

Eastern Art at the Ashmolean Museum

An Ashmolean Museum Blog

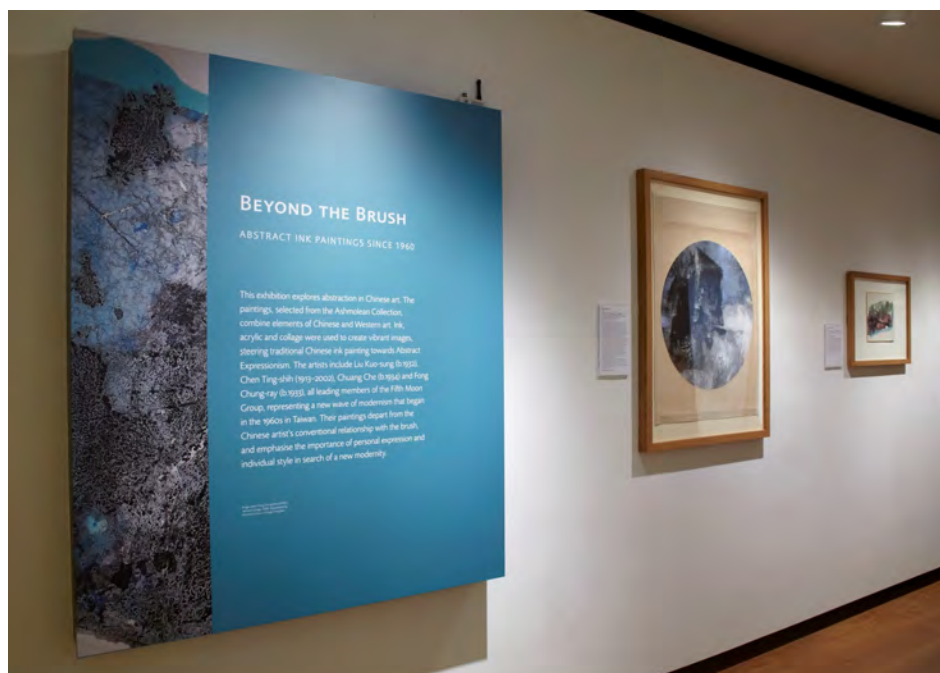
Beyond the Brush—Abstract Ink Painting since 1960

Posted on [May 17, 2017](#) by [yanl](#)

Exhibition dates: 4 April to 28 August 2017

Gallery 29 | Admission Free

The New display *Beyond the Brush—Abstract Ink Painting since 1960* in gallery 29 explores abstraction in Chinese art. The paintings, selected from the Ashmolean Collection, combine elements of Chinese and Western art. Ink, acrylic and collage were used to create vibrant images, steering traditional Chinese ink painting towards Abstract Expressionism. The artists include Liu Kuo-sung (b.1932), Chen Ting-shih (1913-2002), Chuang Che (b.1934) and Fong Chung-ray (b.1933), all leading members of the Fifth Moon Group, representing a new wave of modernism that began in the 1960s in Taiwan. Their paintings depart from the Chinese artist's conventional relationship with the brush, and emphasise the importance of personal expression and individual style in search of a new modernity.



Beyond the Brush: Abstract Ink Paintings since 1960 – Exhibition View

The Modern Art Movement in Taiwan Part I

In the 1960s a group of young artists in Taiwan believed that Chinese painting frozen into formality on the mainland and hidebound by conservatism in Taiwan, was at a standstill, and it was their mission to bring it to life. Abstract Expressionism, which was developed in New York in the 1940s, became a major source of their art creation. The Fifth Moon members met regularly to appreciate and critique one another's work, including Liu Kuo-sung, Chuang Che, Chen Ting-shih, Hung Hsien, and Hu Chi Chung. They also exhibited their works at art

shows held in May. They were not restricted by medium or technique, and used oils, acrylic, collage and Chinese ink to create a new Chinese painting responsive to the challenge of Western modernism. These stylistically diverse paintings illustrate a variety of new ink language in modern Chinese painting. Since 1960, a number of innovations initiated by a group of Taiwan artists have introduced new themes, techniques and ideas to Chinese painting, at the same time they serve to reaffirm the strength and vitality of the tradition itself. Although the Modern Art Movement began in Taiwan, its outlook from the very beginning was international.



