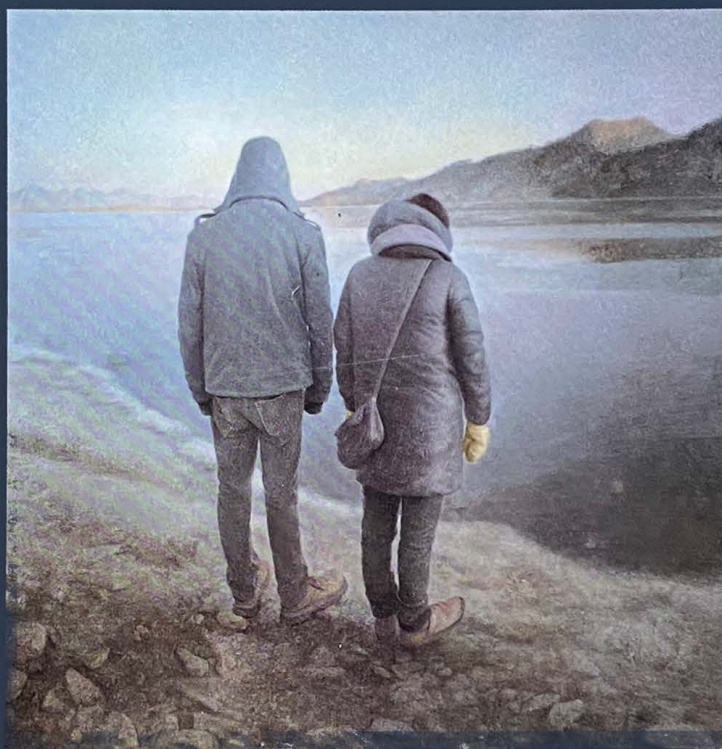


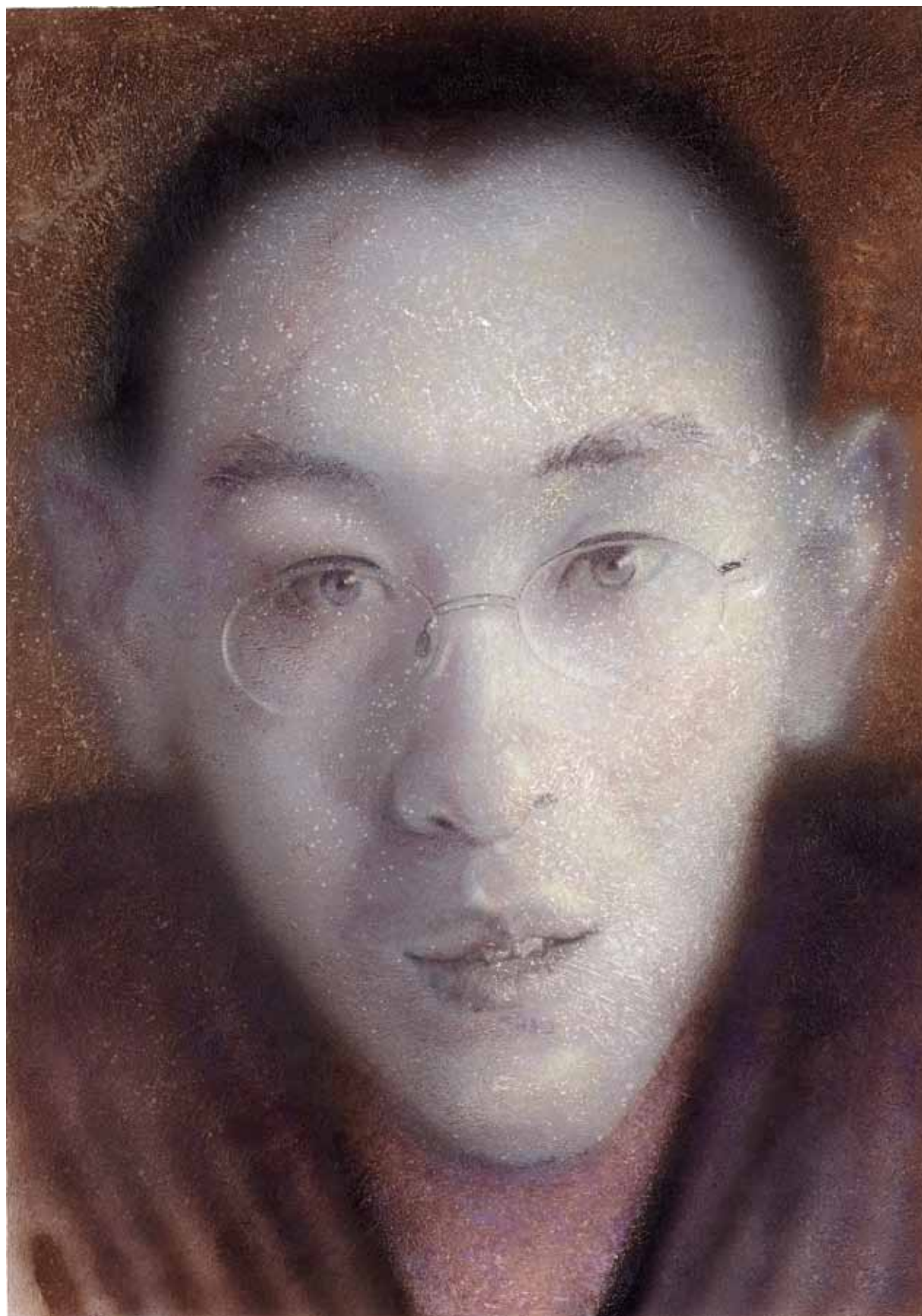
JIANG SHAN CHUN  
"THE REFUTATION OF TIME"



PEKING ART ASSOCIATES

*PEKING ART ASSOCIATES*





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JIANG SHAN CHUN  
“THE REFUTATION OF TIME”

COMPILED AND EDITED BY EMILY DE WOLFE PETTIT



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“Portrait of Emily de Wolfe Pettit”  
“裴依珊肖像”  
Tempera on paper  
纸本坦培拉  
2010  
72 x 36 cm



“Portrait of Christopher Atkins”  
“安可瑞肖像”  
Tempera on paper  
纸本坦培拉  
2010  
72 x 36 cm

## NOTE FROM THE CO-DIRECTOR

*Emily de Wolfe Pettit*

In the past year since articulating my plan to open a gallery in Beijing, I have been asked many times “what kind of art” we will exhibit and “how big is your gallery”? I must admit I have been a little bemused by both questions. To address these points:- Firstly, yes we are in China and specialise in Chinese contemporary art, but I wish us to be known for the quality of the art we present, not based on the fact that it happens to be created in China, and for each artist to be considered according to his or her own individual ideas, methods and trajectory. The artists we shall present at Atkins & Ai are, without exception, not superficial nor narrow-minded in thought or ability, nor pretentious in character. I mention the latter partly because, if any generalisation is to be made between Chinese per contra the majority of Western artists, it is arguably that the most interesting artists working in China are humble in character, incredibly generous with their time and not usually inclined to self-promotion (this is our task in any case)!

On the second point, two of my favourite museums in the world are the Courthauld Gallery in London and the Beyeler Foundation in Basel, Switzerland. Both are relatively small spaces but there is certainly no correlation between their size and the quality of their respective world-class collections and exhibitions. Anyone familiar also with the London gallery tradition will appreciate treasure chests of shows in intimate spaces in the centuries old gallery areas of London’s St James’s and Mayfair, the unique experience of joining in-house gatherings for collectors and artists, and gleaning the gallerist’s and artist’s insight into their most beloved works of art. We chose Baiziwan as the location for the gallery because of its similarly close proximity to the city centre and have adapted the gallery interior to have the “look and feel” of this gallery tradition (with accommodation for visiting curators and art historians upstairs). I speak in my catalogue essay of a return to traditional aesthetic (and other) concepts. Analogous to this, I believe it is on this human scale that fine art is meant to be viewed (we shall not show large-scale installation works in this space), allowing for the possibility of close interaction between the viewer and the art work.

What I am greatly more interested in and I think is far more important for our artists and clients are the principles we hold and how we will serve both.

I mentioned above the character of the artists. We are here for the long-term and it is imperative to us to get to know an artist and their plans for their art before considering if we can collaborate and present their art works. This may sound obvious but we take this task incredibly seriously in establishing whether an artist is bona fide - or just seeking short-term commerce through gimmick and formulaic, one-dimensional approaches. It takes a lot to impress us. What is common to all great artists, regardless of their background, is sheer hard work, pure and simple. I feel very fortunate to have Christopher Atkins as my partner who shares my views. He is one of the most energetic, dedicated and perfectionistic collectors and dealers I have ever met. He also believes in making long-term relationships with his clients and is liberal with the time he gives investing in artists, their ideas and needs, and will always have as his main objective the placement of our artists’ works at the highest international institutions. Christopher and I will be devoting a great deal of time to this over the coming years. Furthermore, we both genuinely love being in China; we have invaluable friendships here and it surprises, intrigues and entertains us each and every day, whether in conversation with our local cabinet-maker, the brightest upcoming entrepreneurs or governmental heirs apparent.

For our clients, old and new, we are committed to providing professional, prompt and most importantly, ethical dealing. This also brings us to the unavoidable fact that much is made of the investment hedge to Chinese contemporary art. Fabulous art and monetary investment are of course not mutually exclusive, but it is of course the latter that follows the former. True investment in its reach over the long-term does not bow to hype nor trend and involves a network working together - galleries, museums, curators, critics and influential collectors, not to mention other artists in the experimentation and development of ideas.

The last word I reserve for our collectors just starting or continuing to home the ‘art of collecting’:- be demanding, ask questions, be brave in your choices and - as the old adage goes - always follow your heart in your acquisitions - it is our task to undertake research for many, many years and reserve the pleasure for you.

Emily de Wolfe Pettit, Beijing, December 2010



“Play of Light” No.s 1, 2, 3 & 4  
“光之嬉戏”之一，二，三，四”  
Tempera on paper  
纸本坦培拉  
2009  
76 x 50 cm each



“The Tempest”  
“暴风雨”  
Tempera on Canvas  
布面坦培拉  
2009  
170 x 50 cm

## INTRODUCTION TO ATKINS & AI Gallery

*Victoria Pettit*

In 2004 my daughter Emily de Wolfe Pettit first came to mainland China, to study a field distinct to her post-graduate studies in Arts and Humanities at Oxford, in economics at the Centre for Economic Research at Bei Da, Beijing University in Haidian. She enjoyed Bei Da tremendously and the privilege to study there, but it was also what she was learning and seeing in her spare time that captivated her:- the Chinese contemporary art works dotted around the city. We had seen shows of Chinese contemporary art together over the years from afar, but to fully grasp the vibrancy and sheer diversity of the Chinese art scene one not only had to be in China, but spend a considerable amount of time there, and travel her diverse regions.

After trips to China together, in 2006 Emily and I relocated to Shanghai initially to establish the independent contemporary Chinese arts consultancy, Arts Influential China, with three foci:- arts consultation, including advising to corporate clients and Emily lecturing in Arts Management at Shanghai University; advisory on Asian art fairs including Hong Kong, New York and Korea; and sourcing important historic works from the 80's and 90's for private collectors, which were largely in the West. How times have changed!

Over the past five years, we have both undertaken research (and a great deal of research!) to gain a deeper understanding of the disparate requirements of collectors of Chinese art, internationally and in mainland China. Expertise in understanding and forming relationships with both artists and collectors is key and it is Emily's academic background in the Arts and philosophy that means she has been able to build these with credibility and undertake analysis and writing in depth. From Ireland and the UK, I take great pleasure in hosting artists from China in the British Isles, introducing them to institutions of higher education in London and Cork, and simply witnessing the influence of a very different environment, both personally and artistically.

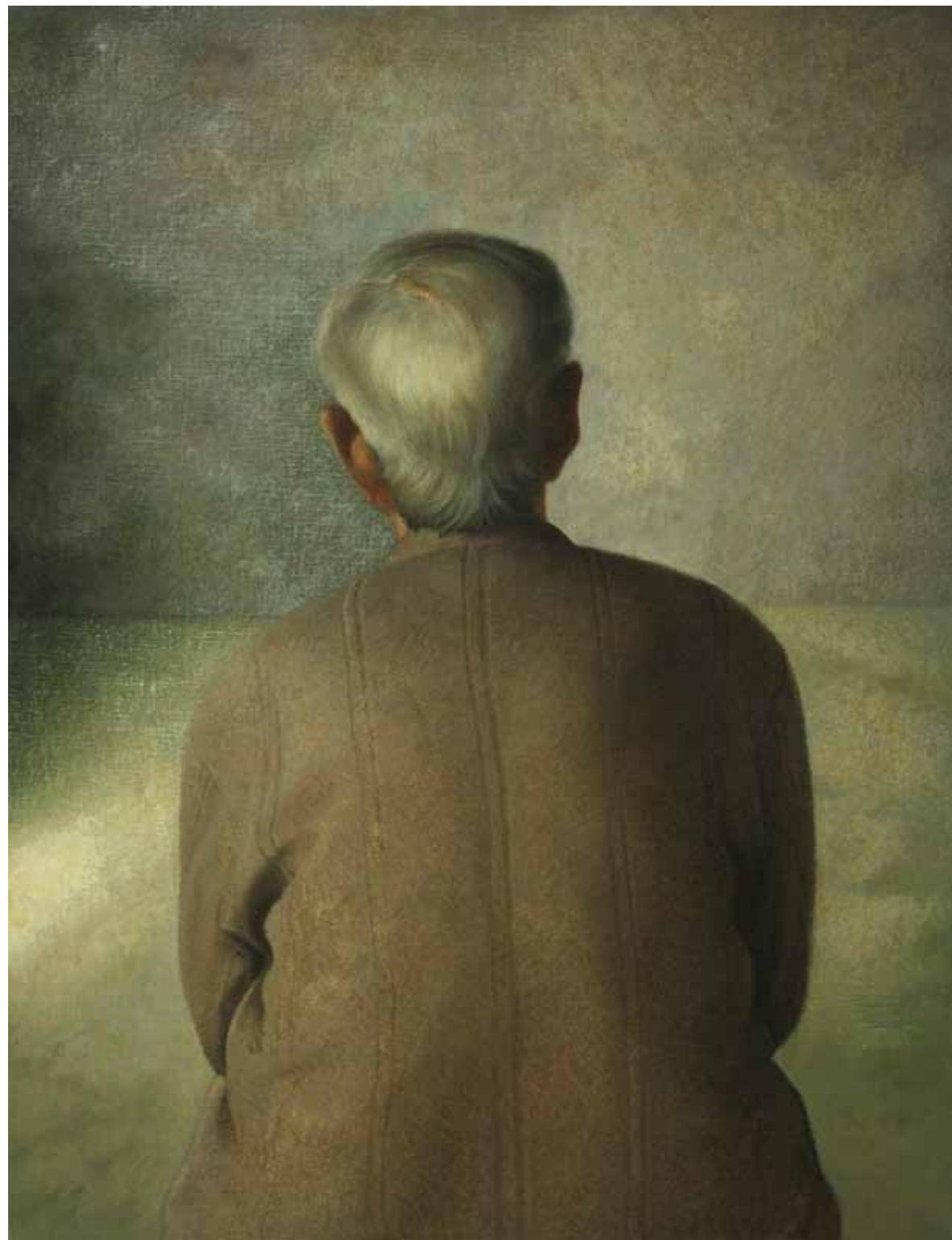
Since Christopher Atkins first established his gallery in the centre of Brussels, which grew to three galleries on the Chaussée de Charleroi and Avenue Louise from 1973 - 2003, he has been known for his considerable dynamism and depth of knowledge. A specialist in the purveyance of 17th, 18th and 19th century English, French and Dutch furniture, as well as ethical restoration, Christopher was widely recognized for his expertise:- as the Senior Advisor to the Royal Guild of Flemish Antique Dealers from 1980 - 1990, Senior Consultant to the Royal Chamber of Belgium Antique Dealers for twenty years and requested to vet dealers for major international fairs, for instance Brussels International Fair.

