

chen + miller : east - west

Chen Zhongsen and Nick Miller
Model Arts and Niland Gallery

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19th April - 3rd June 2002
Chen Zhongsen and Nick Miller

Presented by:

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ARTISTS' SPACE FOR ARTISTS' GALLERY

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Foreword

I have always appreciated the crossroads, a liminal threshold where you can veer toward the known or toward the unknown, belief or disbelief, a place of familiarity or a place of mystery, the vantage point that lets you glimpse both. It is one of the gifts of art that it can propel you to such a territory. There is this territory in this exhibition, a place in which you're not quite sure what you're seeing, or more accurately, when seeing it you can't find a way in your known territory to explain it.

Over a year ago, I met with Nick Miller in his studio and he showed me recent landscapes that he had painted from the back of his studio van. They had an intensity that conveyed something beyond the representation of, or reaction to, a place. He also introduced me to the work of Chen Zhongsen, an artist who has a wide vocabulary of traditional Chinese practice. Nick showed me several examples of Chen's micro carvings, objects that are extraordinary for the magnitude of material carved on such minuscule scale. The strand of hair on which a poem is carved beggars belief.

Several months later, Nick discussed with me his own work that he intended to exhibit with Chen's. Again, I realised there was a component of this work that I can't describe in my usual visual or art historical vocabulary. For, while there is textual material, landscape and figural elements in both artists' work, the exhibition really visualises something else and offers, even those of us uninitiated in Eastern thought, a journey to that crossroads.

I am delighted to welcome Chen Zhongsen to Ireland and very appreciative of his willingness to share his unique practice with us both through the exhibition and in various performances. We also thank Clare Pollard of the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin for hosting lectures and performances during the exhibition and Josephine Kelliher of the Rubicon Gallery, Dublin, where Chen's work will also be shown. Brian Flaherty and Ren Yuzhi have been invaluable for their services as translators for the project in Ireland and China and organisers in China. Most of all, I am very grateful to Nick Miller both for bringing this work to my attention and for the huge effort he has undertaken to realise the exhibition and all its components.

Suzanne Woods
Model Arts and Niland Gallery

East -West

For a painter any attempt to explain the origin of work or an exhibition is often unwise. In this case, it is also as difficult as explaining how or why my co-exhibitor, Chen Zhongsen can carve poems down the length of a single strand of silver hair taken from his wife's head. Words will not add to or take away from the peculiar experience of engaging one of his meditative micro carvings nor can they elucidate my surprise at the figurative watercolours I made in response to some eastern learning. Despite this, I am compelled towards some account, to clear my head and to point the curious viewer in directions that they can explore alone.¹ However, as I am neither an academic or oriental specialist, I am thinking aloud: it is the bias of my curiosity and thirst for learning in relation to painting that has brought our two worlds together and led to these shows.

Trying to understand eastern thought and what it offers is more an attitude to being than an accumulation of information with answers at the end. Defying de-construction, it stands and falls on human nature, not an external God as creator or the analytical and logical reasoning that are the foundations of western thought. It centres on an individual's 'practice' at 'being' to generate meaning. While this is hard for the western scientific mind to comprehend, many artists can recognise this relationship between practice and meaning. This attitude is the very heart of difference between East and West.

A similar difficulty of comprehension and illusive quality resides at the centre of great art in the western tradition. That is where we have guarded that energy, separate and focused in the internal dynamics of painting, novel or symphony because it defies the prevailing logic of linear progress. Great art in the Chinese tradition is functionally different, inseparable from philosophy, part of the 'art of living'. So while traditional Chinese art may appear exotic to the western eye, it reflects thousands of years of 'non-linear' wisdom emerging from Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism, all fundamental to Chinese civilisation and culture.²

Scholars tell us that the oriental mind is characterised by a symbolic imagination. It is rooted in the visual nature of the written language, where word characters are derived from symbolic depictions of the idea they represent. The resulting calligraphy is as much a visual art as a conceptual communication. Chinese thought is spherical or synthetic; no one part can be analytically progressed as a separate to the whole (not so different from the act of painting itself). This is the foundation of Taoism and the principle of polarity without opposition.³ In Chinese, the poles are known

"Two poems on a hair:
(Tang Dynasty).

1. "At Heron Lodge" by Wang Zhi Huan.

Mountains cover the white sun
And oceans drain the gold river;
But you widen your view three hundred miles
By going up one flight of stairs.

2. "A night thought" by Li Bai.

A bright whiteness surrounds my bed.
Could there have been a frost already?
Lifting myself to look,I found that it was moonlight
Sinking back again, I thought suddenly of home.

PLATE 1:

Chen Zhongsen, "Two poems on a hair"
Calligraphy carved on a white hair taken from his wife's head. , ±30 mm x ±0.2 mm.

LEFT: Enlarged image of first poem.

TOP RIGHT: Actual size of hair, mounted on stone with needle for scale.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Enlarged image of hair with needle, calligraphy in central area.



as Yang (positive) and Yin (negative). In other cultures, good is seen to be at war with evil, life with death, and the positive with the negative, aiming to cultivate the former to eliminate the latter. In Taoist thought this does not make sense, for as with an electric current you must have both positive and negative poles to function, different aspects of one system. Eliminating one would mean the end of both. The universe is understood in terms of the mutually responsive movement between polarities, the masculine in the feminine, and the feminine in the masculine. Being emerges from non-being, action from non-action, like sound from silence. 'Non-action' or 'Wu Wei' is a core concept of Taoism, described here by Martin Buber as:

"The teaching that genuine effecting is not interfering, not giving vent to power, but remaining within one's self. This is the powerful existence that does not yield historical success, that is, the success that can be exploited and registered in this hour, but only yields that effecting that at first appears insignificant, indeed invisible, yet endures across generations and there at times becomes perceptible in another form". ⁴

I believe that the power of the Chinese knowledge that is central to understanding Chen's work is in the practical paths it offers to endlessly cultivate human potential with nothing other than the self. Disciplines of meditation and movement aimed at achieving full 'awakening' are focused on the relationship between mind, body, and spirit. For the artist in any culture, consciously or not, this is the daily ground of activity - the transformation of material and energy through human action in response to the world. So while there are chasm gaps between Chen and I in our respective worlds and intentions; our strongest link is in the primacy of our concerns with human energy - painting, carving or drawing with a brush or simple tool as a direct extension of the body and mind.



Above: Chen, calligraphy; Fujian painting studio.

Left: Chen Micro carving on a Shoushan stone; Fuzhou studio.



Bamboo boat, Yang Jia Xi



Stripping bamboo, Yang Jia Xi



Bamboo boat, Yang Jia Xi

Proposition of calm: The work of Chen Zhongsen

Chen's landscape paintings propose art as nature. All artifice, art, and human action are felt to be the same as a natural or spontaneous action. The technique is one of no technique, a discipline of the "controlled accident", of doing exactly the right thing without force or self-conscious intention at the right moment. Our senses receive endless impressions and in response, we experience continual desires and confusion. It is Chen's view from the Buddhist tradition that you can't see a true reflection in turbulent water and that you need to cultivate your energy and train your heart for an internal stillness, peace and calm, so that all reality can be clearly reflected. Painting emerges from this stillness, more a natural emission than effort at control or wilful construction: A proposition of calm.

In Chen's paintings, the classical visual grammar of mountains, rivers, bamboo boats, clouds and small animal or human presence reflect the philosophy of Taoism, the natural flow of Yin and Yang as The Tao (way/guide) for man to follow. They also reflect a real, if partial, iconography of rural China where he paints. As an artist, he wishes to create images of beauty, offerings, in which your mind can find peace. Despite these strong roots, his work is evolving in its use of paint and colour away from the strictly traditional, slowly absorbing his experiences of the west and seeking ways to extend the boundaries of his painting.