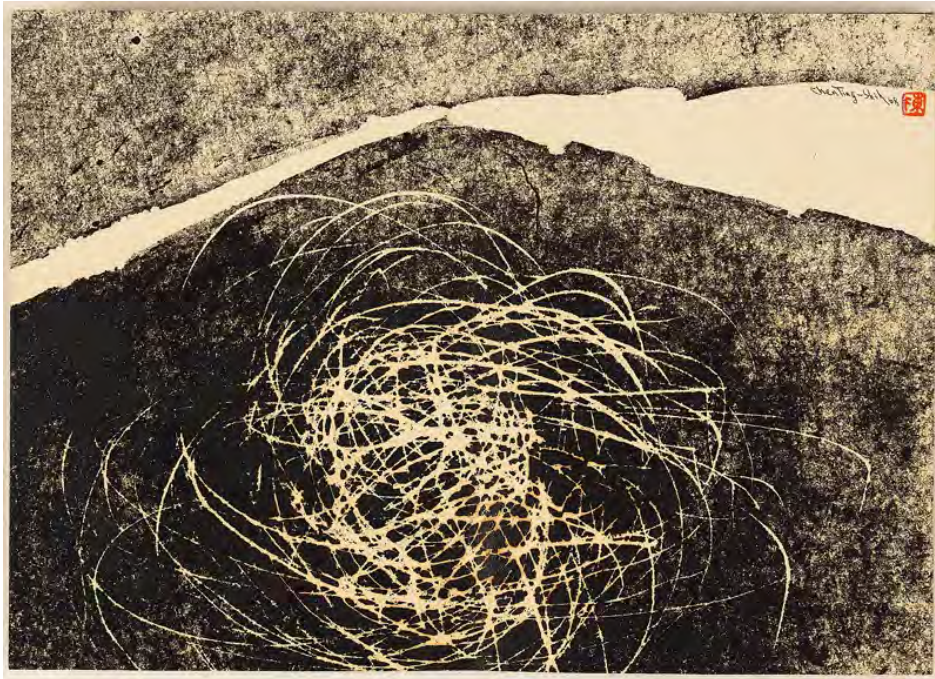
Beyond the Brush: Abstract Ink Paintings since 1960 – Exhibition View – On the left: Liu Kuo-sung, Abstract landscape, 1966, Sullivan Bequest © the Artist. EA2015.223; On the right: Chuang Che, Abstract, 1967, ink and colour on paper, 59.9 x 46.3 cm, Sullivan Bequest © the Artist. EA2015.77.

Liu Kuo-sung is one of founders of the Fifth Moon Group and a leading painter in Taiwan. Born in Bangbu, Anhui province, Liu began learning Chinese painting when he was fourteen years old. He moved to Taiwan with the National Revolutionary Military Orphan School in 1949. He changed his area of study to Western painting after entering university. During 1958 and 1959, he experimented with a number of Chinese and Western styles, feeling the influence of Cézanne, Klee, and Picasso. Since 1960 he has abandoned oil and canvas, and returned to the world of ink and paper. As early as the 1970s, Liu developed his theory about modern ink art, in his own words, “A brush is but dots and thread; ink is but colour and surface; light-ink strokes are but a way of creating texture.” His individual creative technique was marked by bold, sweeping brushstrokes and calligraphically-inspired lines. The two landscape paintings on display show results of Liu’s early experimental ink art. He invented Guosong paper made with coarse fibre to create white lines by stripping off the top layer to expose the rougher surface beneath and pulling out the fibres. He combined paint with collage and the calligraphic brushstroke to create his own vision of the natural world.



