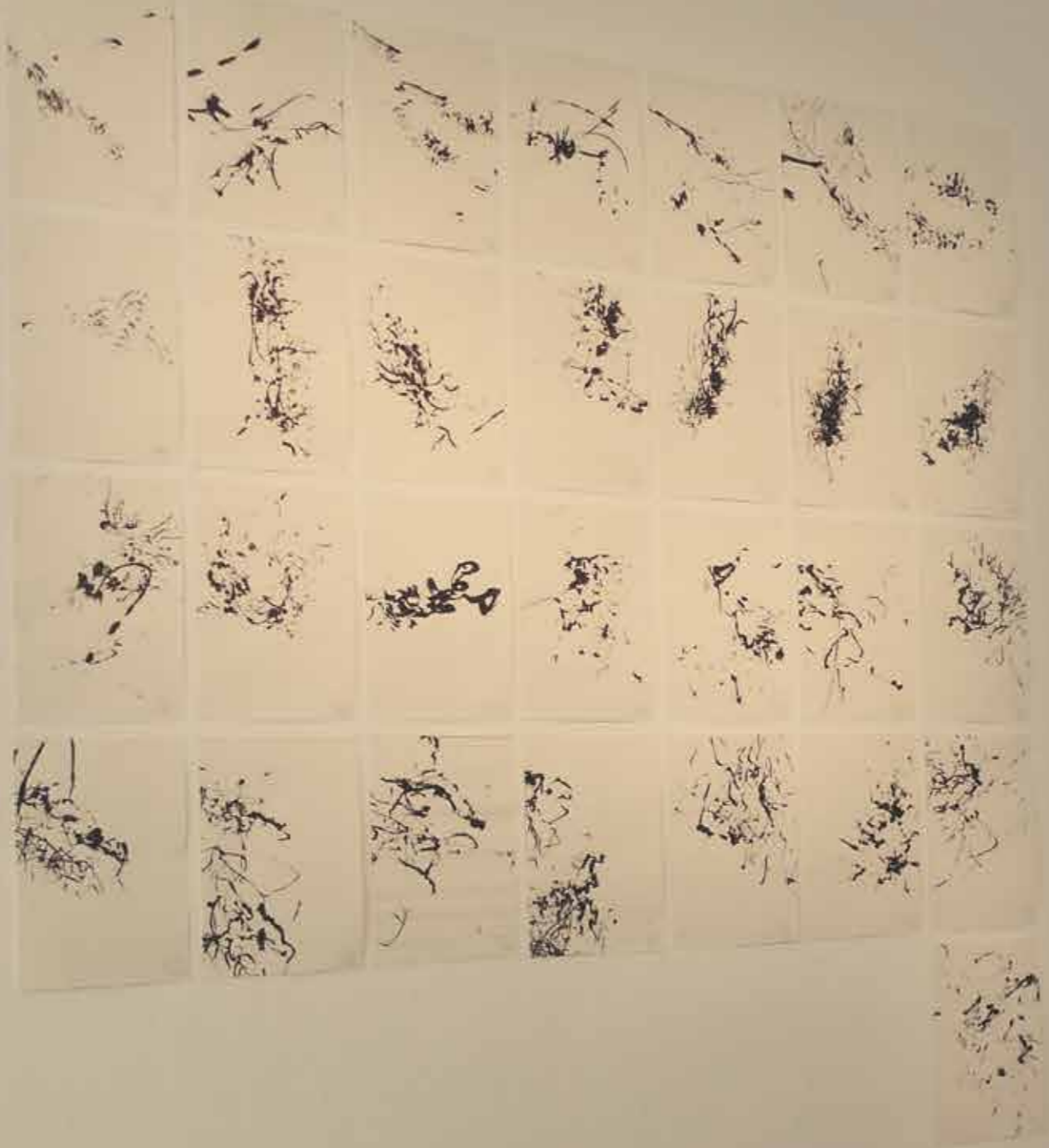
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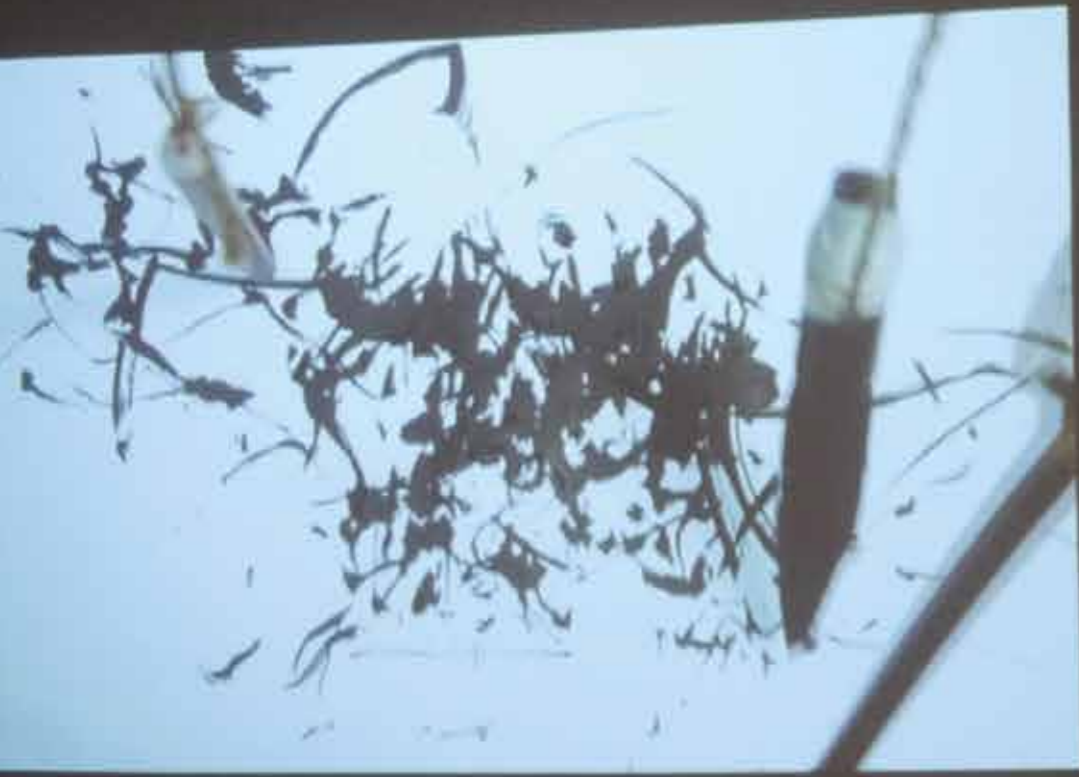
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The Conversation, 10:47, video installation, 2011



Self-portraits by Tree Series #1-8, 50 x 50cm, silkscreen ink on linen, 2011





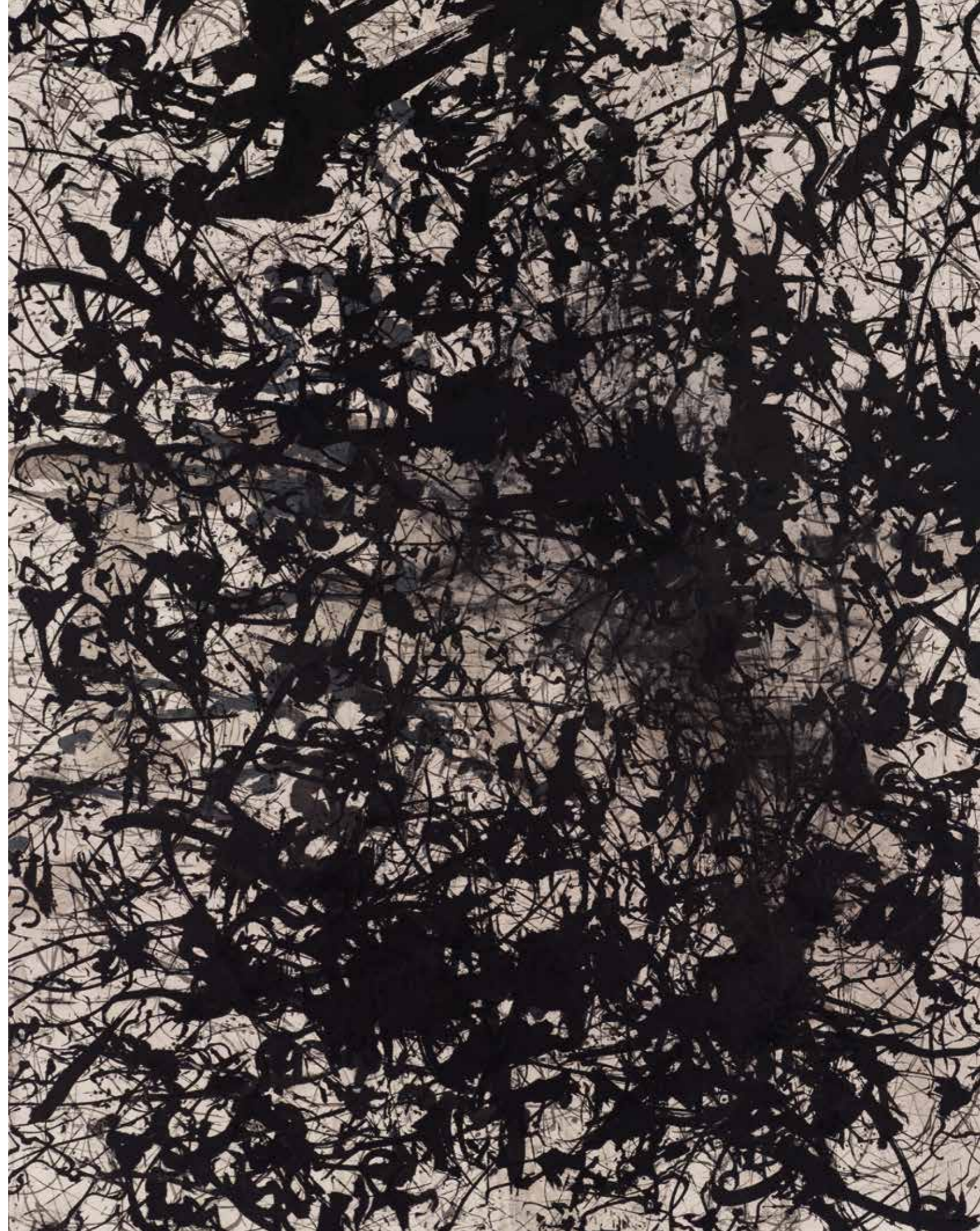
Freedom, 165 x 148cm, silkscreen ink on linen, 2015



LEFT
Conversations with Trees #3,
70 x 50cm, silkscreen and ink on Fabriano paper, 2011

RIGHT
Conversations with Trees #4,
70 x 50cm, silkscreen and ink on Fabriano paper, 2013

OPPOSITE
Conversations with Trees #2,
70 x 50cm, silkscreen and ink on Fabriano paper, 2011





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LEFT
Conversations with Trees #18,
70 x 50cm, silkscreen and ink on Fabriano paper, 2011

RIGHT
Conversations with Trees #19,
70 x 50cm, silkscreen and ink on Fabriano paper, 2011

OPPOSITE
Conversations with Trees #7,
70 x 50cm, silkscreen and ink on Fabriano paper, 2013

OPPOSITE
Conversations with Trees #5,
70 x 50cm, silkscreen and ink on Fabriano paper, 2011

LEFT
Conversations with Trees #12,
70 x 50cm, silkscreen and ink on Fabriano paper, 2011

RIGHT
Conversations with Trees #13,
70 x 50cm, silkscreen and ink on Fabriano paper, 2011

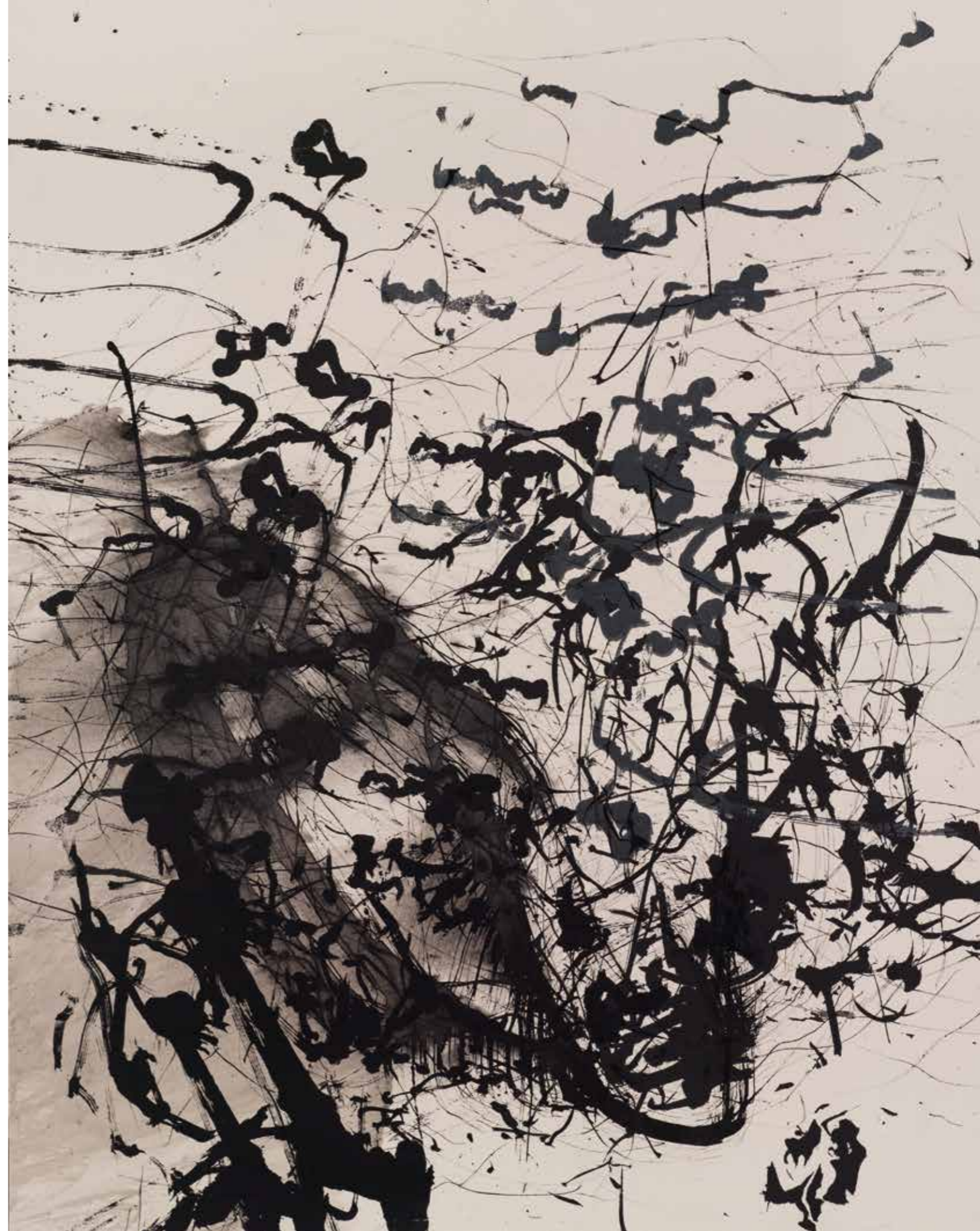


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OPPOSITE
Conversations with Trees #3,
 50 x 50cm, silkscreen on linen, 2012

LEFT
Conversations with Trees #1,
 50 x 50cm, silkscreen on linen, 2012

RIGHT
Conversations with Trees #2,
 50 x 50cm, silkscreen on linen, 2012
 Private collection



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TOP
Dancing Wind #1,
54 x 44cm, silkscreen ink
and ink on glass, 2014

BOTTOM
On a Velvet Day,
54 x 44cm, silkscreen ink
and ink on glass, 2014

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TOP
Tree of Life,
54 x 44cm, silkscreen ink
and ink on glass, 2014

BOTTOM
Dancing Wind #2,
54 x 44cm, silkscreen ink
and ink on glass, 2014

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LEFT
Conversations with Trees,
 150 x 450cm, silkscreen ink on linen, 2012
 Collection of Mr Toh Ee Loong

RIGHT
Painting for the Wind,
 80 x 70cm, silkscreen ink on canvas, 2015

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In a studio converted from a rice warehouse with the spectacular view of the rice fields and the mountains, village life was a refreshing change from the urban cityscape of Singapore. Studio Kura, Itoshima inspired Yeo Shih Yun to use found objects as well as non-traditional painting tools like robots and remote-controlled toy cars.