The extraordinary micro carvings represent polar opposites to the technological logic board of our most advanced microcomputer: 'Hand made', they rely not on leaps forward in science and technology, but on leaps into the interior world of human activity. They are executed with eyes closed, using a fine steel engraver; there are no tricks, lenses, or mechanics. It is an art, based in Buddhist meditation and ancient Chinese breathing and energy cultivation exercises known collectively as 'Qigong'. These allow the practitioner to follow and direct 'Qi' (breath/energy) along the paths described by Chinese physiology (in Traditional Chinese Medicine).⁵ Chen Zhongsen was introduced to Qigong early, by a traditional doctor, an uncle, who taught him exercises to cure a serious liver complaint. After regaining health, he continued practising Qigong, finding a mental and physiological state of extreme calm - slowing his heart rate and breathing to almost nothing, so giving him the unique level of control he has at this microscopic scale of activity. The nearest technological equivalent would be a laser surgeon visualising his work on a computer screen as he controls microscopic laser tools inside the human body. For Chen however, the laser is his own energy channelled through the body to the tip of steel, and the screen, is the text or image he visualises during meditation.



Yang Jia Xi, Fujian



Water Buffalo



Calligraphy, Chen



Landscape, northern Fujian province



Bamboo grove



Micro-carving studio, Fuzhou



Traditional Chinese Herbalist

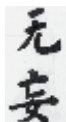


Calligraphy, performance

Chen carves major Taoist, Buddhist texts and classical poems on an incomprehensibly small scale so as to be almost invisible to the naked eye and certainly unreadable without strong magnification, even if you read Chinese. This suggests both the power and intangibility of the content, and reminds us that reading is only a small part of a process of understanding that is simultaneously physical, mental, and spiritual. On stones measuring only a few centimetres, he has carved full versions of major texts including: The Tao Te Ching by Lao Tzu,⁶ containing over 5,300 Chinese characters, The Diamond Sutra⁷ with 5,200 characters and The Art of War by Sun Tzu⁸ has over 7,000 characters [plates 12, 6, & 14]. Other works such as the remarkable Tang Dynasty poems carved on a human hair [plate 1] remind us with a sense of awe how little we know of human potential. Seen enlarged, they are flawless calligraphy and images of great intensity and strength. The carvings of are not like miniatures, they operate as if the space was immaterial, their intensity giving them an opposing sense of the monumental. They speak with a purity that is oddly unacceptable to contemporary art, in which we are still largely bound to notions of progress and historical success.



PLATE 2:
Chen Zhongsen,
"Beautiful Wu Ling"
Ink & watercolour
67 x 67cm



Wu Wang
Innocence

Hexagram 25: Wu Wang, "I



Tai Ji classic: "step forward, strike with fist" + "Kick with heel" Yang Ch'eng-fu.



'Beijing 24 posture Tai Ji Quan', drawing notebook, Nick Miller, 2001



'Beijing 24 posture Tai Ji Quan', drawing notebook, Nick Miller,



E.L. in Co Sligo studio with "E.L.: golden flower & ashtray" 1999, Nick Miller,.



Studio, Co Sligo with A.P., work in progress, Nick Miller, 1999.



Chungliang Al Huang, teaching in Urbana, Illinois, 1998.(photo:



Chungliang Al Huang, symbolic circle forms & Calligraphy, 1998 &

Innocence: Tai Ji watercolours (1999-2000)

As a teenager in London, I bought a book on Tai Ji Quan (Tai Chi Chuan) which is a Chinese martial art - type of meditation and practice for energy cultivation.⁹ I was fascinated by the faded black and white photographs of elderly men in the poses that make up these ancient sets of movement. At fifteen, trying to decipher the complex indications of weight, angle, and balance, I could briefly imagine Bruce Lee before losing the plot in favour of the attractions of more ready stimulation.

Much later, living in rural Co Sligo, I felt challenged by the unavoidable implications of facing nature. My accidental re-discovery of Tai Ji fitted like a strange old glove, uncovering a system of knowledge that strengthened and renewed my experience of living and painting. Like painting, the learning is as much physical as philosophical and cultural, a daily practice with occasional quantum leaps of enlightenment. It has many other similarities: unforced self-discipline, endless return to the beginning, awareness of flow and use of energy, and, the intuitive adjustment of external form to accord with internal truth.

I have often asserted my need to paint in response to a direct encounter with the 'other', working only in the presence of the subject (be it a person or tree). In this process, I sometimes find an intense reality or 'wholeness' that gives meaning to life.¹⁰ Tai Ji teaches that living this connection can be practiced. This kind of intuitive knowledge that is felt rather than thought is often the most exciting. It has a parallel in sexual union, one of the few times we intuitively melt into a unity with the world beyond the self, and are as nature.¹¹ It is no coincidence that Taoism, by recognising "Jing" (sexual essence or body) as our vital and creative energy, focuses on its cultivation and transformation through "Qi" (energy or breath) training for higher purposes of "Shen" (mind - spirit).¹²

These watercolours owe many debts to others, not least those people who, as 'sitters', endured their making. However, the strongly visual teaching of Chungliang Al Huang,¹³ with whom I have intermittently studied Tai Ji (and its energetic relationship to calligraphy), was seminal. The 'one-stroke' circle and various other Taoist symbolic forms which unexpectedly found their way into these paintings come directly from his teaching and my learning [see opposite, p 12]. These works were my first attempts at a practiced relationship between embodied energy and fluid line- a kind of 'do-it-yourself' figurative calligraphy.



PLATE 3: Nick Miller. “E.L: contained form”, watercolour/ink on paper, 152.4 x 121.9 cm

In Chinese there is no separate word-character for ‘drawing’ or ‘painting’, the actions and meaning are one and the same. Moving in that direction, these watercolours took me completely by surprise as radically different, oblique progressions of earlier work concerned with drawing in close physical proximity to the human figure.¹⁴ While following my normal observational dynamic, these attempt a crossing East to an openness and ‘natural’ response achieved through the ‘play’ of Tai Ji with the person prior to the execution of the watercolours, a different way to achieve a ‘closer’ perspective.¹⁵ The form of energy interplay between two people in Tai Ji Quan is known as ‘Push Hands’ or ‘Tui Shou’ and, although in the studio the parallel is not perfect, engaging the ‘other’ in a circle of learning had a similar intention. These works flowed without reservation with an ‘innocence’ (‘Wu Wang’)¹⁶ and spontaneity unlike anything I had experienced before. They go to the heart of my interest in the masculine and the feminine, in the implications of energy inside and outside the human body.



‘Tui Shou’ or ‘Push hands’, recoiling energy, Beijing, Nov 2001.



Studio interior, reflection with figure, Tai Ji watercolours, 1999.



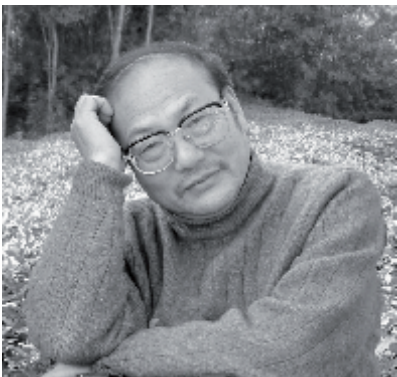
PL4c: ‘Jing’ or ‘sexual-essence’
N. Miller, ink Calligraphy,
2001



PL4b: ‘Qi’ or ‘breath-energy’
N. Miller, ink Calligraphy,



PL4c: ‘Shen’ or ‘Mind-spirit’
N. Miller, ink Calligraphy,
2001



Chen Zhongsen



Brian Flaherty



Nick Miller

The human coin

In the many discussions Chen and I had in the preludes to this show, the similarities are more striking than the differences. Both of us live in remote rural areas: Chen paints somewhere (that I don't think I could find again if I tried) in Fujian province in southern China, and I on the western edge of Europe in Co Sligo, Ireland. Yet when looking at a landscape in China, Chen will see the philosophical strength of a bamboo boat crossing a river as I point out my excitement at the powerlines receding in perspective across a mountain range. Our different conceptions of beauty and art are not mutually exclusive, but parallel certain polarities that exist within and between East and West; the internal and the external - two sides of the same human coin.

