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The Lanqing Preference

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RASTI CHINESE ART

The Lanqing Preference

Blue-and-Green Paintings by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat

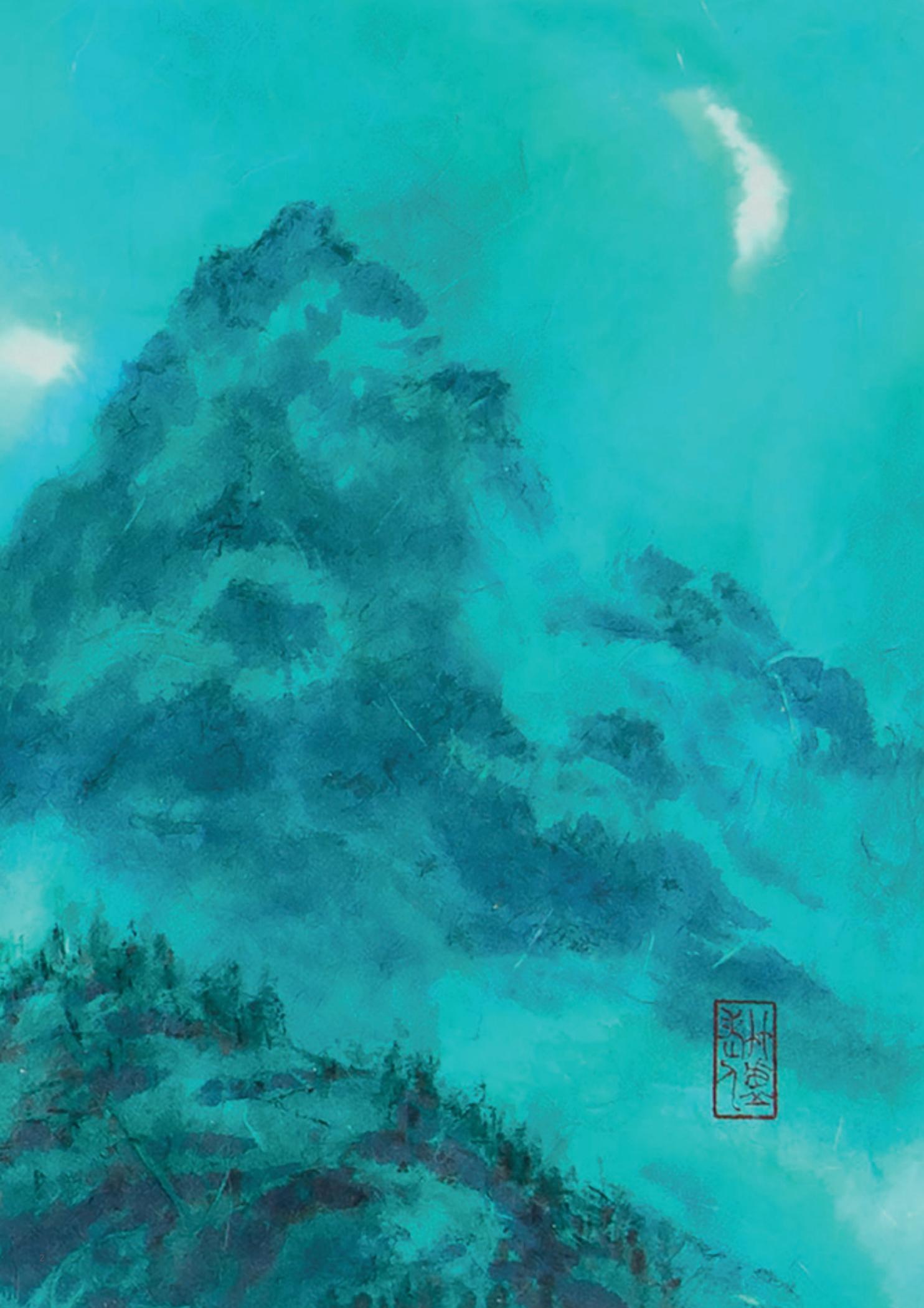
FOREWORD

This latest series of paintings by Hugh Moss experiments with blue and green colours of Chinese inks to create masterful landscapes and rocks. Perhaps one may be familiar with blue-and-green landscapes while finding rocks in these colours odd. The Song dynasty (960–1279) painter Su Dong Po was once questioned why he painted bamboo in vermilion red when there is no red bamboo in nature, to which he replied that there is also no black bamboo. Thus, the question should really be: 'Why not?'

This series portrays the underlying thesis of the artist's art practice; that answers are not to be found at the surface level but at a more universal, timeless level that transcends all details. In the past, blue and green painting pigments contained minerals such as azurite and malachite, which were also used in alchemical practices searching for an elixir of immortality; blue-and-green paintings were therefore associated with the realms of the immortals. Moss, however, is not seeking paradisaical realms like these alchemists of the past, but rather, expressing them and the need for them.

We have invited four distinguished authors to reflect upon these paintings and to view them as mirrors or lenses through which to see themselves.

Nader Rasti
Hong Kong
2020



ALL IS ONE: THE ART OF THE MASTER OF THE WATER, PINE AND STONE RETREAT

Anita Chung

The paintings of the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat fully exploit the mysterious subtleties of strange stones and vast landscapes to echo natural transformations. Borrowing the idea 'to see large within small', the microcosm reflects the macrocosm, and vice versa.

Whether it is standing loftily to display tension and balance, or dancing in open embrace with its root stand, or being suspended in mid-air with tiny points touching the ground, each strange stone imagery exhibits unique character and inexhaustible life-force. The artist's creative insights are characterized by a visionary intensity. The colophons are invariably imbued with classical Chinese and literary allusions. Written in English, however, the calligraphy lends the artwork an air of nonconformity.

To the artist, or the Stone Fool, the stone is a 'portal' for one to step beyond time and to enter the transcendental realm that promises endless possibilities. There, one attains spiritual oneness with the stone, gets invited to take tea with the immortals, meets hermits and meditating sages, strolls around the untrammelled wilderness of the Emerald Gorge or an aquamarine garden, and takes delight in the practice of freedom. Significantly enough, the realm of the stone that is so vividly and imaginatively portrayed in the colophons simply reveals the images of the mind. As the artist elucidates in his inscription to the landscape *Tablescape, No. 8, In the Mind* (December 2013):

Strange stones exist only in the mind; otherwise they are not strange, just stones. The gorge of the eremitic sage exists only in the mind; otherwise it is no more than unconsidered water carving the skin of the world. Paintings exist only in the mind; otherwise, they are just ink, paper and time. Time exists only in the mind; otherwise why does it need a name? Each of us only exists in the mind; without it there is no existence, only Thusness. Thusness exists. Never mind the mind (Beyond the Stage of Time, vol. 1, 2020, p. 128).

Yet, the Stone Fool—who roams freely between the materiality of strange objects and brush and ink, the world of red dust (the desire world), and the transcendental realm—understands that the only thing one can bring back from the mental journey is 'contained within consciousness' (cat. no. 14, *Balance of Nature*). Clearly, the artist's creative aspiration and imagination has provided him with a vehicle for connecting to inner reality. Meditating on strange stones underlines his attunement with the flow of existence.

How about the experience of the artwork to the beholder? The stone imageries communicate the mysteries of nature's creation and the enduring strength of antiquity. One needs not be a Stone Fool to realize that it takes an indefinitely long period of time for a piece to be naturally transformed into an exquisite, fantastic sculpture. Here, nature connects us all. Aesthetically, fantastic stone is the antithesis of the palatable. The aesthetics of 'strangeness' and even 'ugliness' in stone appreciation is indeed culturally determined, which can be activated when needed.

The subject matter and the artist's interpretations bring intellectual connections to certain Chinese

aesthetic concepts—such as ‘lofty antiquity’ and ‘eccentricity’—as well as an art-historical affiliation to the Song artist Mi Fu (1052–1108), the Wild Scholar of Xiangyang, who was known for his connoisseurship of rare garden rocks and his pursuit of naturalness in art. In addition, the contemporary adaptation activates our visual memories of the late Ming archaic depictions of natural subjects, most notably in the work of Wu Bin (1573–1620), such as his remarkable *Ten Views of a Lingbi Stone* (1610). The grotesqueries of Wu Bin’s artistic conception can be traced back in Chinese art history to the arhat depictions attributed to the Chan Buddhist monk Guanxiu (832–912), who claimed that his strange, wild and grotesque imageries were based on visualizations in his dream. Guanxiu’s arhats are rendered against natural settings—grotto, fantastic rock formation or gnarled branches—and the figures carry a bamboo staff or gnarled branches. All these motifs have long been associated with the archaic tradition stemming from Guanxiu, and they continue to find relevance and resonance in the art of the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat.

Colours invite magical interpretations of the stone imageries. As blue-and-green landscapes are traditionally associated with the mystical realm in Chinese painting history, this perception prepares the mind to enter the malachite and azurite stones in search of the immortals. And when the mountain abode of the *Mother Queen of the West* (cat. no. 5), the *Dawn’s Garden* (cat. no. 6), and the *Emerald Gorge of the Western Paradise* (cat. nos 9, 10, 11) are luxuriantly suffused with turquoise or aquamarine colours, the beholder is immersed in the wonders of the otherworldly landscapes. Such fantastic experiences echo the artist’s conception of stepping off the Stage of Time and penetrating the space of infinity.

Knowledge of Chinese art history is merely a starting point for appreciating the artworks presented here. All knowledge must transcend itself, as the artist has pointed out. It is exhilarating to clear the mind from distracting thought and to engage in a meditative journey into nature. Using the stones as a vehicle of transcendence, we will discover that no matter whether they are painted in ink or blue or green, no matter if they appear as lone sculptures or myriad forms of ravine, gorge and mountain range, all these manifestations are but one—*light* emitting from natural transformations that are full of the primordial energies of the universe. It is in this infinite luminescence that we flow with existence. All is one and is here for our discovery.

Selected bibliography:

Rasti Chinese Art Ltd., *Beyond the Stage of Time, vol. 1, ‘Realized Realms: The Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat’*, Hong Kong, 2020, p. 128.

Anita Chung was formerly curator of Chinese art and head of the Asian Art Department in the Cleveland Museum of Art. She is author of *Drawing Boundaries: Architectural Images in Qing China and Ji Yun-Fei: Last Days of Village Wen*; co-author of *Chinese Art in an Age of Revolution: Fu Baoshi* (1904–1965), *Silent Poetry: Chinese Paintings from the Collection of The Cleveland Museum of Art and Chinese Paintings from the Shanghai Museum 1851–1911*.