The main intention of using these non-traditional tools is to surrender control and to release drawing from its enslavement by the artist's hand. ●●●●

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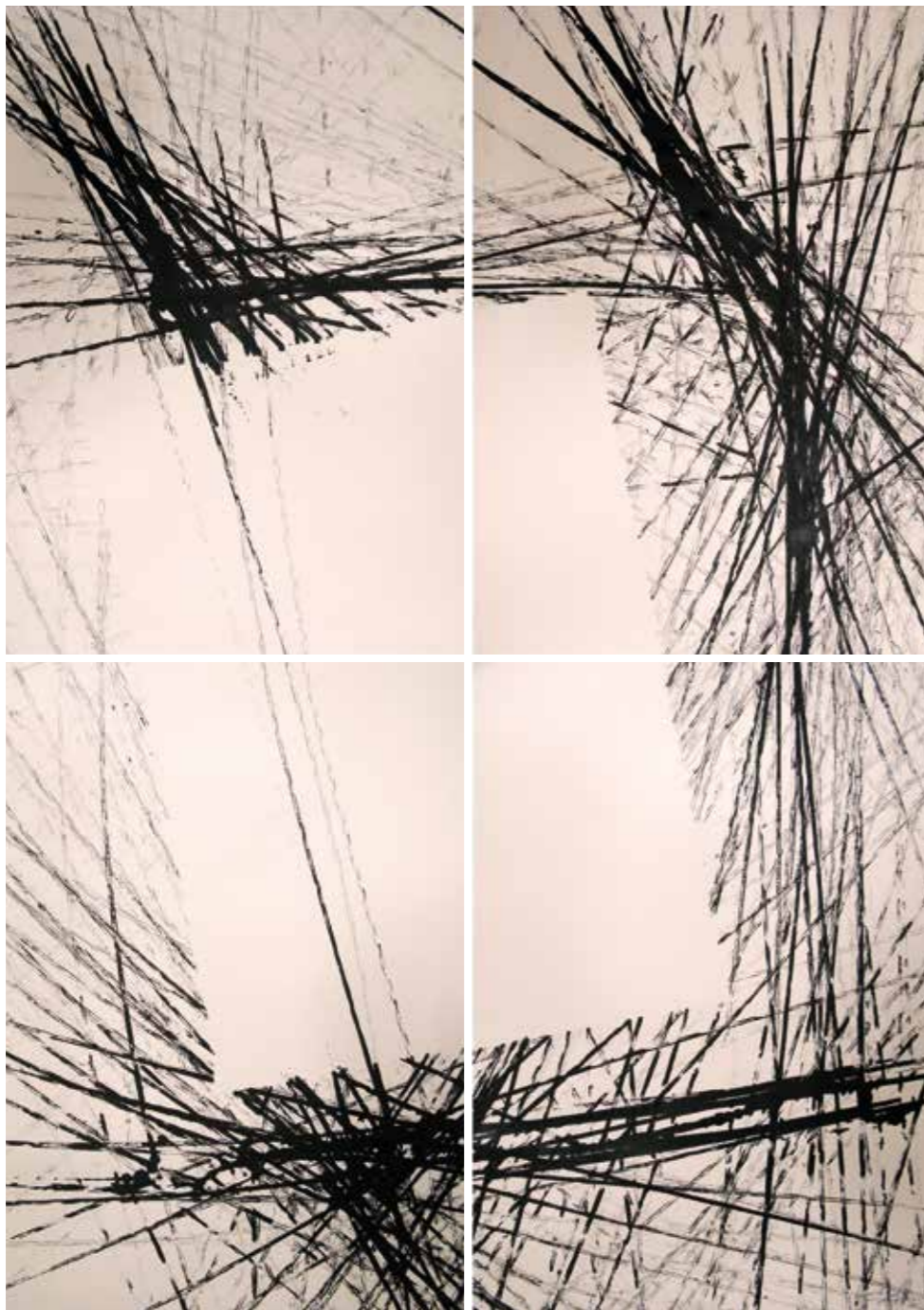
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OPPOSITE
Man and Nature,
70 x 50cm, ink on Fabriano paper, 2010

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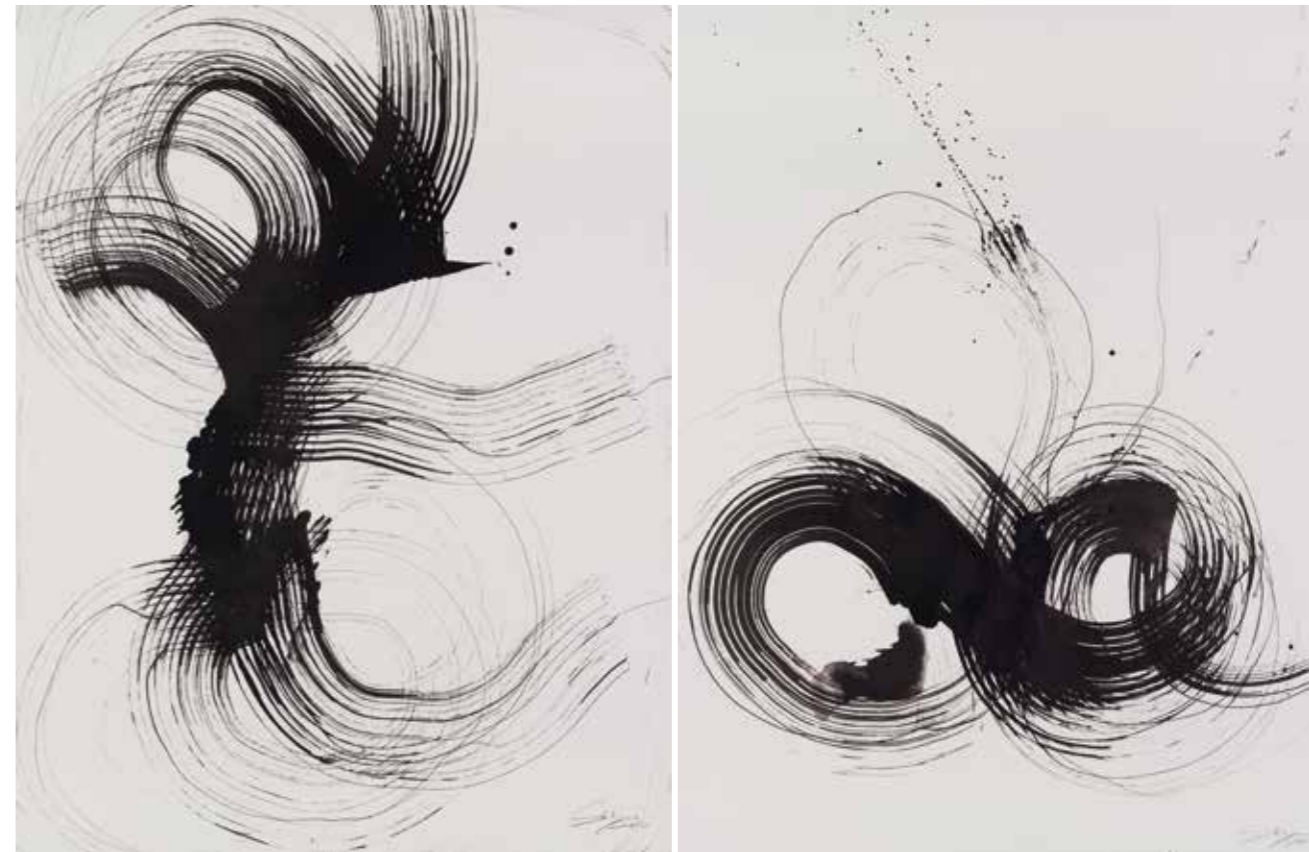


TOP
Racing Time #2,
 152 x 112cm, Chinese ink on Fabriano paper, 2010
 Private collection

RIGHT
Man and Machine Series #4,
 76 x 56cm, ink on Fabriano paper, 2010

LEFT
Man and Machine Series #6,
 76 x 56cm, ink on Fabriano paper, 2010

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Out of the Blue #2 (triptych), 150 x 65cm each, ink on Fabriano paper, 2010







Losing Time #1,
70 x 50cm, mixed media and silkscreen on Fabriano paper, 2010



Losing Time #2,
70 x 50cm, mixed media and silkscreen on Fabriano paper, 2010

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Losing Time #3,
70 x 50cm, mixed media and silkscreen on Fabriano paper, 2010

The K, 70 x 50cm, mixed media on Fabriano paper, 2010



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My World, 70 x 50cm, silkscreen and ink on Fabriano paper, 2010



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Continuing her exploration into creating artworks using robots, Yeo Shih Yun decided to approach the technique with a different direction for this project. Instead of leaving the formation of the marks completely on chance, she devised a set of rules to slightly manipulate and control the process. Her intention was to trade the lack of complete spontaneity for the joy of seeing what would arise.

The entire artwork process was dictated by the throws of a dice, thereby establishing an interplay between artistic control and chance. ●●●●



Study of Chance Robot Painting #1, 40 x 40cm, pigments on paper, 2011

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Chance Robot Painting #6, 80 x 80cm, pigments on canvas, 2011

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**RULES FOR
"ROBOTS PAINTING - DIARY NO. 5"
BY YEO SHIH YUN**

The 80cm square canvas is divided into 6 parts, with each square being 13.33 cm each.

X= horizontal axis

Y= vertical axis

A dice is used to obtain a number from 1-6.

RULE #1

Throw dice to determine the colour to use.

If the number is even 2, 4, 6, then green is chosen.
If the number is odd 1, 3, 5, then black is chosen.

RULE #2

Throw dice to determine the saturation of paint. Depending on the number, different intensities of the paint will be determined. The measurement is from a mini beer mug I bought from a second-hand store along Lindwurmstrasse.

- Number 1: 1.5 cups of the mini beer mug.
- Number 2: 1.25 cups of the mini beer mug.
- Number 3: 1 cup of the mini beer mug.
- Number 4: 0.5 cup of the mini beer mug.
- Number 5: 0.25 cup of the mini beer mug.
- Number 6: 0 cup of the mini beer mug.

RULE #3

Throw dice to determine the position to pour the paint and where to position the robot.

X= (number on the dice)
Y= (number on the dice)

RULE #4

Throw dice to determine which of the two robots to use.

If the number is odd, then use Robot 1.
If the number is even, then use Robot 2.

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2	2
0	0
1	1
1	1

RULE #5

Throw dice to determine the duration (in minutes) for which to operate the robot.

- Number 1: 1 minute
- Number 2: 2 minutes
- Number 3: 3 minutes
- Number 4: 4 minutes
- Number 5: 5 minutes
- Number 6: 6 minutes

RULE #6

Throw dice to determine the duration for which to let the painting rest before the next layer.

- Number 1: 1 minute
- Number 2: 2 minutes
- Number 3: 3 minutes
- Number 4: 4 minutes
- Number 5: 5 minutes
- Number 6: 6 minutes

RULE #7

Throw dice four times to determine the orientation of the painting.

If number adds up to be from 1-6:
top of the painting is the same as the orientation that I worked on from the beginning.

If number adds up to be from 7-12:
rotate the painting anti-clockwise 90 degrees.

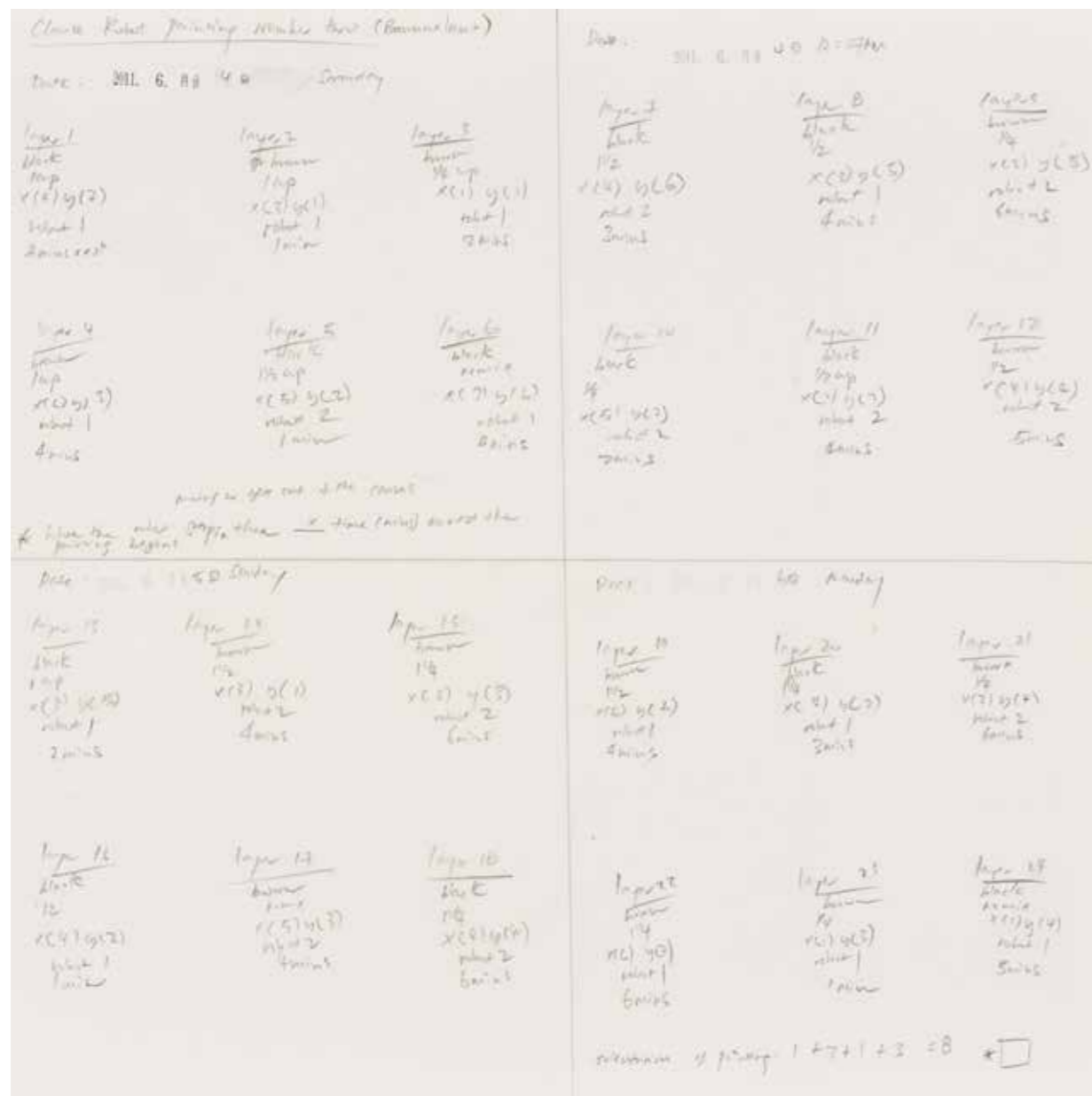
If number adds up to be from 13-18:
rotate the painting clockwise 90 degrees.

If number adds up to be from 18-24:
rotate the painting anti-clockwise 180 degrees.