The long journey towards this exhibition began in 1998 at a Tai Ji workshop I attended in Urbana, Illinois in the USA, where Chungliang Al Huang first showed me a small Chinese chop (seal) carved by Chen Zhongsen with the full 81 chapters of the Tao Te Ching.¹⁷ It was like nothing I had ever seen or could imagine possible. My curiosity and excitement to understand its genesis led me deeper into Chinese culture than I ever intended going. I made all the 'Tai Ji' watercolours in its wake between 1999 and August 2000, when I travelled to meet Chen Zhongsen for the first time. We met at the 'Lan Ting' Institute in Oregon, USA, where he was teaching calligraphy under the auspices of the Living Tao Foundation.¹⁸ There we both met Brian Flaherty, who, living in Beijing, has been a bridge across the vast language, geographical and cultural barriers. None of these events would have been possible without his insight, support, and subtle attention. In November 2001 I travelled to China to finalise details for these exhibitions and meet Chen on his own ground in Fuzhou city where he carves and in Yang Jia Xi, the remote northern area of Fujian province, where he paints. In the realities of China, it is easy to wonder about the illusive Tao or absent Buddha, until you recall the third, Confucian strand of influence where the political mind holds court. Historical success is largely a matter of survival, but in China it is measured in centuries, always aware of the dynasties that come and go. When a Chinese philosopher is asked what he thinks about democracy and the French Revolution, he replies... "It is just too soon to tell." I remind myself as I fly home from Beijing, that while there is a profound simplicity to eastern thought - nothing is straightforward.

Nick Miller

January 2002

Endnotes

1. The references provided are links to texts that deal with concepts in much more depth than is possible in this essay. Clear bibliographical references are sometimes difficult due to different systems of translating of Chinese and difficulty in finding the originals.
2. "The Importance of Living", Lin Yutang, 1937, Quill/William Morrow & Company.
3. One of the most readable and clear writers on Taoism in the English language is Alan W Watts, whose many books: "Tao; the Watercourse Way", Arkana/Penguin 1992, which was completed after his death in 1973 by Chungliang Al Huang,[see note 13]. "The Way of Zen", Arkana/Penguin, 1990. Recent edited lecture transcripts published by Eden Grove Editions include "Taoism, the way beyond seeking", 1998 and "Buddhism, the religion of no-religion", 1995. Also see the works and translations of Thomas Cleary including "The Spirit of Tao", Shambhala, 1998 and "Vitality, Energy, spirit: A Taoist Sourcebook", Shambhala, 1991.
4. From "The Way of Response" Martin Buber, Schocken Books, 1966, page 171.
5. Qigong can be dangerous to health without correct teaching. For a book in English see "Qigong empowerment: a guide to Medical, Taoist, Buddhist, Wushu energy cultivation", by Master Shou-Yu Liang & Wen-Ching Wu, Way of the Dragon publishing, 1997.
6. The "Tao Te Ching" by Lao Tzu is the primary text of Taoism and is second only to the bible in number of translations around the world each with different qualities.
7. "The Diamond Sutra", The Vajracchedika-prajna-paramita sutra is a Buddhist text, translations of which can be found on the Internet.
8. "The Art of War", by Sun Tzu, is another major Taoist text to do with conflict resolution and strategy with many translations and versions to choose from, according to taste.
9. There are many books on the many styles and forms deriving from Tai Chi Chuan. It is also written as Tai Ji Quan or Taijiquan, Tai Ji or plain Tai Chi (see also notes 13 and 12).
10. See "I and Thou" by Martin Buber for a source for this in western thinking (see also note 4).
11. See "Nature, Man and Woman" by Alan W Watts, Vintage Books Edition, 1991.
12. A traditional and fascinating text is "Tai chi Chuan and meditation" by Da Liu, Shoken, 1986.
13. Chungliang Al Huang is a long time authority on East - West synthesis, based in the USA he is the founder of the Living Tao Foundation, a forum for learning, he teaches an evolving form of Tai Ji that developed as a response to both worlds. He is the author of many books, including, "Embrace Tiger, Return to Mountain: the essence of Tai Ji", Celestial Arts 1973; "Mentoring"(with Jerry Lynch), Harper Collins 1995 and "Quantum Soup", Celestial Arts, 1991.
14. "Closer: drawings before the End," Nick Miller, 1999, Rubicon press (Rubicon Gallery, Dublin).
15. As note 14.
16. In this context, I use 'Innocence' as a reference to 'Wu Wang' the 25th hexagram of the "I Ching or Book of Changes" with its emphasis on strength in naturalness and action without intention of gain. See Richard Wilhelm translation with foreword by C.G.Jung, Arkana Edition 1989
17. See notes 13 and 6
18. See note 13

Chen Zhongsen

Micro carvings

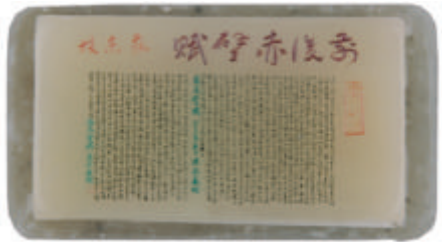
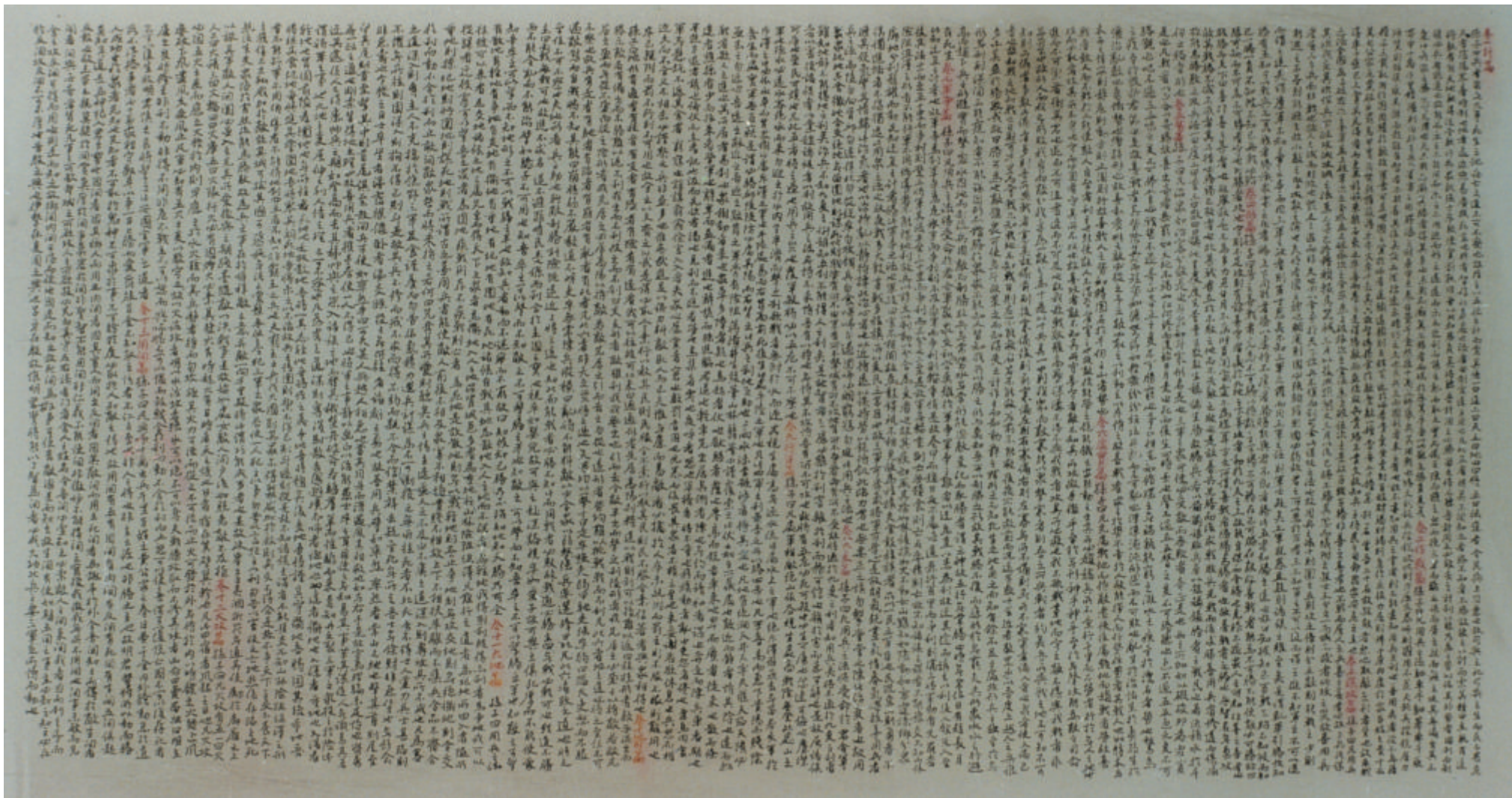