THE LIVES OF COLOURS

Yeewan Koon

I like to follow the methods of Qianli (Zhao Boju) and Zi’ang (Zhao Mengfu)—two schools of qinglu shanshui (blue-and-green landscapes). When the two Zhaos apply the blue and green pigments in concentrated areas, they never apply just one layer of colour. Even though their colours are indeed intense, [they] slowly add them layer by layer. Therefore, their colours are never sick. (Ngan, 2016, p. 118).

The Ming scholar Zhan Jingfeng (1520–1602) in extolling the talents of past painters also cautions his readers about the dangers of poorly applied pigments. His warning suggests that colours are living matters that, like humans, can turn ill. But is it too much to suggest that colour can have a humanist character? When we stand in front of Hugh Moss’s paintings of scholar’s rocks and mountainscapes, this question is less facetious as our eyes take in the pulsating rhythm of light beneath layers of greens and blues.

The association of colour with life force goes back to Chinese antiquity and early concepts of the afterlife. The most common colour used in this period was cinnabar (*dan* 丹), derived from mercuric sulphide to create a red pigment. It was appreciated because of its similarity to blood, and even more for its ability to transform into mercury, or ‘quicksilver’, a living metal that was also toxic. The first emperor of China, Qin Shihuangdi (r. 221–207 BCE), used cinnabar for his recreated afterlife world where all the rivers flowed with quicksilver. Here in his tomb, a place of death, the promise of life was found in the power of alchemy. Another important mineral was azurite, which when ground became a pigment of greenish blue (*qing* 青). This was believed to be a precious stone that could be found only in Daoist paradises, deep magical caves or remote mountains. Early stories speak of these sites as being filled with deities, fantastic beasts and bejewelled walls. Colour was never just surface treatment, for it held the alchemic promise of transformation.

The connection between magico-religious worlds and colours is at the core of early landscape paintings. One text attributed to the artist Gu Kaizhi (c. 345–c. 406) reveals instructions for using azurite for sky and cinnabar for mountains to depict a now lost painting of Cloud Terrace Mountain, a historically important Daoist retreat. This text is also a record of how colours were meant to be combined. Here cinnabar and azurite, or *danzqing* (red-blue), not only captured a Daoist place but, because of the powers associated with the minerals of these colours, were imbuing the image with immortal life.

Around the late 8th century when landscape painting developed into a distinctive genre (one that expanded to depict the secular world), the colour red was replaced by green. It is unclear exactly why cinnabar lost favour, perhaps because its toxicity hinted too much at the darker side of the desire for immortality. Nonetheless, the qualities that were associated with *qing* continued under this new combination of blue and green. The mineral azurite also gained new meanings becoming prized both for its medicinal properties and its greenish-blue colours as symbolic of the virtues of a gentleman. It is this broader history of the blue-and-green that continues today—one whose symbolic power when



in the hands of a talented artist can evoke the many facets of its meaning.

But what of the materiality of pigment itself? Can understanding its properties help our understanding of colours? Of relevance is how the processes involved in making materials needed for alchemy and painting were the same: grinding, heating, washing and mixing. Both also involved similar skills and knowledge needed to mine the minerals. According to the pharmacologist Li Shizhen (1518–1593), the minerals used in paintings are *kongqing* (空青 empty blue) and *shilu* (石绿 stone green). But these were only two within a larger spectrum that included *tianqing* (天青 sky blue), *biqing* (碧青 jade-green blue), *yangmeiqing* (楊梅青 bayberry blue), *xiyi huihui qing* (西夷回回青 Muslim blue) and *fotou qing* (佛頭青 Buddha-head blue). These fanciful names, some more poetic than others, were seldom generic. A blue is never simply just blue.

Li, a rational man, did not believe in the Daoist myths on the origins of these materials, explaining instead how such stones were formed by the conditions of their environment: They are located in deep pits within remote mountains where they absorb and process the mountain's *qi* (energy vapour) that circulates and transforms the internal streams of stone into different mineral types. Moreover, one substance can transform to become another in a slow reactive chain of changes. For example, azurite is one stage in between copper and malachite. Li was not alone in citing the ability of the lifeforce of the earth to transform itself. In *Tiangong kaiwu*, a Ming compendium of technology, the writer Song Yingxing (1587–c. 1666) extends the power of *qi* to forces that can explain why some stones were more precious than others: 'Precious stones are located at the bottom of the shaft without being blocked from the sky. They take advantage of absorbing the essential *qi* from the sun and the moon and therefore luminosity is trapped in their natural matters.' (Song, 1937, p. 293).

It is this idea that colours, as material substance, bear the traces of their becoming—the luminosity of life itself—that leads me back to the paintings by Hugh Moss. He may be painting with modern pigments, but the history of Chinese colours is no less relevant. His colours are never sick. They are of the sun, the moon and the dynamic force that are absorbed into forms that contort, writhe, bend, grow and shrink. Hugh himself is acutely aware of how at times an artist must cede to the painting's awareness of its destiny, its own preferences, for 'so often...the painting led the way and I followed where it led. As a rule, a painting always knows better than I how it should progress.' He may also have been talking about colours.

Selected bibliography:

Song Yingxing, *Tiangong kaiwu* (Shanghai: Shangwu yin shuguan, 1937 reprint).
Zhan Jingfeng, *Zhanshi xingli xiaobian* ('Mister Zhan's explanation of humanities and the great principle', (folio 10a and 10b)), adapted from citation by Quincy Ngan, 'The materiality of azurite blue and malachite green in the age of the Chinese colorist Qiu Ying (ca. 1498-ca. 1552)', PhD. thesis, Chicago University (2016).

Yeewan Koon is associate professor and Chair of the Fine Arts Department at the University of Hong Kong. She has published numerous works including *Nara Yoshitomo* (2020), 'A Chinese Canton? Painting the Local in Export Art' in *Eighteenth-century Art Worlds: Global and Local Geographies of Art* (2019) and *A Defiant Brush: Su Renshan and the Politics of Painting in 19th Century Guangdong* (2014) and is the recipient of several research awards including a Fulbright Senior Fellowship, American Council of Learned Scholars, and visiting scholarships at Cambridge University and Columbia University. In 2014, she was guest curator of 'It Begins with Metamorphosis: Xu Bing' at the Asia Society, Hong Kong Centre, and was one of the selected curators for the 12th Gwangju Biennale, 2018.

BALANCE OF NATURE

Juan José Morales

Strange stones are to Hugh Moss as arranged vessels are to Giorgio Morandi: an opportunity to express a deeper meaning beyond the surface. That the vessels or the rocks are never the same and that the variations yield endless novel possibilities pose questions that the mystery of art tries to answer. In their sincerity, in both cases we are in front of art which communicates before it is understood, art that appeals to a wider audience, from the connoisseur to the casual art lover and even passers-by. As we unroll the scroll with Hugh Moss in search of a permanent essence, one wonders at the artist's references and our own response.

It has been said that Moss's paintings pay homage to tradition, Chinese tradition, and that of the Chinese scholar in particular. There is no denying this deeply felt affinity, for the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat has made the literati's world his own. Indeed, few have been able to articulate the codes and layers of meaning of Chinese painting as Moss has done, not only in his paintings but through his writings and lectures too. To be sure, Chinese tradition is explicit in the use of the Chinese brush, the choice of ink on paper, the interplay of fullness and void and, above all, in the mastery of the composition: the balance of calligraphic blocks and carefully placed seals, colophons and seals buttressing the stone arranged carefully on the blank space. Now, at the peak of his skill, Moss achieves his aim with a greater economy of means, and the balance is sublime.

But every painter is a reflection of tradition, no one acts in a vacuum. What is relevant is how much Moss belongs to the present and how, in turn, he has reinvigorated the tradition. Certainly he straddles boundaries. A painter for our times, the lines of Bei Dao, the sober poet of our times, could help explain in part our painter's stance:

*He opens wide a third eye
the star above his head
warm currents from both east and west
have formed an archway*

Although in a class of his own, Moss's originality does not rest solely on his choice of script—his lines written in the Latin alphabet, in the English language, his mother tongue. There are more meaningful linkages in his passage across cultural borders. The keys can be found looking with intent at this scroll *Balance of Nature*, this stone and the colophons. Contemplating a rock is an intellectual pursuit, it sets one's mind wandering. That this pursuit took root in China speaks of a millenarian culture but, needless to say, this is something that everyone everywhere can appreciate.

The stone portrayed in the *Balance of Nature* is an eminently Chinese rock, possibly Lingbi or Ying but most likely Taihu, soaring high and slender while resting on a diminutive wooden pedestal. And yet, the equilibrium is not precarious but firm, as a bedrock, summing up all the attributes sought by the literati—again, the triumph of the artist's composition. Then one may find paradoxes: in the apparent contradiction of a stone that, with its natural perforations, is transparent; or in the twisted, intricate form, however simplified to an almost schematic representation; or the writhing sense of

movement which is serene and calm at the same time. And one last allegory, the colour. The stone's furrows are veneered in green and blue, the colours of the landscape, the overlapping shades playing harmoniously with the rock's silhouette to magnetic effect. If in the *nervatura* of past life this rock speaks of vigour, of profoundly optimistic fortitude, of transforming grace in strength and vice versa, the colours speak of peace.

We have been pondering where these pictures come from, but what about where they take us? And here the responses are more subjective and personal. For me, this scroll leads me to the studio, by the library, and brings me the joys of leafing the pages of a book, taking notes, writing, of curiosity excited and satisfied. I raise my head and my eyes meet the painting. The studio is a warm and cosy place, not an ivory tower. Neither are the cultural values this painting represents exclusive, but democratic. The confusion arises with the word 'scholar', abused in the English language with its correspondence in the lofty Confucian scholar of old. In other languages and cultures, the intellectual pursuits are not so circumscribed but are a natural extension of a lady's or gentleman's education.

These values find expression in Hugh Moss's painting and in his colophons in particular. These texts invoke the life of the Immortals, fairy tales in the realm of dreams; they summon the dragons watching over the painter like guardian angels. Like prose poetry these allusions are expression of the artist's character and exude a light-hearted optimism.