Christopher's profession also allowed him to enter into ethical restoration as well as real estate where there was several common denominators. Throughout his real estate projects, undertaken either for his own company or for clients, Christopher was consulted for conservation projects, including Stonehenge in the UK and he dedicated years to the faithful and painstaking restoration of his historic property in Wallonia, Southern Belgium. He is currently advisor to an important architectural project in China with an accent on philosophical comprehension of Chinese architectural heritage whilst combining cutting-edge eco-technology to make for a 'green,' ethical project. His commitment to sustainability also informs his selection of the contemporary artists he chooses to support, and he views this engagement over the long-term, as does Emily.

I know Emily and Christopher's combined energies will make a gallery that is committed to powerful art and they both take very seriously the tasks of serving both artists and collectors. Welcome to Atkins & Ai Gallery.

Victoria Pettit





“Transcendence of Imagination”  
 “出神”  
 Oil on canvas  
 布面油画  
 2006  
 100 x 77 cm

## FOREWORD

*Zhang Zikang, Director, Today Art Museum*

Dear Artists, Collectors, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to welcome to the art area of Baiziwan within the precinct of the Today Art Museum a new gallery, Atkins and Ai, founded by Ms Emily de Wolfe Pettit and Mr Christopher Atkins.

I am familiar with Emily de Wolfe Pettit’s understanding of, and commitment to, Chinese contemporary art since first coming to China in 2005. Emily, with her mother Victoria, support Chinese artists’ studies in the UK and Australia, encouraging their flourishing, and furthering dialogue between Chinese artists and the rest of the world. Christopher Atkins lends veritable experience, having had galleries in Belgium for three decades and as Senior Advisor to the Royal Guild of Flemish Antique Dealers from 1980-1990 and Senior Consultant to the Royal Chamber of Belgium Antique Dealers for twenty years.

Together they form a team that recognises and holds in very high regard the true spirit and heterogeneity of Chinese art and culture, while at the same time supporting the ethical advancement of the contemporary gallery model in China to ultimately take her proper place on the world stage.

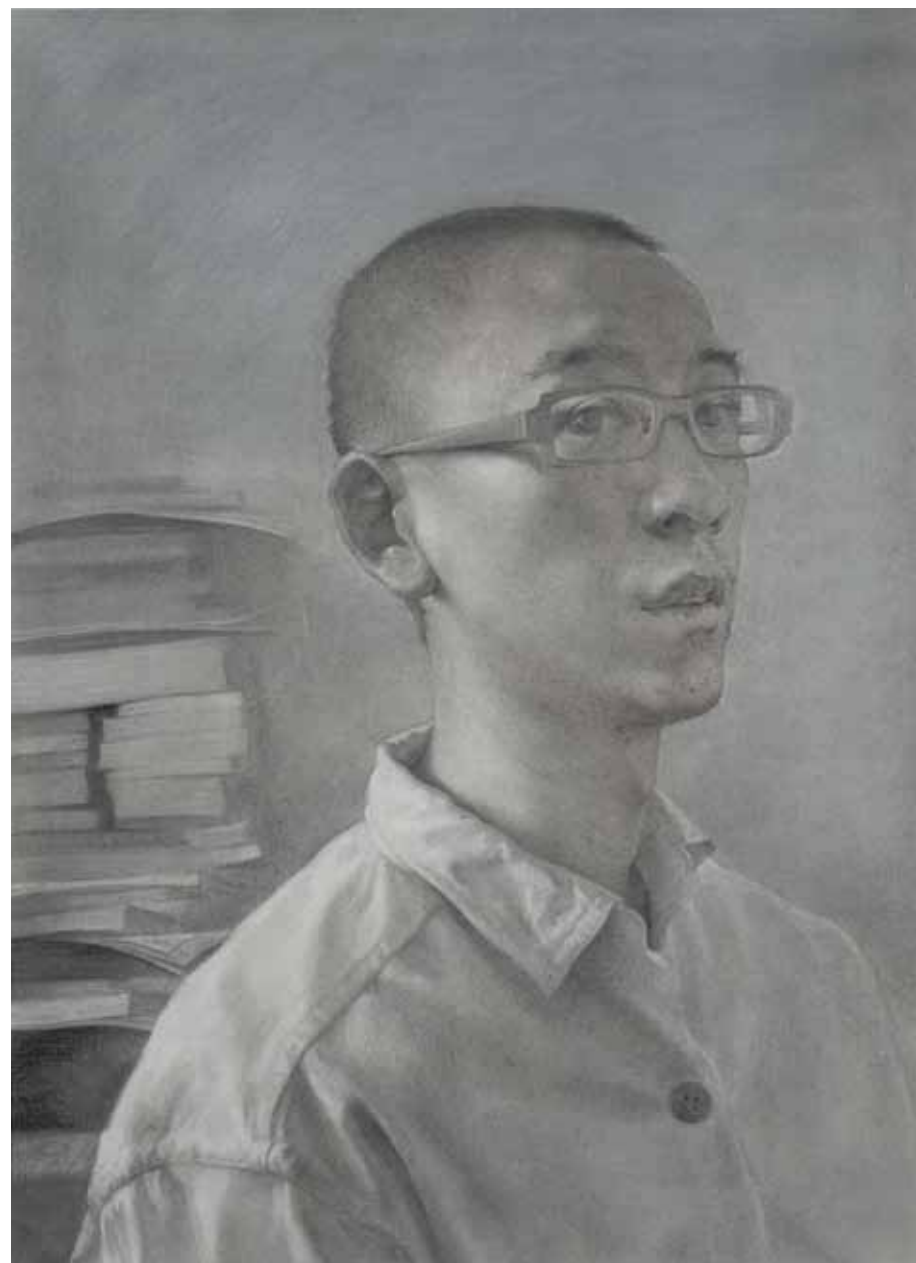
They are equally devoted to introducing as yet unknown Chinese artists and their true diversity and versatility in the West and developing the “art of collecting” amongst new collector groups in China.

I wish them every success in their art projects and support of fine Chinese contemporary art.

Sincerely,

Zhang Zikang, December 2010

Director, Today Art Museum, Beijing  
 China National Academy of Painting Committee  
 Director, Head of China Arts and Culture Publishing House, Beijing



“Self Portrait”  
“自画像”  
Pencil on paper  
纸本素描  
2009  
51.5 x 36 cm

## INTRODUCTION TO ARTIST JIANG SHAN CHUN

*Professor Yang Fei Yun*  
*President of Chinese Academy of Oil Painting*

After years of teaching, countless thoughts and feelings naturally piled up, along with all the delicate young faces. I always treated them as I would various potted plants, caring for their unique characteristics and vibrant yet often chaotic vitality. I would trim and water them, keeping them neat. Yet as soon as it starts to take its own form, I would let go, giving it all the freedom to define itself. Years gone by, in the moment of my reminiscing, I found it hard to locate the exact individual in my memory. It's like discovering from the bottom of your drawer a dusty old painting, knowing you were the one who created it, yet somehow it laid there like a familiar stranger. Trying to put my mind at peace after being overwhelmed by this mixed feeling, I couldn't help feeling: It has truly been a long time.

Jiang Shanchun hit all the common milestones in his life: taking exams, choosing universities, finishing grad school, getting married and starting a family. He makes a living by teaching students and selling his works. Life bestowed on him peace and satisfaction, and he expresses his gratitude by being stable and fulfilled. Like every young man who has a passion for painting, his eyes are often brimming with enthusiasm, as well as passion and confusion it sometimes triggers. As any painter who understands the value of paintings, he never doubts the grandeur of this cause and is able to concentrate and dedicate his life to it. Painters are a group of people who define their core existence with their works. There are far too many different types of emotions and feelings involved, innocent yet complex, direct yet subtle. However, the ultimate question for painters which takes a lifetime to answer is, why does one pick up the paint brush and decide to let it define his own very existence.

We have long passed the age where enthusiasm is all that counts, with painting itself being so heavily burdened. A noisy mixture of evident or subtle issues is so prevalent that it binds the painters and the painting itself wherever they go. This is the blessing and the curse of a young artist.

Jiang Shanchun has also been faced with this exact problem. For years, he kept on experimenting, interchanging between oil painting and Chinese ink and wash painting, picking up the abstract to avoid the concrete. After a long period of sealing off himself, he circled back to square one. On the way ahead, there's bound to be some detours. All the ups and downs, the tears and happiness, are kept as an intimate, personal experience, which only aides the artist to probe deeper in the value of painting and his destiny as a painter. The thoughts that linger his mind, for instance the technique and talent to paint, the understanding and perception of life, the opportunities and fortune granted, all prompt him to reflect and mature, and eventually construct his own painting life.

Life has its distinct traits and tracks. After years of being a teacher and tending his share of bonsai plants, Jiang Shanchun understood like never before – To nurture is to perfect one's self; to educate is to live as an example; to judge is to self reflect; and to act vigorously is to be merciful.

Yang Fei Yun, Beijing, December 2010





“Time Immutable”  
“歌声已经远去” —局部  
Oil on Canvas  
布面油画  
2010  
232 x 56 cm

## CATALOGUE ESSAY - “THE REFUTATION OF TIME”

*Emily de Wolfe Pettit*

### Remodelling of the New World to the Old World

The first decades of the 21st century and its proceeding century's most remarkable aspect may be claimed by historians in centuries to follow as a period distinguished by fundamental remodelling of the New World to aspects of the - Asiatic - “Old World”. On various intra-levels in the West, we see the consideration of age-old models and practices:- from currency re valuation (there is discussion at the highest levels about linking world currencies to gold); to our attitudes to ecology (self-yielding and self-sustaining communities); and eco-political lives (there are murmurings amongst the stronger economic countries in Europe for the gradual disbandment of the Eurozone supranation in favour of the return of Sovereign states). Most notable to this landscape is a fast-approaching, “second wave” return to the Old World, through the nurtured prominence of China and indeed, this ancient power is actively embracing connections to her own distant past and traditions - not as an after-thought, but as complement to her modernisation (in the face of China's championing of technological advancement, this Old World will undoubtedly coalesce with a much more futuristic vision of the New world). A number of Chinese with whom I breach this subject proudly draw a comparison between the past quarter century's flourishing and the dynamism of the Tang dynasty:- China as industrious and trailblazing, with an educated, taste-shaping elite, emulating middle class and huge mass of labour force undertaking menial work, the backbone of every Empire in history, and relatively untouched by modernisation.

While there is undeniably an exchange between East and West, and certain Western practices continue to be discovered and adopted in an ongoing, deeper “Opening-Up” - as Chinese venture to the West and

Western merchants to the East in ever-increasing number, experiment with Western-style cuisine and clothing and living on Lake Geneva (Beijing) - the agents of Western influence arguably operate largely on deceptively superficial levels. Conversely, when reading a Westerner's guide to “Doing Business in China” today, the foreign businessman is more likely to encounter a crash course on Sun Tzu's “The Art of War” than standard Western business school case studies. The comic situation intended by this analogy belies a more serious message:- that contrary to popular Western assumption, rather than the “Westernisation” of newly emerged countries, we are increasingly likely to witness a redress of the balance to the East on all levels, including the cultural arena. Indeed, commentators familiar with China speak of the promulgation of a “Civilisation-State” rather than a Nation-State, implying that the most essential resource China holds lies in her cultural heritage and the greatest impact China may yet to have on the world is through the dissemination of her cultural values.(1) Ironically, one could look far into the past to find the contemporary and the future, as if entering a process of refuting time.

### Reinterpretation of Traditional Chinese Art Philosophy and Practice in a Contemporary Context

In this vein, a growing momentum to the reinterpretation of traditional Chinese artistic philosophy - and moreover philosophy of life - continues to deepen its mark on artists in China today. Parallel to this, increased confidence of this “Civilisation-State” is steadily lending itself to the re-discovery what is intuitive, indigenous and distinct in the visual arts, for instance the reinvigoration of interest in landscape painting and contemporary ink brush works.(2)

1 Martin Jacques' “When China Rules the World”. The dissemination of philosophy and wider Chinese culture is likely to be seen on an unprecedented scale following the exceptional spread of the Chinese language amongst younger and future generations outside of China.

2 Recent and current notable exhibitions of Chinese contemporary art in the West that explore all three include “Fresh Ink”, recently opened in conjunction with a symposium at Harvard University November/December 2010, or Lu Peng's “Pure Views” which focused on the tradition of landscape painting reinterpreted by contemporary Chinese artists at Louise Blouin Foundation in London October 2010, in which the Chinese tradition of landscape painting in contemporary guise is presented.



“Xinjiang Scene”  
“晨炊”  
Oil on Canvas  
布面油画  
2009  
100 x 100 cm

In subject-matter, where almost all Western contemporary art creation, particularly amongst younger artists, focuses on metropolises and urban life, many notable artists working in China are forging a path in the direction of where the vital force is not dependent on material circumstances<sup>(3)</sup>: the landscapes of rural China, everyday domestic settings and the backbone of society - farmers, labourers, migrant workers - in other words, those generally less conspicuous but essential to the functioning whole - and cast members of a unique and unprecedented social phenomenon in human history. Therefore, if we examine artistic practice beyond the appropriation of Western Pop and Realism in China, multiple strands of artistic endeavour, all energised by much earlier Chinese artistic traditions and moreover philosophies of art, are steadily gaining wider recognition internationally. Three of multiple strands span the following:- firstly, the continuation of the ‘grand traditions’ of calligraphy and landscape painting, where imitation and reinterpretation in the temper of earlier Masters is considered the paragon of achievement with a strict adherence to tradition in every aspect;

<sup>3</sup> There are a plethora of examples whereby inspiration in the early works of artists comes from rural China, including:- Mao Xuhui, Zhang Xiaogang, Ye Yongqing, He Duoling, and the focus of artists such as Chen Danqing, Ai Xuan, Ding Fang. Notable recent examples of the juxtaposition of those members of society seemingly stuck in a “time warp” against rapid modernization in China include Yang Shaobin’s “Miners Series” and Liu Xiaodong’s “Hometown Boy” series.