PLATE 5: Chen Zhongsen, "Written before and after Chibi"
by Su Dong Po, 2 poems & landscape micro carved on Shoushan
stone.
ABOVE: enlarged view, actual size, TOP: 17 x 33 mm, BELOW: 20 x 42 mm

PLATE 6: Chen Zhongsen, "The Art of War", by Sun Tzu.
Micro carving of 7000+ characters on Shoushan stone.

Written over two thousand years ago, Sun Tzu sees War as coeval with life: In any confrontation, victory goes - not to the strongest or most aggressive - but to the person who understands the true situation .To win without fighting is best."

RIGHT: Actual size of stone, measuring 33 x 70 mm
BELOW: Detail of central text area [actual size 23 x 43 mm]



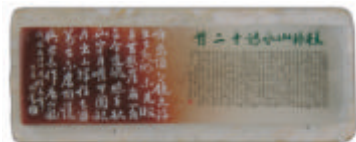
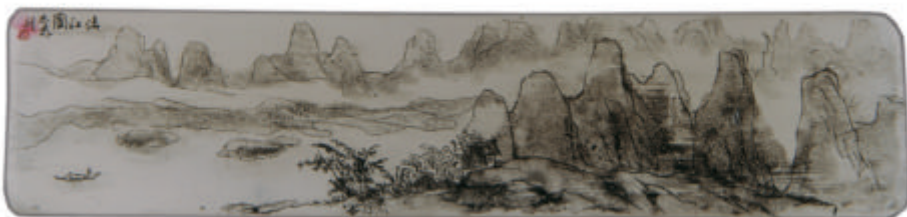


PLATE 7: Chen Zhongsen, "Praising Guilin Landscape", 12 poems and a landscape, micro carving on Shoushan stone.

ABOVE: Enlarged view of both stones.
LEFT: Actual size, TOP 15 x 49 mm, LOWER 10 x 50 mm

PLATE 8: Chen Zhongsen, "Ten poems", by Fan Cheng Da. calligraphy and figure image, Micro carving on Shoushan stone.

ABOVE RIGHT: Actual size:
TOP: 25 x 40 mm
LOWER: 20 x 20 mm
BELOW: Detail of image stone.



"Song of the lute Player",
by Bai Ju Yi
Translation From "Tang
Poems", FLP, China.



In the tenth year of the reign of Yuanhe, I was demoted to the assistant prefectship of Jiujiang. The next autumn, while seeing a friend off at Pengpu, I heard someone strumming a lute in a boat at night, playing with the touch of a musician from the capital. I found upon inquiry that the lutist was a courtesan from Chang'an who had learned from the musicians Mu and Cao but growing old and losing her looks, she had married a merchant. Then I ordered drinks and asked her to play a few tunes. After playing, in deep distress, she told me of the pleasures of her youth and said now that her beauty had faded she was drifting from place to place by rivers and lakes. In my two years as an official away from the capital I had been resigned enough, my mind at peace, but moved by her tale that night I began to

By the Xuanyang River a guest is seen off one night;
Chill the autumn, red the maple leaves and in flower the reeds;
The host alights from his horse, the guest is aboard,
They raise their cups to drink but have no music.
Drunk without joy, in sadness they must part;
At the time of parting the river seems steeped in moonlight;
Suddenly out of the water a lute is heard;
The host forgets to turn back, the guest delays going.
Seeking the sound in the dark, we ask who is the player.
The lute is silent, hesitant the reply.
Rowing closer, we ask if we may meet the musician,
Call for more wine, trim the lamp and resume our feast;
Only after a thousand entreaties does she appear,
Her face half-hidden behind the lute in her arms.
She tunes up and plucks the strings a few times,
Touching our hearts before even a note is played;
Each chord strikes a pensive note
As if voicing the disillusion of a lifetime;
Her head is bent, her fingers stray over the strings
Poring out the infinite sorrows of her heart.
Lightly she pinches in the strings, slowly she strums and plucks;
First The Rainbow Garments, then The Six Minor Notes.
The high notes wail like pelting rain,
The low notes whisper like soft confidences;
Wailing and whispering interweave
Like pearls large and small cascading on a plate of jade,
Like a warbling oriole gliding below blossom,
Like a mountain brook purling down a bank,
Till the brook turns to ice, the strings seem about to snap,
About to snap, and for one instant all is still
Only an undertone of quiet grief
Is more poignant in the silence than any sound;
Then a silver bottle is smashed, out gushes the water,
Armoured riders charge, their swords and lances clang!
When the tune ends, she draws her pick full across
And the four strings give a sound like the tearing of silk.
Right and left of the boat all is silence-
We see only the autumn moon, silver in midstream.
Pensively she puts the pick between the strings,
Straightens her clothes, rises and composes herself.
She is, she says, a girl from the capital
Whose family once lived at the foot of Toad Hill.
At thirteen she learned to play the lute
And ranked first among the musicians;
Her playing was admired by the old masters,
Her looks were the envy of the other courtesans;
Youths from wealthy districts vied in their gifts to engage her,
A single song brought her countless rolls of red silk;
Men smashed jewelled and silver trinkets to mark the beat;

