

1-1-2009

# Contemporary Ink Paintings

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水墨演義

**Contemporary Ink Art Evolution**

2008 · 2009

卡特博士：  
前美国Marquette大学Haggerty  
艺术博物馆馆长，  
现为该校哲学系美学教授。  
同时兼任卡特国际艺术咨询网总裁、  
国际美学学会第一副主席和  
北京当代艺术馆名誉馆长。  
卡特博士曾发表大量的当代艺术和  
美学方面的文章和策划超过  
200个的现、当代艺术展。  
他还经常来往于世界各地讲授  
当代艺术与美学，  
并于近期(2008)在中国中央美院、  
北京大学、中国社会科学院  
和北京国际大学讲学。

以笔墨在纸上进行艺术创作是中国的传统艺术，正如本届画展中所体现的那样，中国艺术通过当代中国艺术家们的努力已获得了新的生机。在新建的北京奥林匹克体育场中举行的2008年奥林匹克盛会开幕式中，水墨画的重要性得到了再次彰显。当巨型卷轴在观众的眼前展露，并通过电视传递给世界各地的观众之时，灵动的舞者在画卷上纵横腾挪，留下了黑色的墨迹，仿佛出自于画家之笔。运动的躯体以模拟的姿势描绘着笔触，画家躯体的移动在纸上留下印迹，舞者的创作满怀激情而又优美地展现了身体之价值。这不仅仅是千真万确的舞蹈，同时也真实再现了绘画创作过程中画家挥毫毛笔的形体动作。奥林匹克的盛大场面之中，这一节目的内涵在于特别提升中国审美文化之中水墨画的重要程度。

为什么今天水墨画引起了浓厚的兴趣？一方面，这也许作为一种防守策略，努力阻止或至少减缓当代中国艺术家们对于西方现代和后现代艺术的手法的盲从。水墨画是中国文化独具魅力的标志之一，有许多有识之士都珍爱并且志在捍卫这种艺术传承。另一方面，这也被视为以一种开放的心态，面对与中国艺术和文化历史一脉相承的中国当代艺术未来的一种途径。

花点时间来比较现代和当代印度艺术家们对传统印度艺术的实践和中国今天的艺术家们的情况是很有益处的。两种文化境遇中的艺术家们，面临着如何看待在日益增长的全球艺术浪潮冲击下的传统艺术。在打造未来艺术的同时，东西方的文化必须表达新旧文化的张力，这其中有很多重要的区别。比如，英国殖民统治的影响意图转移对传统的印度艺术形式的关注，而中国艺术不象印度，从来没有经历过任何称得上西方殖民化的侵袭。

因此，中国的艺术与印度及其他艺术传统被欧洲殖民主义割断的文化迥然不同。除了师承于欧洲的传教士艺术家的努力之外——他们在十六和十七世纪将西方艺术引进中国，中国艺术历史领域受西方影响相当小。二十世纪的中国艺术家不仅仅意识到了这一点，并且仅在有限的范围内被印象派、野兽派等西方现代派发展所影响，正如在中国艺术家郑盛天（音译）的创作中所表现的那样。（1）

也许当今印度艺术的现状——某些人确信它在全球艺术世界领域内正崭露头角，将给那些渴望维系传统艺术与当代艺术之间纽带的中国艺术家们以鼓舞。尽管在印度殖民时期选择了跟随西方艺术形式，仍有印度艺术家和教师（例如罗宾德拉纳特·泰戈尔Abanindranath Tagore）认识到印度艺术的“亘古恢宏和生机犹存”，并且开始发展根植于印度的非西方模式的绘画形式。

（2）对当代中国水墨艺术的兴趣体现了类似的愿望，即以传统艺术的一种重要形式为中国当代艺术的方方面面奠定基础。

换句话说，现在当代中国艺术家的主要问题是“君在何处？”或者他们的艺术正向何处去？这些趋势就体现于旨在检验现今当代中国艺术前卫对水墨画探索成果的这届展览之中。这一中国水墨画新视角，标志着当今中国艺术的变化方向，正如传统的中国水墨画被视为对写实主义深有影响的支持者所推崇的经典形式，并受益于二十世纪中叶的得天独厚。比如，为庆祝北京和上海画院成立50周年，在北京中国美术馆举办了罕有可比的2007年水墨画展“辉煌岁月……”。这些全面回顾的作品，有选择地审视了从二十世纪五十年代到今天的发展，主要以写实主义的风格描绘了革命年代，颂扬了乡村以及实现工业化过程中人民的生活。