Liu Kuo-sung, Blue and black abstract landscape, 1970, ink and colour on paper, 270.7 x 16.6 cm, Sullivan Bequest © the Artist. EA2015.224

Chuang Che, born in Beijing, was introduced to art by his father when he was little. Chuang's father was Chuang Shang-Yen (1899-1980), a scholar and calligrapher who worked at the National Palace Museum in Beijing. Chuang Che moved to Taiwan in 1948. After graduated from Taiwan National Normal University in 1958, Chuang taught at Tunghai University. He joined the Fifth Moon Group and actively pushed the modernization of Chinese painting. He introduced lines, shapes and structures of calligraphy into his painting.



Chen Ting-shih, Black and white abstraction, 1968, fibre-board with string print, with oil-based ink, 27 x 19 cm, Sullivan Bequest © Artist Estate. EA2015.421.g

Chen Ting-shih (1913-2002) was born in Fujian, China. Although deaf at a young age, Chen studied Chinese painting at thirteen and taught himself oil painting. He left China for Taiwan in 1948 and has participated in various artistic circles such as the Fifth Moon Group, the Modern Graphic Art Association and the Modern Eyes Group. He was known as a representative of the abstract style. Chen created his signature technique using bagasse plates, the natural cracking of which became his unique artistic style. The painting *Abstraction* is created by pressing inked fibre-board over loosely coiled string. The entangled and spiralled threads are set afloat against a solid ink background, like sparkling in the dark. This album was circulated among artists of the younger generation whom Professor Michael Sullivan (1916-2013) met during his visit to Hong Kong in 1968. All were painters, except for the sculptors Cheung Yee (b.1936) and Van Lau (b.1933).

Yan Liu, Christensen Fellow in Chinese Painting.

This entry was posted in [Chinese Paintings Collection](#), [Curator Blog Post](#), [Exhibitions](#), [Temporary display](#), [Uncategorized](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#).

Eastern Art at the Ashmolean Museum

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Beyond the Brush—Abstract Ink Painting since 1960 part II

Posted on [May 17, 2017](#) by [yanl](#)

Exhibition dates: 4 April to 28 August 2017

Gallery 29 | Admission Free

The Modern Art Movement in Taiwan Part II

Fong Chung-Ray is a distinguished artist best known for his unique abstract painting. In 1949 he went to Taiwan where he received formal art training at the military's Cadre College of Arts and Crafts. After graduation, he worked as an officer and created art works for the Navy. In 1956 he abandoned realistic descriptive style and became more interested in abstract painting. In 1961 he joined the Fifth Moon Group and his work was influenced by Liu Kuo-sung.



Beyond the Brush: Abstract Ink Paintings since 1960 – Exhibition View, works by Fong Chung-Ray

Upon emigrating to America in 1975, Fong Chung-Ray became more interested in mixed-media and collage. In 1989 Fong introduced collage into his ink painting, and developed his distinguished style that blends the essence of Chinese literati painting and the spirit of modern Western art. He applied acrylic onto thin sheets of plastic to produce unpredictable patterns, and these patterns in turn are transferred onto papers or canvas. Such a process produced ragged, geometric shapes which blended Chinese calligraphy, European Cubism and paper mounting. His paintings blended the brush strokes of Chinese calligraphy with Abstract Expressionist features.



Fong Chung-ray, Blue, green, and black composition, 2008, ink and acrylic on layers Japanese paper, 27.1 x 24.3 cm, Sullivan Bequest, © Fong Chung Ray. EA2015.119

The paintings in this display were created by the artist in the last decade. Inspired by Liu Kuo-sung's encouragement, Fong Chung-Ray frequently uses Chinese calligraphy as visual elements; these paintings are excellent examples of turning Chinese calligraphy into expressive images through collage. Fong Chung-Ray names his works with numbers of production rather than more descriptive titles. He was recognised as the most sophisticated colourist of the group. Fong's colourism is distinguished by its subtle values and delicate hues. In the choice of main colours; he prefers black, pale grey, blue and violet.