Silk skirts as red as blood were stained by spilled wine.
Pleasure and laughter from one year to the next.
While the autumn moon and spring breeze passed unheeded.
Then her brother joined the army, her aunt died,
The days and nights slipped by and her beauty faded,
No more carriages and horsemen thronged her gate,
And growing old she became a merchant's wife.
The merchant thought only of profit: to seek if he leaves her.
Two months ago he went to Fuliang to buy tea,
Leaving her alone in the boat at the mouth of the river;
All around the moonlight is bright, the river is cold,
And late at night, dreaming of her girlhood,
She cries in her sleep, staining her rouged cheeks with tears.
The music of her lute has made me sigh,
And now she tells this plaintive tale of sorrows;
We are both ill-starred, drifting on the face of the earth;
No matter if we were strangers before this encounter.
Last year I bade the imperial city farewell;
A demoted official, I lay ill in Xunyang;
Xunyang is a paltry place without any music,
For one year I heard no wind instruments, no strings.
Now I live on the low, damp flat by the River Pen,
Round my house yellow reeds and bitter bamboos grow rife;
From dawn till dusk I hear no other sounds
But the wailing of night-jars and the moaning of apes.
On a day of spring blossoms by the river or moonlit night in autumn
I often call for wine and drink alone;
Of course, there are rustic songs and village pipes;
But their shrill discordant notes grate on my ears;
Tonight listening to your lute playing
Was like hearing fairy music; it gladdened my ears.
Don't refuse, but sit down and play another tune,
And I'll write a Song of the Lute Player for you.
Touched by my words, she stands there for some time,
Then goes back to her seat and plays with quickened tempo
Music sadder far than the first melody,
And at the sound not a man of us has dry eyes.
The assistant prefect of Jiangzhou is so moved
That his blue coat is wet with tears.

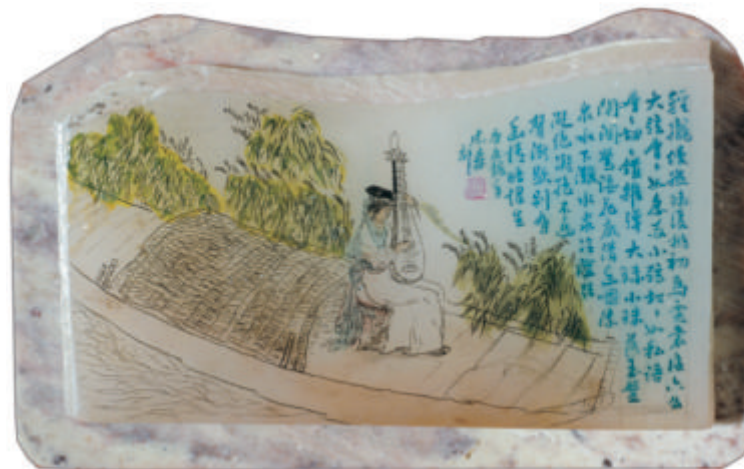


PLATE 9: Chen Zhongsen, "The Song of th Lute Player", by Ba Ju Yi, Version I [version 2 is on p26].
Poem, 612 characters + introduction and figure image, micro carving on Shoushan stone.
ABOVE: Enlarged view of both stones. ABOVE LEFT: Actual size, LEFT 25 x 40 mm, RIGHT 19 x 40 mm
TEXT OPPOSITE: is full translation of the poem carved on the stones illustrated pps 24,25 & 26.

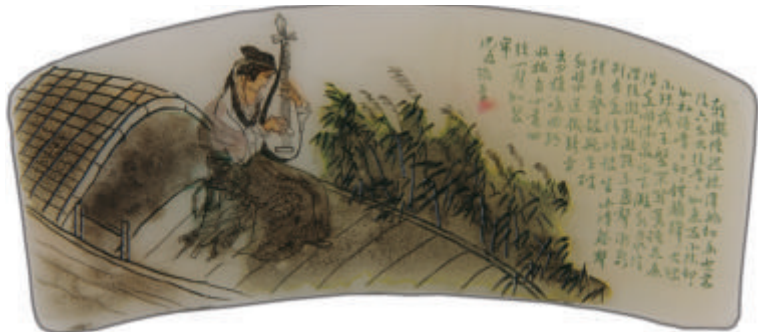


PLATE 10: Chen Zhongsen, "The Song of the Lute Player",
by Ba Ju Yi, Version 2 [version 1 is on p24-25].

ABOVE TOP: Enlarged view of lower stone.
ABOVE: Actual size, TOP 24x 40 mm,
LOWER 20 x 50 mm
TEXT: Translation of the poem is on p.24.

PLATE 11: Chen Zhongsen, "Written by the waterside"
by Su Dong Po, Poem & figure
micro carving on Shoushan stone

ABOVE : Actual size, TOP; 25x 28 mm
LOWER; 30 x 30 mm
RIGHT OPPOSITE: Enlarged view of both stones

PLATE 12: Chen Zhongsen, "The Tao Te Ching"
by Lao Tzu, Over 5,200 Chinese characters & figure micro carved on Shoushan stone.

The Tao Te Ching is the primary text of Taoism dating from around 500 to 300 BC with 81 Chapters it is attributed to the philosopher Lao Tzu and is concerned with the Tao or 'way' for man to follow. After the bible it is the most widely translated text in the world.

ABOVE RIGHT : Actual size, 40 x 95 mm

BELOW: Enlarged view of central text area.

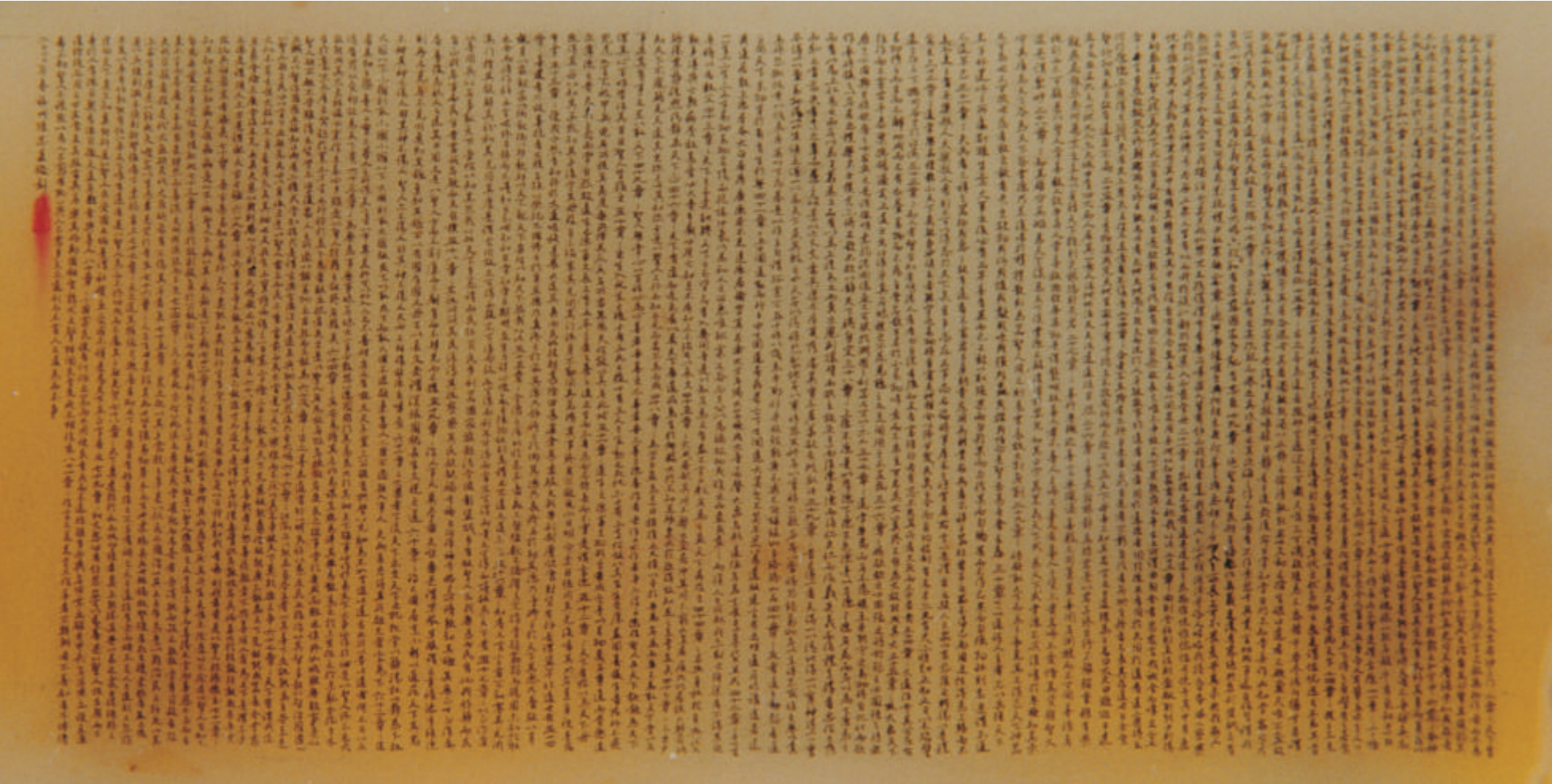
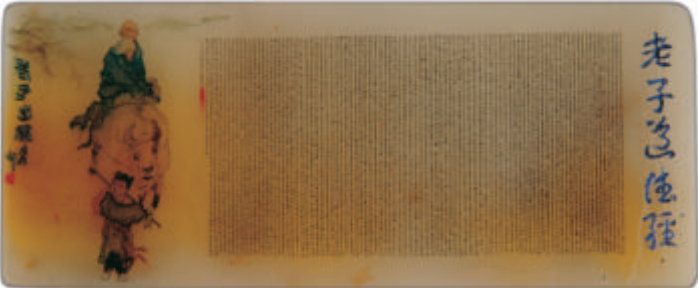