“Forgotten Times”  
“出走的时光”  
Tempera on Canvas  
布面坦培拉  
2009  
85 x 45 cm



“The Door Used to Open”  
“曾经开启的门”  
Tempera on canvas  
布面坦培拉  
2009  
85 x 45 cm

secondly, continued experimentation with the amalgam of Eastern and Western concepts, methods and materials; and thirdly the expansion of traditional Chinese aesthetic experience (of evoking an atmosphere or state through conception rather than strict replication of the physical world) through “void materialism”, or rather softness of form and such subtle employment of media to deliver at once unmitigated and pluralistic possibilities for feeling. Wang Xin, known by his literary sobriquet, Jiang Shan Chun, is a young artist who engages with all three with a genuine maturity his age belies, particularly the areas of the latter two, whilst traversing high-brow Ancient Chinese philosophies of art and life with China’s current domestic quotidian in determining his central thread of “A Refutation of Time”.



“Xinjiang Scene”  
“晨炊”  
Oil on Canvas  
布面油画  
2009  
100 x 100 cm





“Reflection on the Hope of Time”  
“昔日重现”  
Oil on canvas  
布面油画  
2006  
120 x 92 cm

“Self-Portrait” (2009)  
“爱人在我眼中 自画像” (2009)  
Tempera on Paper  
纸本坦培拉  
2009  
50 x 36 cm



“Winter Solstice” Scroll - Detail  
“冬至” 纸卷轴—局部  
Ink on Paper 纸本水墨  
2008  
19.8 x 328 cm overall



“Glimpsing the Supreme Ultimate”  
“无极”  
Oil on canvas  
布面油画  
2007  
180 x 120 cm

### The Range of Artist Jiang Shan Chun

Spanning an impressive range of styles and techniques and drawing inspiration from earlier traditions, Jiang Shan Chun is capable of creating abstract oil works that impart a sensory experience usually reserved for ink brush works in their delicate chromatic possibilities through apparent solids and voids; Jiang’s tempera portraits (a medium most popular between the 13th-15th centuries amongst elite European artists, before being surpassed by oil) hover between Western Realism and Eastern abstraction; his ink works in traditional Chinese scroll format present humble subjects that become exceptional through the verisimilitude and moreover delicacy with which he renders the subject; and he effectively translates writing into painting through his depictions of lofty Ancient Chinese analects of Taoism and Buddhism, Confucius and Zhuangzi, in Realistic style on large yet extremely detailed oil on canvas paintings. Indeed, to engage deeper into any of the three strands of art practice mentioned above and specifically the work of this artist, his approach, subjects for study and the aesthetic effects of his works, demands probing into Chinese philosophy and this artist’s philosophy of life.



“Old Traveller”  
“神游老人”  
Tempera and Acrylic on Paper  
纸本坦培拉和压克力  
2008  
51.5 x 36 cm

“A Hard Day’s Simple Comfort”  
“小憩”  
Oil and Tempera on canvas  
布面油画和坦培拉  
2010  
195 x 50 cm



### A Man’s Life Philosophy related to an Artist’s Philosophy

Jiang Shan Chun was born in Hohhot, the capital of Inner Mongolia, in 1979. At the age of eighteen he moved to Beijing, where he had won a place at the Central Academy of Fine Art (CAFA), under the part-tutelage of one of China’s most renowned Neo-Realist painters, Yang Fei Yun. More consequently, he was chosen by Yang Fei Yun to study under his guidance at Masters’ level at The Chinese National Academy of Arts and this likely cemented his considerable technique that allows him to work in various media at a masterly pace. Since I have had the pleasure of becoming acquainted with Jiang I have come to know a character of substance who, apropos his career and artistic life, applies himself consistently:- by morning he is a Professor and returns home at midday to paint for up to ten hours each day. He is equally consistent in his integrous approach to life and artistic practice as he is with his choice of subjects in searching for integral values, focusing his attention by turns on areas of the indigenous physical and symbolic ‘heart and soul’ of China, its natural landscape and inhabitants who hold traditional values of family and simple rituals of daily life very dear. The artistic culmination is far from pastiche, but highly pertinent commentary (of unquestionably increasing significance in coming years) on the subtler changes to people and areas that may not be directly affected by rapid modernisation and swept up in huge socio-economic adjustment - still the vast majority of the Chinese population - and more extraordinarily, seemingly from another age. Poignant demonstrations include works such as “Old Traveler”, “A Hard Day’s Simple Comfort” and “Memory”, a poetic work depicting haunting figures to the background of a pair of old boots in an almost shrine-like homage to time past.



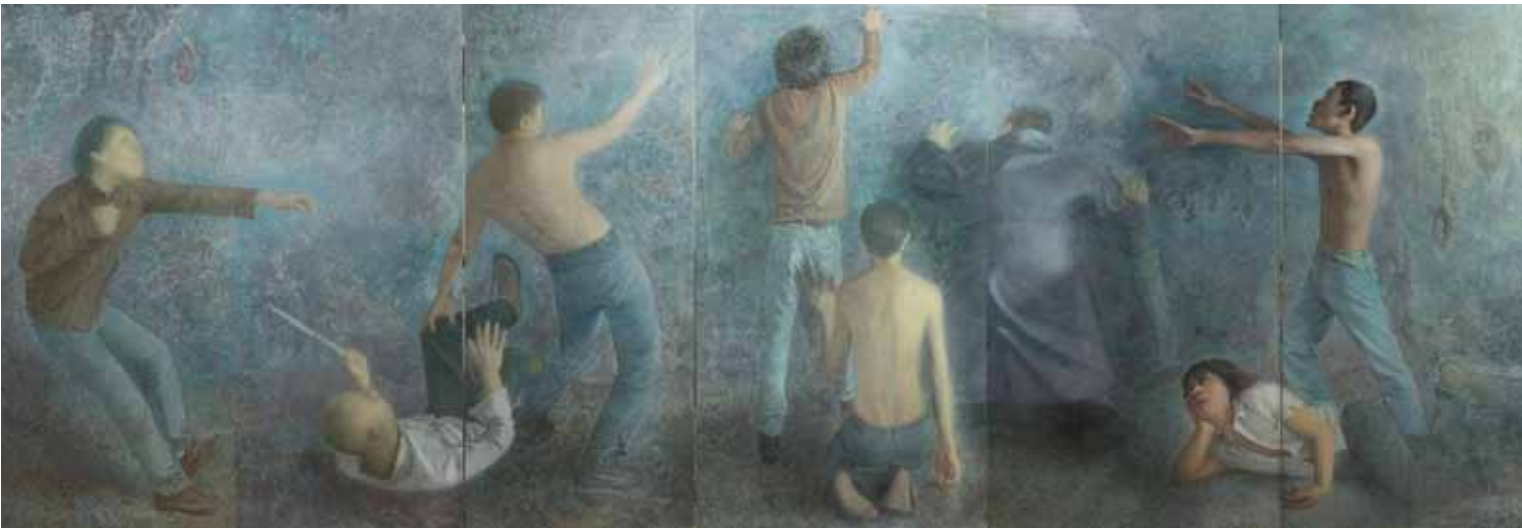
“The Three Monkeys: Speak no Evil, See no Evil, Hear no Evil”  
 “非礼勿言，非礼勿视，非礼勿听”  
 Tempera on Wood  
 木板坦培拉  
 2010  
 29 x 43.5 cm each (29 x 130.5 cm overall)

### Translating Stories of Ancient Chinese Philosophy into Painting

Germane to Jiang Shan Chun’s search for integral role models, the other central conduit of his work lies in ancient Chinese philosophy and its most enduring stories. “*The Three Monkeys: Speak No Evil, See No Evil, Hear No Evil*” is thought to originate in Confucian analects that date to circa 470 BC and predates any known visual depictions: “*Look not at what is contrary to propriety; listen not to what is contrary to propriety; speak not what is contrary to propriety; make no movement which is contrary to propriety*”. Jiang pays homage to what is thought to be the original pictorial rendering of this maxim, a 17th century wooden carving above the famous Toshogu shrine in Nikko, Japan, through his application of tempera on wood, using a stippled effect to give a sculptural effect. Elsewhere, he translates these stories to paintings of fine realistic detail, such as his 2009 oil on canvas painting, “*Zhuangzi’s Dream*” that takes as inspiration the 4th century BC philosopher’s (4) well-known story in underscoring that there is no reality, only perception.

Here Jiang renders Zhuangzi’s account of dreaming of being a butterfly and, upon awakening, not knowing if he is Zhuangzi dreaming of being a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming of being Zhuangzi. This subject is again explored with its implications for semantics in an ongoing major work, “*Touching the Elephant*”, where the Buddhist story is fast-forwarded to the present-day as figures in casual Western-style clothing grapple to touch an almost undetectable outline of an elephant, whose physical imperceptibility in the artist’s eyes “broadens the possibility for symbolic application of the ancient tale to the present day”. The Buddhist story goes that upon being asked by the King “what is an elephant”, a group of six blind men each feel a different part of the animal to offer a different version, eventually coming to blows as they each maintain their version is the only truth. Buddha uses this story as warning to scholars and preachers who hold their own views as absolute truth without considering alternative viewpoints. These stories are highly pertinent to China today, changing rapidly on the surface, and elsewhere hardly at all, and maintaining inherent modes of behaviour throughout.

4 Zhuangzi, Master Zhuang, or Zhuang Zhou lived during the Warring States Period, a turbulent time in China’s history, but nonetheless saw the perpetuation of “*The Hundred Schools of Thought*” (spanning 770 to 221 BC), philosophers and schools of thought that had flourished since The Spring and Autumn Period. It is considered the Golden Age of Chinese philosophy because as an era of great cultural and intellectual development in China a sweeping range of philosophical thoughts were initiated and actively debated, those of which were refined during this period have profoundly shaped China to the present day.

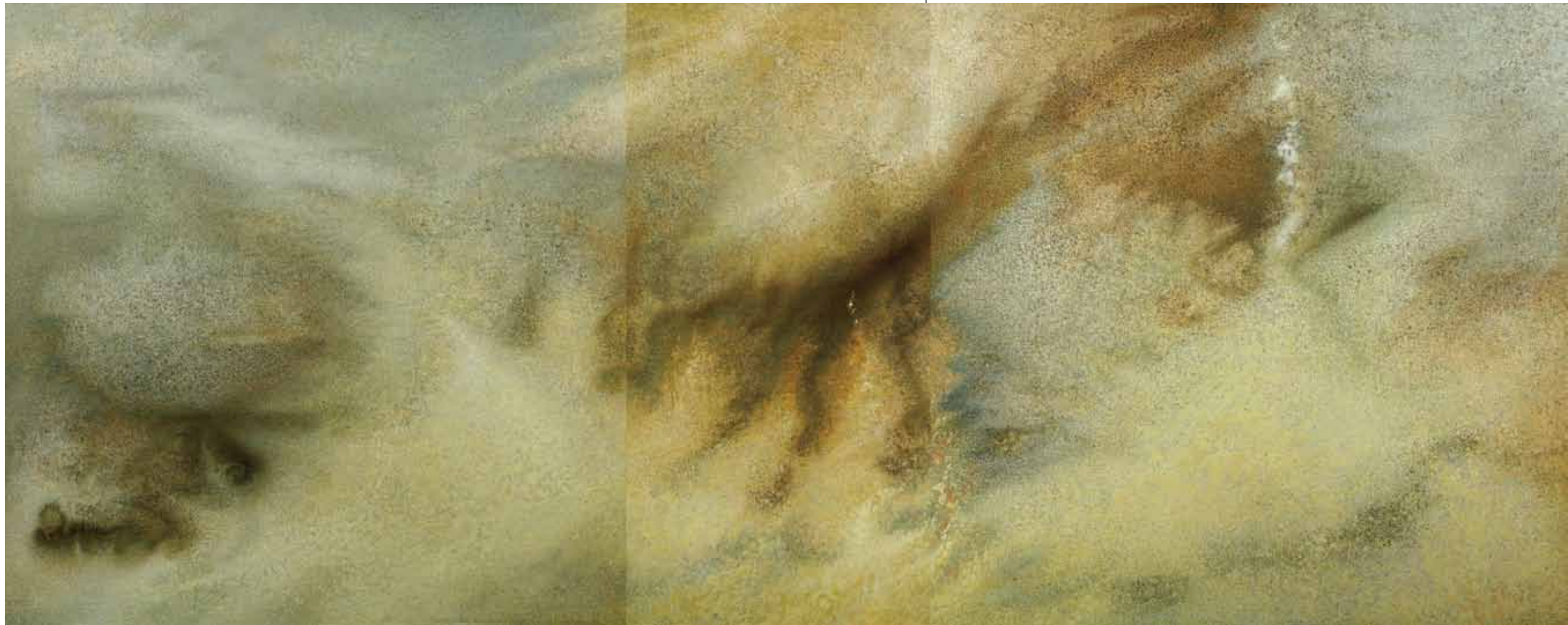


“Touching the Elephant”  
 “摸象”  
 Oil on Canvas  
 布面油画  
 2010 – Ongoing 未完成  
 180 x 600 cm approx





“Zhuang Zi's Butterfly Dream”  
“梦蝶”  
Oil on canvas  
布面油画  
2009  
180 x 180 cm



“The Supreme Ultimate (Taiji)”  
“太极”  
Tempera on canvas  
布面坦培拉  
2007  
150 x 375 cm



Jiang’s Visual Analysis of Ancient Chinese Philosophical Concepts

Moving very deeply into Ancient Chinese philosophy, Jiang has created a set of abstract works based on Taoism’s “Taiji”, “the supreme ultimate”, the highest conceivable principle from which all existence flows, creating Yin and Yang from places of stillness and movement respectively. This all-pervasive concept underpins traditional Chinese energy systems of cosmology, the elements (Qi) which give rise to the seasons and indeed our own human life cycle, determining for instance the practice of traditional Chinese medicine, and balance of cold and heat in the body.(5) Jiang gives pictorial voice to this vast concept of “Taiji” in his large-scale 2007 abstract tempera on canvas triptych entitled “The Supreme Ultimate (Taiji)”. In this work, swathes of intertwined light and shade in mineral hues are chromatically textured to enact the infinite spatial temporal directions of the Universe. Two further works, “Taiji - The End is the Beginning” and its balanced counterpart “Taiji - The Beginning is the End” present this is a self-perpetuating, eternal cycle of dualities and that reversal is the movement of the Tao:

*“The “supreme ultimate” [“Taiji”] creates yang and yin: movement generates yang; when its activity reaches its limit, it becomes tranquil. Through tranquility the supreme ultimate generates yin. When tranquility has reached its limit, there is a return to movement. Movement and tranquility, in alternation, become each the source of the other...”(6)*

In these works, Jiang achieves inclines to peaks and declivities to voids through technically impressive work (most remarkably he employs only oils on canvas in these two pieces), as if sculpting three-dimensional planes in painting while subtlety of gradation again implies innumerable possibilities spatially and temporally.