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Black Pigments Test, 40 x 40cm, pigments on paper, 2011



Chance Robot Painting #2 Walnut Process, 40 x 40cm, pencil on paper, 2011



Study of Chance Robot Painting #10, 40 x 40cm each, pigments on paper, 2011



LEFT
Study of Robot Movements #2,
40 x 40cm, pigments on paper, 2011
MIDDLE
Study of Robot Movements #3,
40 x 40cm, pigments on paper, 2011
RIGHT
Study of Robot Movements #4,
40 x 40cm, pigments on paper, 2011

LEFT
Study of Robot Movements #5,
40 x 40cm, pigments on paper, 2011
MIDDLE
Study of Robot Movements #7,
40 x 40cm, pigments on paper, 2011
RIGHT
Study of Robot Movements #8,
40 x 40cm, pigments on paper, 2011

THE ART OF
YEO SHIH YUN
2012 - 2017

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THE ART OF
YEO SHIH YUN
2012 - 2017

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WATERFALL, Water fall, Chinese ink on sumi paper, 2400 x 30cm each (30 scrolls), 2012
WATERFALL, White Scroll, Chinese ink on sumi paper, 173 x 180cm, 2012
CHOREOGRAPHED COLLISIONS, Frequency, digital print and silkscreen on linen, 50 x 35cm, 2014
CHOREOGRAPHED COLLISIONS, Gravity, digital print and silkscreen on linen, 50 x 35cm, 2014
CHOREOGRAPHED COLLISIONS, Axis, silkscreen on canvas, 46 x 36cm, 2014
CHOREOGRAPHED COLLISIONS, Harmonic, silkscreen on canvas, 46 x 36cm, 2014
CHOREOGRAPHED COLLISIONS, Fresh Battery, silkscreen on canvas, 46 x 36cm, 2014
CHOREOGRAPHED COLLISIONS, Burn-In, silkscreen on canvas, 46 x 36cm, 2014
CHOREOGRAPHED COLLISIONS, Uptime, ink and silkscreen on linen, 200 x 130cm, 2014
CHOREOGRAPHED COLLISIONS, Downtime, ink and silkscreen on linen, 200 x 130cm, 2014
CHOREOGRAPHED COLLISIONS, Motion Series, silkscreen on canvas, 44 x 25cm, 2014
CHOREOGRAPHED COLLISIONS, Re-charging, ink and silkscreen on canvas, 97 x 88cm, 2014
CHOREOGRAPHED COLLISIONS, Connecting the Wires, ink and silkscreen on canvas, 97 x 88cm, 2014
CHOREOGRAPHED COLLISIONS, Against the Spring, ink and silkscreen on canvas, 88 x 123cm, 2014
CHOREOGRAPHED COLLISIONS, Black Wires Series, silkscreen on wood, 25 x 21cm, 2014
CHOREOGRAPHED COLLISIONS, Neon Robot City #1, silkscreen on wood, 26 x 20.5cm, 2014
CHOREOGRAPHED COLLISIONS, Neon Robot City #2, silkscreen on wood, 26 x 20.5cm, 2014
CHOREOGRAPHED COLLISIONS, Neon Robot City #3, silkscreen on wood, 26 x 20.5cm, 2014
CHOREOGRAPHED COLLISIONS, Neon Robot City #4, silkscreen on wood, 26 x 20.5cm, 2014
PAINTINGS, MBS 114 PSI, acrylic and silkscreen ink on canvas, 91 x 61cm, 2014
PAINTINGS, For the Wind, acrylic and silkscreen ink on canvas, 91 x 61cm, 2014
PAINTINGS, Mountain and Waterfalls, acrylic and silkscreen ink on canvas, 91 x 61cm, 2014
PAINTINGS, Rhapsody, acrylic and silkscreen ink on canvas, 91 x 61cm, 2014
PAINTINGS, The Voice of Aqua, acrylic and silkscreen ink on canvas, 91 x 61cm, 2014
PAINTINGS, Against the Wall, mixed media and ink on canvas, 60 x 90cm, 2012
PAINTINGS, Reload, mixed media and ink on canvas, 142 x 83cm, 2012
PAINTINGS, Remember, mixed media on canvas, 152 x 120cm, 2012
PAINTINGS, Silence Within, mixed media and ink on canvas, 120 x 90cm, 2012
PAINTINGS, Reborn, Chinese ink on canvas, 148 x 122cm, 2012
PAINTINGS, Relive, Chinese ink on canvas, 140 x 80cm, 2012
PAINTINGS, A Moment in Space, Chinese ink on paper, 70 x 200cm, 2012
PAINTINGS, Still, Chinese ink on paper, 70 x 200cm, 2012
PROJECT 6581, Youkobo Studio Process Robot Series #1-3, photo transfer on wood, 27 x 23cm, 2013
PROJECT 6581, Robots Print Installation, manipulated offset print, 150 x 240cm, 2013
LKY TRIBUTE, Without You There Would Be No Garden City, silkscreen and acrylic on canvas, 30 x 30cm, 2015

LKY TRIBUTE, LKY Tribute #1, silkscreen ink and acrylic on canvas, 43 x 35cm, 2015
LKY TRIBUTE, LKY Tribute #2, silkscreen ink and acrylic on canvas, 43 x 35cm, 2015
LKY TRIBUTE, LKY Tribute #3, silkscreen ink and acrylic on canvas, 43 x 35cm, 2015
LKY TRIBUTE, LKY Tribute #4, silkscreen ink and acrylic on canvas, 43 x 35cm, 2015
LKY TRIBUTE, LKY Tribute #5, silkscreen ink and acrylic on canvas, 43 x 35cm, 2015
LKY TRIBUTE, LKY Tribute #6, silkscreen ink and acrylic on canvas, 43 x 35cm, 2015
LKY TRIBUTE, LKY Tribute #7, silkscreen ink and acrylic on canvas, 43 x 35cm, 2015
LKY TRIBUTE, LKY Tribute #8, silkscreen ink and acrylic on canvas, 43 x 35cm, 2015
LKY TRIBUTE, Thank you LKY Chief Gardener of Singapore, silkscreen and glow in the dark paint on canvas, 40 x 30cm, 2015
LKY TRIBUTE, Thank You for Being the Light, Neon, 28 x 40cm, 2015
WE ARE SINGAPORE, Life, graphite on board, 29 x 20cm, 2015
WE ARE SINGAPORE, Lion Roar, graphite on board, 29 x 20cm, 2015
WE ARE SINGAPORE, Stand Together, graphite on board, 29 x 20cm, 2015
WE ARE SINGAPORE, Future, graphite on board, 29 x 20cm, 2015
WE ARE SINGAPORE, Peace, graphite on board, 29 x 20cm, 2015
AMBIGUOUS, Ambiguous Series #1-10, silkscreen ink and acrylic on canvas, 60 x 60cm, 2017
SCREENPAINTINGS, Forest Wind, silkscreen paint and ink on canvas, 55 x 110cm, 2017
SCREENPAINTINGS, Coral Waves, silkscreen paint and ink on canvas, 55 x 110cm, 2017
SCREENPAINTINGS, Exuberance Blue, silkscreen paint and ink on linen, 100 x 170cm, 2017
SCREENPAINTINGS, A thousand blue skies, silkscreen paint and ink on linen, 100 x 170cm, 2017
SCREENPAINTINGS, Chromium Green, silkscreen paint on canvas, 90 x 170cm, 2017
SCREENPAINTINGS, Black Pearl, silkscreen paint on canvas, 90 x 177cm, 2017
SCREENPAINTINGS, Water, silkscreen and ink on canvas, 30 x 30cm, 2017
SCREENPAINTINGS, Wood, silkscreen and ink on canvas, 30 x 30cm, 2017
SCREENPAINTINGS, Metal, silkscreen and ink on canvas, 30 x 30cm, 2017
SCREENPAINTINGS, Earth, silkscreen and ink on canvas, 30 x 30cm, 2017
SCREENPAINTINGS, Fire, silkscreen and ink on canvas, 30 x 30cm, 2017

WATERFALL, Water fall, ink on sumi paper, 2400 x 30cm each (30 scrolls), 2012
WATERFALL, White Scroll, ink on sumi paper, 173 x 180cm, 2012
CHOREOGRAPHED COLLISIONS, Frequency, digital print and silkscreen on linen, 50 x 35cm, 2014
CHOREOGRAPHED COLLISIONS, Gravity, digital print and silkscreen on linen, 50 x 35cm, 2014
CHOREOGRAPHED COLLISIONS, Axis, silkscreen on canvas, 46 x 36cm, 2014
CHOREOGRAPHED COLLISIONS, Harmonic, silkscreen on canvas, 46 x 36cm, 2014
CHOREOGRAPHED COLLISIONS, Fresh Battery, silkscreen on canvas, 46 x 36cm, 2014
CHOREOGRAPHED COLLISIONS, Burn-In, silkscreen on canvas, 46 x 36cm, 2014

OF ABSTRACTION, AUTOMATION AND THE ANTI-GESTURAL PARADIGM

LOUIS HO
CURATOR

“I am too accustomed to my own gestures.”

– Yeo Shih Yun¹

Let’s begin with what Yeo Shih Yun’s latest work is *not*.

Take *Uptime* (2014), for instance: billowing over the upper portion of the canvas is a cloud of smoky grey which alternately lightens and darkens as it dissipates over the pristine background, ranging from an almost colourless pewter to a steely gunmetal and back again. In the manner of the so-called splashed-ink technique of Chinese painting, or *po-mo* 泼墨, the chromatic tonalities shift with the spread of the wash. Over this soft chiaroscuro is a complex mix of bold, calligraphic gestures: wispy skeins and small splashes in the upper left corner give way to thick, dynamic strokes of ink along the left section of the space, which look as if they were rendered with a particularly large brush, the bulging blotches tapering off in a dance of tendrils that resemble the bristles of the implement. Elsewhere, brushstrokes are massed in webs of dark lines that arbitrarily terminate in suspiciously straight edges. A faint path of what appears to be wheel tracks, crisscrossed by threads of white, flows through another corner, above which is a radiating pattern of circles, limned in knife-thin lines and occasionally disrupted by messy flecks of ink.

The aesthetic lineage of Shih Yun’s particular mode of visibility presents itself immediately. As she remarks of her forebears: “When I was at the SFAI (San Francisco Art Institute), I was introduced to the world of Abstract Expressionism. First Pollock, then I discovered other artists like Motherwell, Klein, Rothko, Frank Stella, and Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns.”² The vigorous gestural strokes, the all-over quality of the surface (certain portions of empty space are covered in white paint), the visual correspondence to East Asian calligraphy—the legacy of Abstract Expressionism in Yeo’s work is apparent, from the actionism of Pollock to Kline’s inscrutably Zen-seeming canvases³.

Her abstract use of ink on white surfaces, in particular, strongly suggests the oft-noted confluence of mid-century American art at its avant-garde best, and traditional modes of East Asian visibility. As Harold Rosenberg famously formulated it, the significance of this new art was the fact that it shifted the freight of meaning from product to process:

“At a certain moment, the canvas began to appear ... as an arena in which to act—rather than as a space in which to reproduce, re-design, analyse or express an object, actual or imagined. What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but *an event*.”⁴ (emphasis added)



Uptime, 200 × 130cm, ink and silkscreen on linen, 2014
Private collection

This event, the near-mystical act of putting brush to surface was observed by various commentators to bear more than a passing resemblance to the practice of ink painting and calligraphy; curator William Seitz identified what he termed the calligraphic brushstroke of American action painting, “which involves not only ... shape but the spirit—lyrical, violent, or tentative, in which it was executed.” Elsewhere, scholar D. T. Suzuki observed of Japanese ink painting, or *sumi-e* 墨絵 – which proved a profound influence on yet another member of the New York school, Mark Tobey—that it was “poor in form, poor in contents, poor in execution, poor in material, yet we Oriental people feel the presence in it of a certain moving spirit that mysteriously hovers around the lines, dots, and shades of various formations; the rhythm of its living breath vibrates in them.”⁵

To return to the opening disclaimer, however: despite the resonance with various art historical lineages, Shih Yun’s work is not all that it seems.

2⁰ 1² – 2⁰ 1⁷

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Uptime—and its fellows in the same series, produced for the purposes of the present exhibition—is both less and more than what it appears to be at first glance. Contradicting the all-too-apparent parallels to other forms of aesthetic praxis, the almost knee-jerk comparisons to action painting and calligraphy, the piece is a deliberate, methodical departure from those gestural paradigms. Shih Yun’s mark-making here does not partake of the “spirit” or the “rhythm of ... living breath” that animates the painterly strokes of a Pollock, a Kline or a Tobey; it denies those connotations of the spiritual, and the subjective. *If anything, her particular form of abstraction surrenders those very autonomies of gesture.*

The proceedings featured only two moments of direct contact between the artist’s hand and the canvas: at the outset, when the initial layer of ink wash was applied, and again when successive layers of ink were screen-printed on. The first stage of production involved the pouring of ink onto the canvas, which was diluted with water—also poured on—and spread, manually, with a squeegee attached to a long handle. The movement of the wash was also manipulated by the application of air, shot with a little plastic syringe in the desired directions. Meanwhile, marks had also been made on a long scroll of paper, again with the aid of simple mechanical devices. Shih Yun had affixed brushes of both the painting and scrubbing variety, dipped in ink, to small, battery-operated robotic toys⁶, and allowed these to move over the surface of the paper as and where the vagaries of chance took them. The marks thus obtained were then digitally scanned, and altered using Photoshop. The artist selected sections from this digital complex of marks, which ranged from long, continuous strokes to circular patterns to large splatters of ink, and rendered them onto individual silk screens. Finally, these designs were printed onto the canvas, in a manner of the artist’s choosing, in progressive layers and in both black ink and white paint.

There is, of course, aesthetic intentionality at work here, as well as traces of the author’s hand—what Shih Yun has effected is not a complete surrender of intervention in the artistic process, but, rather, an abdication of the subjective and metaphysical dimensions of the discourse around gestural abstraction, its aspirations to individualistic heroism and spiritual attainment⁷. If, as Clyfford Still opined, “a single stroke of paint, backed by work and a mind that understood its potency and implications, could restore to man the freedom lost in twenty centuries of apologies and devices for subjugation”⁸, then it is those intimations of grand(iose) notions—male-oriented forms of thought and action (the term “potency” is telling), liberty of mind and matter—that Shih Yun relinquishes in her turn to largely mechanical means of art-making. She notes of her practice that “it is ... about the marks, how to get the most interesting marks without using my hands/body to create them.”⁹

Perhaps nothing could be further from the claims of personal emancipation, the expression of individual spirit, than the relinquishing of artistic autonomy to automated contrivances, the cessation of the gesture to gadgets. What appears to be a visual citation of the graphological contours and inflections of the calligraphic stroke reveals itself to be, rather, the random movements of inanimate objects. The superseding of the human hand by the motion of machinery—it is a redolent theme, and one is tempted to read any number of socio-historical phenomena into it, from a sense of Weberian disenchantment to the Fordist-inspired urban landscape of post-independence Singapore¹⁰. The last word on the topic, though, probably goes to the artist, Peter Halley, who put it such:

“Post-war abstraction was to be dominated by one overriding response to culture: spirituality and phenomenology supplanted by alienation as the guiding impetus behind abstraction ... it is the emotional blankness, emptiness and numbness of an abstract world where social relations have become as untethered as technology has.”¹¹ ●●●●



REFERENCES

¹ In an e-mail to the author, dated June 3, 2014.

² E-mail to the author, June 3, 2014. Perhaps a short note on the matter of artistic influences is in order: as Yeo points out, Abstract Expressionism remains her primary reference. However, closer to home, Chinese calligraphy and ink painting, which arrived in Singapore with various waves of Chinese immigration remains a vital contemporary practice here (even if Yeo, avowedly, does *not* look to those sources). For a brief history of cross-cultural exchanges between China and Southeast Asia during the colonial era, see Xia Shuqi, "Nanyang Spirit: Chinese migration and the Development of Southeast Asian Art" in *Visions and Enchantment: Southeast Asian Paintings* (Singapore: Singapore Art Museum and Christie's International Singapore, 2000), pp. 18-21.

³ Kline, however, was personally less than enthusiastic about comparisons between his work and Japanese painting and calligraphy. For an account of his so-called "Asian denial", see Bert Winther-Tamaki's *Art in the Encounter of Nations: Japanese and American Artists in the Early Postwar Years* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), pp. 56-62.

⁴ Harold Rosenberg, "The American action painters", *Art News*, vol. 51, no. 8 (December 1952), pp. 22-23 and 48-50.

⁵ Both Seitz and Suzuki are quoted in Bert Winther-Tamaki, "The Asian Dimensions of Postwar Abstract Art: Calligraphy and Metaphysics" in Alexandra Munroe, ed., *The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860-1989* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2009), pp.145-157. The topic of Asian "influence" on the New York school has been much written about; Seitz was one of the earliest to point it out. For somewhat more recent commentary, refer to the essays in the catalogue for the Guggenheim exhibition, *The Third Mind* (cited above), as well as Charles Lachman, "The Image Made by Chance" in China and the West: Ink Wang Meets Jackson Pollock's Mother', *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 74, no. 3 (September, 1992), pp. 499-510.

⁶ Some of these include the Brush Robot and the Doodling Robot, educational toy models produced by Hong Kong-based manufacturer, 4M.

⁷ The New York school was perhaps less of a unified movement than a particular historical moment. As Michael Leja comments: "certain apparent similarities in ... [Abstract Expressionist] paintings rested upon very different sets of priorities, beliefs, and commitments." See his essay, "The Formation of an Avant-Garde in New York", in Michael Auping, ed., *Abstract Expressionism: The Critical Developments* (Harry N Abrams: New York, 1987), pp. 13-33.

⁸ Qtd. in Max Kozloff, "American Painting during the Cold War", *Artforum*, 12 (May, 1973), pp. 43-54.

⁹ E-mail to the author, June 3, 2014.