PLATE 13: Chen Zhongsen, “The Lan Ting Preface”
by Wang Xi Zhi
Text & figure micro carved on Shoushan stone.

This famous classical essay focuses on the impermanence of existence. The Chinese poetic awareness of mortality is captured in this essay reflecting the line from Su Dong Po: “life passes like a spring dream without trace”.

ABOVE LEFT : Actual size, 20 x 40 mm
OPPOSITE: Enlarged view of central text area.

“The Lan Ting” Preface: (“The Orchid Pavilion”) by Wang Xi Zhi

In the ninth year of the reign Yunho (A.D. 353) in the beginning of late spring we met at the Orchid Pavilion in Shanyin of Kweich’i for the Water Festival, to wash away the evil spirits.

Here are gathered all the illustrious persons and assembled both the old and the young. Here are tall mountains and majestic peaks, trees with thick foliage and tall bamboos. Here are also clear streams and gurgling rapids, catching one's eye from right to left. We group ourselves in order, sitting by the water side, and drink in succession from a cup floating down the curving stream; and although there is no music from string and wood-wind instruments, yet with alternate singing and drinking, we are well disposed to thoroughly enjoy a quiet intimate conversation. Today the sky is clear, the air is fresh and the kind breeze is mild. Truly enjoyable it is to watch the immense universe above and the myriad things below, travelling over the entire landscape with our eyes and allowing our sentiments to roam about at will, thus exhausting the pleasures of the eye and the ear.

Now when people gather together to surmise life itself, some sit and talk and unburden their thoughts in the intimacy of a room, and some, overcome by a sentiment, soar forth into a world beyond bodily realities. Although we select our pleasures according to our inclinations-some noisy and rowdy, and others quiet and sedate- yet when we have found that which pleases us, we are all happy and contented, to the extent of forgetting that we are growing old.. And then, when satiety follows satisfaction, and with the change of circumstances, change also our whims and desires, then arises a feeling of poignant regret. In the twinkling of an eye, the objects of our former pleasures have become things of the past, still compelling in us moods of regretful memory. Furthermore, although our lives may be long or short, eventually we all end in nothingness. “Great indeed are life and death” said the ancients. Ah what sadness !

I often study the joys and regrets of the ancient people, and as I lean over their writings and see that they were moved exactly as ourselves, I am often overcome by a feeling of sadness and compassion, and would like to make those feelings clear to myself. Well I know it is a lie to say that life and death are the same thing, and that longevity and early death make no difference ! Alas! as we of the present look upon those of the past, so will posterity look upon our present selves. Therefore, have I put down a sketch of these contemporaries and their sayings at this feast, and although time and circumstances may change, the way they will evoke our moods of happiness and regret will remain the same. What will future readers feel when they cast their eyes upon this writing!



PLATE 14: Chen Zhongsen, “The Diamond Sutra”
The Vajracchedika-prajna-paramita sutra,
a major Buddhist scripture

ABOVE, LOWER : Actual size, 40 x 50 mm
OVERLEAF P 33-34: Enlarged view of central text

此書中說及諸般名目... 三寶弟子... 忠義居士...

PLATE 14 [DETAIL]: Chen
Zhongsen
"The Diamond Sutra" The
Vajracchedika - Prajna -
Paramita sutra
LEFT: Detail of central text



PLATE 15: Chen Zhongsen, "Soaring flight", modern calligraphy, ink/colour, 64.5 x 102 cm

Chen Zhongsen calligraphy and painting



LEFT
PLATE 16: Chen Zhongsen,
"The flow of rain",
The union of heaven and humanity
modern calligraphy, ink/colour, 64.5 x 102 cm

OPPOSITE RIGHT:
PLATE 17: Chen Zhongsen: [hanging scrolls]
ink on mounted Chinese paper

LEFT 1: "Washing the sand"; Liu Yu Xi
running & grass style calligraphy, 146 x 38"
CENTRE 2: "A night at cloud gate temple"
Ba i Ju Yi, Clerical style calligraphy, 131 x 46cm.
RIGHT 3: "2 poems" Cui Lu
Running style calligraphy, 146 x 38"