By contrast to the notion of “Taiji” exists the “space-time” between Yin and Yang, “Wuji”, which translates to “without limitlessness or without ultimacy”. Jiang explores this concept in his 2006 oil on canvas work “Without Ultimacy - Wuji”, through the depiction of a three dimensional, enclosed space, yet still retaining the same layering and fluidity of technique found in the above-mentioned works, thus suggestive of a greater spectrum in reference to “Taiji”.



“Without Ultimacy - Wuji”  
“无极”  
Oil on Canvas  
布面油画  
2006  
180 x 90 cm

5 Many natural dualities, for instance feminine and masculine, dark and light, low and high, cold and hot — are thought of as manifestations of Yin and Yang respectively.

6 “...By the transformations of the yang and the union of the yin, the five elements (Qi) of water, fire, wood, metal and earth are produced. These five Qi become diffused, which creates harmony. Once there is harmony the four seasons can occur. Yin and yang produced all things, and these in their turn produce and reproduce, this makes these processes never ending” Lao Tzu Tao Teh Ching Translated by John C.H. Wu, late 20th century



“Shadow of Bamboo Story”  
“竹影系列”  
Tempera on canvas  
布面坦培拉  
2006  
92 x 332 cm overall

Aesthetic Possibilities of Chinese Philosophical Thought

Beyond visual manifestations, Jiang Shan Chun is most interested in the aesthetic possibilities of Ancient Chinese philosophical thought and fully immersing the viewer in that action, or rather suspended action in his exploration of time. In his still life works, such as “I used to travel a different path”, “Midday Quietude” or “Afternoon Light Filtering Through”, once useful but now discarded objects, such as a pair of well-worn boots, a fissured chair or a half-full cup of tea, leave the viewer catching a moment of something just happened or about to happen or simply appreciating a moment of quietude between actions. This even applies to scenes of great potential flurry - a child’s playroom in “Time Wings its Way”, play-sparring in “Youthful Battles” and a working kitchen in “Xinjiang Scene”. Jiang’s intention, and subsequent aesthetic effect, is a sense of “wu wei”, without effort, or “wu wei wu”, effortless action or diminished will, as espoused in Zhuangzi and Taoism. The aim of “wu wei”, as prescribed by Taoism, is to achieve a state of perfect equilibrium; similarly, the effect Jiang achieves throughout his work is a supreme sense of serenity. Having spent some time contemplating Jiang’s naturescapes, such as “The Baron Seed”, “Shadow of Bamboo Story” and “Play of Light” I can attest to the deep sense of calm that washes over the viewer from these works. Likewise, the very act of unfurling his scroll works is at once poetic and peaceful. Even in Jiang’s figurative works, such as “My Son”, Self-Portrait” (2009) and “Portrait of My Wife”, a non-referential quality that speaks most directly to the emotions is evoked by his unusual mix of oil with tempera; whilst creating layers of texture, the latter evokes fluidity through its consistency, having the effect of skewing time.



“Beautiful ”  
“美”  
Tempera on Paper  
纸本坦培拉  
2009  
50 x 36 cm



“I used to travel a different path”  
“路漫漫”  
Tempera on paper  
纸本坦培拉  
2009  
47 x 33.5 cm





“The Baron Seed”  
“花椒树”  
Tempera on Canvas  
布面坦培拉  
2006  
40 x 288 cm

In Jiang’s words, in his portraits “I seek distance from reality through distance from time - aligned with the Tao where time does not exist”.<sup>(7)</sup> He also achieves this impression through alignment of the human figures in his works with perennial elements of nature, such as “*This Life Still Allows Beauty*”, depicting the ‘everyman’ in China alongside delicately-rendered flora and “*I am here, imagining there*”, presenting the imagery of a butterfly to the old man’s dreams and hopes of another time and place. In the 2010 oil on canvas “*Time*”, depicting Jiang’s fellow artist and family friend (also from Inner Mongolia) Song Kun, with her husband on receiving the news that she was expecting their first child. Jiang sought to depict the scale of the life journey their news brought through depiction of the pair gazing into the horizon of a vast natural landscape, with backs turned to emphasize the personal quality of the moment. In “*Live for the Moment*”<sup>(8)</sup> Jiang sought to present the Chinese reading of “*Carpe Diem*”. It shows the bon vivant side to Chinese life through their passion for food as a symbol of life and vitality; and, also a personal side as Jiang imprints to the bottom middle of the canvas an image of himself as a mnemonic of this dictum. The tenor of an individual’s privately owned, contemplative space is also strongly resonant in “*Transcendence of Imagination*” and “*Reflection on the Hope of Time*”. The latter work appertains to Jiang Shan Chun’s new series inspired by his discovery of an old set of family photographs from the period of the founding of the People’s Republic of China.



“Live for the Moment” (Carpe Diem)  
“盛宴”  
Oil on Canvas  
布面油画  
2005  
50 x 70 cm



“I am here imagining there”  
“生活在别处”  
Oil on canvas  
布面油画  
2010  
100 x 65 cm

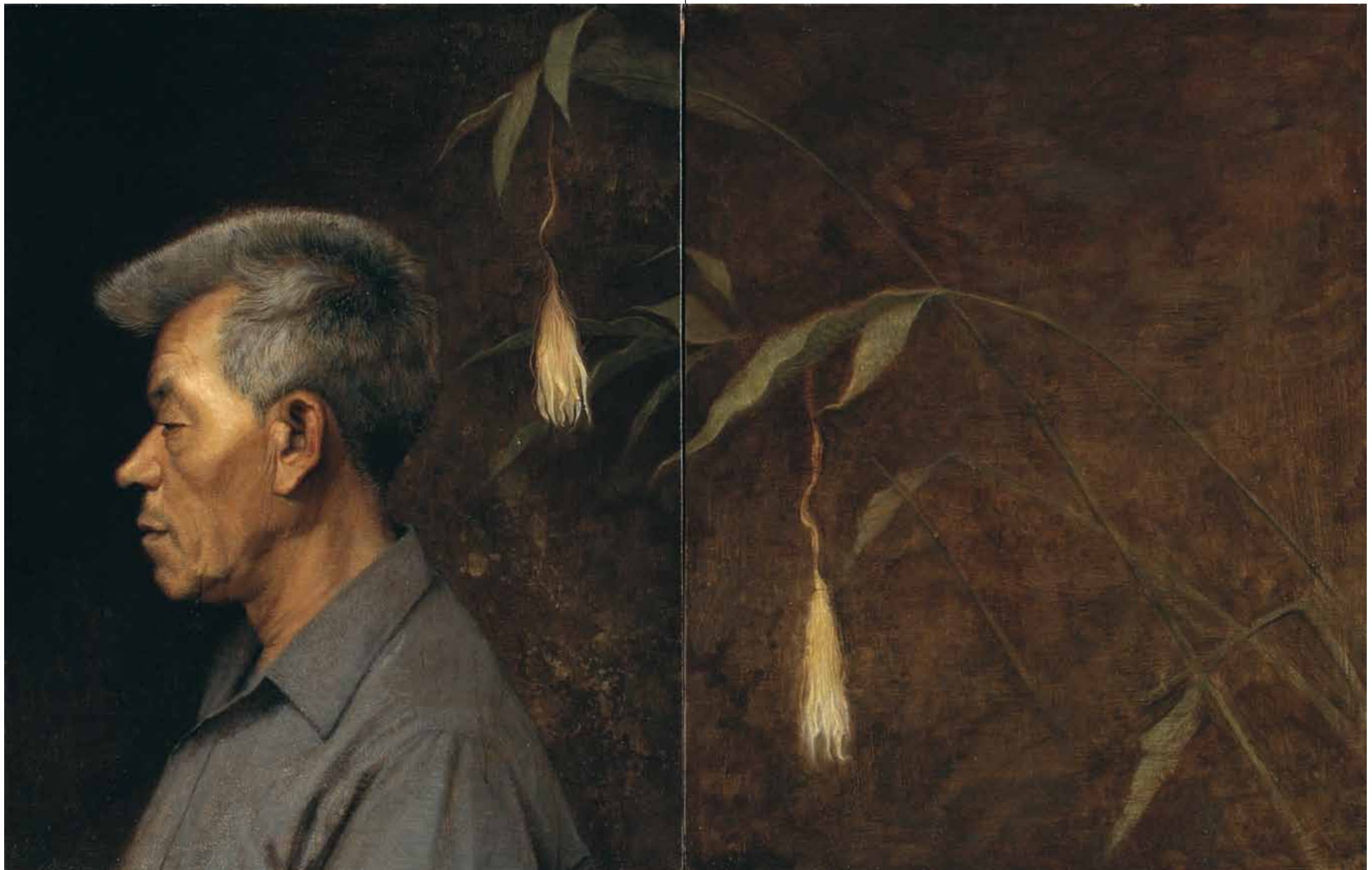
<sup>7</sup> “The Tao or the Way has attributes and evidence, but it has no action and no form. It may be transmitted but cannot be received. It may be apprehended but cannot be seen. From the root, from the stock, before there was heaven or earth, for all eternity truly has it existed... It lies above the zenith but is not high; it lies beneath the nadir but is not deep. It is prior to heaven and earth, but is not ancient; it is senior to high antiquity, but it is not old.” (translation Mair 1994:55)

<sup>8</sup> “活在当下” in Chinese



“Time”  
“时间”  
Oil on canvas  
布面油画  
2010  
150 x 150 cm



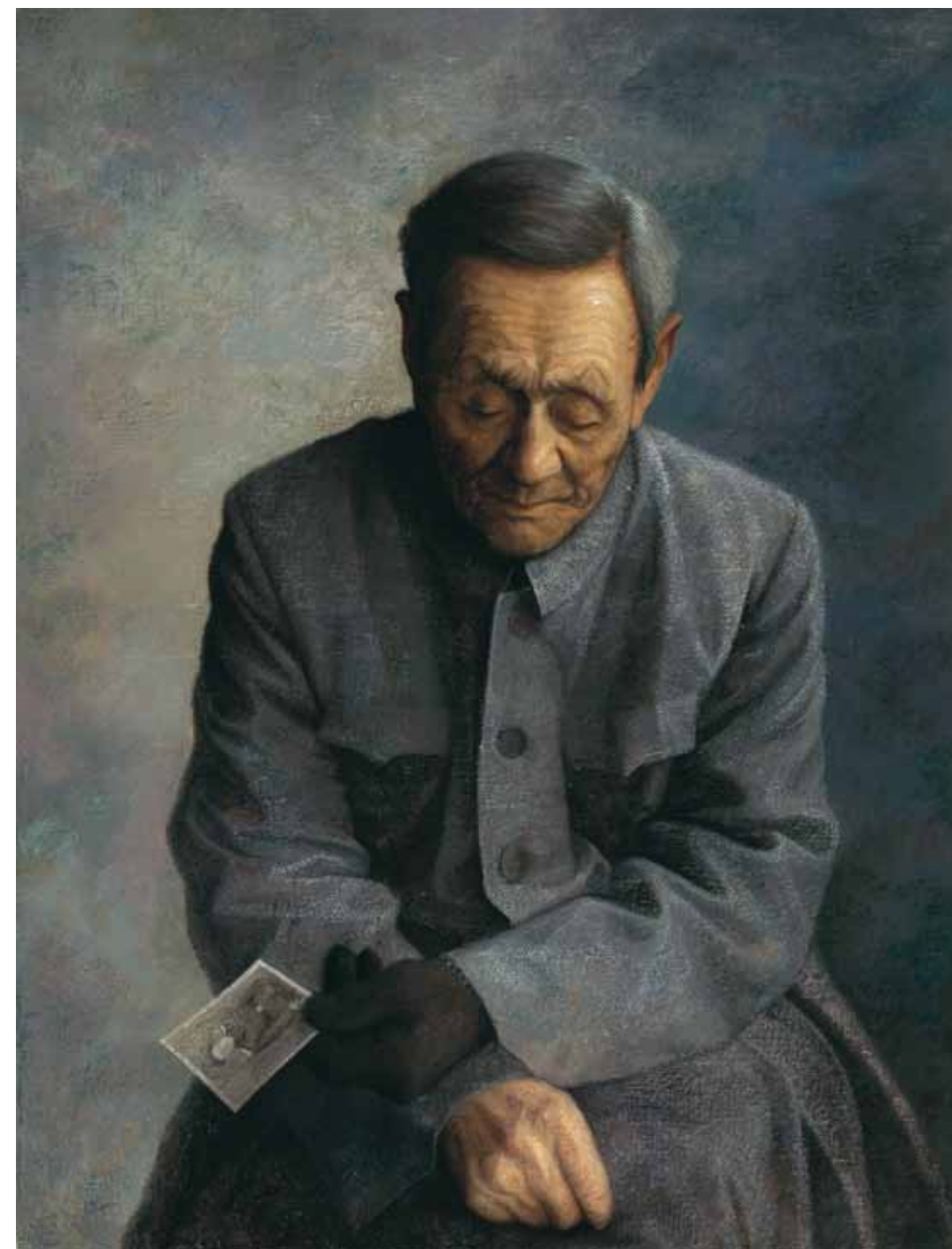


"This Life Still Allows Beauty"  
 “夕阳无限好”  
 Oil on canvas  
 布面油画  
 2006  
 90 x 140 cm



For all the outward appearance of Western art influence through Pop and Realism in China, the revitalization of traditional Chinese philosophy of art and aesthetics - and philosophy of life - continues to underpin artistic practice in China over recent years. Concurrent to this, the ripened confidence of this ancient power is lending itself to artistic conviction in what is indigenous, intuitive and distinct. Furthermore, in subject-matter many respected and upcoming artists working in China today are re-discovering directions where the vital force is not contingent on material factors; rather, traditional Chinese philosophy, enduring stories and the *dramatis personae* of unposed, uninhibited characters with primal faces, to which the backdrops are the rich landscapes and domesticity of China, and the backbone of every Empire in history - a vast and fluid population of manual workers. Such subjects and their treatment through traditional Chinese approaches to aesthetic experience distinguish a unique aspect of art practice in China today, and arguably reaches the very core of understanding China's development:- that contrary to popular Western assumption, rather than the "Westernization" of China, she retains her autochthonous, very traditional 'heart and soul'. Indeed, artist Jiang Shan Chun guides the viewer to

skip back far into various chapters of China's distant past and conversely, to find what is age-old in the present; to un-peel the superficial layer's of her present to find the deeper signifiers of a culture, deep-seated behaviour and customs that will likely become more apparent in the future - as if entering a process of refutation of time. The concept of refuting time is itself embedded in Chinese philosophy - originating in Taoism, whereby reversal is the movement of the Tao and the possibility of heightening vitality through alignment with the Tao ("*the way*") and related concepts such as "*neidan*" or "*spiritual alchemy*", whereby physical, mental and spiritual disciplines are undertaken to achieve this enhancement of the physical and spiritual self. Jiang engages with this process on multiple levels:- in the masterful way he applies traditional techniques, particularly tempera, and tempera mixed with oil, to achieve at once an unusual combination of hyper-realism and muted form; interpretation of stories from Ancient Chinese philosophy and their application to modern society; and achieving a heightened sense of serenity through "*wu wei*" that pervades all of his work. Through his remarkable works, Jiang Shan Chun leads the viewer to contemplate and sensorily engage in a journey simultaneously ephemeral and immutable, qualifying a return to one's original being.