¹⁰ On the subject of Max Weber and the disenchantment of modernity, Jane Bennett's *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001) is an enlightening study. Robbie Goh has described Singapore's HDB-dominated topography as "the blank anonymity of standardised housing ... accorded with essentially Fordian methods of mass production appropriate to Singapore's state of economic development ...". See his article, "Ideologies of 'Upgrading' in Singapore Public Housing: Postmodern Style, Globalisation and Class Construction in the Built Environment", *Urban Studies*, vol. 38, no. 9 (Aug 2001), pp. 1589-1604.

¹¹ Peter Halley, "Abstraction and Culture" in Maria Lind, ed., *Abstraction (Whitechapel: Documents of Contemporary Art)* (London and Cambridge, MA: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2013), pp. 137-42.

2012 WATERFALL 瀑布

SINGAPORE

With "Waterfall" Yeo Shih Yun wanted to extend the limitations of ink painting — to go beyond the typical Chinese waterfall landscape painting confined to the four sides of the rice paper. In this site-specific installation a three-dimensional space is created using two-dimensional, painted scrolls.

These scroll paintings are not created by any brush, but by dipping the paper rolls in different shades of ink. "Time" became the artist's brush, determining how much ink the paper absorbed and the way the ink flowed. ●●●●

2012 - 2017

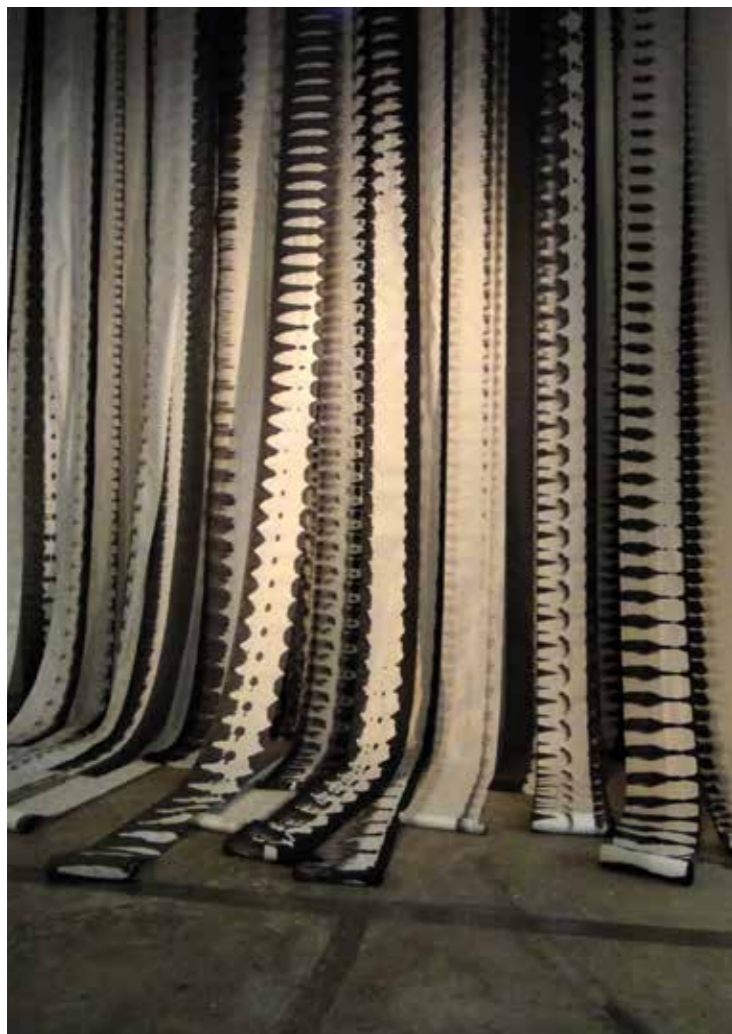
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Waterfall 瀑布, installation in Mo 墨 exhibition, Jendela Visual Arts Space, Esplanade, Singapore, 2012

WATERFALL 瀑布

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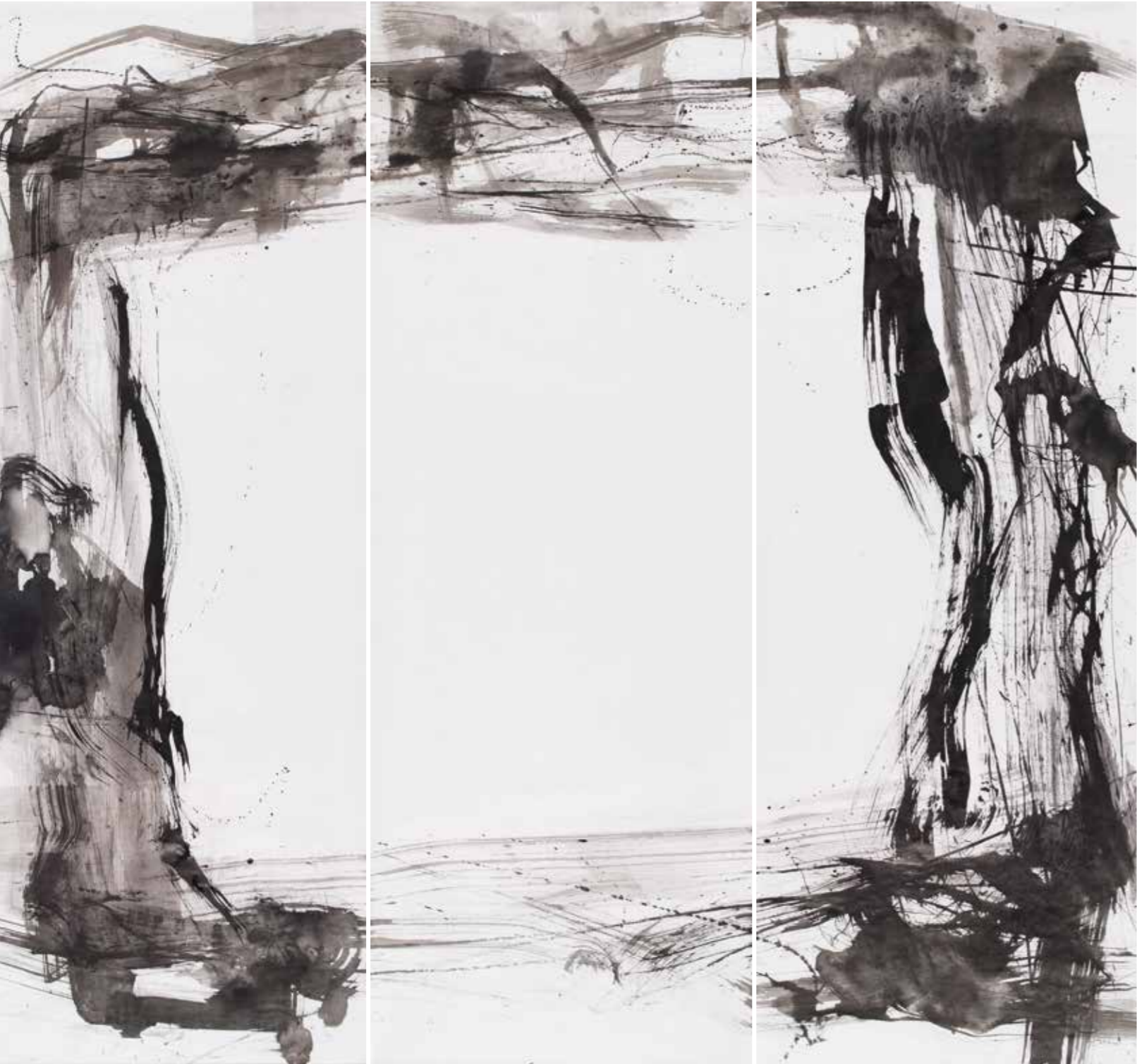


Waterfall 瀑布, 2400 x 30cm each (30 scrolls), Chinese ink on sumi paper, 2012

OPPOSITE
Waterfall 瀑布 - detail,
2400 x 30cm each (30 scrolls),
Chinese ink on sumi paper, 2012



WATERFALL 瀑布



White Scroll (triptych), 173 x 180cm, Chinese ink on sumi paper, 2012

"Our true selves, we like to think are spontaneous. An authentic gesture is unique and this is not to be imitated, even by the one who made it."

— Harold Rosenberg

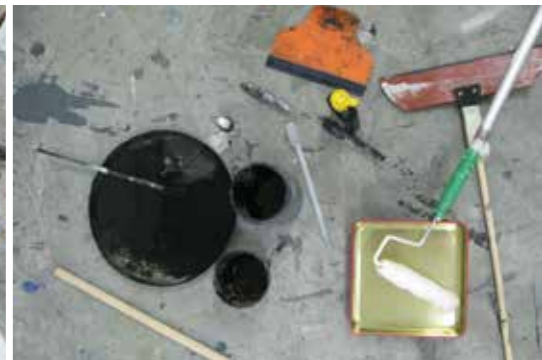


2014 CHOREOGRAPHED

COLLISIONS

SINGAPORE

In this series, Yeo Shih Yun continues her experimentation with spontaneous gestures and random motions through toy robots. Using bold and energetic use of black ink, the works express movement and serve to emphasise mark making as a performance. ●●●●



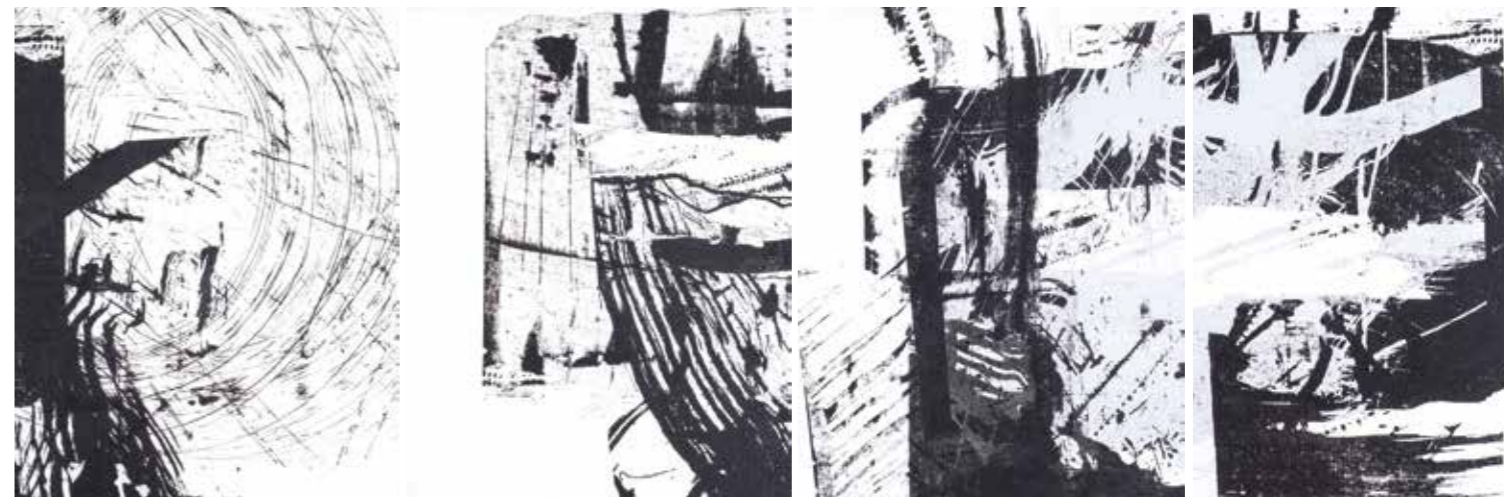
CHOREOGRAPHED COLLISIONS





TOP
Frequency,
50 x 35cm, digital print and silkscreen on linen, 2014
Private collection

BOTTOM
Gravity,
50 x 35cm, digital print and silkscreen on linen, 2014



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT
Axis,
46 x 36cm, silkscreen on canvas, 2014
Harmonic,
46 x 36cm, silkscreen on canvas, 2014
Fresh Battery,
46 x 36cm, silkscreen on canvas, 2014
Burn-in,
46 x 36cm, silkscreen on canvas, 2014



Uptime, 200 x 130cm, ink and silkscreen on linen, 2014
Private collection



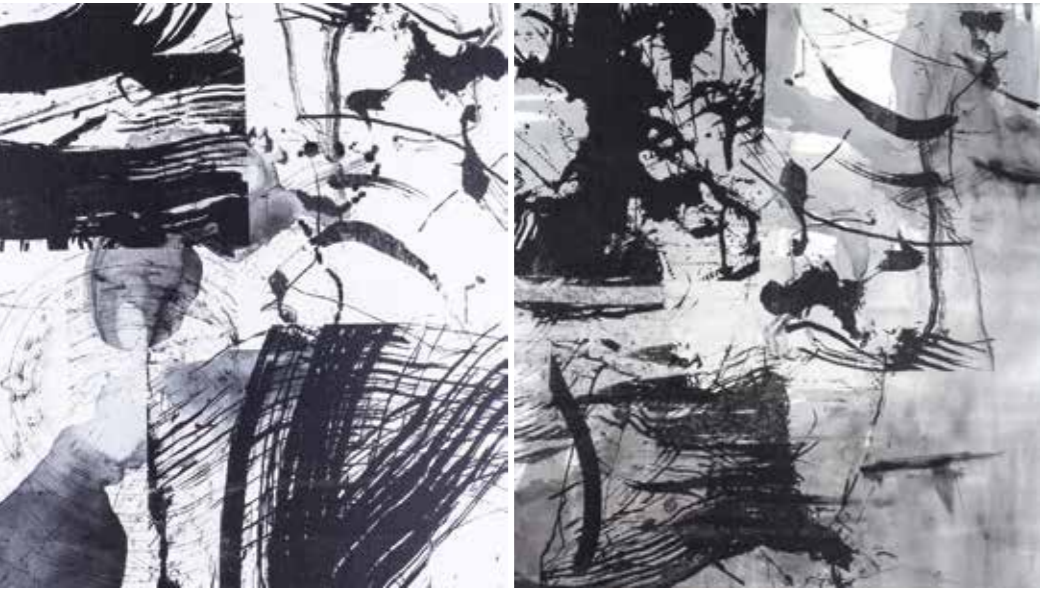
Downtime, 200 x 130cm, ink and silkscreen on linen, 2014



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CHOREOGRAPHED COLLISIONS

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT
Motion Series #1,
 44 x 25cm, silkscreen on canvas, 2014
Motion Series #2,
 44 x 28cm, silkscreen on canvas, 2014
Motion Series #3,
 44 x 33cm, silkscreen on canvas, 2014
Motion Series #4,
 44 x 35cm, silkscreen on canvas, 2014
Motion Series #5,
 44 x 26cm, silkscreen on canvas, 2014
Motion Series #6,
 44 x 26cm, silkscreen on canvas, 2014
Motion Series #7,
 44 x 36cm, silkscreen on canvas, 2014



LEFT
Re-charging,
 97 x 88cm, ink and silkscreen on canvas, 2014
RIGHT
Connecting the Wires,
 97 x 88cm, ink and silkscreen on canvas, 2014



Against the Spring, 88 x 123cm, ink and silkscreen on canvas, 2014



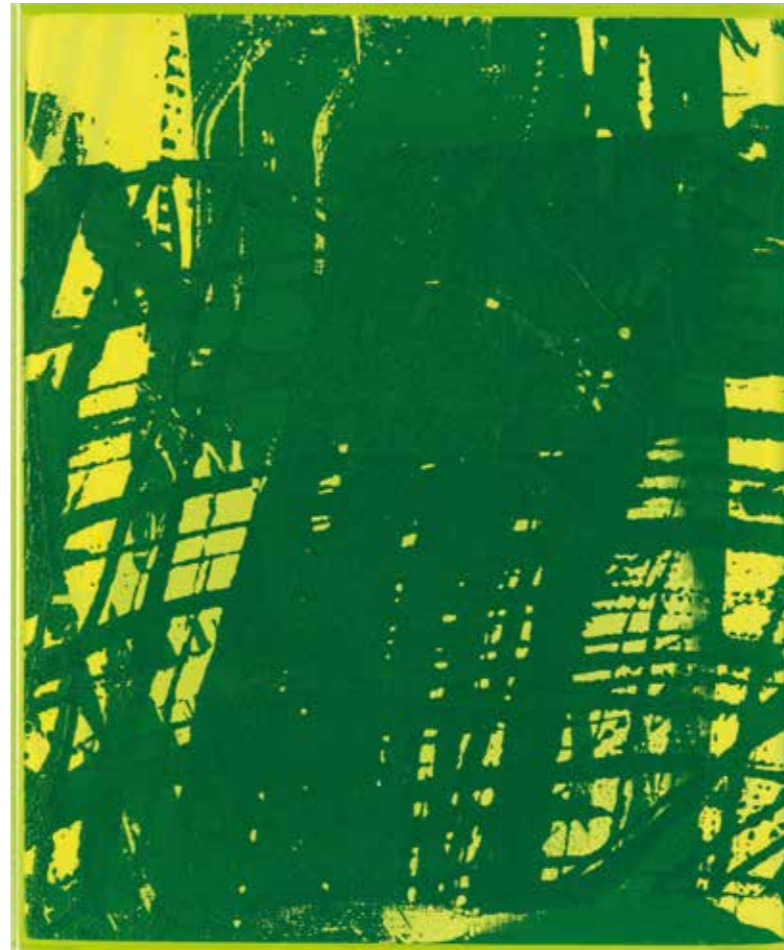
TOP ROW (FROM LEFT TO RIGHT)
Black Wires Series #5,
25 x 21cm, silkscreen on wood, 2014
Black Wires Series #4,
25 x 21cm, silkscreen on wood, 2014
Black Wires Series #3,
25 x 21cm, silkscreen on wood, 2014