There is much in common between the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat and the Tang dynasty poet Po Chü-i, whose poem, *Madly Singing in the Mountains*, as translated by the like-minded genius Arthur Waley, explains it well:

*There is no one among men that has not a special failing.
And my failing consists in writing verses.
...
Fearing to become a laughing-stock to the world,
I choose a place that is unfrequented by men.*

If anything, Moss's life is one lived on an aesthetic plane, his retreat, and this is for sure Dionysiac if not Epicurean to the extreme—call it Taoist, for the artist's bonds to nature—and decidedly cheerful, not Apollonian or Confucian in its cold rationality. And this reflection takes us to the last twist, for these cultural values are rooted in ancient wisdom too, and we are nowadays at risk of missing this universal truth: leisure is the mother of culture. Studying, learning for learning's sake, is an infinite pleasure, and for this one must find time, forgetting the daily constraints and occupations, suspending for a while our connections to the world so that, in turn, we can enlarge it and expand it.

Once again, Po Chü-i and Arthur Waley mirror the world of the scroll:

Illness and idleness give me much leisure.

*What do I do with my leisure, when it comes?
I cannot bring myself to discard inkstone and brush;
Now and then I make a new poem.*

From this wisdom and sense of humour we draw strength, no longer or not only attached to the values of the Chinese literati in times past but anchored to the present, whatever the place. Like Morandi's still lifes, Hugh Moss's *Balance of Nature* suggests an inner life that is as rich as it is approachable. It is founded in the same pictorial tradition, which is Moss's tradition too, of still-life, *bodegón* and *nature morte*, motives for meditation on the essence of things, which reward contemplation as a source of solace and peace.

Juan José Morales is co-author of *Painter and Patron: The Maritime Silk Road in the Códice Casanatense* (2020) and *The Silver Way: China, Spanish America and the Birth of Globalisation, 1565–1815* (2017) and has co-edited two poetry collections, *Quixotica: Poems East of La Mancha* (2016) and *Desde Hong Kong: Poets in Conversation with Octavio Paz* (2014). His writing has also appeared in the *Asian Review of Books*, *Caixin*, *The Diplomat* and the *South China Morning Post*.

ALONE STONE

Mei Chin

Just like Greta Garbo, some stones want to be alone.

My mother, who is a Confucian historian, believed that I, her daughter, should be raised on a diet of what was personally important to her. This meant old movies, classic novels, and Franz Kafka's short stories. Now that I think about it, the ideals I absorbed from these first years of childhood were those of melancholy, loneliness and martyrdom. My first female hero was Greta Garbo. Garbo suffers in silence, much in the way that Kafka's Hunger Artist starves himself in a cage until he disappears into the straw.

When I see Hugh Moss's beautiful painting of a stone that, like Garbo, wants to be left alone, I am allured, and yet it prickles. I have never thought of stones as being particularly feminine before, but with this image, I realize that they are a specific kind of woman, all curves and coldness, perhaps embodying the woman that I once aspired to be.

Another favourite of my mother's is the 18th century Chinese novel by Cao Xueqin, *Story of the Stone*. It is a novel of manners, centred around a hero called Bao Yu as he navigates his way through life and love. Underlying this narrative, however, is one of Buddhist reincarnation. Bao Yu, whose name means Precious Jade, is a stone cast out into the world to find his other half, another stone. There are two women who are candidates to be his soulmate—their potential inscribed within their names. Bao Chai shares the 'bao', meaning precious. Dai Yu shares the 'yu', which means that she is the jade with whom he is destined to connect.

For many readers, including my mother and me, Dai Yu is a paragon of womanhood. She is tragic, an orphan with problems with her lungs. She has a keen intellect, and her poetry is unparalleled. She also refuses to eat and wastes away. While her soulmate, Bao Yu, swans around having affairs with maids and boys, and her rival, Bao Chai, composes verses inferior to hers, Dai Yu, the perfect female-stone, weeps in solitude stricken by sorrow and, in a famous scene, shreds flower blossoms with her fingers and buries them because she senses that she will not outlive the end of the book.

Every year I re-read this Chinese novel in David Hawkes' rapturous translation, which carries with it Western notions of psychology and romance. Perhaps this is why Hugh Moss's English inscriptions resonate with me; because, like him, I have absorbed Chinese culture through the English language.

About his Garbo stone Moss writes, 'it has a certain darkness and strength to it that is lost in a crowd'. Maybe, when Moss wrote his inscription, he was also thinking about the English meaning of 'jade'. In English there is a jade that is totally separate from the precious Chinese object. It is derived from the Finnish *jadis* for a female horse, or mare, and connotes a prostitute that is worn out from work. From this word we also get the word 'jaded'. 'Let the galled jade wince', declares Shakespeare, 'our withers are unwrung.' Jades, in the English language, are wantons, hussies and minxes. Dai Yu, the virginal martyr who dies young, is no such jade.

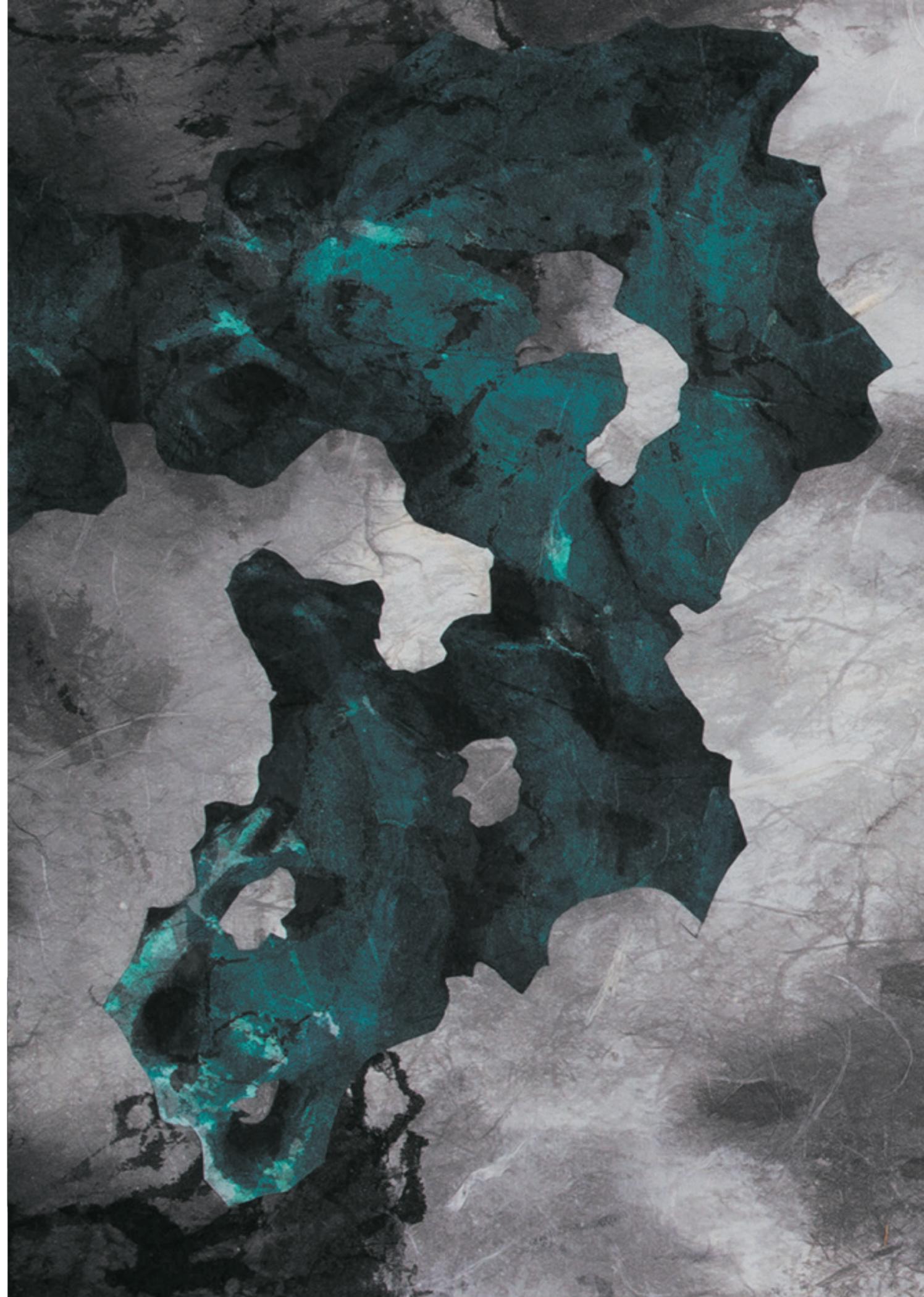
Then there is Greta Garbo. As the title character in *Anna Christie* asking for a whisky—‘and don’t be stingy, baby’—Garbo, at 25 years old, is already a woman washed up, a jade in the English sense of the word. In *Camille*, she is a courtesan with tuberculosis. In *Anna Karenina*, she throws herself under a train because she falls in love with a man who is not her husband. Yet she is a perfect Chinese stone; her years of drink and heartbreak have left no mark. She is polished and unspeakably lovely.

Moss writes, ‘Strange stones are the skeleton of the cosmos, the foundation story of consciousness, and the root of wisdom. Find a way back into the stone bearing with you an infinite capacity for delight, and not only will fulfilment be yours, you will also carry it back to the Source with grateful thanks.’

Moss’s stones are vivid and dark; sharp like an actress’s cheekbones, gloomy and sensual. I would like to think that some of his stones have also enjoyed themselves. While Garbo projected sadness, she also engaged in rampant affairs with her co-star John Gilbert and the lesbian poet Mercedes de Acosta. My favourite Garbo film is *Ninotchka*, where she plays a frigid Russian spy who is wooed and eventually won by Melvyn Douglas, who dresses her in opulent hats and makes her laugh. Stony Greta Garbo, in *Ninotchka*, defrosts.

Jade stones transform and grow more valuable when they are warmed by skin and breath. Moss’s unabashedly female stones beg the question. Are we, as women, simply stones? Is this to be a woman’s lot in life, to be held by others and to stay mute while containing centuries of pain? One wonders when reading *Story of the Stone* why Dai Yu endures so much anguish. Perhaps she behaved naughtily in a previous existence? Garbo as an actress had many lives; she had been a spy, an adulteress, and a prostitute, and then, in *Ninotchka*, is rewarded with a chance to be silly. One can only hope that Dai Yu, in her next incarnation, will finally deserve someone who will heat her, tease her, and coax her into having just a little bit of fun.