"Reflection on the Hope of Time"  
 “昔日重现”  
 Oil on canvas  
 布面油画  
 2006  
 120 x 92 cm



## FURTHER CATALOGUE OF WORKS



“Young Beauty”  
“美丽的侧影”  
Acrylic on Paper  
纸本压克力  
2006  
52 x 31 cm



“Old Woman”  
“老妇”  
Acrylic on canvas  
布面压克力  
2005  
43.5 x 29 cm



“Portrait of my Wife”  
“阳光让我爱上了她”  
Tempera on Paper  
纸本坦培拉  
2009  
50 x 36 cm



“Tranquility”  
“宁静”  
Oil on canvas  
布面油画  
2010  
60 x 50 cm



“A Comic Character”  
“笑非笑”  
Tempera on Paper  
纸本坦培拉  
2008  
51.5 x 36 cm





“Friends”  
“同伴”  
Tempera and acrylic on paper  
纸本坦培拉 压克力  
2009  
51.5 x 36 cm



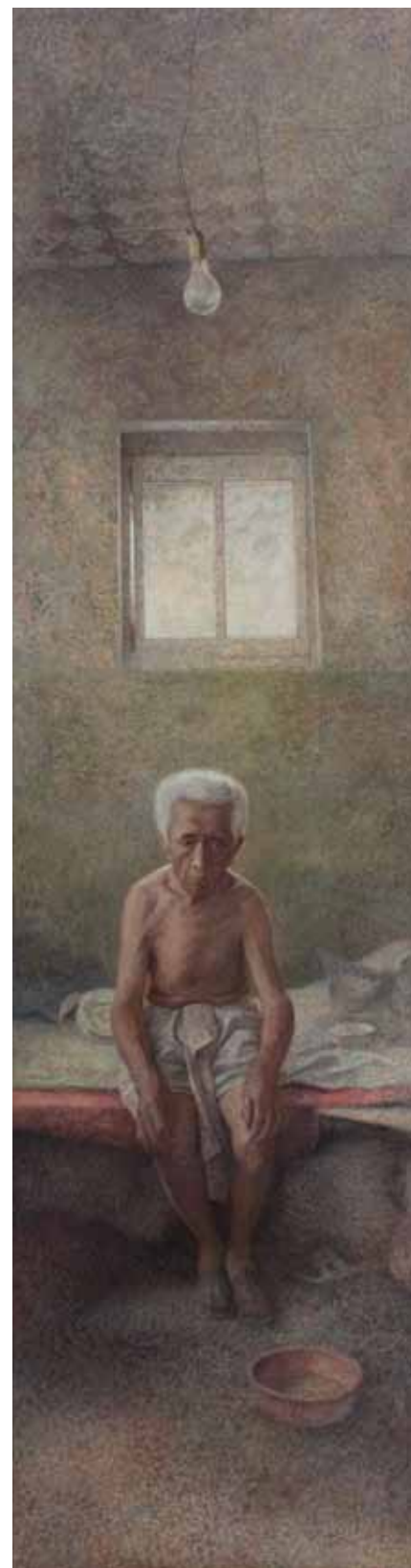
“I am here imagining there”  
“生活在别处”  
Oil on canvas  
布面油画  
2010  
100 x 65 cm



“Time Immutable”  
“歌声已经远去”  
Oil on Canvas  
布面油画  
2010  
232 x 56 cm



“A Hard Day's  
Simple Comfort”  
“小憩”  
Oil and tempera  
on canvas  
布面油画和坦培拉  
2010  
195 x 50 cm



“Flight of Time”  
“小鸡短飞”  
Tempera on paper  
纸本坦培拉  
2005  
38 x 26 cm



“Return to the Earth”  
“笼子”  
Tempera on paper  
纸本坦培拉  
2009  
47 x 33.5 cm



“Winter Provisions”  
“冬藏”  
Tempera on paper  
纸本坦培拉  
2009  
47 x 33.5 cm



“Morning”  
“清晨”  
Tempera on paper  
纸本坦培拉  
2009  
47 x 33.5 cm





“Mid-Morning Quietude”  
“静”  
Tempera on paper  
纸本坦培拉  
2009  
47 x 33.5 cm



“Afternoon Light Filtering Through”  
“阳光洒过”  
Tempera on Paper  
纸本坦培拉  
2009  
33.5 x 47 cm



“Daily Ritual”  
“仪式”  
Tempera on paper  
纸本坦培拉  
2009  
47 x 33.5 cm



“Winter's Night”  
“寒夜”  
Tempera on paper  
纸本坦培拉  
2005  
37.5 x 51cm



“Door to Passage”  
“等待”  
Tempera on paper  
纸本坦培拉  
2005  
28 x 18 cm



“Shadow of Bamboo”  
“竹影”  
Tempera on paper  
纸本坦培拉  
2010  
47 x 33.5 cm





“Shadow of Bamboo Story”  
 “竹影系列”  
 Tempera on canvas  
 布面坦培拉  
 2006  
 92 x 332 cm overall





“Time Wings its Way”  
“飞过光的痕迹”  
Tempera on Canvas  
布面坦培拉  
2010  
36 x 200 cm





“Youthful Battles”  
 “午后——场小战斗”  
 Tempera on Canvas  
 布面坦培拉  
 2010  
 210 x 70 cm



“The Baron Seed”  
 “花椒树”  
 Detail of Each Triptych Panel  
 三联画局部  
 Tempera on Canvas  
 布面坦培拉  
 2006  
 40 x 288 cm





“Dust”  
“尘埃”  
Oil on Canvas  
布面油画  
2006  
111 x 52 cm



“The Door Used to Open”  
“曾经开启的门”  
Tempera on canvas  
布面坦培拉  
2009  
85 x 45 cm



“Forgotten Times”  
“出走的时光”  
Tempera on Canvas  
布面坦培拉  
2009  
85 x 45 cm





“Taiji - The Beginning is the End”  
 “太极—无始无终”  
 Oil on Canvas  
 布面油画  
 2007  
 120 x 92 cm



“Taiji - The End is the Beginning”  
 “太极—无终无始”  
 Oil on canvas  
 布面油画  
 2007  
 140 x 110 cm





“Live for the Moment” (Carpe Diem)  
 “盛宴”  
 Oil on Canvas  
 布面油画  
 2005  
 50 x 70 cm



“Glimpse of the Cosmos”  
 “若无痕”  
 Tempera on paper  
 纸本坦培拉  
 2005  
 37 x 25 cm



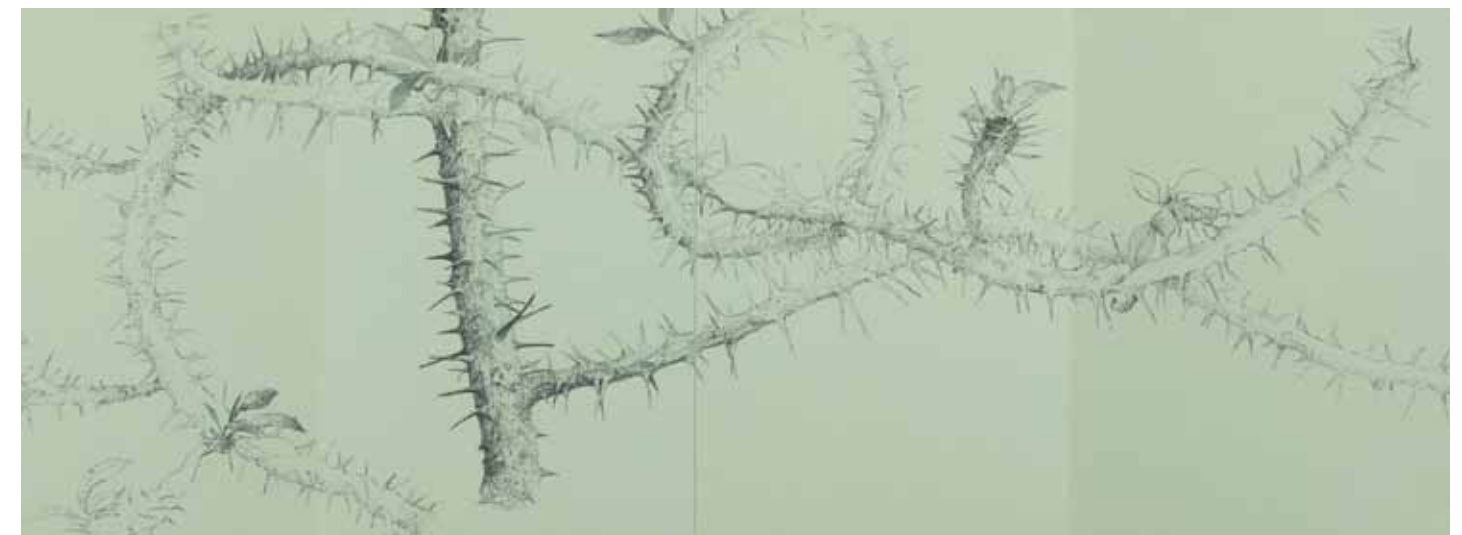
“The Three Monkeys: Speak no Evil, See no Evil, Hear no Evil”  
 “非礼勿言，非礼勿视，非礼勿听”  
 Tempera on Wood  
 木板坦培拉  
 2010  
 29 x 43.5 cm each (29 x 130.5 cm overall)



# SCROLLS



“The Greenhouse” Scroll - a selection  
 “彩墨百草”  
 Watercolour on Paper  
 纸本水彩  
 2008  
 26 x 413.5 cm overall



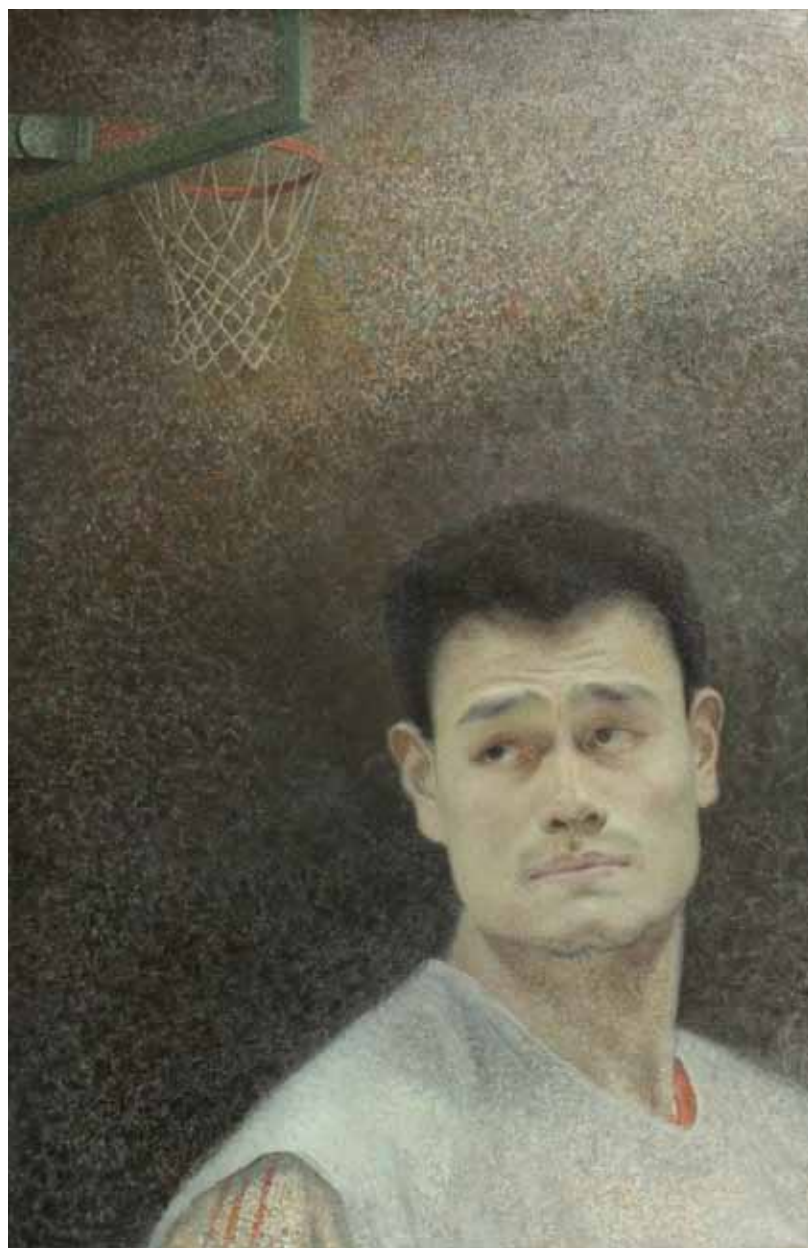
“Winter Solstice” Scroll - Detail  
 “冬至—局部”  
 Ink on Paper  
 纸本水墨  
 2008  
 19.8 x 328 cm

## PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

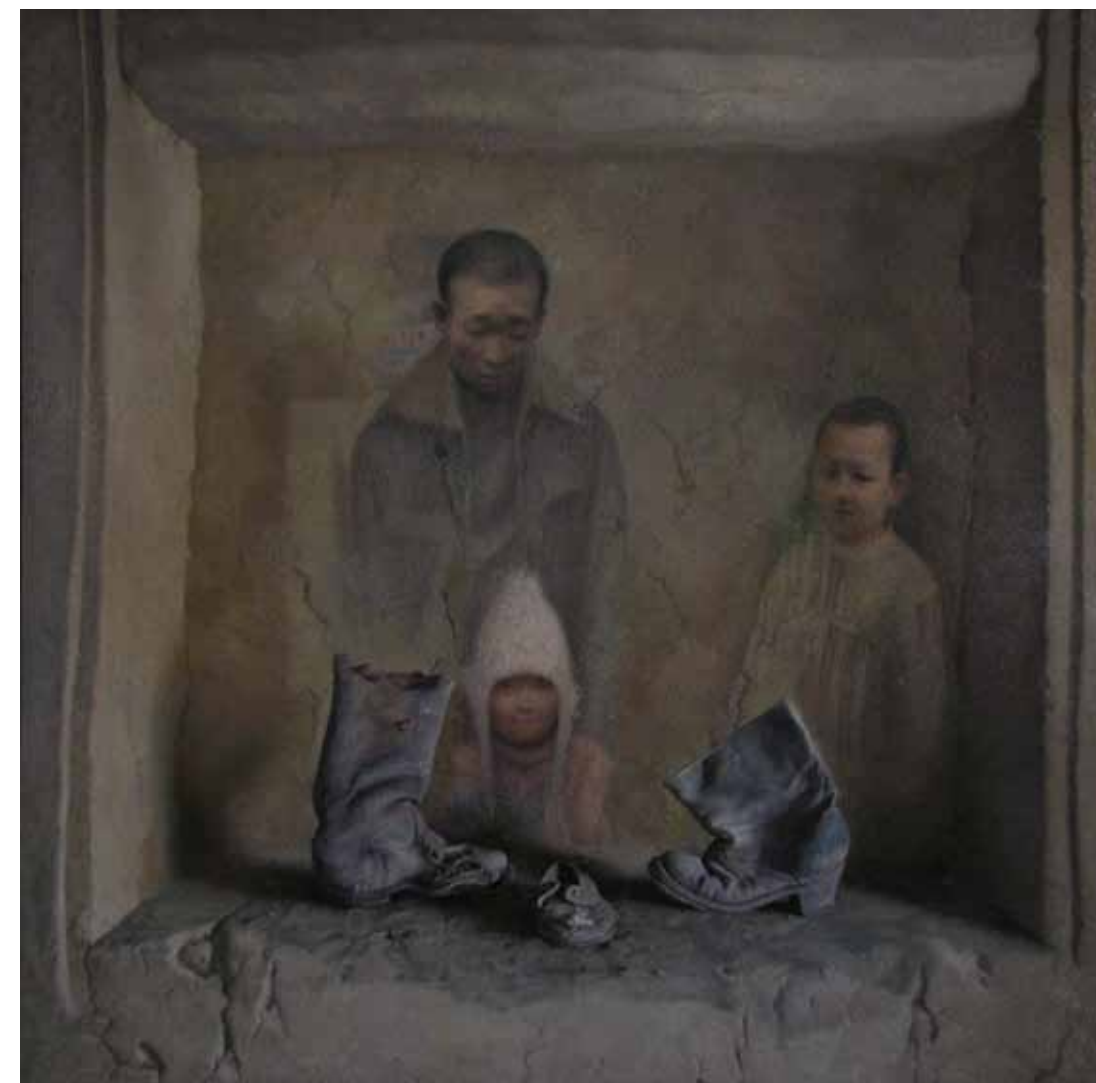


“China's Temporality - The Present” I & II  
“此时 - 此刻”  
Oil on Canvas  
布面油画  
2010  
50 x 60 cm  
Standard Chartered Bank Collection, Singapore  
新加坡渣打银行收藏





“Yao Ming”  
 “姚明”  
 Oil and Tempera on Canvas  
 布面油画和坦培拉  
 2010  
 100 x 80 cm  
 Presentation to The China Olympic Museum, Beijing  
 北京中国奥林匹克委员会订制



“Memory”  
 “记忆”  
 Oil on Canvas  
 布面油画  
 2009  
 100 x 100 cm  
 Heaven, Earth and Man's Museum, Shandong, China  
 天地人和美术馆，中国 山东

# INTERVIEW

*with Jiang Shan Chun, Emily de Wolfe Pettit and Christopher Atkins*

You were born in Inner Mongolia, in the capital Hohhot, a city that lies between Yinshan Mountain and the Yellow River. Today Hohhot is a sprawling metropolis, but with a relatively small population, and of course still with the beautiful backdrop of its natural setting. Did you have contact with the natural landscape as a child and young man growing up there and if so, what are the memories you keep of it?

Memories, equipped with a curious selective filter, are always fascinating. My treasured childhood memory has to do with the vast riverbed and forest north to grandmother’s place. She would take us on nature treasure hunt, digging up wild plants and mushrooms. To us boys, we were on a different mission – catching grasshoppers to feed the chicken. We would bring a large glass jar, watching it get filled with restless little insects. On our triumphant return, we would throw them into the coop one by one and sit back to enjoy the fight for food. When you are a child, there’s no appreciating the lively scene, all you feel is the inherent excitement brought on by those little creatures. Summers were never boring: there were butterflies to catch – only keeping the fancy ones and watching them flap their wings on the screen window; there are tadpoles to fish – only choosing the big ones and waiting for the legs to come out. One time, my brothers and I climbed the tree in search of bird’s nests, only to find one with four crystal-clear eggs. Using a straw hat, we managed to transport the fruit of our labour half way home, before the wind from a truck dashing by blew it out of our hands. Yet the most tragic of all was about a bag of toads. These were the result of an entire morning’s adventure. On the way home, faced with a 1-meter wide riverbed, my older brother and I jumped over without much hesitation, while my younger brother shied away. After brief negotiation, we decided to play toss-and-catch with him. However, the plan backfired, with my little brother falling into the mossy water, cursing at our guts, followed by rushed rescue and never-ending nagging from our parents. It wasn’t until 3 days later it suddenly occurred to me that we had completely forgot about the toads. When we traced our steps to find it, all the toads had already become toad jerky. This incident was so tragic, even today it gave me goose bumps. Whenever my son got the lecture from my wife for so much as plucking a flower, I couldn’t help reflecting on my childhood and pondering the implication of violence and cruelty in these stories.

Does the natural landscape or manmade settings of Inner Mongolia and moreover the spirit of that region still inform your work today and, if so how? To what extent do your still life paintings refer to actual scenes and / or are they re enacted in your imagination?

To exert lasting and profound impact, natural scenery needs to blend in with human activities. This experience, however, is lost on people who grew up in an urban setting. Personally, I grew up in the context of the major transition in Chinese economy. From Hohhot to Beijing, one city to another, nature never played too essential a role in this. Urban life has its distinct rhythm and orders, its own dynamics and clamour; in the same breath, it suffers inherent alienation and indifference, readily detectable on the faces of the anonymous crowd prevailing in the city, forming the biggest artificial scenery. A Zen Koan jumped to mind: “Emperor Qianlong was paying a visit to a highly respected monk. At the sight of the busy Grand Canal, Qianlong asked, ‘Master, how many ships do you think sail the Canal every day?’ The master answered, ‘Two.’

The confused emperor asked for an explanation, the answer was, ‘one named fame, the other wealth.’ For an artist, it is almost impossible to rid off the common vulgarity, and because his vulgarity is wrapped inside the graceful exterior, he is even more vulnerable to it. I remember once chatting to the editor-in-chief of a high-end magazine. He mentioned a story from a renowned master in the art circle. The latter described his business (i.e. selling his works) as follows: Phone rings, he answers. “Is this (artist’s name)?” “Yes, this is he.” “How much is your painting.” “X\*\$# (the price)” “Come on, give me a deal.” The master confessed about his inner struggle on hearing this, about the pride of an artist, and the uniqueness of art works in elaborating the value of human spirit, and then...A deal is made. In China, traditional men of words invented a not un-pretentious term runbi, which literally means “moisten the pen or brush”, to refer to the remuneration for an artist. To “moisten” to what extent varies according to the numerous categories, and ambiguity widely understood in the art circle.

I can’t say that I agree with the categorization of still life in Chinese language, which literally means “still object”. I much prefer the English term “still life”, at least one can detect a trace of “life” in the term. China has a long pantheistic tradition. No object, big or small, is spiritless. As a result, the so-called real scenery is not necessarily solid; it has been filtered and decorated by a composite of emotions, and delicately kept at heart. After such a complex process, those that still stir your mind are the ones worth painting. Yet, reality is undeniably the necessary starting point, so the often elusive emotions have a place to dock.

I understand you first started painting at a young age. What or who gave you the first impetus to paint?

For children, drawing is more of an instinct, rooting from the simple pleasure of doodling. When I was little, the excitement from watching the movie Shaolin Temple prompted me to draw a lot of kungfu scenes on the walls at home with crayons. My grandmother cleaned the most of it off, and covered the rest with calendars. Not discouraged in the slightest, I moved on to the front page of photo albums. This was eventually crushed down by my mother. Later on, when I officially started art classes, numerous disciplines, rules and norms suffocated a large part of the original pleasure. Fortunately, I had the best mentor. Constantly taking the exam for the art academy, my first mentor always came top in art, but hopelessly failing maths, and ultimately missed the chance of getting in Central Academy of Fine Arts due to his age. He was so filled with ambition and passion for painting and knew exactly how to pass that on to us. My essential basis in the early days was all from the period, despite the childish techniques, lack of organization, the passion for painting shone through. And then I met my other mentor Yang Feiyun, whose crucial influence on me enhances as time goes by. He is, without a doubt, one of the best role models in my life as an artist and in general. The impact from these mentors came as a blessing to me, as well as much treasured opportunities. But the driving force behind painting doesn’t stop here; it needs a more solid source. The appeal of a career in art lies in the ability to transform thriving vitality into pure beauty. The art works will keep the liveliness of real living beings and the artist himself will rejoice in this brief moment for seeing eternity.

Your use of tempera, and tempera mixed with oil, is very unusual today. What drew you to this medium? What is the history of its use in China?

Egg Tempera was used in Western history as a very traditional painting medium. The entire technical system of traditional western painting bases on the continual improvement of this medium. Egg Tempera distinguishes itself with precision and tenderness, which allows continued perfection. Most crucially, it has an innate nature of keeping distance from the reality. Comparing with the authenticity and physicality offered by oil painting. Egg Tempera is more in line with my own logic in artistic expression. Starting from 1980s, China started to focus on painting materials and techniques. In this trend, two courses stood out. Central Academy of Fine Arts’ oil painting department’s training course on painting materials and techniques in 1987, taught by Abraham Pincas of The École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-arts. And Luxun Academy of Find Arts’ course on oil painting and materials in June, 1988, taught primarily by Claude Yvel, known for his trompe-l’oeil painting. This marked the beginning of a trend that most Chinese painters started to focus on the characteristics of painting materials. Many leading painters in China’s art circle today were graduates from those two courses. They value the regularity of visual vocabulary in painting. With their individual style developed on the basis of technical purity and excellence. They formed their own art camp, distinguishing themselves from painters from “85 New Wave”.

You are praised already for your portrait paintings which beyond their realistic depiction of the sitter afford a real sense of their character. How do you approach your subject to achieve this - what is your process?

I’m fascinated by faces, and am a firm believer in the messages carried by people’s appearances. The Chinese in ancient times had developed an entire system of physiognomy. I flirted with the idea of studying it, but eventually gave up. Its own complexity aside, physiognomy is only a minor branch of a vast system of mysticism. To truly practise it, one needs to master the entire system; otherwise it’s no different from any common back-alley psychic. Therefore I stopped speculating the future of these individuals’ and settled for the ambiguity. However, I am still convinced by the correlations between faces and destiny, and am a keen observer of the impact that the changes of appearance have on individual existence.In comparison, portraits seem to be a much less demanding task. When someone or an image triggers my interest, I would quietly observe him at length, and try to gather all information I can about him. This might last long, yet a clear judgment of this image helps me immensely in locating the right perspective. There are also times when I’m simply fascinated by the formality of the image. A crevice of sunlight or an obscure atmosphere can make a mundane image radiant.



You also teach painting at the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of Art Academy, and cannot travel as a result of your professional engagement. Are you aware of this affecting your psyche and therefore your approach to your choice of subjects?

In modern days, painters are more fortunate. Cultural heritage of all civilizations are readily on display. History thus becomes more accessible than ever. However, the volume of all the information has far exceeded what individuals can bear. As a rather unfortunate result, we started to experience profound frustration in the face of its sheer volume. What I need at the moment is to slow down my pace and limit my scope. In the west, the well-known fable about the Tower of Babel tells of the human aspiration for the unknown and eternity, and the chaos and disorder it leads to. Being gratefully humble, accepting what I have and the limits that come with it, this puts me at ease. In the days of my mentors, holding a thin book of black-and-white Rembrandt, they created works that are still hard to surpass today. That is the simple beauty radiated only by the painting itself. Having faith in what life has bestowed on me, accepting it, experiencing it and then expressing it, this is the choice I've made, a result of unbiased self-reflection. To choose is not only to take a stand, but also shows wisdom.

You have trained under one of the most eminent Neo-Realist painters in China, Yang Fei Yun. Within Chinese art of any period, who or what are your most important artistic influences, and outside of China? Who do you think is a role model currently in Chinese contemporary art for younger artists?

For Chinese painters, they are predestined to root in China. Increasingly comprehensive interactions between China and the West has only made it more pressing for Chinese painters to reflect on their own culture. While knowing all too well the closeness of the blood ties to the native culture, it is inevitable to see it mutate into something absurd. Personally, I stay on the traditional side, always alert to superficial leanings, while aware of the peril of being too conservative. Every serious artist with respect to history is experiencing this tension. Every time when I see classic traditional Chinese paintings, the excitement always overwhelms me, rendering me silent. Last summer the Han Banquet Map in the Forbidden City was one of those riveting experiences. According to the story, the painter Gu Hongzhong finished this painting after sneaking a peak at the grand banquet. Yet the painting is so richly detailed, without a hint of haste. The calmness the artist had shown, even while being sneaky, truly demonstrates his own unrivalled artistic expertise. In China's contemporary art circle, there's never a shortage of talents. However, no one would take up the role of a leader or an instructor to the masses. It's more a group of sensible people, minding their own business. At least this summarizes my friends. I wouldn't dare overgeneralize, for my knowledge of the outside trend is far from adequate.

Some of your subjects, as depicted in "Memory" and "Old Traveler", are the less visible in society: farmers, laborers, migrant workers, those essential to the functioning whole, but generally inconspicuous and certainly given less attention to date in contemporary art production in China, although this is changing. Do you see the artist having a duty in presenting the humanistic element in society for a particular purpose?

Balancing the social functions and aesthetic functions of art is an important issue. At times, the durability contradicts with authenticity. Paintings tend to focus on social reality. Revealing social problems and maintaining a keen critical perspective, these are much treasured traits and require true bravery. Yet, what separates painting from a biting satirical editorial? What prevents the value of painting from being replaced by an elaborate documentary? The answer lies in whether the painter agrees with the value of painting itself. The value of a painting is sourced from more than information, viewpoint, perspectives, reflections and desire to communicate; it has its own logic. An Indian proverb says: "concept is the child from a woman who has never given birth." I often find it strange why the elements separated from whole would be emphasized, amplified and tagged as "modern" or "contemporary". These two terms lack certain vigor. After all, art is art, there's no need to add two adjectives to make it special. In my works, social elements are not rejected but carefully controlled in a suitable context. Humanism is not only about showcasing humanities, but more returning to beauty. Beauty is in no way a pretentious concept, it is one of the advanced stages attainable by human souls. Some of my works are based on or regarding migrant workers or farmers. This is not because of the group they represent, it could simply be the result of a certain person I encountered, who caught my attention. I paint them for the undecorated beauty and realism I found in them.

Beyond visual manifestations of traditional Chinese philosophical subjects, you seem interested in the aesthetic effect of philosophical thought, for instance the heightened sense of stillness and serenity you create in your work evokes a sense of "wu wei", effortless action. Even your figurative works, whilst photo-realistic, manage an ethereality and non-referential quality; I know you have said on other occasions that you seek "distance from reality through distance from time" and on being commissioned to paint a portrait, you ask to see old photos of your subject. Would you say your subliminal message, no matter your subject, is on the visceral rather than the corporeal and do you think your ability to achieve this aesthetic lies in your own personal philosophy of "wu wei"?