MIDDLE ROW (FROM LEFT TO RIGHT)
Black Wires Series #9,
25 x 21cm, silkscreen on wood, 2014
Black Wires Series #1,
25 x 21cm, silkscreen on wood, 2014
Black Wires Series #10,
25 x 21cm, silkscreen on wood, 2014
Black Wires Series #2,
25 x 21cm, silkscreen on wood, 2014

BOTTOM ROW (FROM LEFT TO RIGHT)
Black Wires Series #8,
25 x 21cm, silkscreen on wood, 2014
Black Wires Series #6,
25 x 21cm, silkscreen on wood, 2014
Black Wires Series #7,
25 x 21cm, silkscreen on wood, 2014



installation view of "Choreographed Collisions" at Galerie Steph



LEFT
Neon Robot City #1,
26 x 20.5cm, silkscreen on wood, 2014

RIGHT
Neon Robot City #3,
26 x 20.5cm, silkscreen on wood, 2014

LEFT
Neon Robot City #2,
26 x 20.5cm, silkscreen on wood, 2014

RIGHT
Neon Robot City #4,
26 x 20.5cm, silkscreen on wood, 2014

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OPPOSITE
MBS 114 PSI,
91 x 61cm, acrylic and silkscreen ink
on canvas, 2014





LEFT
For the Wind,
 91 x 61cm, acrylic and silkscreen ink on canvas, 2014



RIGHT
Mountain and Waterfalls,
 91 x 61cm, acrylic and silkscreen ink on canvas, 2014

PAINTINGS

2012-2017

PAINTINGS

TOP
Rhapsody,
 91 x 61cm, acrylic and silkscreen ink on canvas, 2014

BOTTOM
The Voice of Aqua,
 91 x 61cm, acrylic and silkscreen ink on canvas, 2014





Against the Wall, 60 x 90cm, mixed media and ink on canvas, 2012

Reload, 142 x 83cm, mixed media and ink on canvas, 2012



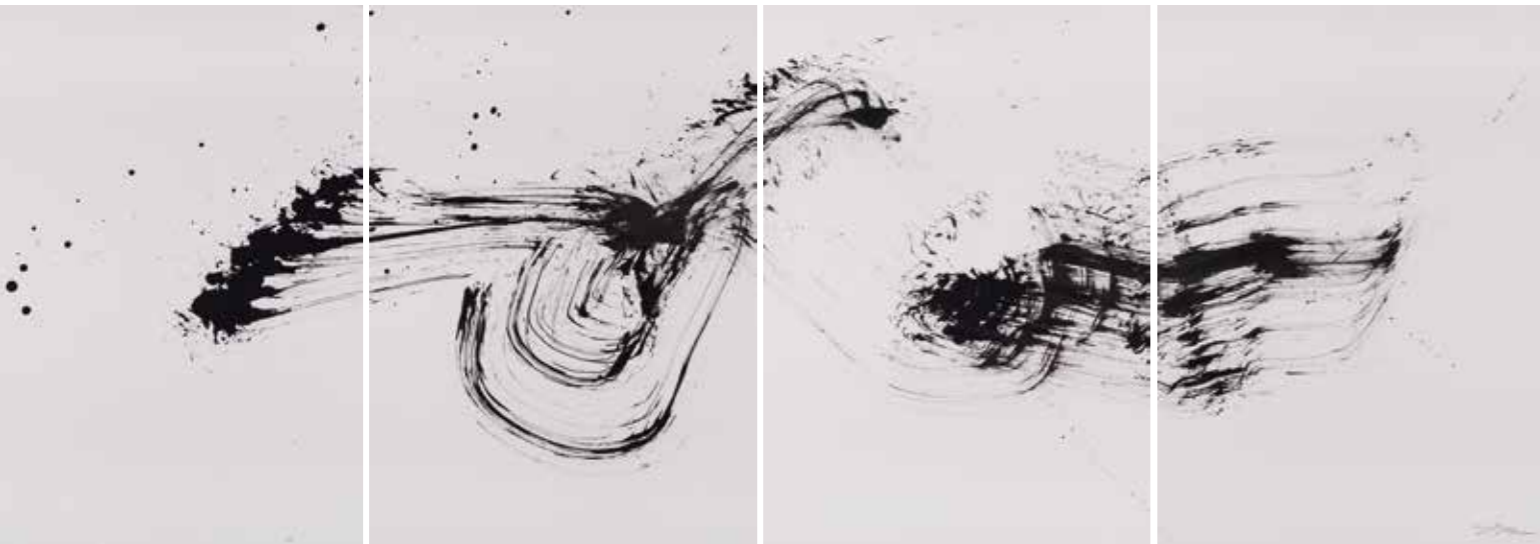
LEFT
Remember,
152 x 120cm, mixed media on canvas, 2012
Private collection

RIGHT
Silence Within,
120 x 90cm, mixed media and ink on canvas, 2012



LEFT
Reborn,
148 x 122cm, Chinese ink on canvas, 2012

RIGHT
Relive,
140 x 80cm, Chinese ink on canvas, 2012



A Moment in Space, 70 x 200cm, Chinese ink on paper, 2012



Still, 70 x 200cm, Chinese ink on paper, 2012

A LOT LIKE FATE

KELLEY CHENG
EDITOR

RIGHT
Featured in *ish* magazine in 2006
Study of Marks #1-5,
65 x 50cm, Chinese ink
on paper, 2004

As a student of architecture, one of the most important design principles I picked up on was to never have a pre-conceived image of the final outcome. We were constantly reminded that every line we drew was supposed to have meaning and value, and everything we did must be guided by our core concepts and vision, eventually leading to the final product.

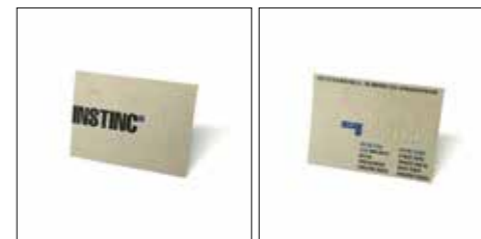
The beauty of Yeo Shih Yun's work is that each one is driven solely by a concept, and the final outcome is never pre-conceived. The concise design of a conceptual process, method or system is the consistent thread running through her body of works. Her practice is primarily driven by these methodologies, and is more often than not, completely unaware or oblivious to the final product. She begins by addressing the overall concept, followed by devising a method of execution and finally allows the art to develop from the application of this method. Perhaps, the reason for such an artistic process is rooted in Shih Yun's recognition of her own strength as a conceptualist and weakness as a figurative painter. Nonetheless, she has used her artistic skills to her own advantage, developing a unique and alternative way to express her thoughts and emotions. That is precisely what first attracted me to Shih Yun's art, a kind of architecture not very different from what I had known, where Chance and Reason flirt.

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I first met Shih Yun in 2006. I was, then, the founding editor of *ish*, a magazine with a vision to provide a platform for the fast emerging local art and design scene. As on any other day in a magazine studio, I was going through piles of hard copies of press releases for luxury brands and blockbuster exhibitions delivered to me when I came across one that completely took me by surprise. It was a simple photostated copy with a very home-made look to it, completed with a couple of ink-jet printed A4 pages featuring the works of three young Singaporean artists. The exhibition was titled "Parallel Journeys". The works were mainly abstract, with ample of energy and spirit to instantly captivate me. I was especially attracted to the paintings by Shih Yun, even though I am not sure I fully understood the paintings at the time. I could not resist, and eventually ended up at her gallery and studio on Emerald Hill. Thoroughly impressed with her art and artistic process, I invited her to contribute an exclusive series of works for the magazine. That was the beginning of our friendship. Conversations about art over beer and wine, outings to exhibitions and art fairs where we excitedly chatted about the paintings we liked and laughed at the ones we did not approve of, as well as our common vision and values towards our creative lives only made our bond stronger. While Shih Yun moved from Graphic Design to Fine Art, I too had made a career switch, from Architecture to Graphic Design. The one thing that we both valued most in our work is the process and the design of systems we incorporated in controlling chaos, an important instrument used to organise information and elements without falling into a predictable look. It was really no wonder that we shared such a similar outlook on things and as a result, started collaborating on projects along the way, this book being one such joint endeavour, an outcome that is no less volatile than "fate".



LEFT
Identity & namecard design
for Shih Yun's gallery INSTINC
by Kelley Cheng/The Press
Room, 2015

I officially became Shih Yun's trusted personal designer in 2013. For all the projects that we have worked on together, I only had to do a single proposal because Shih Yun immediately agreed with them. It is truly a pleasure designing for her because she gives me complete artistic freedom and never interferes with my designs. Or maybe I am always happy working on projects for her because every time I show her a proposal, she exclaims, "Cool!", as she does with everything else she likes, and buys me beer.

One of our most memorable collaborations was "6581: Parallel Perceptions & Counter Connections", an art exhibition featuring the works of four Singaporean and four Japanese artists at the Japan Creative Centre. At the end of the cross artist residencies between Instinc and Youkobo Art Space, Shih Yun invited me to be the curator and exhibition designer for the final show. Due to her complete faith in me, unconditional support and the creative freedom I was provided, "6581: Parallel Perceptions & Counter Connections" still remains one of the most enjoyable shows I have ever curated. My fee for the show was an entire year of free dinners every time Shih Yun and I went out, as well as a triptych of her artworks. Priceless!

That's what true friendship is about.



TOP
Shih Yun personal namecards
designed by Kelley Cheng/
The Press Room, 2013



TOP
Catalogue design of
"Project6581" at
Japan Creative Center

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BELOW
Photographs of "Project6581"
at Japan Creative Center



Eventually, every tiny and big collaboration lead us to this book – an important milestone for Shih Yun. Surviving eighteen years as a full-time artist in Singapore is no small feat. Never one to say die, Shih Yun has shown all the young artists that in order to be successful, talent alone is not enough. You have to put in a lot of hard work, be resourceful and need a group of friends and supporters to fall back on in times of need (Like yours truly.). And although there is so much I have to say about Shih Yun's persistence and determination, when I initially started on the book, it took me a long time to come up with a concept. Of course, I was given complete artistic freedom as always, except one tiny request – "Ey, it must be conceptual!" – which was, in fact, a tall order because it meant that I would have to try to encapsulate all her conceptually driven works under the umbrella of one design concept.

I even postponed a few meetings with Shih Yun because I felt stuck. (Now you know why, Shih Yun.) Perhaps, it was because I wanted it to be perfect, not something overly contrived and pretentious but something subtle, clever and understated. Nonetheless, I did manage to come up with a first proposal worthy of both our agreements, albeit the initial creative constipation.

In order to reflect on Shih Yun's artistic process as one driven by conceptual methodologies, the design of the book too was guided by a well thought-out process and composed in a manner coded with meanings. The concept is numerically driven and makes use of a system that provided for endless permutations of compositions. According to our calculations, the 18 years of Shih Yun's practice can be divided into 3 stages of 6 years each and thus, the book has been composed in 3 parts with 6 years of works for each part. Similarly, following the pattern, each page has been divided into three regular columns and each spread into six, with text and images moving fluidly within the system. Every page has an underlying grid system of 3 x 3 mm and every single picture is composed on this grid. The book size, 213 x 270 mm was hence derived, and not pre-conceived. Finally, to complete the concept of 3, the book block has also been designed in 3 parts with an art-card acting as a structural spine that unfolds into 3 distinct sections, each featuring the 3 stages of her work.

The magic number for this project is 3.

It is not often that the people you encounter through work become lifelong friends, but Shih Yun, for me, is definitely one of the few who has not only been by my side for years but also inspired me in many ways. Shih Yun started the Instinc Gallery because as an emerging artist, she could not find a gallery willing to represent her. Instinc Residency, too came to be because she realised she thrives on collaborations and creative conversations. Always humble and never one to sit around and complain, Shih Yun is the most resourceful artist I have known. Devoid of any delusions about being an artist and a strong believer in hard work, you will often find her drilling and hanging works in exhibitions for other artists and for herself. She has always managed to find a way to make things work, no matter what. Watching my dear friend evolve as an artist over the years, and observing how her talent shone through and matured as a result of the blood and sweat she has put into her work, I feel truly humbled. I am honoured to have had the opportunity to work on this book, with her beautiful paintings as its focus. This definitely is every bookmaker's dream project! I am still as much in awe of Shih Yun's abstract strokes as I was when I first encountered them. Every single one of her masterpieces, much like our friendship, thrived on the absence of any pre-conceived expectations and they both feel a lot like fate. ●●●●



2014 PROJECT



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During her residency at Youkobo, Yeo Shih Yun further explored the unusual means of making art using toy robots. These little “machines” inform the creative process by replacing the personal touch or signature stroke with a mechanical means. The result is a collaboration between the toy robots and the artist. Shih Yun also collaborated with her former graphic design classmate from LASALLE College of the Arts (1999–2001), Kunihiro Masuko, and his technician Yoshimi Yomogida, who has more than 30 years of experience in offset printing.

Kunihiro Masuko had recently taken over his father’s print shop and had a printing machine that could print up to A3 size in a single colour and was good for short print-runs. The process of offset printing is often very precise and perfect. And yet, in this collaboration with Mr. Yomogida, the artists broke almost every rule in the tradition. First, the oil-based ink was mixed directly in the roller. Then, the “ghost” image created by using insufficient ink was printed onto the works. Each print was turned and printed up to three times, inducing a layered effect. The results of the 500 prints were very spontaneous, and their colours slightly varied, so no two prints were totally identical.

The process of creating the final wall installation started with collecting the marks from the toy robots using Sumi ink on a roll of paper. Digital photographs of the most interesting marks were taken, then layered to form new compositions using Adobe Photoshop, an image-editing software. A film and plate of the final 30cm by 30cm composition were cast and printed using the traditional offset printer model, the Heidelberg Printmaster QM. 40 prints were chosen out of the total of 500 in an installation at the Youkobo Art Space.