Mei Chin is a food and fiction writer who splits her time between New York City and Dublin, Ireland. She is the recipient of a James Beard MFK Fisher and two IACP awards. She has written for *Saveur*, *Lucky Peach*, *Vogue*, *The New York Times*, *Fiction*, and *Bomb*.



1. I WANT TO BE ALONE

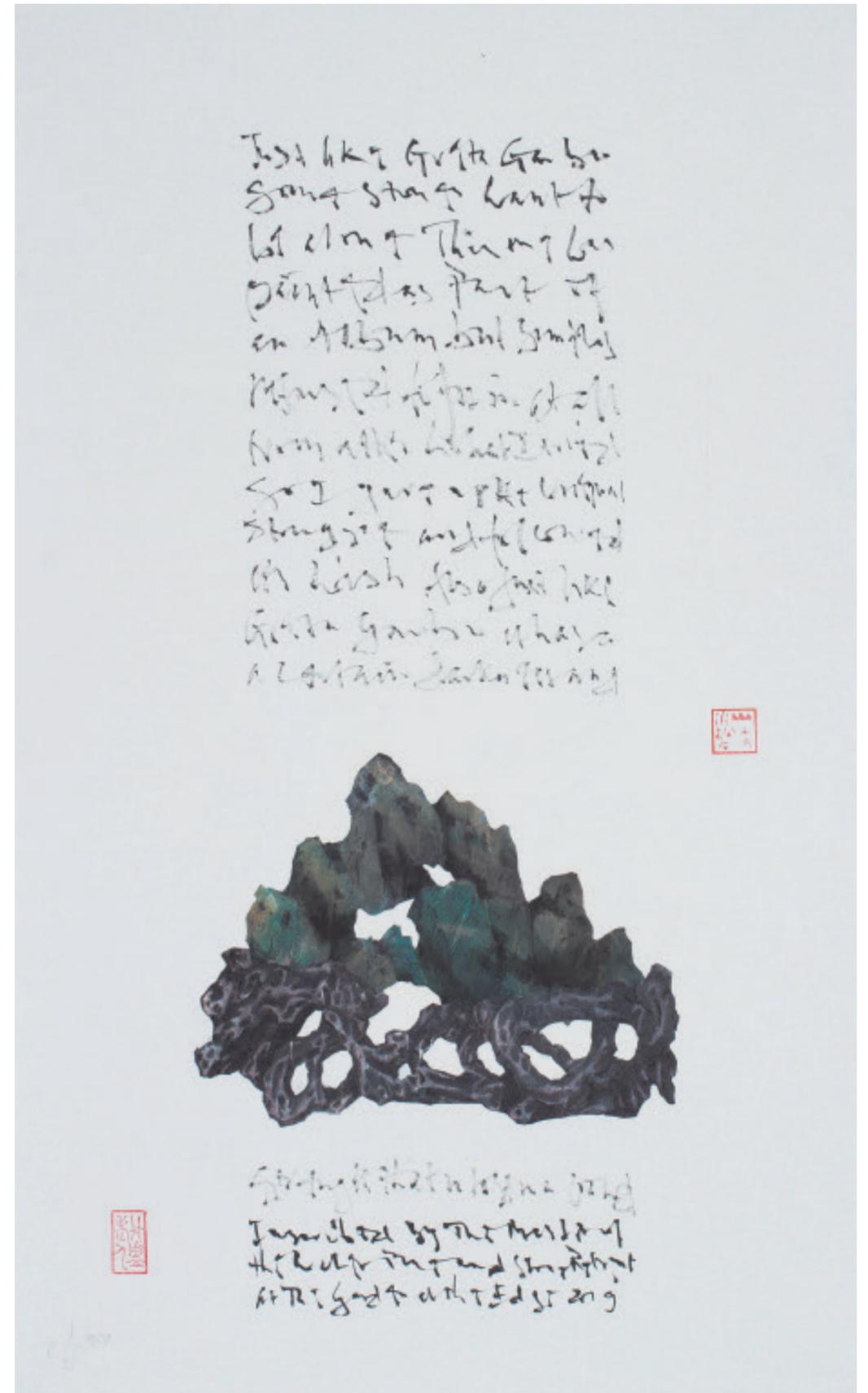
Ink and water-colours on cloud-dragon paper, mounted down on *xuan* paper
80.5 x 50 cm
Hong Kong, February 2019

With two seals of the artist, 水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* ('The Water, Pine and Stone Retreat'),
and 竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* ('Old man as empty inside as bamboo')

Inscription:

Just like Greta Garbo, some stones want to be alone. This one was painted as part of an album but simply refused to fit in at all no matter what I tried, so I gave up the unequal struggle and followed its wish. Also, just like Greta Garbo, it has a certain darkness and strength to it that is lost in a crowd.

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat at the Garden at the Edge, 2019.



2. TAKING TEA IN A STRANGE STONE

Ink and water-colours on cloud-dragon paper mounted down on *xuan* paper
70 x 77 cm
Hong Kong, February 2019

With three seals of the artist, 水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* ('The Water, Pine and Stone Retreat'),
墨者不朽 *Mozhe buxiu* ('Let ink be my immortality'), and 竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* ('Old man as empty
inside as bamboo').

Inscription:

The inner life of strange stones and, indeed, of Stone Fools is truly intriguing. One never knows what will happen after stepping out of the world of red dust and into the realm of the stone. This very day I found myself lost in a stone I was painting only to be invited to take tea with an immortal.



3. MONUMENTAL MINIATURE

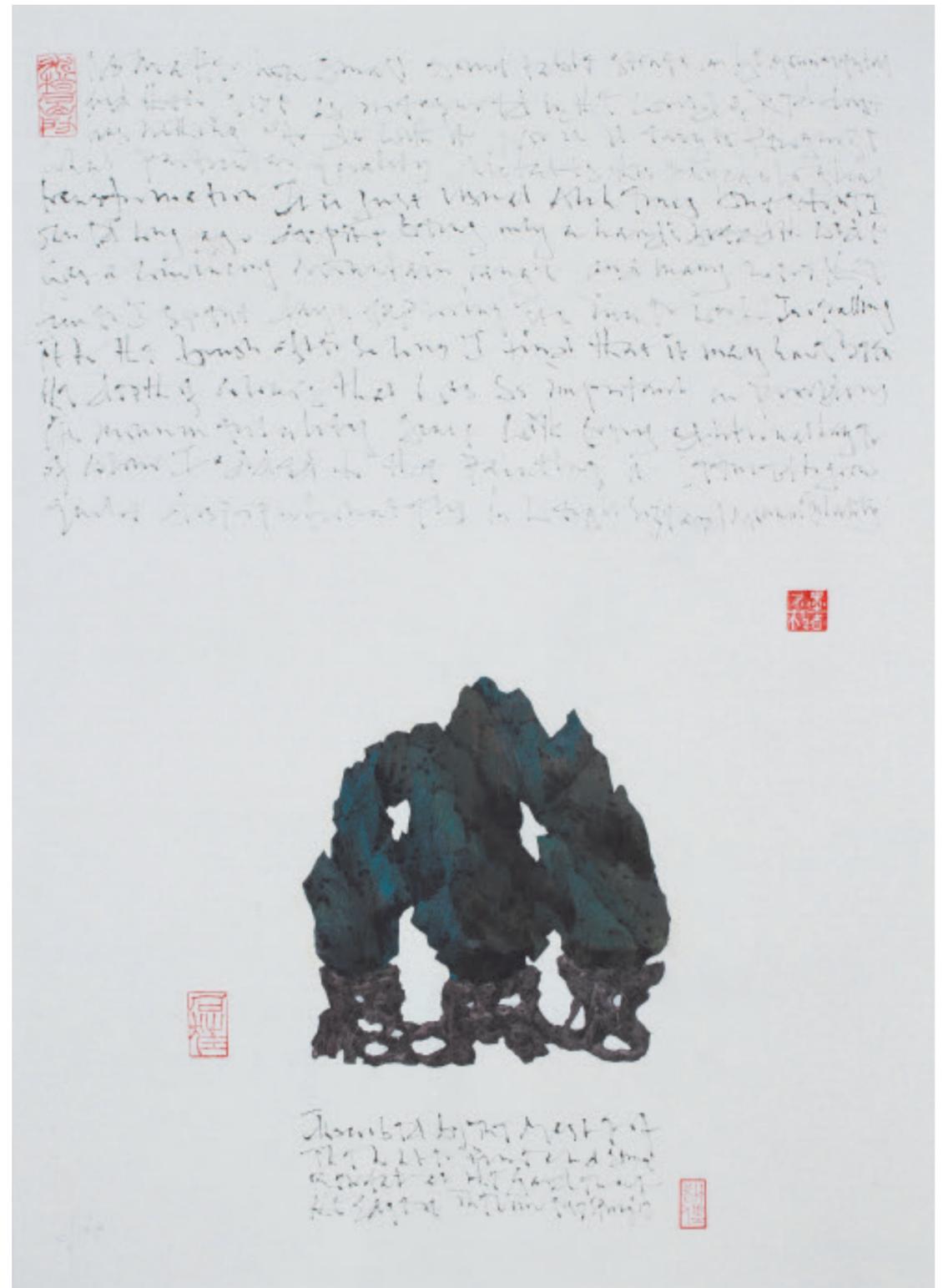
Ink and water colours on cloud-dragon paper
98 x 70 cm
Hong Kong, February 2019

With four seals of the artist, 水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* ('The Water, Pine and Stone Retreat'), 石狂 *Shikuang* ('Stone fool'), 墨者不朽 *Mozhe buxiu* ('Let ink be my immortality') and 竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* ('Old man as empty inside as bamboo')

Inscription:

No matter how small, some table stones can be monumental and their size as measured in the world of red dust has nothing to do with it. Nor is it easy to recognize what particular quality dictates this psychological transformation. It is just visual alchemy. One stone I owned long ago despite being only a hand's breadth wide was a convincing mountain range, and many were the times I spent days exploring its inner world. In recalling it to the brush after so long, I find that it may have been the depth of colours that was so important in providing its monumentality since with every additional layer of colour I added to the painting it seemed to grow quite disproportionately in weight, size, and monumentality.

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe, Spring 2019.