Behind the creation of a painting hides a complicated psychological journey. The excitement and acuteness in aesthetics tend to wear off eventually in the long process of creating a painting. Generally speaking, the artist will base on his own aesthetics, and manage an ever changing reality. I myself attach great importance to the preparation beforehand, especially to weighing the value of various information. I prefer to put my "target" in the framework of time, consequently keeping appropriate distance from reality while remaining fundamentally authentic. "Time" exerts undeniably impact on people, continuously reminding us of human limitation, and is the origin of all our emotions and memories. In traditional Chinese culture, there is a rather poetic understanding of time. People get frustrated and upset by time and, in this exquisite sorrow, identify oneself and develop empathy. The scroll used in traditional painting is also psychologically suggestive—that time and space can be compressed and turned upside down. Reality can fit in the intimacy of one's own palms. This is, to humanity, release and comfort.

What are the values you hold most dear, as a man and artist?

China for long enjoys traditional norms and standard for both human virtues and artistic competence. The virtues of being a man is put before the actual techniques, with the former requiring much more wisdom and effort. A qualified artist, apart from dedication in his field, needs broad feelings and sense of responsibility—the essentials of being a man. Recently I started to realize the fact that traditional art is a triad, a mixture of the true, the good and the beautiful. Apart from the formality of beauty, it is crucial to have high moral standards and truth. Nowadays, these standards are too commonly ignored. The complex social and historical factor behind aside, art needs to maintain the power to move people on a deeper level and the power to exert lasting impact on human soul.

You are atypical for your age group; rather than introspectively examining yourself as many of the "Cartoon Generation", you possess a maturity of artists twenty years your senior. How do you account for your maturity? (Do you for instance read a lot or spend time with older artists?)

Maturity means getting more and more humble. In this, I am still far from the standard, still bothered by wild fancies and pride. Artists are sometimes proud by nature, for they always feel the sense of mission and their unique existence. However, a truly mature artist simply wouldn't have time for his ego/pride. Ignorance is bliss, sometimes generating tremendous forces, although often out of control.

I know following your only trip thus far overseas, to Italy and France, that you returned home from seeing the Renaissance Masters for the first time and their unusual effect on you was to paint abstract rather than figurative works. How did this come about?

This experience had a huge impact on me, no less important than a form of pilgrimage for the pious. Many artists specializing in oil painting in China shared similar experience, which can be likened to looking up respectfully to an insurmountable peak in human history. Many serious Chinese artists, in the face of systematic evolution of Western culture, are reflecting on the mutation of native culture and disappearance of traditional value. In this chaos without root, support and morality, all things became familiar strangers, with pretentious thinly veiled nonsense. During my darkest period, I was in desperate need of a strong support. I was struggling between two cultures. On one hand, I found it impossible to dive into western culture; while on the other hand, I didn't have the right environment which allows my returning to my native culture. I sunk into extreme pessimism. I started to detach myself, walling myself off from others. For hours on end, I would stare at the marks on the wall. My works centering marks in that period was my struggling between the solid and the abstract? As a result, nobody understood these paintings, yet I was still not detached enough not to care. It was safely the worst moment in my life. Nowadays, my mind is much more at peace. I started to realize

the limitations of my thoughts and started to realize the basic value of art works and limitations of people’s choices in a given period. Having understood these, I no longer view things with an absolute perspective, or aspire to an ideal environment. I started to do the things I’m capable of, keeping an extent of ambiguity.

Recently, you have started a new series of work inspired by old photographs of your grandparent’s generation and their stories passed down via your parents. Story-telling is a large part of your painting interest and Mongolia is famous for its folklore. To return to your formative years in Inner Mongolia, was story-telling part of your upbringing?

When I was little, my older brother used to tell us all these stories. He had a knack for making us the heroes of the story. The plot-line was usually generic heroic martial arts stories, but with ourselves being in the actual stories, it became infinitely more exciting. The plot also changed according to the mood and our behavior that specific day. I still vaguely remember that I was behaving particularly well one day, as a reward, the story had me accidentally come across a secretive skill. This gave me such an ego boost, as if I had actually mastered the skill in real life. In those days, street side book stalls were common place. This used to be our favorite gathering place, where 10 cents allowed you to read two comic books. I also owned a lot of these comic books, my brothers and I used to get into fight over them. These fights always ended with us each protecting our own pile, staring at one another. Traditionally, the narrative feature is quite crucially in paintings. The core of this feature is fundamentally a holistic view, in which the value of paintings are based on the entire cultural background and stipulates the social functions to some extent. For a long period of time, I failed to see the point in this theory and attempted to get rid of any element that hinders artistic freedom. On the contrary, at the moment, I actively seek out certain limitations, and benefit from the power hidden in them.

You are currently working on a large scale work “Blind Men Touching the Elephant”. What inspires you to create such substantial pieces and what are your plans for further major work?

The well-known Chinese fable “Blind men and the elephant” shares the same message with the Tower of Babel in the West. Both stories talk about the human aspiration to advance and to reach a sacred state of mind, as well as eternal pursuit of the mystery of the unknown. Both aim to point out the brilliant irony between the effort made by humanity in striving for these purposes and the chaos and paranoia created by human limitations. I have pondered on this topic at length, and eventually settled on painting a group of young men. In my point of view, men can better represent the desire of human sensibility to take over the world, while the young are the ones about to enter this norm despite being almost clueless about all the rules. As a group, they are frustrated yet not infuriated; tolerant yet not emotionally numb; confused yet manage to find relief in self-mockery. Their aspiration is based on the confidence in eventually mastering the norm and all its disciplines, without realizing how absurd the norm and the disciplines actually are.

I based these characters on my students who are studying painting in the hope of getting in to Central Academy of Fine Arts. For some of them, this is already the fourth attempt, their passion and vitality being worn down by repeated failure. The other day, I invited them back to mine, after taking some pictures for source materials and showing them my works, I treated them to a meal. Most of the time they were silent, I could not recall any real interactions between us. They just lowered their heads, concentrating on finishing the meal.

Many fables, proverbs and stories in Chinese traditions serve as an essential pivot point for me. I tend to choose traditional topics which were tightly woven into modern lives, concentrating on one painting a year. Meanwhile, I also keep a keen eye on my own resources. Lately, I’ve been really intrigued by my ancestry and the family history, including their lives and emotions...The history appears distant due to the passage of time, yet I became more emotionally attached and identified more with destiny and karma. The tension created by both overwhelmed me with mixed emotions.

In the words of the long-standing critic of Chinese contemporary art, Britta Erickson, in a recent paper: “Chinese art has matured, and with a slowly growing domestic audience is gradually less concerned with reception overseas. At the same time, the overseas audience is increasingly knowledgeable and inclined to recognize Chinese artists as talented individuals rather than part of an agglomerate. Tellingly, many artists... now are contemplating their artistic heritage...” Do you feel a conscious move to rediscover your “artistic heritage”?

The concept about rediscovering artistic heritage is an illusion. It’s like when a group of people read in the same room; a few of them couldn’t help reading aloud the brilliant extract. Hearing this, outsiders will have an impression of the kind of books they are reading, and even form the perception that only those who made the noise exist. True artistic heritages are time-honored gems. For example, the relics from our ancient ancestors, it’s been there for thousands of years and will

be there for longer. But then again, to establish effective communications, you need opened doors and windows, so the air is fresh. Moreover, people living inside also need to stretch their legs outdoors. However, this is more an issue beyond the artist’s concern. Painter’s workplace remains in his studio, going around too much and going too far would bring a guilty conscience.

How do you envisage the influence of Chinese art in the next decade?

This is too big a question that we should leave it to the theorists with broader horizon, tight logic and even skills of prediction. As a painter, I wouldn’t dare so much as speculate. What I do want to talk about is the impression of art in painters’ as a community in the past decade, or even 3 decades. Not so long ago, the Department of Oil Painting hosted “Back to Sketch” and “Back to Classics”<sup>1</sup>. A kick-off event was held, with all the participants being leading Chinese artists in oil painting. The event was hosted by Chen Danqing. Wearing a traditional black shirt and round rimless glasses, he gave a passionate speech about the marginalization and decline of art itself, reflecting on the loss of pure pleasure of painting and reminiscing the beauty of his immature early works in a much simpler period.... Compared with what happened to China in the past few decades and what art has become during this period, the artists are more in desperate search of the pure excitement of holding the paint brush, the kind of excitement that sends ripples down one’s spine, the excitement that can only be found in retrospect. During the dinner following the event, most artists were still in a rather nostalgic mood; Chen recalled the first time his works were acquired by the National Art Museum. He got 200 yuan for two oil paintings, which was enough for a brand-name watch back in those days. He remembered being overexcited that he counted the 200 again and again. Exactly how pure art can be, or should be, this is the real question painters face today.



ARTIST’S BIOGRAPHY

Jiang Shan Chun  
Born in Inner Mongolia in 1979  
Graduated from Oil Department of Central Academy of Fine Arts in 2002.B.F. A. degree  
Graduated from Chinese National Academy of Arts in 2009.M.A. degree  
Living and Working in Beijing, China

EXHIBITIONS

2010  
The Exhibition of the Fangzi Gallery Opening, Weifang, China  
“Hand in heart, see the glorious world” — — Liu Yujun &Jiang Shanchun charitable donation exhibition,  
“Dragon” Space, Beijing Hong Kong Jockey Club, China  
Tracing Sources and Seeking Law, Ordos, China  
Tracing Sources and Seeking Law to the Western — — Chinese Oil Painting Exhibition, Baotou, China  
Teachers and students of the Department of Fine Arts Exhibition — — 50 anniversary of PLA Art Academy,  
PLA Art Academy, Beijing, China

2009  
The Fourth A+A,PIFO New ART Gallery, Beijing, China  
Tracing Sources and Seeking Law — — Appointment in Fangzi, Weifang, China  
The Eleventh Asian Arts Festival — — The Ordos International Art Exhibition, Ordos, China  
Seeking and Finding — — The First Exhibition of Chinese New Oil Painting Artists, Chinese Academy of Oil  
Painting, Beijing, China

2008  
Tracing Sources and Seeking Law, China Art Gallery, Beijing, China  
Tracing Sources and Seeking Law, Chan Liu Art Museum, Taibei, China  
Wenchuan, The Fine Arts School Attached To The Central Academy of Fine Arts ,Beijing, China

2007  
Power of Realism, Contemporary Realism Art Gallery, Beijing, China

2005  
The Quest for the Origin of Art , China Art Gallery, Beijing, China  
Sketching Works of Tracing Sources, CAFA Gallery, Beijing, China

2004  
Awarded Works of Charles B.Wang Oil Painting Scholarship, CAFA Gallery, Beijing, China

2002  
Graduation Works of Central Academy of Fine Arts ,CAFA Gallery, Beijing, China

2001  
Nokia — — I See the World , CAFA Gallery, Beijing, China

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Standard Chartered Bank Collection, Singapore  
China Olympic Committee  
Earth and Man’s Museum, Shandong



# CATALOGUE ESSAY – “THE REFUTATION OF TIME”

Emily de Wolfe Pettit

## Remodelling of the New World to the Old World

The first decades of the 21st century and its proceeding century’s most remarkable aspect may be claimed by historians in centuries to follow as a period distinguished by fundamental remodeling of the New World to aspects of the - Asiatic - “Old World”. On various intra-levels in the West, we see the consideration of age-old models and practices:- from currency re valuation (there is discussion at the highest levels about linking world currencies to gold); to our attitudes to ecology (self-yielding and self-sustaining communities); and eco-political lives (there are murmurings amongst the stronger economic countries in Europe for the gradual disbandment of the Eurozone supra nation in favour of the return of Sovereign states). Most notable to this landscape is a fast-approaching, “second wave” return to the Old World, through the nurtured prominence of China and indeed, this ancient power is actively embracing connections to her own distant past and traditions - not as an after-thought, but as complement to her modernization (in the face of China’s championing of technological advancement, this Old World will undoubtedly coalesce with a much more futuristic vision of the New world). A number of Chinese with whom I breach this subject proudly draw a comparison between the past quarter century’s flourishing and the dynamism of the Tang dynasty:- China as industrious and trailblazing, with an educated, taste-shaping elite, emulating middle class and huge mass of labour force undertaking menial work, the backbone of every Empire in history, and relatively untouched by modernization. While there is undeniably an exchange between East and West, and certain Western practices continue to be discovered and adopted in an ongoing, deeper “Opening-Up” - as Chinese venture to the West and Western merchants to the East in ever-increasing number, experiment with Western-style cuisine and clothing and living on Lake Geneva (Beijing) - the agents of Western influence arguably operate largely on deceptively superficial levels. Conversely, when reading a Westerner’s guide to “Doing Business in China” today, the foreign businessman is more likely to encounter a crash course on Sun Tzu’s “The Art of War” than standard Western business school case studies. The comic situation intended by this analogy belies a more serious message:- that contrary to popular Western assumption, rather than the “Westernization” of newly emerged countries, we are increasingly likely to witness a redress of the balance to the East on all levels, including the cultural arena. Indeed, commentators familiar with China speak of the promulgation of a “Civilization-State” rather than a Nation-State<sup>1</sup>, implying that the most essential resource China holds lies in her cultural heritage and the greatest impact China may yet to have on the world is through the dissemination of her cultural values. Ironically, one could look far into the past to find the contemporary and the future, as if entering a process of refuting time.

## Reinterpretation of Traditional Chinese Art Philosophy and Practice in a Contemporary Context

In this vein, a growing momentum to the reinterpretation of traditional Chinese artistic philosophy - and moreover philosophy of life - continues to deepen its mark on artists in China today. Parallel to this, increased confidence of this “Civilization-State” is steadily lending itself to the re discovery what is intuitive, indigenous and distinct in the visual arts, for instance the reinvigoration of interest in landscape painting and contemporary ink brush works.<sup>2</sup> For subject-matter, where almost all Western contemporary art creation, particularly amongst younger artists, focuses on metropolises and urban life, many notable artists working in China are forging a path in the direction of where the vital force is not dependent on material circumstances:<sup>3</sup> the landscapes of rural China, everyday domestic settings and the

backbone of society - farmers, laborers, migrant workers - in other words those generally less conspicuous but essential to the functioning whole - and cast members of a unique and unprecedented social phenomenon in human history. Therefore, if we examine artistic practice beyond the appropriation of Western Pop and Realism in China, multiple strands of artistic endeavour, all energized by much earlier Chinese artistic traditions and moreover philosophies of art, are steadily gaining wider recognition internationally. Three of multiple strands span the following:- firstly, the continuation of the ‘grand traditions’ of calligraphy and landscape, where imitation and reinterpretation in the temper of earlier Masters is considered the paragon of achievement with a strict adherence to tradition in every aspect; secondly, continued experimentation with the amalgam of Eastern and Western concepts, methods and materials; and thirdly the expansion of traditional Chinese aesthetic experience (of evoking an atmosphere or state through conception rather than strict replication of the physical world) through “void materialism”, or rather softness of form and such subtle employment of media to deliver at once unmitigated and pluralistic possibilities for feeling. Wang Xin, known by his literary sobriquet, Jiang Shan Chun is a young artist who engages with all three with a genuine maturity his age belies, particularly the areas of the latter two, whilst traversing high-brow Ancient Chinese philosophies of art and life with China’s current domestic quotidian in determining his central thread of “A Refutation of Time”.