在当代中国水墨画艺术家中，高行健是首先引起我注意的人士之一。

（3）尽管高没有在本届画展中亮相，但是他的美学思想构建了一个理解本届画展作品的共同平台。正如高的画作一样，本届画展中的作品根植于中国水墨画着力于自由表现形式的中国水墨画的美学传统。摒弃了对颜色的依赖，灰度不同的千般笔法、黑与白勾勒出的色调、线条和形状构成了视觉的冲击力。艺术家的外表下挥洒出的能量或者说生命力（气）给所有这些元素赋予了特质。他们通过发挥无尽的创造力，并部分汲取了西方绘画的元素（秦风）展现了高超的现代艺术。画作中的墨迹通过光线、纹理的微妙变化和墨色的浸润，以及通过应用现代摄影技术（角度、景深、焦距）以及基于中国绘画理论的“散点透视法”更显丰厚。画作非常的洗炼，其表现力生发于内心感受或思想的灵感，而不仅仅拘泥于对外部世界的观察。他们能够将沉静的墨彩与亮色相映成趣（谷文达），或者对线条精妙组合（徐冰）。这些元素成为诗般意境，使观者浮想联翩，沉浸于创作的完美之中。

本届画展的艺术家们共同关注如何维护作品和传统间的纽带，然而无人满足于重复照搬前辈大师的技巧。相反，他们寻求用自己的创新来推进绘画艺术，同时对东西方理念和艺术创造的技巧兼收并蓄，在某些作品中还吸纳了禅的思想精髓。

这些艺术家都经历过社会变迁的多个不同的戏剧性的年代。多数人经受了由领袖毛泽东为推行社会革命计划而发动的文化大革命时期。一些人选择了旅居欧洲和美国，在那儿他们目睹了现代和后现代艺术的深刻嬗变，并跻身于国际艺术市场。

从某种程度上讲，中国二十世纪中叶的写实主义艺术的主导地位明显推迟了西方发展现代艺术实践的导入。然而，始于二十世纪八十年代的全球化时代已经带来了机遇和挑战，其中包括无法想象的市场机遇和面对世纪变幻思考中国艺术未来的诉求。但是，中国艺术家们的市场运作开始获得成功，部分原因是由于他们具有使创作适合西方口味的能力，这导致了一个严重的问题就是：如何保持一种真正的中国声音。本届画展上艺术家展现了他们寻求答案的努力。

关乎今天与传统绘画纽带的问题是：艺术家为谁作画、为什么目的而画？中国艺术家的先人包括学者、宫廷贵族或专业画匠。这些艺术家享受着皇帝的俸禄，对皇帝惟命是从。恰如宋朝朝廷那样，由于画院的建立使宫廷绘画日趋程式化，作画者必须顺从于画院的规矩。后来，在写实主义的外衣下，作画者俨然受命要为所谓的“社会利益”推进国家的目标。

对此问题，本届画展的艺术家们立足何处？他们似乎在另辟蹊径。也许他们最类似的历史先例是效法中国的文人画师，将丹青艺术作为一种内心感受和思想自由表达的方式。（4）文人画是指“具有文学、历史和哲学思想的大学问家”所绘的画作。那么问题是绘画为了自娱自乐？作为迎合市场的艺术的商品化形式？或者为了更加理性的目的？每一个问题的结论都是持续占据中国文化美学核心地位的一种美学表达。不仅如此，这些作品成为一种符号，激励创作反思，同时为存在于本性和人类生活之中的创造力的衍生提供了途径。在这些情况下，我们可以思考将个人作品作为发展人类的理解力的一种方法，使观者关注于纽带和联系，并将新的洞察力引进人类思想和艺术自身的创新秩序。

注释：

1. 赫兰德·科特 (Holland Cotter), “艺术及中国革命”回顾,《亚洲社会》, 纽约—2009年1月11日。科特提出了印象派及野兽派艺术对于当代艺术家郑盛天(音译)创作风景画的影响。

2. 赫兰德·科特 (Holland Cotter), “从折衷派及朦胧派到印度现代派”,《纽约时报》, 2008年8月20日。“印度旋律：南陀拉尔·博斯(1882—1966)艺术”回顾,费城艺术博物馆。在科特看来,为打造一种独特特色的印度艺术,博斯“复制了十五世纪阿旃陀佛教石窟中的壁画”,同时“倾心于现代形式,城市和乡村、印度教和伊斯兰教”,还留意于西方艺术及中国、日本水墨画的发展。