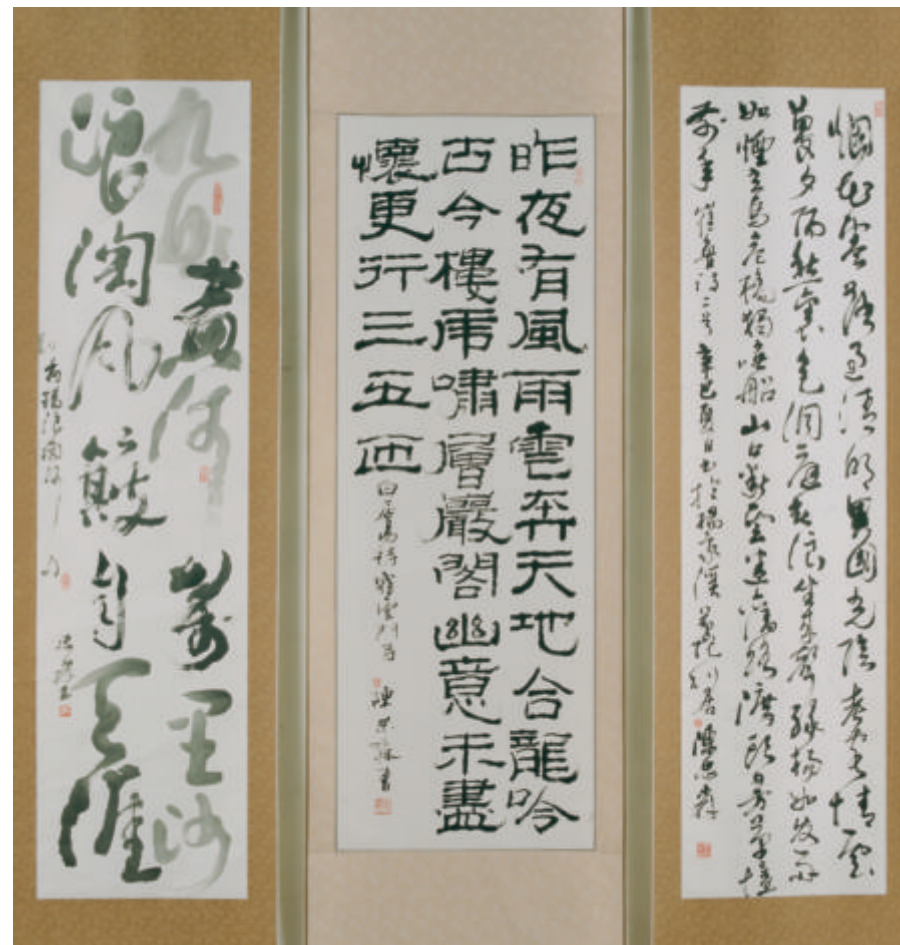




PLATE 18: Chen Zhongsen, "Untitled landscape", watercolour/ink on paper, 52 x 47 cm



PLATE 19: Chen Zhongsen, "Mountain Landscape", watercolour/ink on paper, 50 x 61 cm

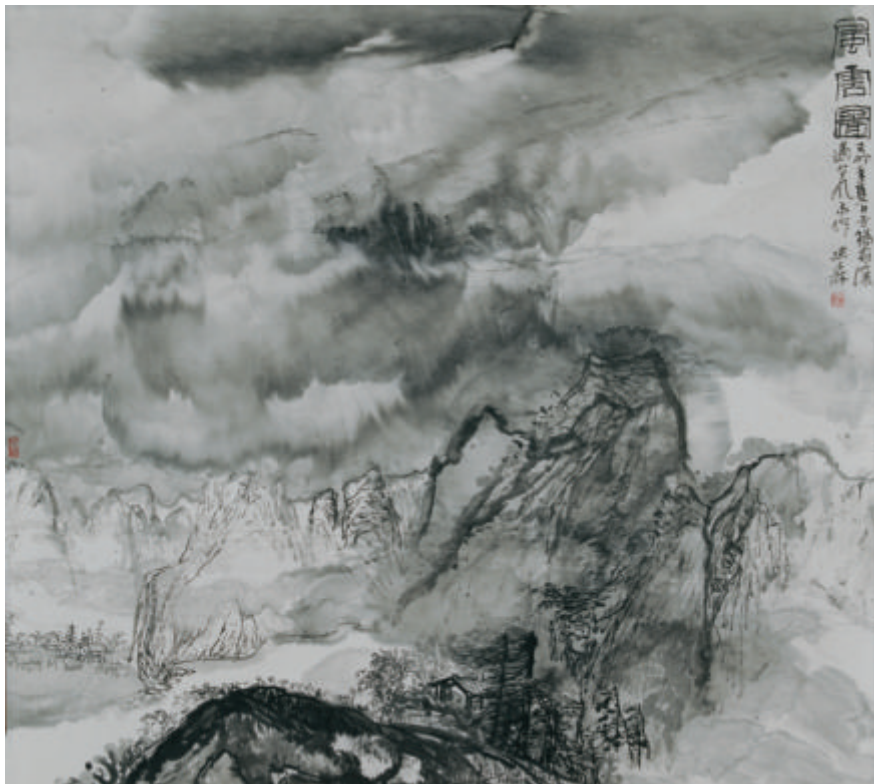


PLATE 20: Chen Zhongsen, "Wind and clouds". Hanging scroll, watercolour/ink on paper, 52 x 47 cm

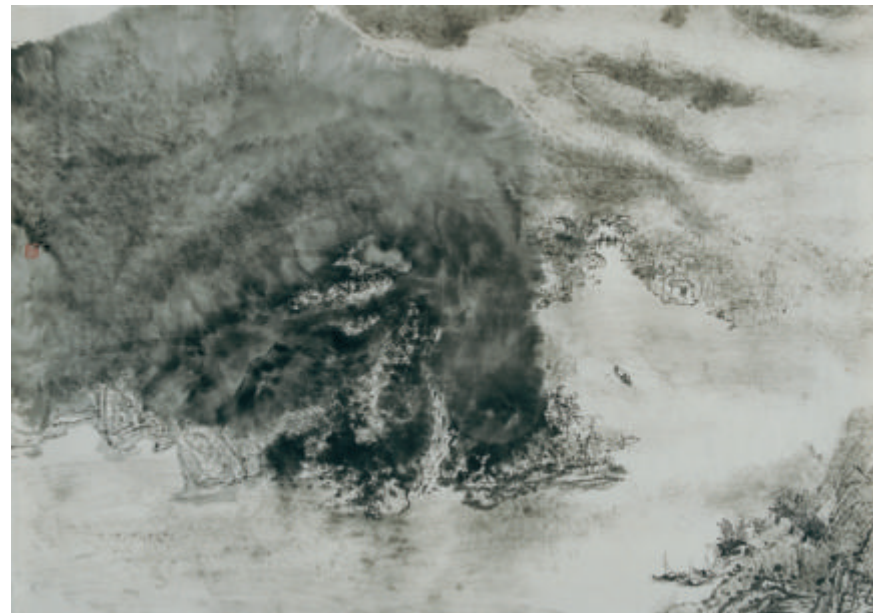


PLATE 21: Chen Zhongsen, "land and water", ink on paper, 45 x 69 cm

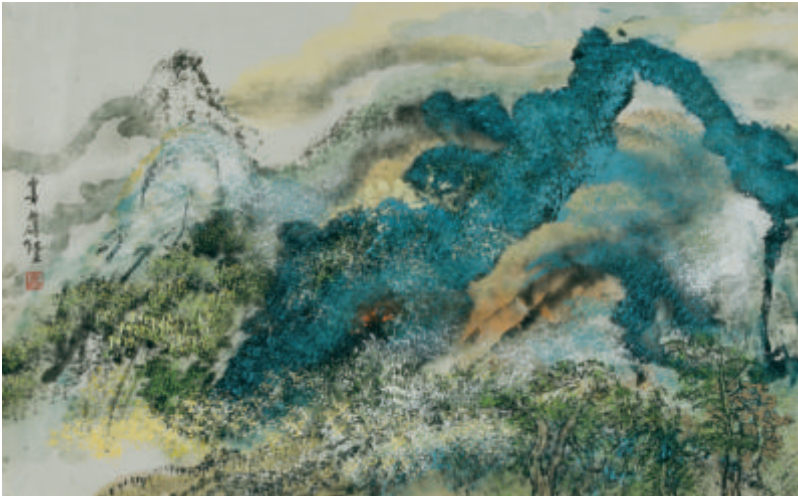


PLATE 22: Chen Zhongsen, "Endless mountains", watercolour/ink on paper, 48.5 x 77 cm



PLATE 23: Chen Zhongsen, "Green valley pavilion", watercolour/ink on paper, 44 x 46.5 cm