## The Range of Artist Jiang Shan Chun

Spanning an impressive range of styles and techniques and drawing inspiration from earlier traditions, Jiang Shan Chun is capable of creating abstract oil works that impart a sensory experience usually reserved for ink brush works in their delicate chromatic possibilities through apparent solids and voids; Jiang’s tempera portraits (a medium most popular between the 13th-15th centuries amongst elite European artists, before being surpassed by oil) hover between Western Realism and Eastern abstraction; his ink works in traditional Chinese scroll format present humble subjects that become exceptional through the verisimilitude and moreover delicacy with which he renders the subject; and he effectively translates writing into painting through his depictions of lofty Ancient Chinese analects of Taoism and Buddhism, Confucius and Zhuangzi, in Realistic style on large yet extremely detailed oil on canvas paintings. Indeed, to engage deeper into any of the three strands of art practice mentioned above and specifically the work of this artist, his approach, subjects for study and the aesthetic effects of his works, demands probing into Chinese philosophy and this artist’s philosophy of life.

## A Man’s Life Philosophy related to an Artist’s Philosophy

Jiang Shan Chun was born in Hohhot, the capital of Inner Mongolia, in 1979. At the age of eighteen he moved to Beijing, where he had won a place at the Central Academy of Fine Art (CAFA), under the part-tutelage of one of China’s most renowned Neo-Realist painters, Yang Fei Yun. More consequently, he was chosen by Yang Fei Yun to study under his guidance at Masters’ level at The Chinese National Academy of Arts and this likely cemented his considerable technique that allows him to work in various media at a masterly pace. Since I have had the pleasure of becoming acquainted with Jiang I have come to know a character of substance who, apropos his career and artistic life, applies himself consistently:- by morning he is a Professor and returns home at midday to paint for up to ten hours each day. He is equally consistent in his integrous approach to life and artistic practice as he is with his choice of subjects in searching for integral values, focusing his attention by turns on areas of the indigenous physical and symbolic ‘heart and soul’ of China, its natural landscape and inhabitants who hold traditional values of family and simple rituals of daily life very dear. The artistic culmination is far from pastiche, but highly pertinent commentary (of unquestionably increasing significance in coming years) on the subtler changes to people and areas that may not be directly affected by rapid modernization and swept up in huge socio-economic adjustment - still the vast majority of the Chinese population - and more extraordinarily, seemingly from another age. Poignant demonstrations include works such as “*Old Traveller*”, “*A Hard Day’s Simple Comfort*” and “*Memory*”, a poetic work depicting haunting figures to the background of a pair of old boots in an almost shrine-like homage to time past.

## Translating Stories of Ancient Chinese Philosophy into Painting

Germane to Jiang Shan Chun’s search for integral role models, the other central conduit of his work lies in ancient Chinese philosophy and its most enduring stories. “*The Three Monkeys: Speak No Evil, See No Evil, Hear No Evil*” is thought to originate in Confucian analects that date to circa 470 BC and predates any known visual depictions: “*Look not at what is contrary to propriety; listen not to what is contrary to propriety; speak not what is contrary to propriety; make no movement which is contrary to propriety*”. Jiang pays homage to what is thought to be the original pictorial rendering of this maxim, a 17th century wooden carving above the famous Tosho-gu shrine in Nikko, Japan, through his application of tempera on wood,

1 Martin Jacques' “*When China Rules the World*”. The dissemination of philosophy and wider Chinese culture is likely to be seen on an unprecedented scale following the exceptional spread of the Chinese language amongst younger and future generations outside of China.

2 Recent and current notable exhibitions of Chinese contemporary art in the West that explore all three include “*Fresh Ink*”, recently opened in conjunction with a symposium at Harvard University last November, or Lu Peng’s “*Pure Views*” which focused on the tradition of landscape painting reinterpreted by contemporary Chinese artists at Louise Blouin Foundation in London last October, in which the Chinese tradition of landscape painting in contemporary guise is presented.

3 There are a plethora of examples whereby inspiration in the early works of artists comes from rural China, including:- Mao Xuhui, Zhang Xiaogang, Ye Yongqing, He Duoling, and the focus of artists such as Chen Danding, Ai Xuan, Ding Fang. Notable recent examples of the juxtaposition of those members of society stuck in a “time warp” against rapid modernization in China include Yang Shaobin’s “Miners Series” and Liu Xiaodong’s “Hometown Boy” series.



using a stippled effect to give a sculptural effect. Elsewhere, he translates these stories to paintings of fine realistic detail, such as his 2009 oil on canvas painting, *“Zhuangzi’s Dream”* that takes as inspiration the 4th century BC philosopher’s<sup>4</sup> well-known story in underscoring that there is no reality, only perception. Here Jiang renders Zhuangzi’s account of dreaming of being a butterfly and, upon awakening, not knowing if he is Zhuangzi dreaming of being a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming of being Zhuangzi. This subject is again explored with its implications for semantics in an ongoing major work, *“Touching the Elephant”*, where the Buddhist story is fast-forwarded to the present-day as figures in casual Western-style clothing grapple to touch an almost undetectable outline of an elephant, whose physical imperceptibility in the artist’s eyes *“broadens the possibility for symbolic application of the ancient tale to the present day”*. The Buddhist story goes that upon being asked by the King “what is an elephant”, a group of six blind men each feel a different part of the animal to offer a different version, eventually coming to blows as they each maintain their version is the only truth. Buddha uses this story as warning to scholars and preachers who hold their own views as absolute truth without considering alternative viewpoints. These stories are highly pertinent to China today, changing rapidly on the surface, and elsewhere hardly at all, and arguably maintaining inherent modes of behaviour throughout.

**Jiang’s Visual Analysis of Ancient Chinese Philosophical Concepts**

Moving very deeply into Ancient Chinese philosophy, Jiang has created a set of abstract works based on Taoism’s *“Taiji”*, *“the supreme ultimate”*, the highest conceivable principle from which all existence flows, creating Yin and Yang from places of stillness and movement respectively. This all-pervasive concept underpins traditional Chinese energy systems of cosmology, the elements (Qi) which give rise to the seasons and indeed our own human life cycle, determining for instance the practice of traditional Chinese medicine, and balance of cold and heat in the body.<sup>5</sup> Jiang gives pictorial voice to this vast concept of *“Taiji”* in his large-scale 2007 abstract tempera on canvas triptych entitled *“The Supreme Ultimate (Taiji)”*. In this work, swathes of intertwined light and shade in mineral hues are chromatically textured to enact the infinite spatial temporal directions of the Universe. Two further works, *“Taiji - The End is the Beginning”* and its balanced counterpart *“Taiji - The Beginning is the End”* present this is a self-perpetuating, eternal cycle of dualities and that reversal is the movement of the Tao:

*“The "supreme ultimate" ["Taiji"] creates yang and yin: movement generates yang; when its activity reaches its limit, it becomes tranquil. Through tranquility the supreme ultimate generates yin. When tranquility has reached its limit, there is a return to movement. Movement and tranquility, in alternation, become each the source of the other...”*<sup>6</sup>

In these works, Jiang achieves inclines to peaks and declivities to voids through technically impressive work (most remarkably he employs only oils on canvas in these two pieces), as if sculpting three-dimensional planes in painting while subtlety of gradation again implies innumerable possibilities spatially and temporally. By contrast to the notion of *“Taiji”* exists the *“space-time”* between Yin and Yang, *“Wuji”*, which translates to *“without limitlessness or without ultimacy”*. Jiang explores this concept in his 2006 oil on canvas work *“Without Ultimacy - Wuji”*, through the depiction of a three dimensional, enclosed space, yet still retaining the same layering and fluidity of technique found in the above-mentioned works, thus suggestive of a greater spectrum in reference to *“Taiji”*.

**Aesthetic Possibilities of Chinese Philosophical Thought**

Beyond visual manifestations, Jiang Shan Chun is most interested in the aesthetic possibilities of Ancient Chinese philosophical thought and fully immersing the viewer in that action, or rather suspended action in his exploration of time. In his still life works, such as *“I used to travel a different path”*, *“Midday Quietude”* or *“Afternoon Light Filtering Through”*, once useful but now discarded objects, such as a pair of well-worn boots, a fissured chair or a half-full cup of tea, leave the viewer catching a moment of something just happened or about to happen or simply appreciating a moment of quietude between actions. This even applies to scenes of great potential flurry - a child’s playroom in *““Time Wings its Way”*, play-sparring in *“Youthful Battles”* and a working kitchen in *“Xinjiang Scene”*. Jiang’s intention, and subsequent aesthetic effect, is a sense of *“wu wei”*, without effort, or *“wu wei wu”*, effortless action or diminished

will, as espoused in Zhuangzi and Taoism. The aim of *“wu wei”*, as prescribed by Taoism, is to achieve a state of perfect equilibrium; similarly, the effect Jiang achieves throughout his work is a supreme sense of serenity. Having spent some time contemplating Jiang’s naturescapes, such as *“The Baron Seed”*, *“Shadow of Bamboo Story”* and *“Play of Light”* I can attest to the deep sense of calm that washes over the viewer from these works. Likewise, the very act of unfurling his scroll works is at once poetic and peaceful. Even in Jiang’s figurative works, such as *“My Son”*, *Portrait of An Artist”* and *“Portrait of My Wife”* a non-referential quality that speaks most directly to the emotions is evoked by his unusual mix of oil with tempera; whilst creating layers of texture, the latter evokes fluidity through its consistency, having the effect of skewing time. In Jiang’s words, in his portraits *“I seek distance from reality through distance from time - aligned with the Tao where time does not exist”*.<sup>7</sup> He also achieves this impression through alignment of the human figures in his works with perennial elements of nature, such as *“This Life Still Allows Beauty”*, depicting the ‘everyman’ in China alongside delicately-rendered flora and in *“I am here, imagining there”*, presenting the imagery of a butterfly to the old man’s dreams and hopes of another time and place. In the 2010 oil on canvas *“Time”*, depicting Jiang’s fellow artist and family friend, also from Inner Mongolia, Song Kun with her husband on receiving the news that she was expecting their first child. Jiang sought to depict the scale of the life journey their news brought through depiction of the pair gazing into the horizon of a vast natural landscape, with backs turned to emphasize the personal quality of the moment. In *“Live for the Moment”* <sup>8</sup> Jiang wanted to present the Chinese reading of *“Carpe Diem”*. It shows the bon vivant side to Chinese life through their passion for food as a symbol of life and vitality; and, also a personal side as Jiang imprints to the bottom middle of the canvas an image of himself as a mnemonic of this dictum. The tenor of an individual’s privately owned space is also strongly resonant in *“Transcendence of Imagination”* and *“Reflection on the Hope of Time”*. The latter work appertains to Jiang Shan Chun’s forthcoming series inspired by his discovery of an old set of family photographs from the period of the founding of the People’s Republic of China.

**Conclusion**

For all the outward appearance of Western art influence through Pop and Realism in China, the revitalization of traditional Chinese philosophy of art and aesthetics - and philosophy of life - continues to underpin artistic practice in China over recent years. Concurrent to this, the ripened confidence of this ancient power is lending itself to artistic conviction in what is indigenous, intuitive and distinct. Furthermore, in subject-matter many respected and upcoming artists working in China today are re discovering directions where the vital force is not contingent on material factors; rather, traditional Chinese philosophy, enduring stories and the dramatis personae of unposed, uninhibited characters with primal faces, to which the backdrops are the rich landscapes and domesticity of China, and the backbone of every Empire in history - a vast and fluid population of manual workers. Such subjects and their treatment through traditional Chinese approaches to aesthetic experience distinguish a unique aspect of art practice in China today, and arguably reaches the very core of understanding China’s development:- that contrary to popular Western assumption, rather than the “Westernization” of China, she retains her autochthonous, very traditional ‘heart and soul’. Indeed, artist Jiang Shan Chun guides the viewer to skip back far into various chapters of China’s distant past and conversely, to find what is age-old in the present; to un-peel the superficial layer’s of her present to find the deeper signifiers of a culture, deep-seated behaviour and customs that will likely become more apparent in the future - as if entering a process of refutation of time. The concept of refuting time is itself embedded in Chinese philosophy - originating in Taoism, whereby reversal is the movement of the Tao and the possibility of heightening vitality through alignment with the Tao (“the way”) and related concepts such as “neidan” or “spiritual alchemy”, whereby physical, mental and spiritual disciplines are undertaken to achieve this enhancement of the physical and spiritual self. Jiang engages with this process on multiple levels:- in the masterful way he applies traditional techniques, particularly tempera, and tempera mixed with oil, to achieve at once an unusual combination of hyper-realism and muted form; interpretation of stories from Ancient Chinese philosophy and their application to modern society; and achieving a heightened sense of serenity through “wu wei” that pervades all of his work. Through his remarkable works, Jiang Shan Chun, leads the viewer to contemplate and sensorily engage in the journey of time ephemeral and immutable, qualifying a return to one’s original being.

4 Zhuangzi, Master Zhuang, or Zhuang Zhou lived during the Warring States Period, a turbulent time in China’s history, but nonetheless saw the perpetuation of “The Hundred Schools of Thought” (spanning 770 to 221 BC), philosophers and schools of thought that had flourished since The Spring and Autumn Period. It is considered the Golden Age of Chinese philosophy because as an era of great cultural and intellectual development in China a sweeping range of philosophical thoughts were initiated and actively debated, those of which were refined during this period have profoundly shaped China to the present day

5 Many natural dualities, for instance feminine and masculine, dark and light, low and high, cold and hot — are thought of as manifestations of Yin and Yang respectively.

6 “...By the transformations of the yang and the union of the yin, the five elements (Qi) of water, fire, wood, metal and earth are produced. These five Qi become diffused, which creates harmony. Once there is harmony the four seasons can occur. Yin and yang produced all things, and these in their turn produce and reproduce, this makes these processes never ending”. Lao Tzu Tao Teh Ching Translated by John C.H. Wu, late 20th century

7 *“The Tao or the Way has attributes and evidence, but it has no action and no form. It may be transmitted but cannot be received. It may be apprehended but cannot be seen. From the root, from the stock, before there was heaven or earth, for all eternity truly has it existed... It lies above the zenith but is not high; it lies beneath the nadir but is not deep. It is prior to heaven and earth, but is not ancient; it is senior to high antiquity, but it is not old.”* (translation Mair 1994:55)

8 “ 活在当下 "in chinese



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