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4. THE COLOURS OF KUNLUN

Ink and water-colours on cloud-dragon paper mounted down on *xuan* paper
Album of ten paintings with ten inscriptions, title panel, etc.
45 x 35 cm (each leaf)
Hong Kong, February 2019

With twenty five seals of the artist, 攜杖老人 *Xiezhang laoren* ('The old man who carries the staff'), 水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* ('Water, Pine and Stone Retreat'), 如如居士 *Ruru jushi* ('The retired scholar who believes that all doctrines are equal'), 墨者不朽 *Mozhe buxiu* ('Let ink be my immortality'), 山外山樵 *Shanwai shanqiao* ('The mountain woodcutter who is not in the mountains'), 石狂 *Shikuang* ('Stone fool'), 養石閒人 *Yangshi xianren* ('An idler who cherishes stones'), 意氣如雲 *Yiqi ru yun* ('Spirit as high as the clouds'), 年年歲歲一床書 *Nian nian sui sui yichuang shu* ('Bed full of books all year round'), 笑傲烟霞 *Xiaobao yanxia* ('Smile haughtily among clouds and rosy mists'), 南山同壽 *Nanshan tong shou* ('Longevity like the southern mountains'), Flying Cranes (pictorial seal), 偶然得之 *Ouran dezhi* ('Achieved by accident'), 石 *Shi* ('Stone'), 一二三 *Yi er san* ('One, two, three'), 金石壽 *Jinshi shou* ('Indefinite life'), 有意无意 *Youyi wuyi* ('Between intention and no intention' - two different versions), 无為 *Wuwei* ('Without action'), 人磨墨墨磨人 *Renmomo momoren* ('Man grinds the ink; ink grinds the man'), 竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* ('Old man as empty inside as bamboo'), 有所不為 *Yousuo buwei* ('Some things I do not do'), 虛靜觀復道人 *Xujing guanfu daoren* ('Man of the dao who observes the return of all things to emptiness and quietude'), 意外之喜 *Yiwai zhixi* ('A happy accident'), and 閒情似野鶴 *Xianqing si yehe* ('Free as a wild crane').



Handwritten text in a cursive script, likely Chinese or Japanese, describing the object's form and material. A red square seal is in the bottom right corner.



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The
Kojan
of
Kumano

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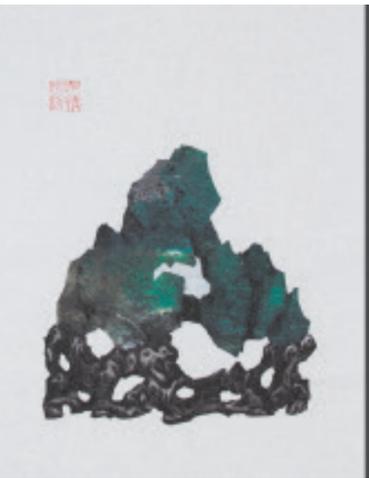


Handwritten text in a cursive script, likely Chinese or Japanese, describing the object's form and material. A red square seal is in the bottom right corner.



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5. STAR-BORN REALM

Ink and water colours on cloud-dragon paper
95 x 86 cm
Hong Kong, September 2019

With three seals of the artist, 水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* ('The Water, Pine and Stone Retreat'), 竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* ('Old man as empty inside as bamboo'), and 有意无意 *Youyi wuyi* ('Between intention and no intention').

Inscription:

Should a Star-born Princess gaze out from the Purple Chamber of the Six Pairings of the All Highest her eyes will be drawn to a jade cascade that falls from the Ninth Heaven to nourish the Mother Queen of the West and her court.

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe, September 2019.



6. THE HIGH MASTER OF THE DAWN'S GARDEN

Ink and water colours on cloud-dragon paper
95 x 91 cm
September 2019

With four seals of the artist, 水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* ('The Water, Pine and Stone Retreat'), 墨者不朽 *Mozhe buxiu* ('Let ink be my immortality'), 竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* ('Old man as empty inside as bamboo'), and 養石閒人 *Yangshi xianren* ('An idler who cherishes stones')

Inscription:

The Lad of Blue Florescence gazes out from his Fangchu Palace and waving his cape of volant blue halcyon plumage turns his world aquamarine before setting out with sylphine companions to idle away eternity.

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe, in the early Autumn of 2019.



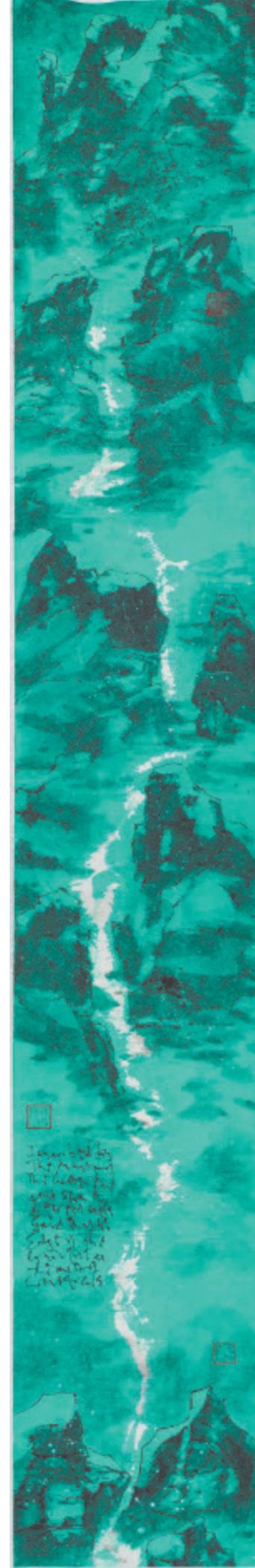
7. GLITTERING GORGE

Ink and watercolour on cloud-dragon paper
128 x 19 cm
Hong Kong, November 2019

With three seals of the artist, 水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* ('The Water, Pine and Stone Retreat'), 養石閒人 *Yangshi xianren* ('An idler who cherishes stones'), and 攜杖老人 *Xiezhang laoren* ('The old man who carries the staff').

Inscription:

Inscribed by the Master of the Water and Stone Retreat at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe, at the onset of winter, 2019.



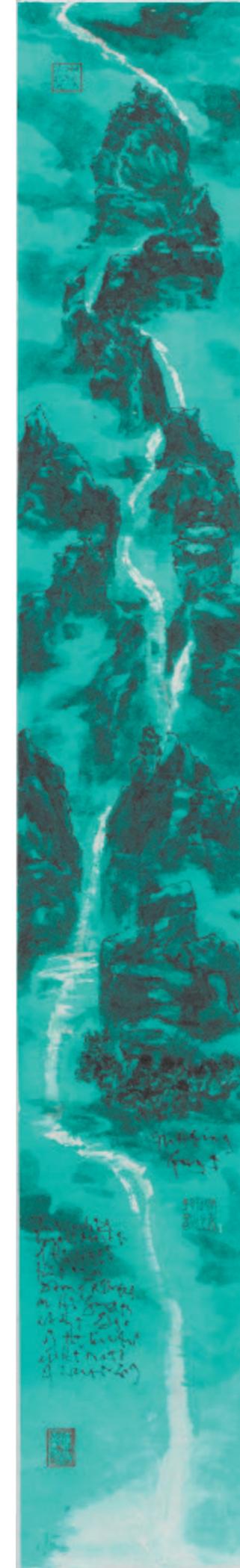
8. GLITTERING GORGE NO. 2

Ink and watercolour on cloud-dragon paper
142 x 19.6 cm
Hong Kong, November 2019

With three seals of the artist, 水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* ('The Water, Pine and Stone Retreat'), 攜杖老人 *Xiezhang laoren* ('The old man who carries the staff'), and 閒情似野鶴 *Xianqing si yehe* ('Free as a wild crane').

Inscription:

Inscribed by the Master of the Water and Stone Retreat at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe, at the onset of winter, 2019.



9. DIVIDING THE INDIVISIBLE

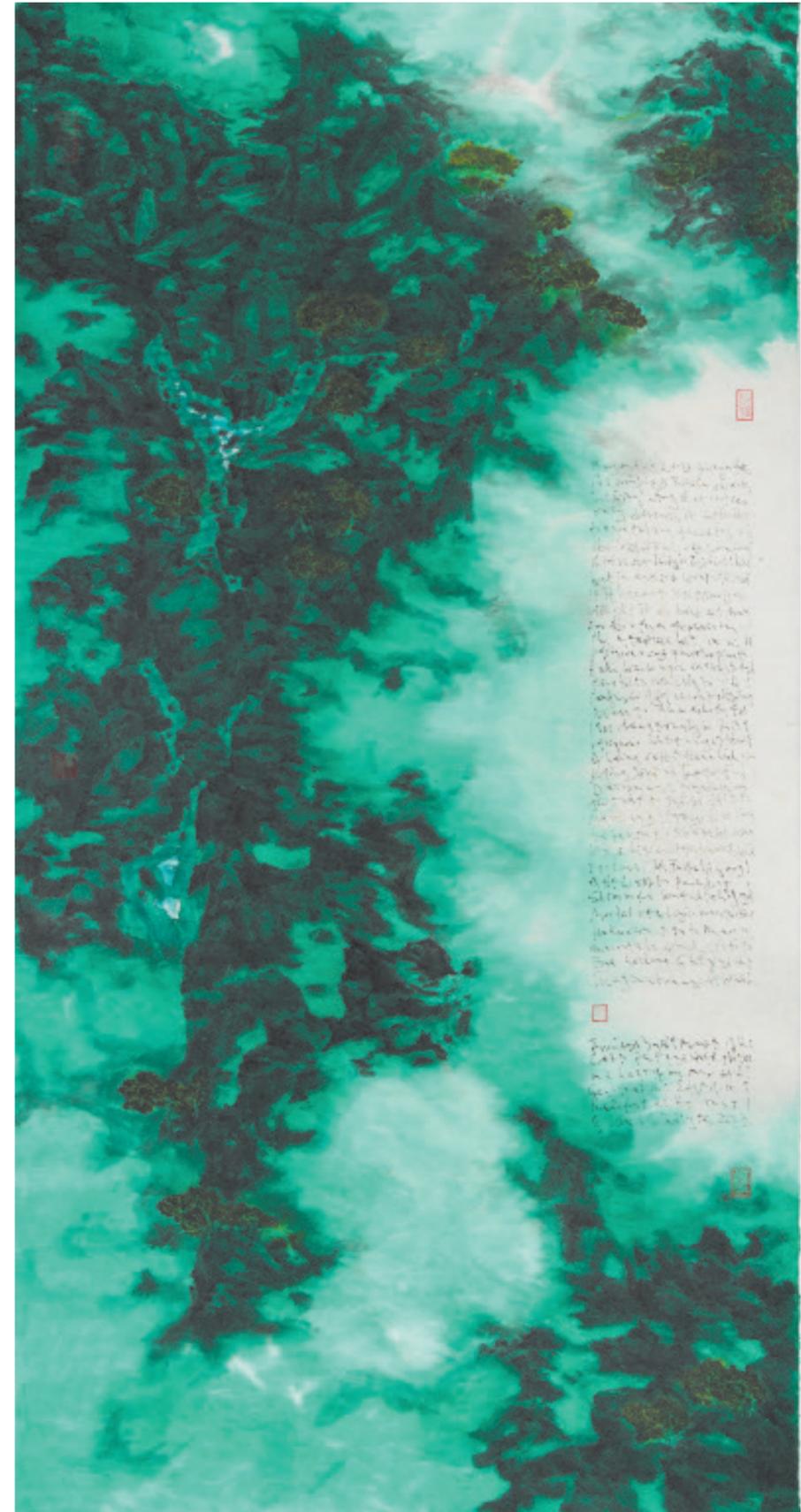
Ink and watercolours on cloud-dragon paper
186 x 97 cm
Hong Kong, October 2019