3. 柯蒂斯L. 卡特,高行健水墨画:1983—1993,展会目录,密尔沃基,哈格特易艺术馆,2003。该画展展出了高行健在莫莱特画院创作的水墨画选。

4. 高建平,《中国艺术的表现形式:从书法到绘画》(乌普萨拉,1996),第30至36页。

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Creating works of art with ink and brush on paper is a tradition in Chinese art that has received new life in the work of contemporary Chinese artists, including those represented in the current exhibition. The importance of ink paintings was revealed again in the opening ceremonies of the 2008 Olympics held in the new Beijing Olympic stadium. As a giant scroll unfolded before the spectators' eyes and via television to viewers throughout the world, live dancers moved expressively across the surface of the scroll leaving black ink markings as if from the brush of a painter. This metaphorical gesture of moving bodies executing brush strokes, analogous to the body movements of a painter marking the paper surface on which he creates beautifully articulates the importance of the body in creative expression. This is not only true for the dance but also in the bodily actions the painter takes to wield the brush during the creation of a painting. The inclusion of this process in the Olympic spectacle can only heighten the importance of ink brush painting in the aesthetic culture of China.

Why the interest in ink and brush paintings today? On one level, it is perhaps useful as a defensive tactic in an effort to stave off, or at least slow, the rush of contemporary Chinese artists to adopt western modern and post-modern approaches to art. Ink and brush painting is one of the distinctive marks of Chinese culture, and there are many who cherish and wish to maintain this artistic tradition. On the other hand, it can be seen as a way of remaining open to the future of Chinese contemporary art that is integrally connected to the evolving history of Chinese art and culture.

It is useful to compare for a brief moment the role of traditional Indian art in the practices of the modern and contemporary artists of India with the situation of artists in China today. Artists in both cultures face the challenge of how to view traditional art in the context of an increasingly global art world where the cultures of east and west must address the tensions of the old and the new while forging

the art of the future. There are important differences. Unlike the situation in India, for example, where British colonial influences were present and perhaps aimed to divert attention from traditional Indian styles of art, Chinese art did not experience any comparable western colonization efforts.

Hence the situation of art in China differs from that in India and other cultures whose artistic traditions were interrupted by the influences of European Colonialism. Apart from efforts of Jesuit artists trained in Europe, who introduced western art to China in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there was relatively little western influence in the history of Chinese art. Chinese artists in the twentieth century were aware of, and in limited spheres influenced by certain developments in Western modernism such as Impressionism and Fauvism as is suggested in the work of Chinese artist, Zheng Shengtian.

Perhaps the situation in Indian art today, which some believe is on the threshold of rising importance in the global art world, will offer some encouragement to Chinese artists who desire to maintain important connections between traditional art and contemporary art. Despite the option of following western art styles in India during the colonial era, there were Indian artists and teachers (for example Abanindranath Tagore) who recognized in Indian art a "grand ancient and still vibrant phenomenon" and set out to develop a type of painting based on Indian rather than western models. The interest of contemporary Chinese arts in ink and brush paintings suggests a similar desire to ground aspects of Chinese contemporary art in one of its important forms of traditional art.

To put it another way, the main question for contemporary Chinese artists today is, *Quo Vadis?* Or in what directions might their art be heading? One of these directions is embedded in the current exhibition dedicated to examining recent experiments with ink brush paintings by leading contemporary Chinese artists. This new interest in Chinese ink painting marks a change in direction for recent Chinese

art, as traditional Chinese ink painting was considered an elitist form of art by influential proponents of Socialist Realism and grew out of favor in mid-twentieth century. For example, there is little reference to ink and brush painting in the 2007 exhibition at the National Art Museum of Art in Beijing, "The Splendid Age..." celebrating the 50 year anniversary of the founding of Beijing Painting Academy and the Shanghai Institute. The works included in this comprehensive overview, which selectively surveys Chinese art from the 1950s to the present, mainly feature scenes from the revolutionary period celebrating the lives of people in rural or industrial settings in the manner of Socialist Realism.