Fong Chung-ray, Green, red, and black composition, 2008, ink and acrylic on layers Japanese paper, 24 x 27.2 cm, Sullivan Bequest, © Fong Chung Ray. EA2015.118

Chu Ge (alternative name Yuan Dexing) was a central figure in Taiwan's modern art movement as a poet, art critic, painter and sculptor. He went to Taiwan in 1949, in 1957 he joined in the modern poetry and painting movements, and used the pen name of Chu Ko.



Beyond the Brush: Abstract Ink Paintings since 1960 – Exhibition View with two works by Chu Ko

In 1965 Chu Ko started working at the National Palace Museum, his research on prehistoric artefacts and Chinese history became some sources of his artistic creation. In Herdsm an 's Song, the entangled calligraphic lines present artfully tied knots which were often used by people in ancient China to keep records before writing. From Chu's view, the aesthetic of Chinese art lies in the simple beauty of knots full of transformation.

Yan Liu, Christensen Fellow in Chinese Painting.

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Eastern Art at the Ashmolean Museum

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Beyond the Brush—Abstract Ink Painting since 1960 part III

Posted on [May 15, 2017](#) by [yanl](#)

Exhibition dates: 4 April to 28 August 2017

Gallery 29 | Admission Free

Experimental ink art in the Mainland and beyond

This exhibition also showcases a few experimental ink paintings by contemporary artists from mainland and Hong Kong whose works blend the spirit of Western Abstract Expressionism and an oriental aesthetic.



Beyond the Brush: Abstract Ink Paintings since 1960 – Exhibition View

Qiu Deshu (b. 1948), who is a gifted painter and calligrapher, began experimenting with ink on paper in creative ways when he saw Jackson Pollock's abstract painting at an exhibition in Shanghai in 1979. In the same year, he organised the Grass Society (Caocao huashe), one of the first dissident groups. After a year in America (1985-1986) he returned to Shanghai, and developed his unique technique "fissuring", or "transparent paper tear method". Qiu's experiment in ink painting began in the end of 1970s. Inspired by the crack in a flagstone by change in 1982, he started his "Fissure" series. He uses ink, colour and paper in a collage-like process indebted to the techniques used for mounting scrolls. In the painting *Ghostly figures and cracks*, he introduced graphic composition into ink painting, and the red marks in this image recall the collector's seals on ancient Chinese calligraphy and paintings (Image 2015. 267).



Qiu Deshu, Ghostly figures and cracks, before 7 May 1989, ink and colour on paper, 34.4 x 48.3 cm, Sullivan Bequest © the Artist. EA2015.267

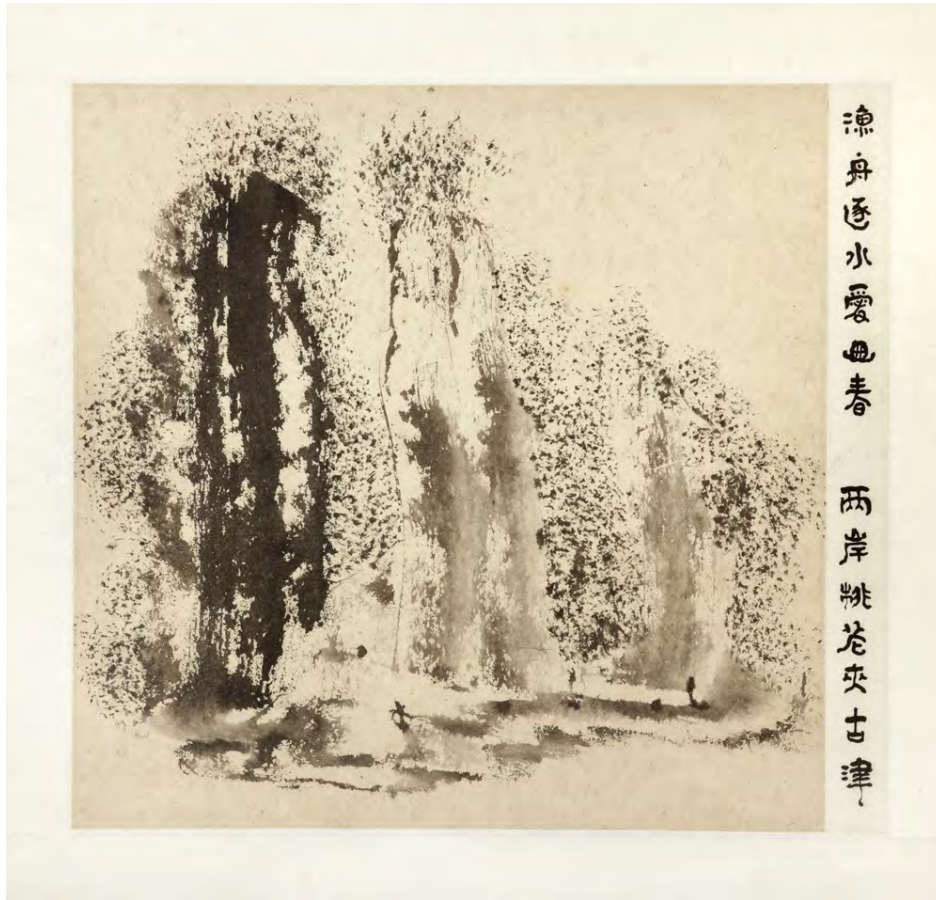
In his later work, he does not directly use ink and colour to make forms and draw line, but instead he applies ink and colour onto canvas and board before mounting the broken rice paper. By hitting and rubbing the surface of rice paper, the base colour can be reflected to form different tones, layers and textures.