With five seals of the artist, 水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* ('The Water, Pine and Stone Retreat'), 攜杖老人 *Xiezhang laoren* ('The old man who carries the staff'), 竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* ('Old man as empty inside as bamboo'), 墨者不朽 *Mozhe buxiu* ('Let ink be my immortality'), and this 養石閒人 *Yangshi xianren* ('An idler who cherishes stones').

Inscription:

Beyond the world of fragments, the unified realm awaits. The irony being that one can only discuss it with the fragmentary faculty of the rational, reasoning intellect. Unity is indivisible, but in order to comprehend it, it becomes necessary to divide it as best we may. For this reason, explaining the inexplicable in all religions and philosophies falls back on analogies and parables, usually to the confusion of the uncomprehending masses. This is achieved less dangerously in those religions where a higher state of being, rather than a higher being, governs, but even Daoism and Buddhism give rise to endless deities, myths and legends that can be taken too seriously, along with a hierarchy of transcendent realms. The Emerald Gorge of the Western Paradise shimmers somewhere beyond mortal reach and is inaccessible, unknown, even to many immortals and deities. But nothing is beyond the imagination and the brush.

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine, and Stone Retreat in a haze of incense at the Garden at the edge of the Universe at the onset of winter in the year 2019.



10. CONVERSING WITH CLOUDS

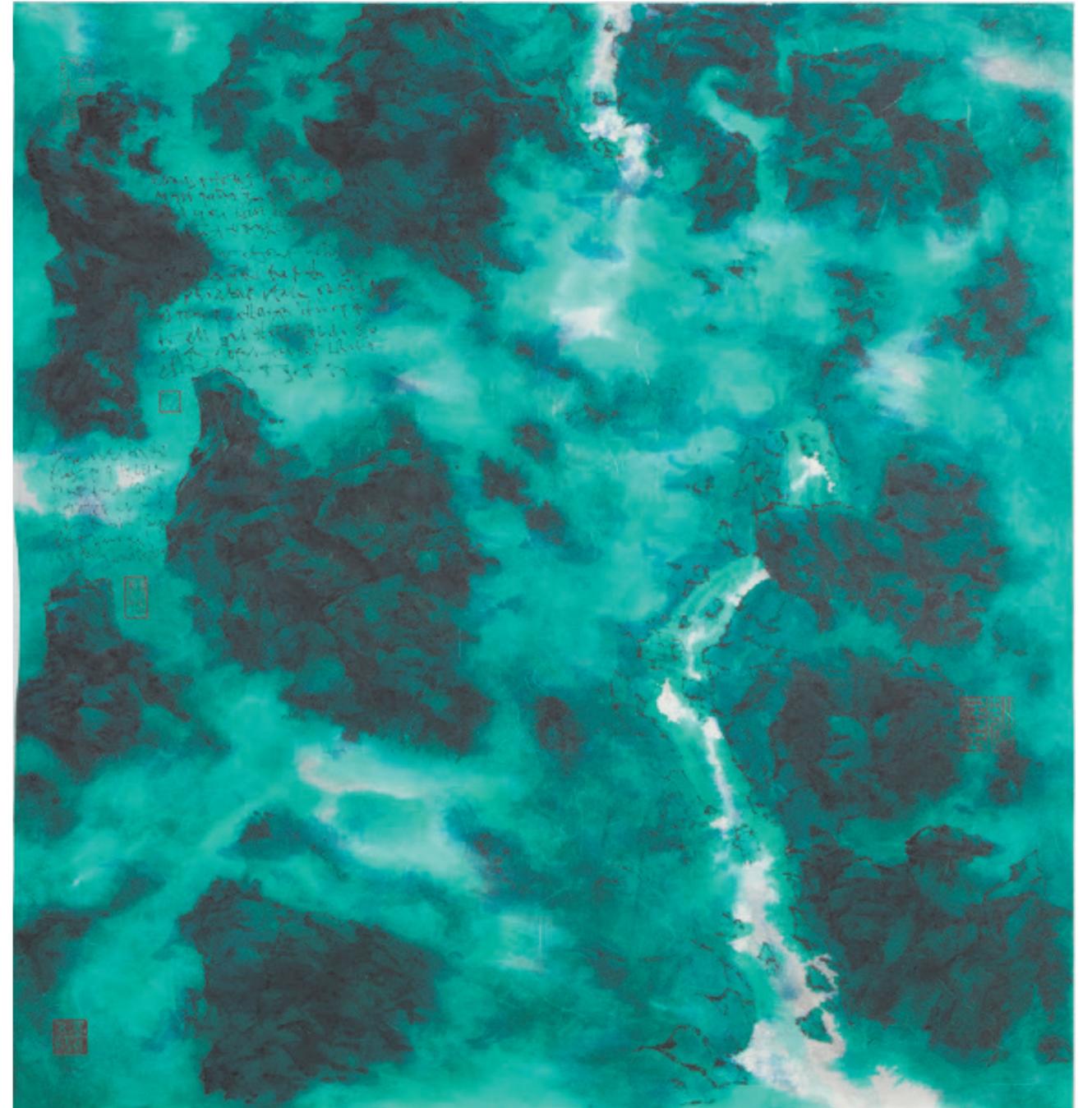
Ink and water colours on cloud-dragon paper
98 x 93.5 cm
Hong Kong November 2019

With five seals of the artist, 水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* ('The Water, Pine and Stone Retreat'), 養石閒人 *Yangshi xianren* ('An idler who cherishes stones'), 竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* ('Old man as empty inside as bamboo'), 墨者不朽 *Mozhe buxiu* ('Let ink be my immortality'), and 如如居士 *Ruru jushi* ('Retired scholar [or lay devotee] who believes that all doctrines are equal')

Inscription:

Climb to the heights of the mysterious Emerald Gorge and you will come to understand everything there is to know about white clouds. Few enter this inexplicable realm outside of time, although it is open to all, but those who do so often report that the white clouds are green.

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone retreat at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe in the early Winter, 2019.



11. EMERALD GORGE STONES

Ink and watercolours on cloud-dragon paper and *xuan* paper
47 x 323 cm
Hong Kong, November 2019

With three seals of the artist, 竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* ('Old man as empty inside as bamboo'), 墨者不朽 *Mozhe buxiu* ('Let ink be my immortality'), and 水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* ('The Water, Pine and Stone Retreat').

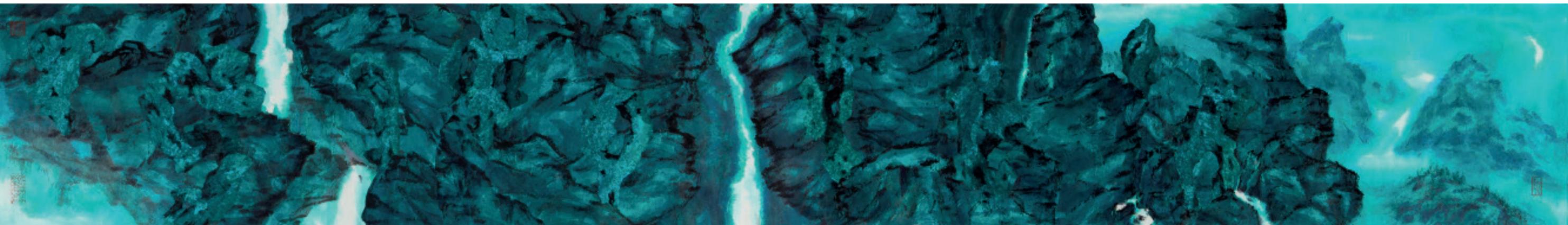
Inscription:

As a Stone Fool should you, one day, so perfect the art of disappearing into the stone and find yourself in an Emerald Gorge. Follow the river backwards, by simurgh or on foot - and the only difference between the two is a matter of time which, in a timeless realm, is incidental. Once beyond the tree line many waterfalls descending from within an inch of heaven feed the river you will have followed. As the air thins and you climb into the permanent chill of the high peaks you will discover the Stone Garden of the Gorge. Who knows how they came to be there, but for as far as one can see twisted stones emerge from the mountains - it is the monumental stone garden of the Immortals. You may be tempted to wonder how you might take smaller stones home with you, but that is a hollow dream. Nothing that seems physical beyond the Stage of Time can be brought back to the world of Red Dust, only consciousness can move unhindered between the two.

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone retreat at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe in the early Winter of 2019.

Note:

As so often, this painting began as a rectangular landscape as the process evolved, the painting led the way and I followed where it led. As a rule, a painting always knows better than I how it should progress, so it morphed into a hand scroll. But by the time it was finished although title and story had already presented themselves, I put it on the studio wall and decided it would look better seen as a single image hanging on the wall. This left no room for the lengthy inscription already composed, so now it must accompany the painting as a related text.



12. BANGING ON A DRUM

Ink and watercolour is on cloud-dragon paper mounted down on *xuan* paper
148 x 49 cm
Hong Kong, November 2019

With all seals of the artist, 水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* ('The Water, Pine and Stone Retreat'), 石狂 *Shikuang* ('Stone fool'), seal idle, 墨者不朽 *Mozhe buxiu* ('Let ink be my immortality').