Among contemporary Chinese ink and brush artists, Gao Xingjian was one of the first to come to my attention. Although Gao is not represented in the current exhibition, his aesthetic suggests a common platform for understanding the paintings in the current exhibition. Like the paintings of Gao, the paintings in the current exhibition are rooted in an aesthetic tradition of Chinese ink and brush painting which engages in free expression. Instead of relying on color, multiple strokes of grays, blacks and whites are used in marking out striking patterns of tonality, line, and shape. All of these elements are given their unique identity by a certain energy or vital force (qi) emerging from the persona of the artist. They display a modern edge by incorporating a spirit of endless innovation gleaned in part from western painting (Qin Feng). The ink surfaces in the paintings are enriched with subtle variations of light, texture, and ink saturation and by applying the techniques of modern photography (angle, depth of field and focus) alongside "diffuse point perspective" based on Chinese painting theory. The paintings are mainly abstract, with occasional elements of representation based on inner feelings or ideas rather than observations of the external world. They can be filled with threatening patches of dark ink, with corresponding patches of light (Gu Wenda), or by delicately sketched patches of lines (Xu Bing). These elements serve as visual poems to engage the viewer in active contemplative and imaginative participation in the completion of the creative act.

The artists in this exhibition share a common interest in maintaining a connection between their work today and tradition. Yet none is content merely to follow the repetitive techniques of past masters. Instead they seek to advance the art of painting with their own innovations, taking into account both eastern and western ideas and techniques for creating art. In some instances the work embodies the spirit of Zen philosophy.

These artists share a common social history having experienced multiple dramatic epochs of social change. Most lived during the period of cultural revolution initiated as a plan of social reform under leadership of Mao Zedung. Some chose periods of exile in Europe and America where they encountered radical changes in modern and postmodern art and were introduced to the international art market. For some, the dominant role of Socialist Realism in the mid-twentieth century art of China significantly deferred the intervention of developing modern artistic practices in the west. Still, the recent era of globalization beginning in the 1980s has brought opportunities and challenges including unimagined market opportunities and the need to consider the future of Chinese art in the face of a century of change. Still, the initial market success of Chinese artists, based in part on their ability to create

art suited to western tastes, raises serious questions for how to maintain an authentic Chinese voice. The artists in this exhibition represent one effort to find answers.

Also related to their connecting today's painting to tradition, is the question for whom, or for what purpose are the artists painting? Earlier generations of Chinese artists would have included learned men, court aristocrats, or professional artisans. These artists typically enjoyed the patronage of and were accountable to serve the emperor. When court painting became more formalized through the establishment of the art academy, as in the Song Court dynasty, painters were held accountable as well to the rules of the academy. Later, painters working under the aegis of Socialist Realism had a clear mandate to advance the aims of the state for the perceived benefit of society.

Where do the artists of this exhibition stand with respect to such questions? They seem to have taken a different path. Perhaps their closest historical precedent would be the Chinese literati painters who chose ink and brush work as a means of free expression of inner feeling and ideas. Literati painting is referred to as *shenren hua* meaning paintings done by "persons with great knowledge of literature, history and philosophy." The question is then, is this painting done for self-amusement? As a means of commodification of art for the market? Or for some larger intellectual purpose? The result in every instance is an expression of beauty which continues to occupy a central place in the aesthetic of Chinese culture. More than this, these works act as symbols that stimulate the mind to creative reflection and provide the means for increased appreciation for creativity in nature and in human life. In such instances we can think of the individual works as means of advancing human understanding by enabling the viewer to focus on connections and relations that bring new insight into the creative order of the human mind and of art itself.

1. Holland Cotter, Review of "Art and China's Revolution," *Asia Society*, New York, -January 11, 2009. Cotter suggests the influence of Impressionist and Fauvist art on contemporary artist Zheng Shentian's landscape painting.

3. Holland cotter, "Indian Modernism via an Eclectic and Elusive Artist," *New York Times*, August 20, 2008. Review of "Rhythms of Indian: The art of Nandalal Bose (1882-1966), Philadelphia Art Museum. According to Cotter, In forging a distinctly Indian art, Bose "copied Buddhist fifth century murals in the Buddhist caves at Ajanta," and also "paid close attention to popular forms, urban and rural, Hindu and Muslim," while also keeping an eye on developments in western art and Chinese and Japanese ink and brush paintings.

2. Curtis L. Carter, *Gao Xingjian Ink Paintings: 1983-1993*, Exhibition Catalogue, Milwaukee, Haggerty Museum of Art, 2003. The exhibition is based on a collection of Gao Xingjian's ink and brush paintings at the Morat-Institut für Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft, Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany.

4. Gao Jianping, *The Expressive Act in Chinese Art: From Calligraphy to Painting* (Uppsala, 1996), pp. 30- 36.