Ng Yiu-chung, Landscape with red sun, 1970 – 1971, ink and colour on paper, 31.1 x 44.4 cm, Sullivan Bequest © the Artist. EA2015.222.e

Ng Yiu-chung (Wu Yaozhong, b. 1935) is a painter based in Hong Kong. In 1968 he studied painting under Lü Shoukun (1919-1975), who was a pioneering painter and initiated the New Ink Movement involved in pulling

modernist elements into ink painting in Hong Kong. In this landscape painting, Ng discarded the traditional vocabulary of texture-strokes, and built up his mountains with short, even, straight strokes, layer upon layer, as if they were bricks.



Lü Wu-chiu, Wang Wei's Peach Blossom Spring, 2004, ink on paper, 77.3 x 82.8 cm, Sullivan Bequest © the Artist.
EA2015.242.b

Lü Wu-chiu was born 1918 in Tanyang, Jiangsu province, as the second daughter of the painter and calligrapher Lü Fengzi, former president of the National Arts College in Suzhou. Lü received her early training in the art of portraiture, which at first she practised in embroidery, so well that her work was presented as gifts to foreign diplomats, winning her a fellowship to the United States. During her visit and study in North America in 1959-60, Lü Wu-chiu became interested in experimental ink painting. Her paintings take on the form of abstract expressionism and embody the essence of Chinese aesthetics.



Beyond the Brush: Abstract Ink Paintings since 1960 – Exhibition View

It is worth mentioning that all the exhibits are from the Sullivan Bequest. Professor Michael Sullivan (1916-2013) was Fellow Emeritus of St. Catherine's College, Oxford University and a pioneering scholar of modern and contemporary Chinese art. He was born on October 29, 1916, in Toronto, Canada. In 1939 he went to China to drive trucks for the Red Cross in southwest China, where he met and married Khoan in 1943, and made many goods friends with Chinese artists. Over seven decades, the Sullivans built up a rich collection of modern and contemporary Chinese art in a diversity of styles and media.

After his death, more than 450 paintings were bequeathed to the Ashmolean together with his archive. The paintings on display were gifted to Sullivan by artists themselves, including the album with Chen Ting-shih's painting, which was circulated among artists of the younger generation whom Professor Michael Sullivan met during his visit to Hong Kong in 1968. All were painters, except for the sculptors Cheung Yee (b.1936) and Van Lau (b.1933). Their contributions give a hint of the fascinating range of media, styles and techniques, from the purely classical to abstractions and collages, being practised at the time of the colony's artistic awakening.

Yan Liu, Christensen Fellow in Chinese Painting.

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