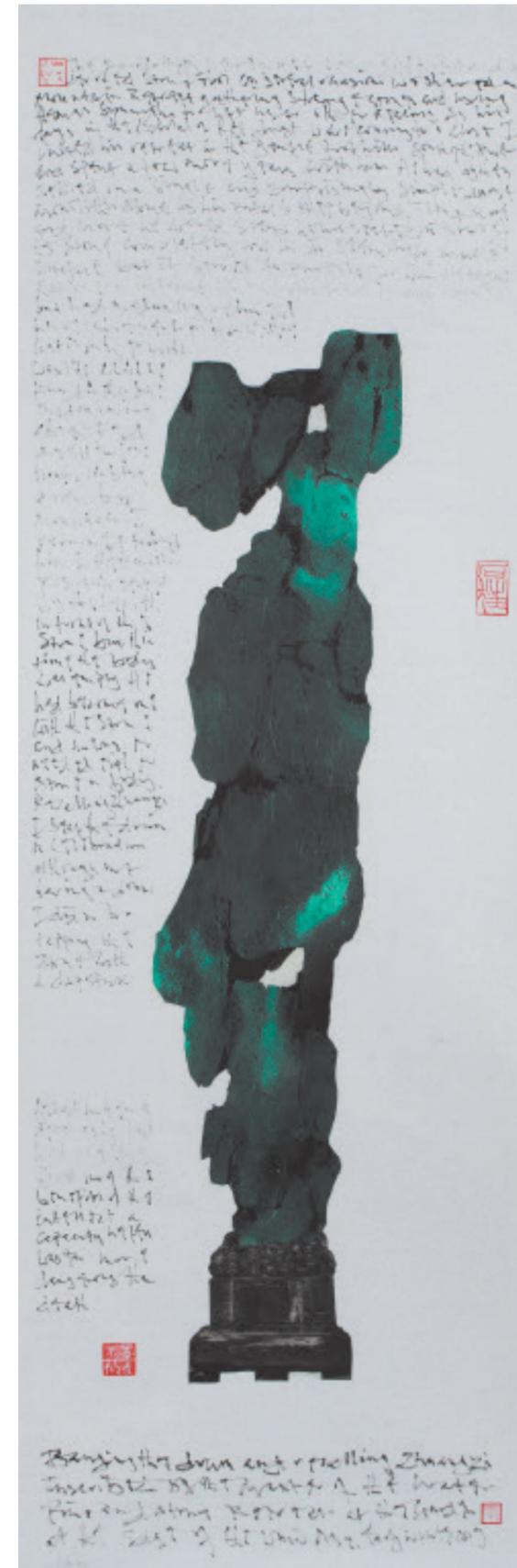
Inscription:

The Partially Present Hermit was a good friend and a devoted Stone Fool. On several occasions we shared a mountain retreat, gathering strange stones and using them as simurghs to lift us to other realms. As his days in the world of red dust were coming to a close, I visited his retreat in the gentle foothills south of the river and spent a few more years with him. He had, by then, settled upon a single and surprisingly simple, almost monolithic stone as his portal to step beyond time. More and more he would spend hours seated in front of the stone, completely lost in its seemingly simple surface, but it served its purpose for him. He told me that over a lifetime he had entered many stones but had gradually reduced his requirements for transcendence until only purity was left, which he found in this stone.

One day, having absented myself for some time climbing a nearby mountain, I returned to find him in the familiar position seated by the hearth in front of the stone, but this time the body was empty. He had become one with the stone, and no longer needed either stone or body. Re-calling Zhuangzi, I beat the drum in celebration, although not having a drum, I did so by tapping the stone with a chopstick.

He had no fear of death, as he had had no fear of birth, nor of the benefits of intellect, a capacity he felt was far more dangerous than death.

Banging the drum and recalling Zhuangzi, in this scribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone retreat at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe, early Winter, 2019.



13. TIMELESS WISDOM

Ink and watercolours on cloud-dragon paper, mounted down on *xuan* paper
97 x 178 cm
Hong Kong, November 2019

With three seals of the artist, 水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* ('The Water, Pine and Stone Retreat'),
石石狂 *Shishikuang* ('A fool for stones'), and 如如居士 *Ruru jushi* ('Retired scholar [or lay devotee] who
believes that all doctrines are equal').

Inscription:

Strange stones are the skeleton of the cosmos, the foundation story of consciousness, and the root of wisdom.
Find a way back into the stone bearing with you an infinite capacity for delight, and not only will fulfilment be
yours, you will also carry it back to the Source with grateful thanks.

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone retreat in 2019.



14. BALANCE OF NATURE

Ink and watercolours on cloud-dragon paper, mounted down on *xuan* paper
138 x 72 cm
Hong Kong, November 2019

With four seals of the artist, 水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* ('The Water, Pine and Stone Retreat'), seal Stone Fool, 墨者不朽 *Mozhe buxiu* ('Let ink be my immortality'), and 竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* ('Old man as empty inside as bamboo').

Inscription:

The strange stones in the Garden of the Immortals at Emerald Gorge rose majestically far above my head while balanced on the tiniest foot. Strange stones from beyond the stage of time do not need to follow the physical rules of the realm of red dust, some of them stay firmly upright standing on nothing at all. Of course they cannot be removed; the only thing we can bring back from there is contained within consciousness. Having seen them, however, they live in the mind and can be brought forth in the world of red dust with the help of the brush. The stone I named 'Coaxing the Dragon' stood more than three times my height, but as for its manifestation as I recall it to the brush, I have reduced it to a table stone. The Dragon is smaller, but dragons, like twisted stones, do need to be large as they don't rely upon their size for their power.

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone retreat at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe in the early Winter 2019.



15. DRINKING AT THE POOL OF THE SUN

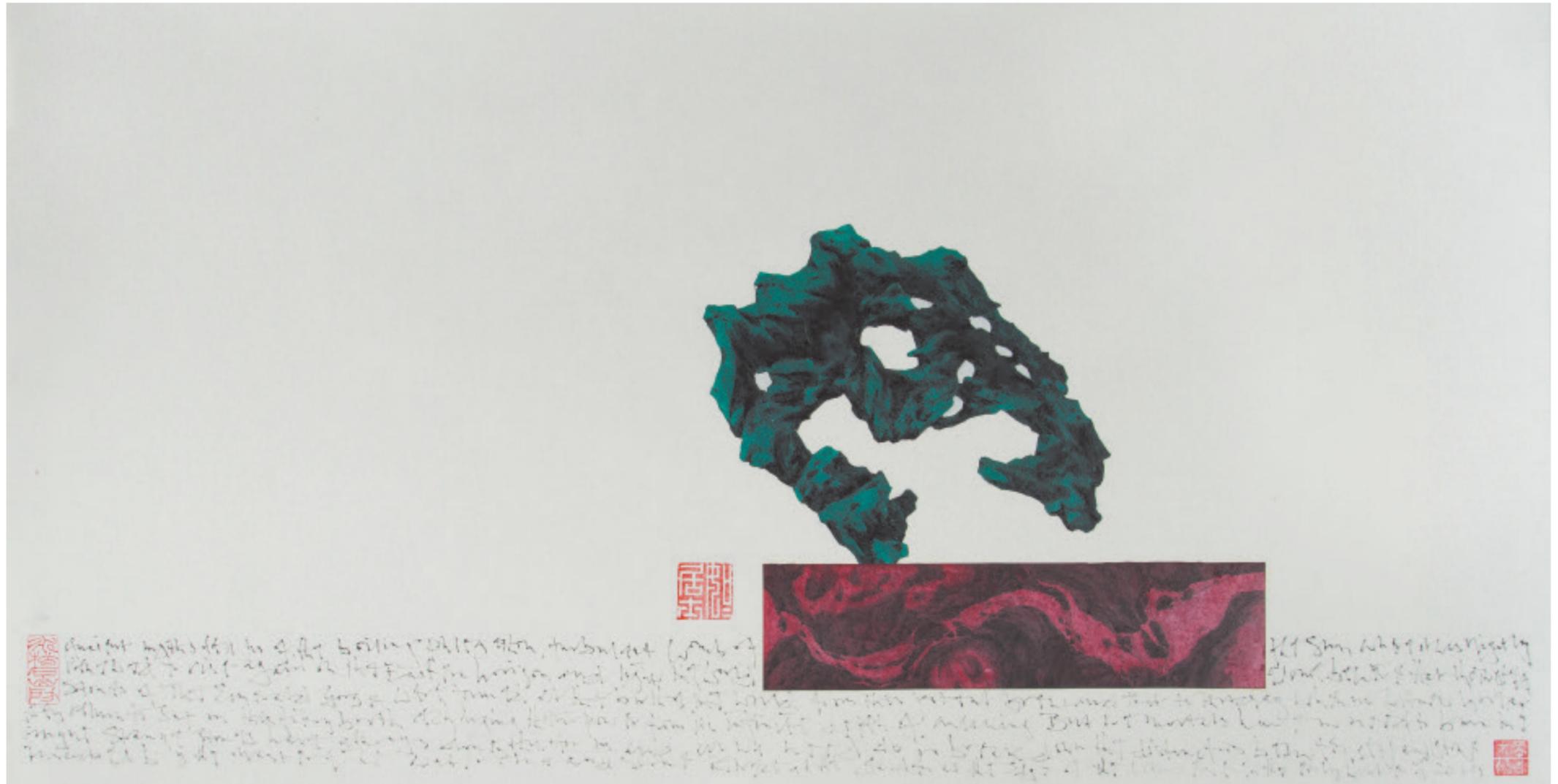
Ink and watercolours on cloud-dragon paper mounted down *xuan* paper
72 x 138 cm
Hong Kong, November 2019

With three seals of the artist, 水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* ('The Water, Pine and Stone Retreat'), seal let ink, and 如居士 *Ruru jushi* ('Retired scholar [or lay devotee] who believes that all doctrines are equal').

Inscription:

Ancient myths tell us of the boiling Phlegethon, turbulent womb of the sun, where it was nightly renewed to rise again on the eastern horizon and light the world. Some believe that the twisted stones of the Emerald Gorge were formed at the birth of the world from this potent brew and that to this day, when no witness is near, they return to sup on this fiery broth, re-charging their power from its infinite depth of meaning. But we mortals have no need to burn the tongue, strange stones have already done this for us and all we need do is break down the distinction between self and stone.

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone retreat at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe in the early Winter of 2019.