The decision to create a square composition was inspired by the concept of tiling, which uses one pattern to create a single, large visual. As an abstract painter, Shih Yun chose to form the pattern after her paintings, which are asymmetrical and random. Each installation was site-specific. Special thanks to Kunihiro Masuko, Yoshimi Yomogida, and Terminal Sate-light, in Arakawa-ku, Tokyo for their assistance in this work. ●●●●



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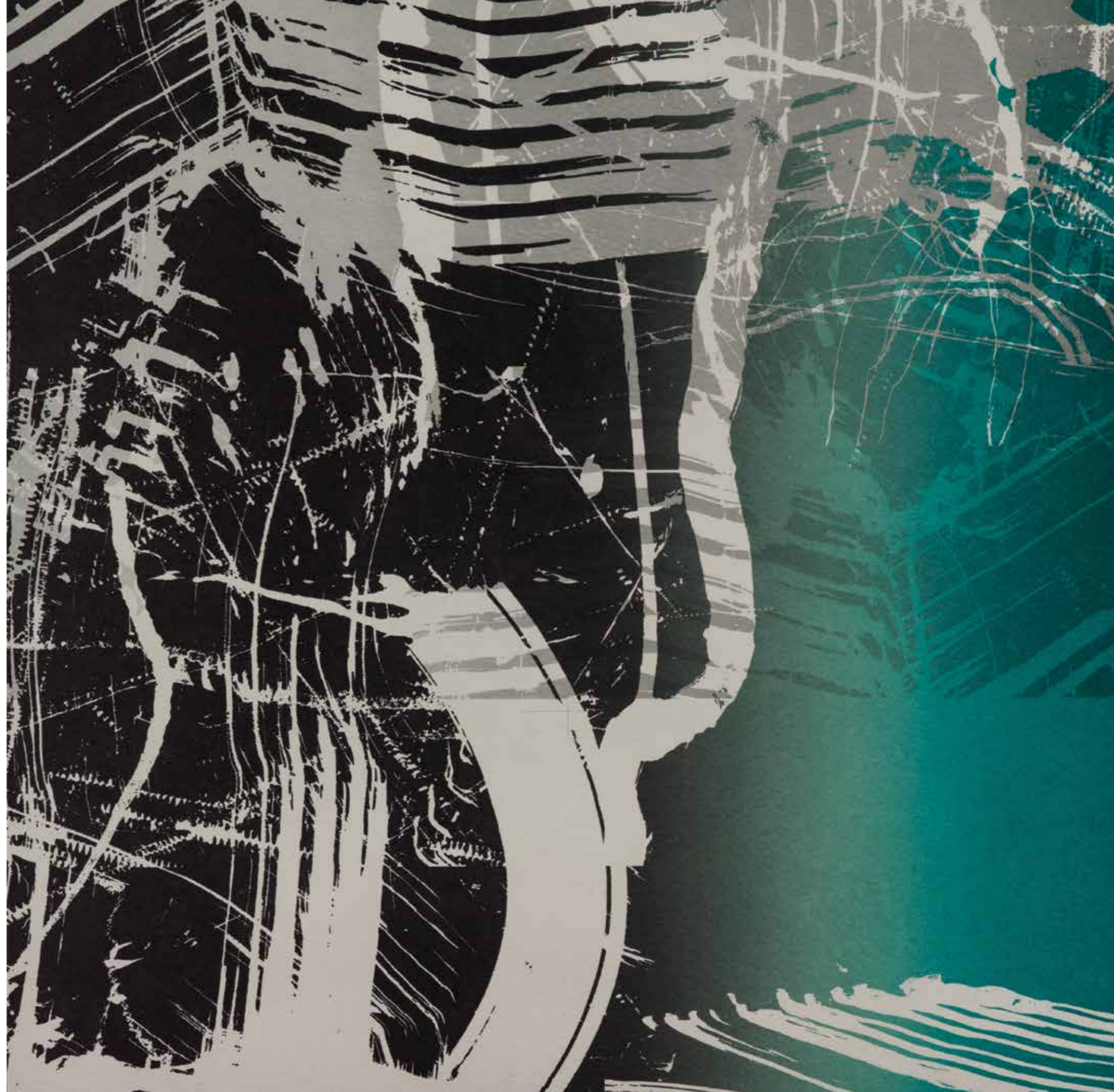
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Mr Yoshimi Yomogida printing in Terminal Sate-light in Arakawa-ku, Tokyo

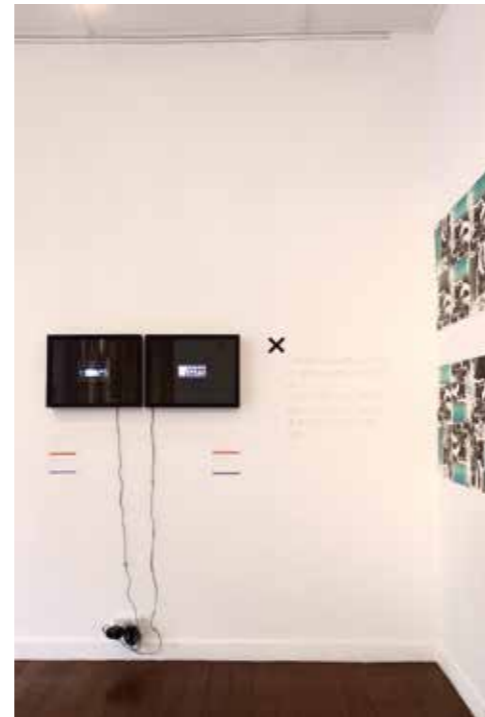
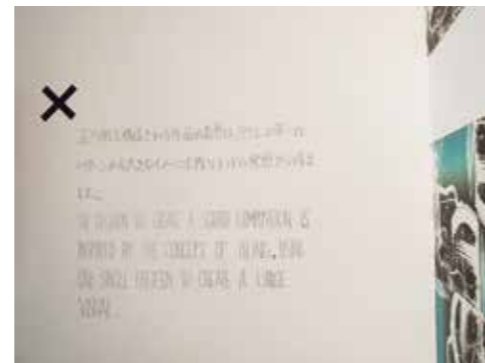






Installation view at Japan Creative Center

2012-2017



PROJECT 6581

2017



Robots Print, size variable, manipulated offset print paper, 2014

PROJECT 6581



Installation view at Youkobo Art Space



Youkobo Studio Process Robot Series #1-3, 27 x 23cm, photo transfer on wood, 2013
Collection of Mr Justin Lee



Robots Print installation, 150 x 240cm, manipulated offset print, 2013



2015
LKY

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“Mr Lee Kwan Yew planted a tree on 16 June 1963 and many more in his lifetime. I was not aware of this before his death. Without him, we will not have roughly two million trees and I am so grateful for his vision and commitment in making this green vision a reality. “Never mind the colours, just green up the city first. When the first plane lands, I want people to look at planted vegetation not ranked vegetation,” were Mr Lee’s words.”

– Yeo Shih Yun

Shih Yun’s love for the trees in Singapore led her to create Conversations with Trees, a project that began in 2011. In this series, indirectly inspired by her previous works, the idea was to combine the silkscreens of Lee Kwan Yew planting trees with the marks of Singapore trees on the same canvases. This series pays tribute to Lee Kwan Yew—the chief gardener of Singapore, a “City in a Garden”. ●●●●

2012 - 2017

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Without You There Would Be No Garden City, 30 x 30cm, silkscreen and acrylic on canvas, 2015

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LKY TRIBUTE



OPPOSITE
LKY Tribute #4,
 43 x 35cm, silkscreen ink and acrylic on canvas, 2015
FROM LEFT TO RIGHT
LKY Tribute #1,
 43 x 35cm, silkscreen ink and acrylic on canvas, 2015
LKY Tribute #2,
 43 x 35cm, silkscreen ink and acrylic on canvas, 2015
LKY Tribute #3,
 43 x 35cm, silkscreen ink and acrylic on canvas, 2015





LEFT
LKY Tribute #5,
43 x 35cm, silkscreen ink and acrylic on canvas, 2015

RIGHT
LKY Tribute #6,
43 x 35cm, silkscreen ink and acrylic on canvas, 2015

L K Y T R I B U T E

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LEFT
LKY Tribute #7,
43 x 35cm, silkscreen ink and acrylic on canvas, 2015

RIGHT
LKY Tribute #8,
43 x 35cm, silkscreen ink and acrylic on canvas, 2015



Thank You LKY Chief Gardener of Singapore, 40 x 30cm, silkscreen and glow in the dark paint on canvas, 2015

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Thank You for Being the Light, 28 x 40cm, Neon, 2015
Edition of 5



2015
WE ARE

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“Every piece of the artwork is created by the song “We Are Singapore” itself. I might have helped by pouring graphite powder and water onto blasting speaker membranes and catching the spills and vibrations on paper, but the real artist was the sound.”

— Yeo Shih Yun

For such a young country to reach where it has in just a span of 50 years is a remarkable feat worth celebrating. “Everyone should celebrate. Everyone has benefitted from living here and everyone should mark this notable achievement that not many countries in the modern era have the chance to experience — to celebrate a real achievement”, says the artist. As an artist, she feels very fortunate to be based in Singapore.

Her way of celebrating was to use music and art to create a special set of artworks. This series uses the national song, familiar to all Singaporeans, as the main source of inspiration.

Music is an important part of Shih Yun’s painting process; it is always in the background. When and how a mark is made is influenced by the rhythm, tempo and mood of the music at the moment. Continuing the use of the colour black, Shih Yun creates captivating pieces. However, in these works, the music becomes the artist and the artist becomes the instrument. The start of the series of works is the beginning of the song and when the song ends, the works are finished. After that, the marks made by the music are scanned digitally, selected by the artist and printed on circled shaped plexiglass panels, reminding us of the vital role of the speakers. ●●●●

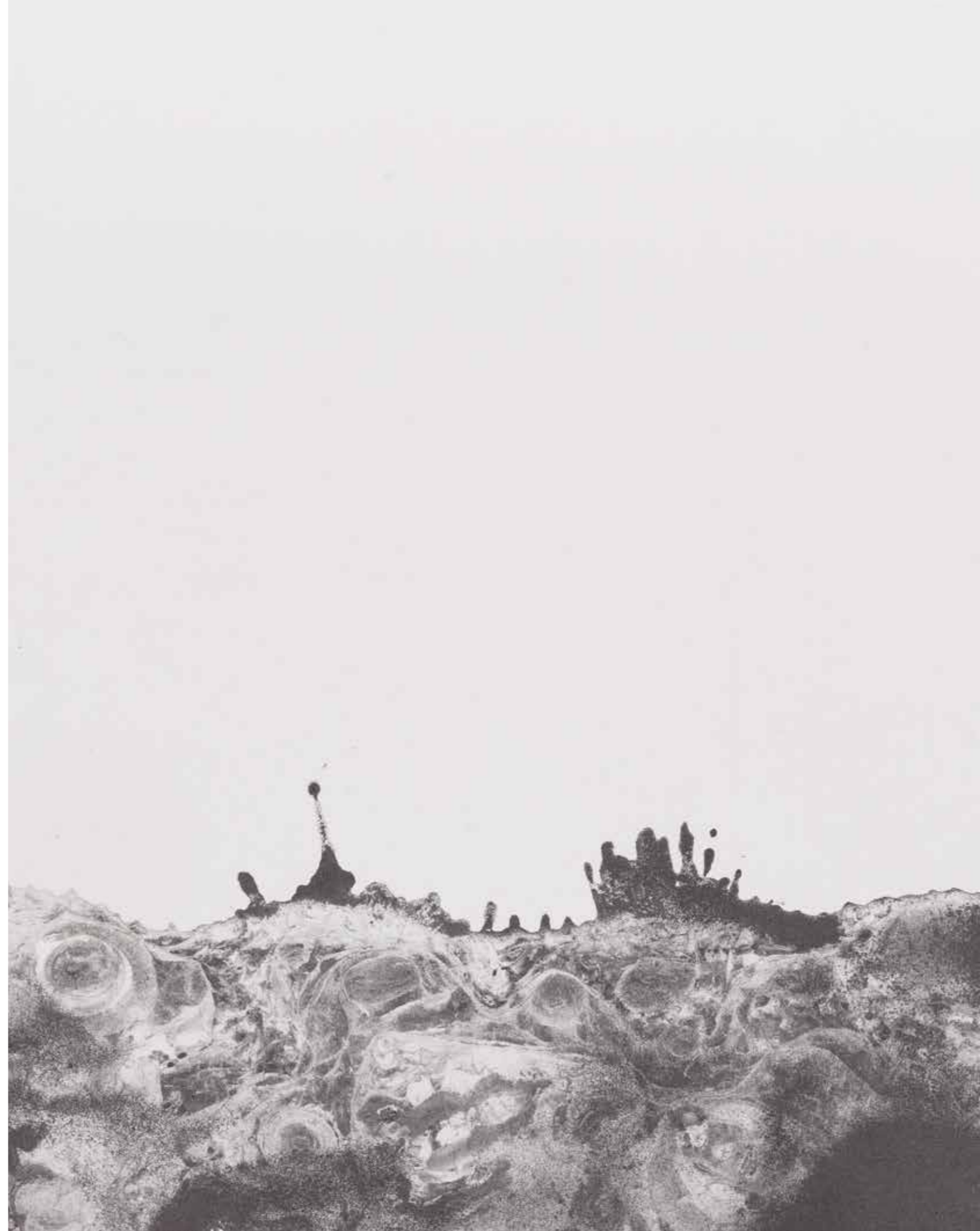


WE ARE SINGAPORE



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FROM LEFT TO RIGHT
Life,
29 × 20cm, graphite on board, 2015
Lion Roar,
29 × 20cm, graphite on board, 2015
Stand Together,
29 × 20cm, graphite on board, 2015
Future,
29 × 20cm, graphite on board, 2015
Peace,
29 × 20cm, graphite on board, 2015



“Chance served to break down the ego’s resistance to the unconscious.”
— John Cage



We are Singapore (looped video), 4:09mins, 50 x 40cm (framed), 2015



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT
Lion Roar,
30cm diameter, UV print on Plexiglass, 2015
Edition of 5
Life,
30cm diameter, UV print on Plexiglass, 2015
Edition of 5
Stand Together,
30cm diameter, UV print on Plexiglass, 2015
Edition of 5
Future,
30cm diameter, UV print on Plexiglass, 2015
Edition of 5
Peace,
30cm diameter, UV print on Plexiglass, 2015
Edition of 5

2017

玄 AMBIGUOUS

SINGAPORE

In this series of paintings, using her usual abstraction and silkscreen technique, the artist plays with colours, light, equivocal spaces and repetition— inviting viewers to perceive beyond the visible.

This series of 10 silkscreen paintings is inspired by the Chinese character “玄”. By studying different variations of this character over time, she constructed her own versions. The “stroke” was then painted with Chinese ink onto positive film. Once the screen was manufactured, the foreground and background colours were carefully chosen for each painting, before the ink was spread over the “stroke” using a squeegee.

This marked a means of painting that removes traces of the artist’s hand, producing almost a serial “stroke” suggestive of mass production. However, even though the “stroke” is identical, through the use of different foreground and background colours and varying the strength of pushing the ink through the squeegee, the results vary drastically, with some appearing to vibrate and pop out while others recede and almost disappear. Like Jasper Johns’ technique for his number paintings, the artist let the process of silkscreening, the “stroke” and the background painting dictate the structure of the painting. This allowed her to concentrate on the qualities of the paint itself, exploring colour, light and equivocal spaces.

By repetition of the stroke, the artist achieved an effect in which the actual content—the “stroke” (visible) seems to disappear (invisible), leaving one to become conscious only of the visual pattern it makes. ●●●●



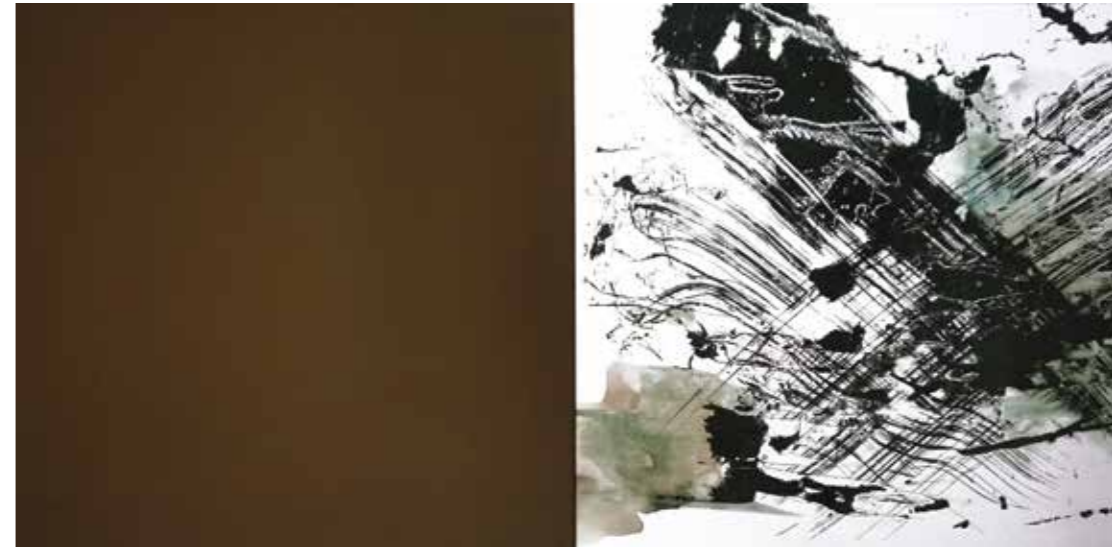


Ambiguous Series #1-10,
60 x 60cm, silkscreen ink and acrylic on canvas, 2017
Private collection

2017
SCREENPAINTINGS
SINGAPORE

Combining the techniques of painting and silkscreening to form a unique style that the artists calls "screenpainting", this series of works is an exceptional demonstration of the experimentation in Yeo Shih Yun's artistic process. The silkscreening technique used here not the same as in the Warhol days - treating the method like a mechanical task - but is instead transformed into the artist's brush. Silk screening technique used here is not treating it as a machine in Andy Warhol's days but as another type of artist's brush.

Positive films are created when the artist paints on them using large Chinese brushes and ink. During the process of exposing the screens, some marks are lost due to the fragile nature of the ink on the surface of the film. The artist is intrigued by what is captured in the final screen and views this as a 'spontaneous' collaboration with the silkscreen maker. ●●●●



Forest Wind, 55 x 110cm, silkscreen paint and ink on canvas, 2017, Private collection



Coral Waves, 55 x 110cm, silkscreen paint and ink on canvas, 2017



Exuberance Blue, 100 x 170cm, silkscreen paint and ink on linen, 2017



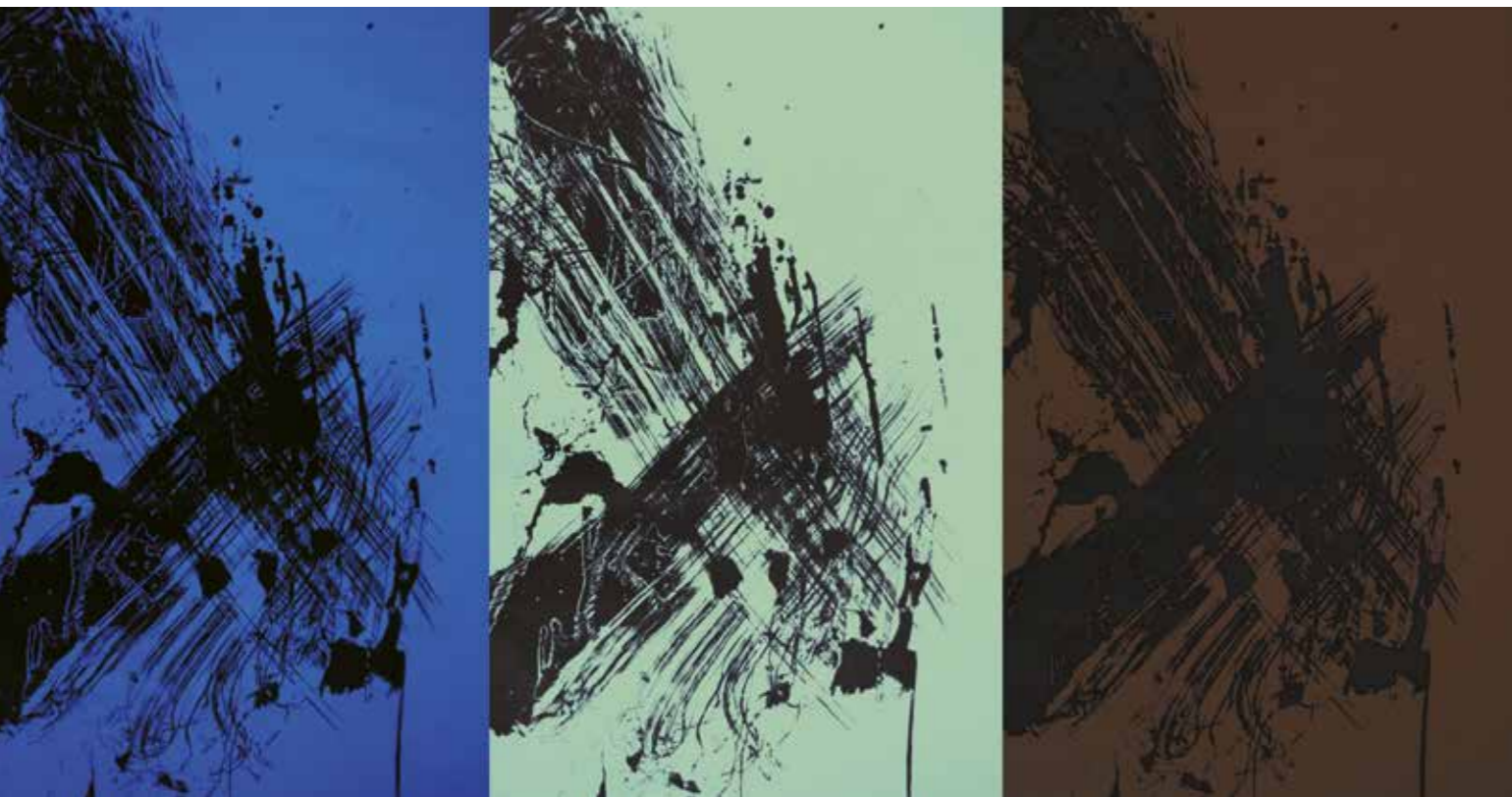
A thousand blue skies, 100 x 170cm, silkscreen paint and ink on linen, 2017

2012-2017

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Black Pearl, 90 x 177cm, silkscreen paint on canvas, 2017



Chromium Green, 90 x 177cm, silkscreen paint on canvas, 2017

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Water水, 30 x 30cm, silkscreen and ink on canvas, 2017



Wood土, 30 x 30cm, silkscreen and ink on canvas, 2017



Metal金, 30 x 30cm, silkscreen and ink on canvas, 2017



Earth土, 30 x 30cm, silkscreen and ink on canvas, 2017



Fire火, 30 x 30cm, silkscreen and ink on canvas, 2017

EPILOGUE

YEO SHIH YUN
FEBRUARY 2017

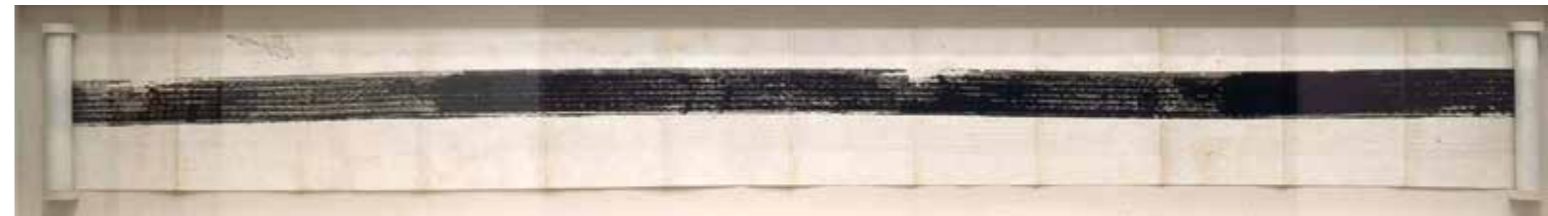
“What could be more interesting, or in the end, more ecstatic than those rare moments when you see another person look at something you’ve made, and realise that they got it exactly, that your heart jumped to their heart with nothing in between.”

— Robert Motherwell

This monograph feels to me a stock-taking of my art practice from 2000 to 2017—a total of 18 years. It seems overwhelming at first, almost chaotic. As details of the book fell into place, after much discussion with Kelley, the chaos, too, slowly fell into order. What is common from the beginning until now is: ink is the catalyst. I was first mesmerised by ink while I was a student in a class—“Ambiguous Space”, it was called—conducted by Mr. Rasid when I was schooling at LASALLE-SIA College of the Arts. I remember thinking how elegant it was when the ink mixed together with water and the way the two elements interacted on watercolour paper. I have not stopped experimenting with ink since. While I was in LASALLE, I seized the opportunity to learn from Chua Ek Kay, a well-known and respected ink master in Singapore. He became my mentor and subsequently, an important person in my artistic life. I learnt substantial techniques and the fact that ink has a soul from him.

I continued to pursue ink and its elusive qualities when I furthered my studies at the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI). I was searching, seeking to draw out the qualities of ink when it was uncoupled from its perfect match of rice paper and a Chinese brush. I began experimenting with using watercolour paper, rollerblades and bouncy balls while I was at SFAI. It was also in the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) where I found my Gods: the Abstract Expressionists. After that encounter, I read almost all the books in my school library on them, day and night. The more I read about their art, lives and quotes, the more I wanted to be like them, I wanted to live in that moment and do what they did in New York during the 1950s and 1960s. I guess that was the instant I made up my mind—I wanted to be a full-time artist when I returned home.

The simplicity and purity of *Automobile Tire Print*, a seminal artwork I encountered at SFMOMA, was embedded into my subconscious and has inspired a number of my works and collaborations. While in SFAI, Andy Warhol, Jackson Pollock and Eva Hesse were the three artists I was fascinated with. Andy Warhol’s works motivated me to take up silkscreen printing as an elective in SFAI, and I was hooked ever since. This led to many works using silkscreen printing, and eventually to the piece *Conversations with Trees* commissioned by the Singapore Art Museum. Pollock introduced me to the amazing world of Abstract Expressionism and showed me how painting can be executed so beautifully without a brush. I admired Eva Hesse’s character, and her resilience to find her voice in an art world dominated by male artists in the 1960s. Also, I was influenced by her willingness to let the materials and the process dominate her works.



Automobile Tire Print (a collaboration piece between John Cage and Robert Rauschenberg), 41.9 × 726.4cm, paint on 20 sheets of paper mounted on fabric, 1953
© 2017 Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Even until now, I am still inspired by the Abstract Expressionists. Their spontaneous gesture, and the physical act of creating marks still intrigues me immensely and makes my heart skip a beat. This has not changed a bit. Black, a colour I was addicted to since I started my practice, still remains alluring to me. However, I now have a newfound appreciation of colours and a desire to play with them more using pigments in the near future. I am also beginning to use much larger—taller than me even—screens and combining it with an abstract painting style. I call them screenpaintings. I am still captivated by the qualities of silkscreen since I started using them in 2007, producing unexpected and unpredictable results that I much value. Large-scale works by Christopher Wool have also touched and inspired me in recent years.

I guess after 18 years, what has changed is how, after studying the geniuses of these artists through their works, I am trying to find its relevance in today’s world and reinterpreting it in my own way, style and attitude. I may not be in New York, but Asia is still as exciting and I hope to continue this long journey as an artist for as long as I live. The art scene in Singapore is promising and, having been around for long enough, I am blessed to be a part of the strong community of driven artists.

I seek to create art that will bring life to the audience when they look at my works, and to transfer energy from my works to the audience. Martha Graham, an experimental dancer, once said, “There is a vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and will be lost.”

This book is the end of my documentation of the best of my art practice from 2000 to 2017. However, the completion of this book marks a fresh start for me as an artist. I wish to continue to create, to collaborate with more artists and “things”. To never-ending discoveries, complexities, the beauty of art and life. Cheers. ●●●●

COLLABORATIONS

2001

KIM WEINBERG,
MICHEAL GILBERT,
KATHELEEN LI
USA



2002

KIM WEINBERG
USA

2003

JAMES
HOLDSWORTH
UK

SIMON JAMES
UK

LAURA PRIKULE
Latvia

MICHEAL GILBERT
USA

2004

WYN-LYN TAN
Singapore



CHAN MEI HSIEN
Singapore



2005

LYNN LOO
UK/Singapore

JOYCE CHIN
Singapore

2005

TAY BEE AYE
Singapore



KATHELEEN LI
USA

VALERIE NG
Malaysia/Singapore



2006

STEVE BLACK
USA/Singapore

VALERIE NG
Malaysia/Singapore

2008

WYN-LYN TAN
Singapore

HIROFUMI
MATSUZAKI
Japan



ALBA ESCAYO
Spain



MAGDALENA
SURANYI
Argentina/UK



CHAN MEI HSIEN
Singapore



2009

KATJA PAL
Slovenia



PAZ LOPEZ
Spain

RUNE SØCHTING
Denmark

PAUL CAMPBELL
USA



2011

LAUDI ABILAMA
Lebanon/UK



MICHEAL AMTER
USA

KATJA PAL
Slovenia

2012

ALBA ESCAYO
Spain

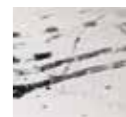
OH CHAI HO
QUEK KIAT SING
TAK BAK CHIANG
Singapore

2014

KUNYOUNG
CHANG
Korea



KATHELEEN LI
USA



ALBA ESCAYO
Spain

2014

LISA CHANDLER
New Zealand

NATALIA LUDMILA
Mexico

PAUL CAMPBELL
USA



LEO LIU
China

HSIENG LU FANG
Taiwan

JUSTIN LEE
Singapore

2015

KIM KEI
USA

2017

JO DARVELL
Australia



ARTIST'S CV



YEO SHIH YUN
(b. 1976, Singapore)

EDUCATION

2001–2002

San Francisco Art Institute,
San Francisco, California
Post Baccalaureate Program (Painting)

1998–2001

LASALLE-SIA College of the Arts, Singapore
Diploma in Communication Design (Distinction)

1995–1998

National University of Singapore, Singapore
Bachelor of Business Administration (Merit)

LECTURES & PROFESSIONAL WORKS

Founder of Artist-run Space
INSTINC, Singapore

Adjunct Lecturer
LASALLE College of the Arts, Masters in Arts
Management

Adjunct Instructor
Miyazaki Art Center, Japan

Conference Speaker
Tainan Art and Culture Conference, Taiwan

Artist's Talk
LW44, Munich, Germany

Artist's Talk
Galerie Steph, Singapore

Artist's Talk
LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore

Guest Speaker, Air Volume 2
Youkobo Art Space, Tokyo, Japan

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2014

Choreographed Collisions
Galerie Steph, Singapore

2013

Learning from Trees
Art Forum, Singapore

2011

Traces of Nature
Community Wall, Esplanade, Singapore

43200 Minutes in Munich
LW44, Munich, Germany

2010

408 hours in Itoshima
Studio Kura Gallery, Fukuoka, Japan

2007

In the Raw
Knoll Gallery, Singapore

2006

Black Rain
INSTINC, Singapore

2005

Mini Me
INSTINC, Singapore

2004

Urbanseries
Anthropology Gallery, Singapore

2003

log:one03
Block43 Studio Gallery, Singapore

New Finds
Art Forum, Singapore

2002

Moment
Intermezzo, Singapore

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2017

Esplanade 15th Anniversary Exhibition - 80cm²
Esplanade Tunnel, Singapore

Pacifico, Alba Esacyo and Selected Collaborations
with Yeo Shih Yun
Antonio De Suñer, Madrid, Spain

All That Is Changing Jo Darvall & Yeo Shih Yun
Australia High Commission, Singapore

Instinctive 1.0: (in)Visible
Ion Art Gallery, Singapore

2016

South by Southeast: Art from Singapore
Yibo Gallery, Shanghai, China

The Farrer Park Company Art Collection
One Farrer Hotel, Singapore

2015

Remembering LKY
INSTINC and One Raffles Place Atrium, Singapore

aSita
Artspace222, Singapore

Scholars & Ink
NUS Museum, Singapore

These Sacred Things
Jendela Visual Arts Space, Esplanade, Singapore

2014

INSTINC10: Celebrating a Decade of Art
and Collaboration
Studio 67 Gallery Singapore

Project 6581
Japan Creative Center, Singapore

2013

Abstract Innovation
One East Asia, Singapore

Robotic Love (Yeo Shih Yun and Justin Lee)
Youkobo Art Space, Tokyo, Japan

2012

墨 (Ink)
Jendela Visual Arts Space, Esplanade, Singapore
Sovereign Asian Art Prize Finalists Exhibition
Marina Bay Sands, Singapore

Rhythm Section
Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) Galleries 1 & 2,
Singapore

2008

Semi Automatic
Lesley Heller Workspace, New York City, USA

Lyrical Abstraction, Works by Jeremy Sharma
and Yeo Shih Yun
Singapore Art Museum, Singapore

Itoshima Art Farm
Fukuoka, Japan

Global Village 2012
Projekt 072, Alkmaar, The Netherlands

2011

New Readings
Jendela Visual Arts Space, Esplanade, Singapore
43200 Minutes in Munich
LW44, Munich, Germany

2010

408 hours in Itoshima
Studiokura, Fukuoka, Japan

Singapore Internationale 10th Anniversary
The Arts House, Singapore

Coney Island Abstract
Campbell Studio, Brooklyn, New York, USA

2009

Surfaces
Singapore Tyler Print Institute, Singapore

Ignite
The Art Loft at The Volvo showroom, Singapore

Convergence Point 1 & 2
INSTINC and Telok Kurau Gallery, Singapore

Art Joke(r)s
INSTINC, Singapore

Yeo Shih Yun – Sarah Boulard
Cobalt International Gallery, Brussels, Belgium

Yang Fudong 'Seven Intellectuals in
Bamboo Forest' & Shih Yun Yeo 'Diary'
Stiftelsen3,14 Gallery, Norway