16. DREAMSTONE

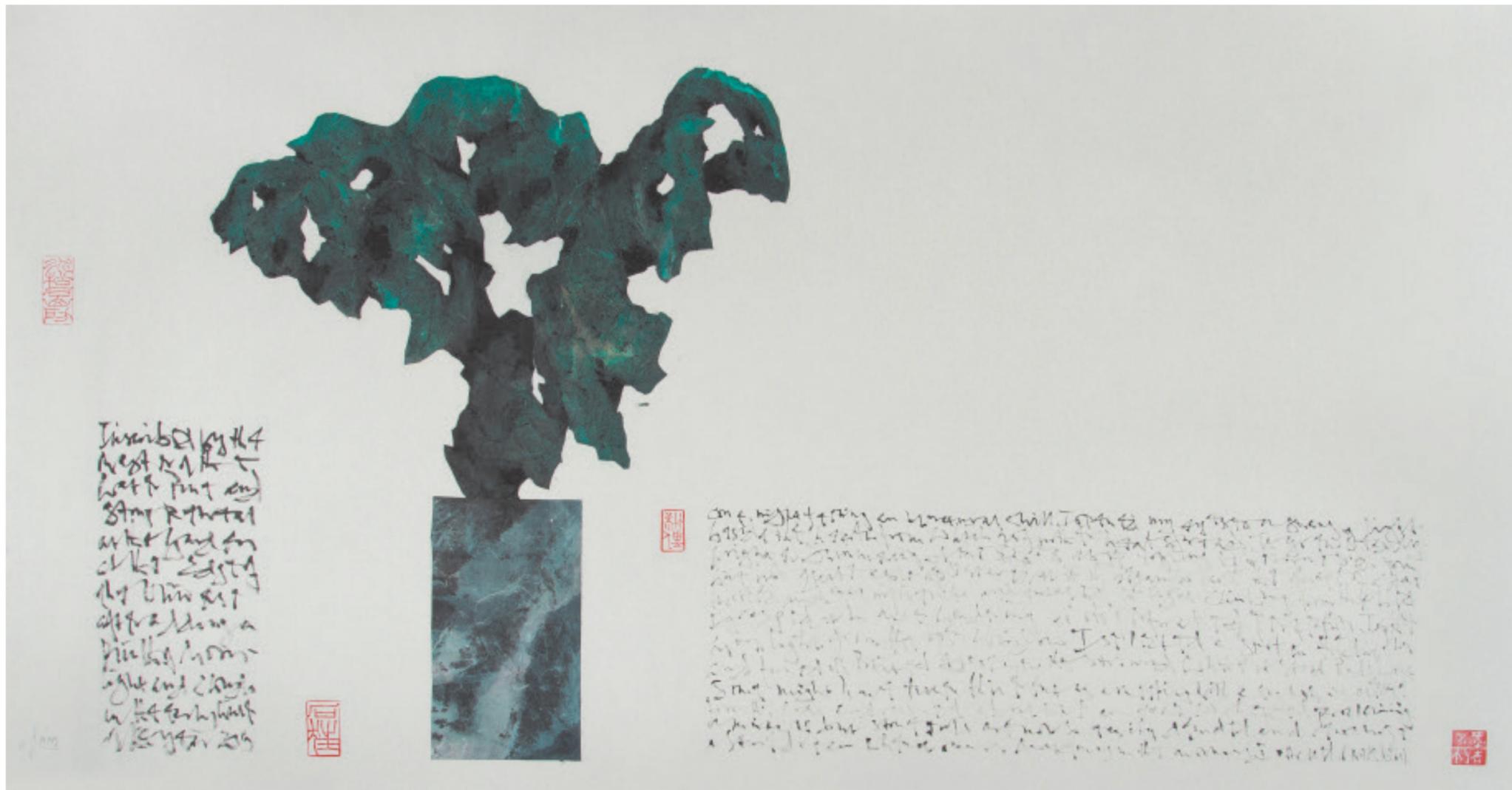
Ink and watercolors on cloud-dragon paper mounted down on *xuan* paper
72 x 178 cm
Hong Kong November 2019

With for seals of the artist, 水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* ('The Water, Pine and Stone Retreat'), 石狂 *Shikuang* ('Stone fool'), 竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* ('Old man as empty inside as bamboo'), and 墨者不朽 *Mozhe buxiu* ('Let ink be my immortality').

Inscription:

One night feeling an unnatural chill I opened my eyes to a strange light beside the hearth from which no further heat spread. It grew steadily brighter, shimmering at the edges as if trying to become solid form but not quite able. As I stared at it, it began take the shape of a stone, twisted and magnificent and encased in light. Climbing from the bed, I grasped it in awe, wondering at its perforated perfection. In the moonlight from the open window, I selected a spot in the dirt floor and forced its pointed base into the ground, where it stood radiant. Some might have taken this event as a meeting with a sylph, or a message from the gods and rushed about like an excited chicken proclaiming a miracle, but Stone Fools are not so readily deluded and recognize a stone dream when it occurs. Awakening in the morning, I recalled it to the brush.

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone retreat at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe, after adding a plinth of moonlight and clouds in the early Winter of 2019.



17. MEDITATION STONE

Ink and watercolours on cloud-dragon paper mounted down on *xuan* paper
138 x 72 cm
Hong Kong November 2019.

With four seals of the artist, 水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* ('The Water, Pine and Stone Retreat'),
石狂 *Shikuang* ('Stone fool'), 養石閒人 *Yangshi xianren* ('An idler who cherishes stones'), and 竹虛老人
Zhuxu laoren ('Old man as empty inside as bamboo').

Inscription:

Anyone who has toyed even briefly with the realm of the Stone Fool will understand the meditational nature of this microcosmic infinity. Initially, of course, a meditational state is required in the process of eliminating the distinction between self and Stone in order to enter it, but once that is achieved, the number of suitable places for meditating within the realm of the stone is boundless. Over the centuries, I have found that it is rare indeed to stroll in this realm without constantly bumping into meditating sages. One might think that it would be considered discourteous to disturb them for a chat, but such nonsense has no meaning between the Realised beyond the Stage of Time.

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone retreat at the Garden at the Edge of the Universe in the early Winter of 2019.



18. MOONLIGHT DREAM

Ink and water colours on cloud-dragon paper
Handscroll
Painting: 24 x 497 cm
Hong Kong, February 2019

Title slip:
With one seal of the artist, 水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* ('The Water, Pine and Stone Retreat')

Inscriptions:
Moonlight Dream

Title panel:
With three seals of the artist, 墨者不朽 *Mozhe buxiu* ('Let ink be my immortality'), 石狂 *Shikuang* ('Stone fool'), and 水松石山房主人 *Shuisongshi shanfang zhuren* ('The Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat')

Inscriptions:
Moonlight Dream

Inscribed by the Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat in the Spring of 2019.

Painting:
With ten seals of the artist, 水松石山房 *Shuisongshi shanfang* ('The Water, Pine and Stone Retreat'), 竹虛老人 *Zhuxu laoren* ('Old man as empty inside as bamboo'), 山外山樵 *Shanwai shanqiao* ('The mountain woodcutter who is not in the mountains'), 養石閒人 *Yangshi xianren* ('An idler who cherishes stones'), 攜杖老人 *Xiezhang laoren* ('The old man who carries the staff'), 無為 *Wuwei* ('Without action'), 笑傲烟霞 *Xiaobao yanxia* ('Smile haughtily among clouds and rosy mists') 人笑我 *Ren xiao wo* ('People laugh at me'), 意外之喜 *Yiwai zhixi* ('A happy accident'), and 有意無意 *Youyi wuyi* ('Between intention and no intention').

Inscriptions:
In the brief but fruitful reign of the Yongzheng emperor I was invited to visit the new estate of the Grand Secretary's son in order to advise him on a stone garden he wished to build. My reputation as a stone fool lingered still at court after earlier visits during the latter part of the reign of the Kangxi emperor when I had become friendly with the minister Gao Shiqi.

I stayed at the estate for several months, pacing, measuring, and painting views of suggested features, but my host seemed detached and disinterested.

Then, one night after an elegant gathering when all present had consumed far too much wine, I had a dream.

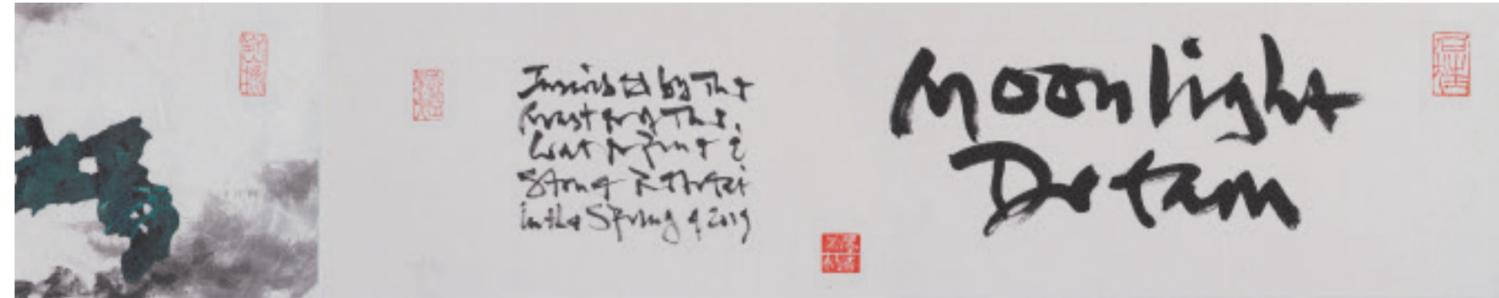
I dreamed I awoke to see the moon shining through the East window and, rising from my bed, I donned a cloak and strolled out into the night where I saw as clear and distinct as in the waking world the garden stretching away from me filled with strange stones.

Every stone was of vibrant green and blue colours like the copper stone. Awaking the next morning the entire garden remained clear in my mind, so calling for brush and ink I began to paint it.

When finished I showed my host. He was delighted: 'A strange event indeed, that is exactly what I had in mind! That will be the design. There is a wild part of the estate with cliffs and rocks and drifting mist that is exactly like your painting, I will take you there this very morning.'

I explained that green stones monumental enough for a garden were not a feasible option and he responded that the colour was immaterial. He would keep the painting for the colour, and make the stone garden with such stones as I might find him.

Today nostalgia prompts me to repaint the scroll, in its original colours, those of my dream, so that I might visit the garden which I never saw completed, for the capital can be wearying after a while.





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