Hello World
Ito Folk Art Museum, Fukuoka, Japan

NUS Alumni Art Exhibition
Shaw Foundation Alumni House, Singapore

Introducing New Artists
FOST Gallery, Singapore

Spring Lights
Artvine Gallery, Amsterdam, Netherlands

2008

Proof V
Alliance Française de Singapour, Singapore

Light from the East
Artvine Gallery, Amsterdam, Netherlands

Lindart
Museum Castle, Lendava, Slovenia

Eye Openers
Bains:Connective, Brussels, Belgium

How Dare You
Stockartist's Room, Berlin, Germany

Simply Saturday
INSTINC, Singapore

Random Starts
The Art Loft at The Volvo Showroom, Singapore

2007

Limited/Unlimited
Singapore Tyler Print Institute, Singapore

Moments on White
Osage SoHo, Hong Kong

26th UOB Painting of the Year Exhibition
Jendela@Esplanade, Singapore

Artrueda
Citibella, Singapore

My Favourite Moleskine
Page One @ Vivocity, Singapore

Moments on White
Osage Atelier, Singapore

2006

Rhodia No. 12 Project Exhibition
BooksActually, Singapore

Rhodia No. 12 Project Exhibition
Kapok, Hong Kong

Micro-Macro: 153
INSTINC, Singapore

3rd International Miniart Exchange Exhibition
Queen B's Gallery, Canada

Parallel Journeys
Pan Pacific Hotel, Public Art Space, Singapore

Mono-chromatic
INSTINC, Singapore

2005

Ring Around the Rosy, Pocketful of Posies...
Your Mother Gallery, Singapore

Labculture Singapore
The Substation & PVA (UK), Singapore

Unspoken Words
INSTINC, Singapore

Visual Conversations
INSTINC, Singapore

Now & Then
INSTINC, Singapore

GONG XI FA CAI
INSTINC, Singapore

INK interpretations
INSTINC, Singapore

2004

Exit
Intrude Gallery, Melbourne, Australia

Cut
INSTINC, Singapore

2003

Art & Fashion Asia 2003
Art Seasons Gallery, Singapore

The Big Small Show-Art Jam 2003
Art Seasons Gallery, Singapore

The Artist Village Public Art Library
Singapore Art Museum, Singapore

Repetition/Recollection
Block43 Studio Gallery, Singapore

2002

Made In Singapore
Art Seasons Gallery, Singapore

SFAI Spring Show
San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco,
California

Artists' Books Exhibition
San Francisco Art Institute, California

1999

18th UOB Painting of the Year Exhibition
UOB Plaza, Singapore

AWARDS

- 2012**
Sovereign Asian Art Prize People's Choice Award
- 2011**
Sovereign Asian Art Prize Singapore Top 20 Finalists
- 2007**
26th UOB Singapore Painting of the Year Competition, Highly Commended Entry Abstract category
26th UOB Singapore Painting of the Year Competition, Certificate of Distinction Abstract category
- 1999**
18th UOB Singapore Painting of the Year Competition, Highly Commended Entry Abstract category

PERFORMANCES

- 2009**
Impulse, live painting performance by Yeo Shih Yun (Singapore) and Magdalena Suranyi (Argentina)
Stifelsen Kulturhuset USF (United Sardine Factory), Bergen, Norway

- 2008**
32-23 Mind the Gap, live painting performance by Yeo Shih Yun (Singapore) and Magdalena Suranyi (Argentina)
Bains:Connective, Belgium, Brussel

SCREENINGS

- 2010**
Film Screening "randomA", Collaboration with Rune Søchting (Denmark)
LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore

GRANTS

- 2014**
Market Development Grant (NAC) for South by Southeast, Shanghai
Promotion and Presentation Grant (NAC) for INSTINC 10: a Decade of Art and Collaboration

- 2012**
Singapore International Foundation Grant for Kinetica Art Fair, London

- 2010**
Singapore International Foundation Grant for New York City Art Project, USA

- 2009**
Arts Professional Development Grant for Residency at USF, Norway

- 2008**
Artist Residency Grant (NAC) for Residency at Bains:Connective, Belgium, Brussels

- 2003**
Emerging Artist Grant, National Arts Council, Singapore

AUCTIONS

- Christie's Asia: Sovereign Asian Art Prize Singapore
- Auction@ArtScience Museum
Marina Bay Sands, Singapore
- National University of Singapore
Charity Art Auction
Singapore

COMMISSIONS

- Singapore Art Museum
- WYNG Foundation Hong Kong
- Volvo Cars Singapore
- Penfolds Wine, Treasury Winery Estates Singapore
- The Westin Singapore Hotel at Marina Bay
- One Farrer Hotel & Spa Singapore
- The Four Seasons Hotel, Hangzhou at Westlake, China
- National Volunteer & Philanthropy Center Singapore
- Moët Hennessy Diageo Singapore
- Asia Pacific Breweries Singapore
- Marina Mandarin Hotel, Singapore

DONATIONS

- Esplanade 15th Anniversary 80cm² – Fund-raising for Esplanade Visual Arts Program
- The Impact of Giving Gala – Fund-raising for UWCSEA Foundation
- Project Stool – Fund-raising for Nanyang Girls' High School, Singapore
- Art intervention for Art Outreach, Auction at ArtScience Museum, Marina Bay Sands Singapore
- Chairity – Art & Design Against Cancer (Singapore Cancer Society)
- Transformation in Humanity (We CARE Community Services)
- National University of Singapore
Charity Art Auction
- Central City Artist Project USA (New Orleans Residency Program)

RESIDENCIES

- 2013**
Artist, Youkobo Art Space
Tokyo, Japan
- 2012**
Researcher, Youkobo Art Space
Tokyo, Japan
- 2011**
LW44
Munich, Germany
- 2010**
Studio Kura
Fukuoka, Japan
- 9th Atelier d'Artista
Gambassi Terme, Tuscany, Italy
- 2009**
Stifelsen Kulturhuset USF
Bergen, Norway
- 2008**
Lindart
Lendava, Slovenia
- Bains:Connective
Brussels, Belgium
- 2005**
PVA MediaLab(UK) & The Substation
Singapore

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

- Aspen Re Collection, Singapore
- Renaissance Shanghai Ming Jie, China
- Far East Organization, Singapore
- Marina at Keppel Bay, Singapore
- Renaissance Beijing Hotel, China
- Crowne Plaza Hotel, Jinan, China
- Sheraton Hotel, Santou, China
- Sheraton Hotel, Guiyang, China
- Duchess Residencies by UOL, Singapore
- Fortune Plaza, Beijing, China

CONTRIBUTORS

BOO SZE YANG

Boo Sze Yang draws inspiration from the city and events that take place around him for his paintings. He treats banal objects, modern architectural interiors and destructive scenes as metaphors for the human condition, transforming these into a symbol of contemporary life through his loose, gestural technique and use of a restrained palette to emphasise the materiality of paint.

His works are in the collections of the National Gallery Singapore, the Singapore Istana Art Collection, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Singapore, United Overseas Bank, Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, Simmons & Simmons Contemporary Art Collection, Urban Redevelopment Authority Singapore and Yingu Art Mansion in Beijing. He is featured in the publication *100 Painters of Tomorrow* published by Thames & Hudson in 2014.

CHANG YUEH SIANG

Chang Yueh Siang is the Curator of the Lee Kong Chian Collection at the NUS Museum. She has curated several exhibitions at the NUS Museum, including *Evening Climb: The Later Style of Lim Tze Peng* (2016), *Who Wants to Remember a War: War Drawings and Posters from the Ambassador Dato' N. Parameswaran Collection* (2016); *Scholars and Ink: Artists from NUS and the Alumni* (2015), *Between Here and Nanyang: Marco Hsu's Brief History of Malayan Art* (2014).

She has 10 years of experience in the museum profession, practising as a collections-based curator and presenting exhibitions, working with both historical and contemporary objects; working closely with artists on loans and commissions; and curating public programmes to accompany exhibitions.

KELLEY CHENG

Kelley Cheng is a veteran designer in Singapore, and an architectural graduate turned Jill-of-all-trades—magazine editor, writer, curator, spatial designer, graphic designer, entrepreneur—she has done it all. She runs her own publishing & design consultancy The Press Room, designing everything from books, brands, exhibitions, documentaries, and even stage and film set design. From F&B businesses to an art gallery, her “creations” are diverse and unpredictable. As a creative director, her graphic and branding projects include the Youth Olympic Games, Singapore Pavilion at the World Expo Yeosu 2012, The National Art Gallery Singapore, Art Stage Singapore, Singapore Writers’ Festival 2014, etc.

An active educator, she had served as adjunct lecturer in Visual Communications at the Nanyang Technological University and Glasgow School of Art, Singapore; she is also a frequent name on international design judging panels Red Dot Awards, Nagoya-Dol, Creative Circle Award, James Dyson Award, etc. Apart from design, Kelley is also a prominent force in the publishing world, the former Editorial & Creative Director of the Page One Publishing Group, she has conceptualised and published hundreds of books and is still continuing her bookmaking journey today as a prominent book designer in the global publishing scene.

MARJORIE CHU

Marjorie Chu was born in Shanghai, China in 1940 and is now a Singapore citizen. Born into a scholarly family from Suzhou, Marjorie's early education in China was exclusively in Chinese, and in school, she wrote in Chinese ink for most of her lessons.

Marjorie has always been close to artists, spending time with them in their studios, especially with artists like Tan Teo Kwang, the late David Kwo Dawei, Chen Wen Hsi and Chua Ek Kay. She learnt first hand from them “the way of the brush”, subsequently practising calligraphy, Taichi and life drawing.

Marjorie is a Founding Member of the Art Galleries Association of Singapore; lecturer to *Friends of the Museum*, Singapore. She established the National Museum Shops, Singapore. From 2005 to 2007 she was President of the Southeast Asian Ceramic Society (Singapore). Marjorie Chu is also the author of *Understanding Contemporary Southeast Asian Art* published in Singapore, 2003.

LOUIS HO

Louis Ho was a co-curator of the Singapore Biennale 2016: *An Atlas of Mirrors* and a curator at the Singapore Art Museum, where his focus is on the art of Malaysia, Myanmar and Brunei. His first exhibition for the museum was the permanent collection show, *After Utopia: Revisiting the Ideal in Asia Contemporary Art*. Prior to joining the Singapore Art Museum's curatorial team, Louis Ho was an independent art historian, critic and curator. He also lectures at the National Institute of Education, and is a contributor to various art publications, such as Art Asia Pacific and Pipeline. He was trained in art history, and his research interests include Southeast Asian visual culture, particularly film, and the intersections between art and the social.

KOH SEOW CHUAN

Koh Seow Chuan is a local architect, and patron of arts and heritage. Koh's collections include historical documents pertaining to Singapore and Malaya, and artworks from Southeast Asia, with a focus on art from Singapore and Malaysia. As an art collector, he has made several important donations and loans to the Singapore Art Museum and the National Gallery including paintings by Lim Tze Peng, Wong Keen and Cheong Soo Pieng. He has also made significant contributions of 19th and 20th century historical documents to the National Library Board. Koh is the Founding Chairman of the National Gallery Singapore; he has also served as the Chairman of the Singapore Art Museum, and has been Chairman of the Visual Arts Cluster Advisory Board since 2013. Koh also sits on the Board of LASALLE College of the Arts and the VIVA Foundation for Children with Cancer. Apart from his art collecting, Koh is a world-renowned philatelist whose stamp collections have won numerous awards.

IOLA LENZI

Iola Lenzi is a Singapore-based art historian and curator of Southeast Asian art. Also a law graduate, she takes a synthetic view of Southeast Asian practices analysed through the lens of Asian culture and history. She has conceptualised numerous institutional exhibitions in Asia and Europe charting Southeast Asian art historical discourses predicated on regional art's critical dialogue with culture and society, and is the author and editor of four research publications that argue the singularising traits of Southeast Asian art. Since 2011 Lenzi has been actively involved in the Asian Art Histories MA programme of Singapore's LASALLE-Goldsmiths College of the Arts, developing and teaching the “Society and Politics in Asian Art” module.

A frequent organiser and participant of academic symposia on Asian art and culture, she is the author of *Museums of Southeast Asia* (Thames & Hudson, 2005) and has written Esplanade, Theatres on the Bay's *Visual Art Critical Review* since 2005. She is currently a PhD candidate at the School of Art, Design and Media at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, preparing her dissertation on early Southeast Asian contemporary art.

LIM XIN YU

Lim Xin Yu's interests are split equally between writing and design. Her experience has led her to embark on both design and writing projects, or a synaesthetic blend of both; with a diverse writing portfolio that ranges from science to art and design. Her articles have appeared in publications by A*STAR, the National Museum of Singapore, and CapitaLand Commercial Trust.

KAY LIU

Kay Liu's educational background lies in International Relations and Museum Studies; she is now seeking to obtain a Doctorate in Finance in Germany. Her profession makes valuable connections between art and market ends; she has worked in e-commerce, media, film and the art auction business. Born in 1975, she has resided in Europe for several years and worked in Beijing and Canada. Her publications include the *German Museums Series* and the *Classical Music Series*. Now, she writes a column in the *Economic Daily*, Taipei, discussing issues in global art. She has also worked as a curator in various art institutions, and is an executive director in an auction house, establishing an arts research organisation in 2016.

IAN WOO

Ian Woo is an artist and musician influenced by forms of modernism, perceptual abstraction and the sound structures of music improvisation. Woo's work is in the collection of major institutions such as ABN AMRO, Singapore Art Museum, The Istana Singapore, National Gallery Singapore, UBS, and the Mint Museum of Craft & Design, USA. His paintings are featured in the publication *Art Cities of the Future: 21st Century Avant-Gardes*, a publication by Phaidon 2013.



Diaries Bergen #2, 100 x 1000cm, ink on paper, 2009

"To be creative means to be in love with life. You can be creative only if you love life enough that you want to enhance its beauty, you want to bring a little more music to it, a little more poetry to it, a little more dance to it."

— Osho

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YEQ SHIH YUN
FEBRUARY 2017



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All my collectors who have supported me through the years. Especially, Toh Ee Loong, who bought my very first painting from Marjorie Chu of Art Forum in 2003; Marie Ng, for her belief in me and for providing me many opportunities to showcase my works overseas; Anthony Ng, for finding me in the midst of innumerable ink artists and being a dear friend and collector; and Audrey Phng, for her support over the years and nomination for Sovereign Asian Art Prize.

National Arts Council and Singapore International Foundation, for supporting my various art activities since 2003 and all my collaborators since my San Francisco Art Institute days. Thank you for the many fun painting adventures!

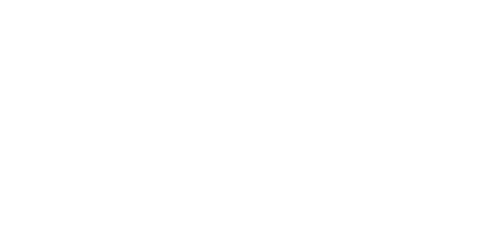
All the contributors to this book for their time and effort - Koh Seow Chuan, Marjorie Chu, Boo Sze Yang, Ian Woo, Louis Ng, Iola Lenzi, Chang Yueh Siang, Kelley Cheng, Lin Xin Yu and lastly, Kay Liu, who especially flew in from Taiwan to research on my art. Especially, Koh Seow Chuan, for giving me that huge push in 2006 by collecting my works from the Pan Pacific Hotel Public Art Space exhibition; Marjorie Chu, for believing in me and giving me my very first public group exhibition in 2003, NEW FINDS; and Kelley Cheng, a dear friend and the art director for this project, for her time and effort in understanding my art and conceptualising this book.

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INKPULSE chronicles the course of Yeo Shih Yun's 18 years long artistic journey, from the early 2000s when she first fell in love with ink and decided to pursue her dream to today having founded an independent art space that speaks volumes of the exceptional creative collaborations she has been a part of over the years and established an impressive oeuvre of works that ranges from pure abstraction to unconventional experimentation. With an ink-based, East-meets-West aesthetic - influenced by the tutelage of the eminent painter Chua Ek Kay - this monograph conceptualises the artist's pulsating pursuit for new depths and new perspectives within and beyond the realm of Abstract Expressionism.

Conversations with chance and a spontaneous search for poetic sentiments and dramatic unknowns are important features of Yeo Shih Yun's art-making process. "It is all about the marks," she says, "What I ultimately seek is the imperfection that comes with an unconstrained and intuitive technique".

This publication is a progressive catalogue of art she has done over the years, interspersed with accounts by the people she has met along the way - inspiring industry professionals like Marjorie Chu and Kay Liu, visionary collectors like Koh Seow Chuan, established curators like Iola Lenzi and Louis Ho as well as friends and fellow artists. It is only through reading their essays does the chaos fall into order, with the randomness of collective memories offering new, multi-layered dimensions to Yeo Shih Yun's art—the closing of one chapter and delving into the next.

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