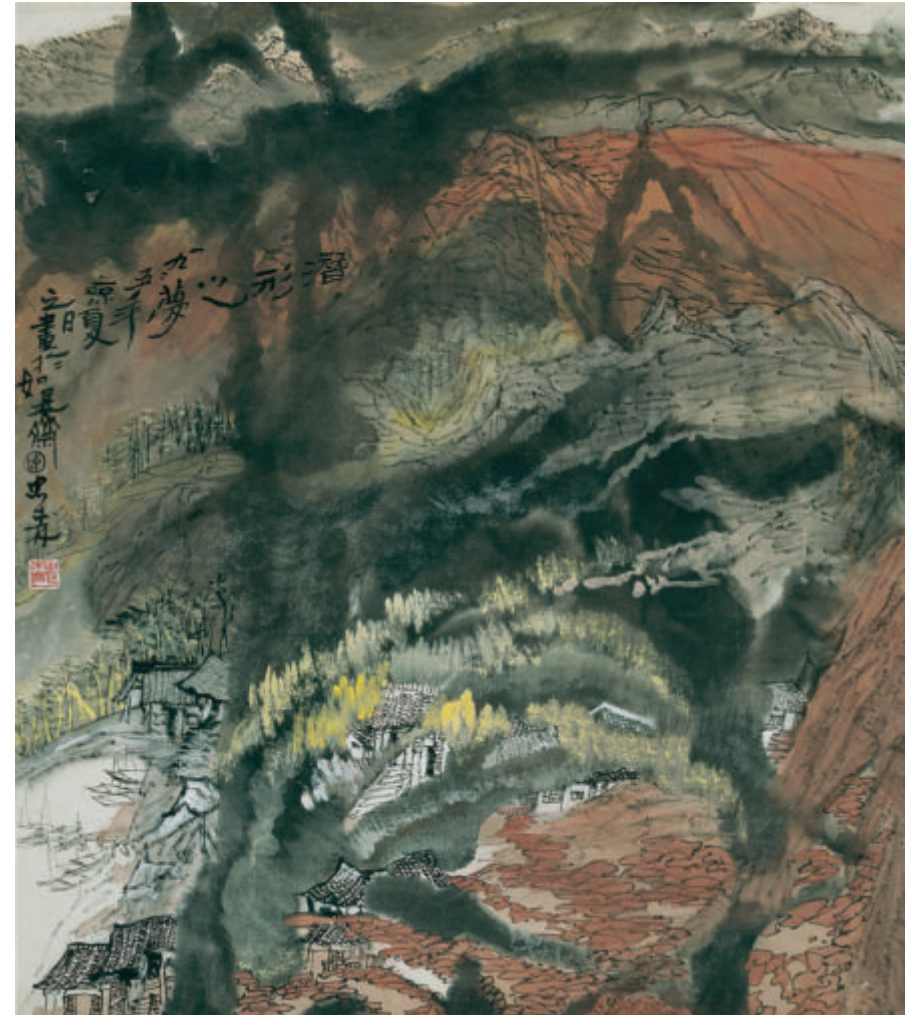


PLATE 24: Chen Zhongsen, "Dream of what could be", watercolour/ink on paper, 67 x 58 cm

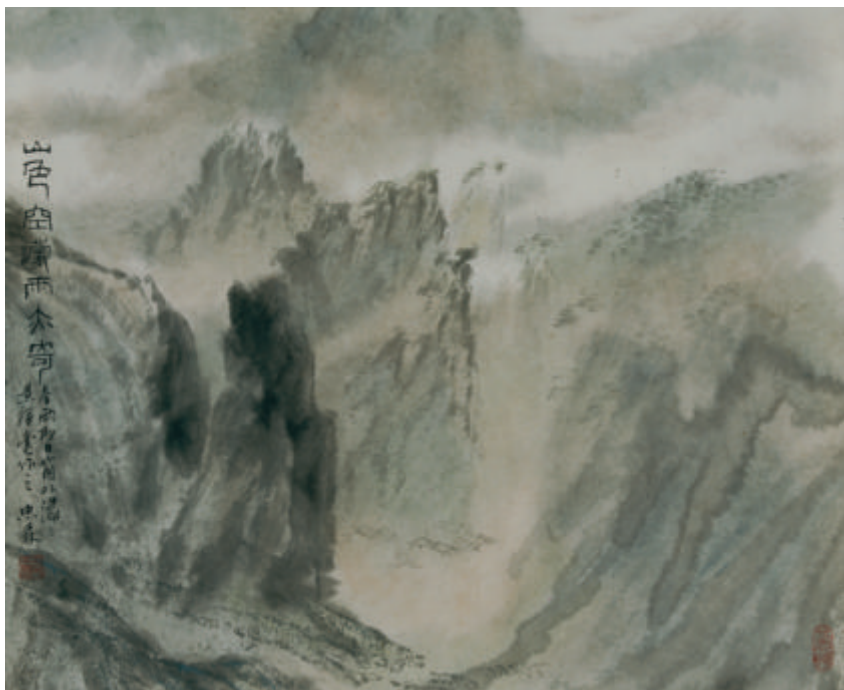


PLATE 25: Chen Zhongsen, "Misty mountain, mysterious rain", watercolour/ink on paper, 50 x 61 cm

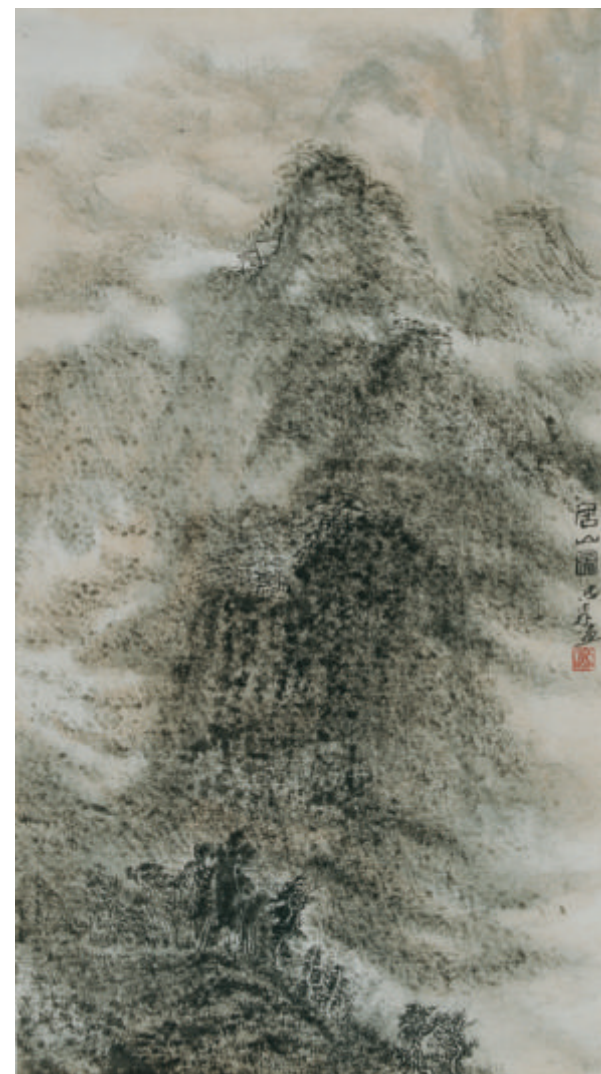


PLATE 26: Chen Zhongsen, "Mountain living", watercolour/ink on paper, 75 x 49.5 cm



PLATE 27: Chen Zhongsen, "Autumn brilliance", watercolour/ink on paper, 43 x 69 cm



PLATE 28: Chen Zhongsen, "Historic site", hanging scroll, watercolour/ink on paper, 57 x 67 cm



ABOVE:
PLATE 29: Nick Miller, "Ciel: hand forms", watercolour/ink on paper, 152.4 x 121.9 cm

OPPOSITE :
PLATE 30: Nick Miller, "One: holding form", watercolour/ink on paper, 152.4 x 121.9 cm

Nick Miller

I n n o c e n c e :
Tai Ji watercolours 1999-2000





ABOVE:
 PLATE 31: Nick Miller, "Two: polar forms", watercolour/ink on paper, 152.4 x 121.9 cm

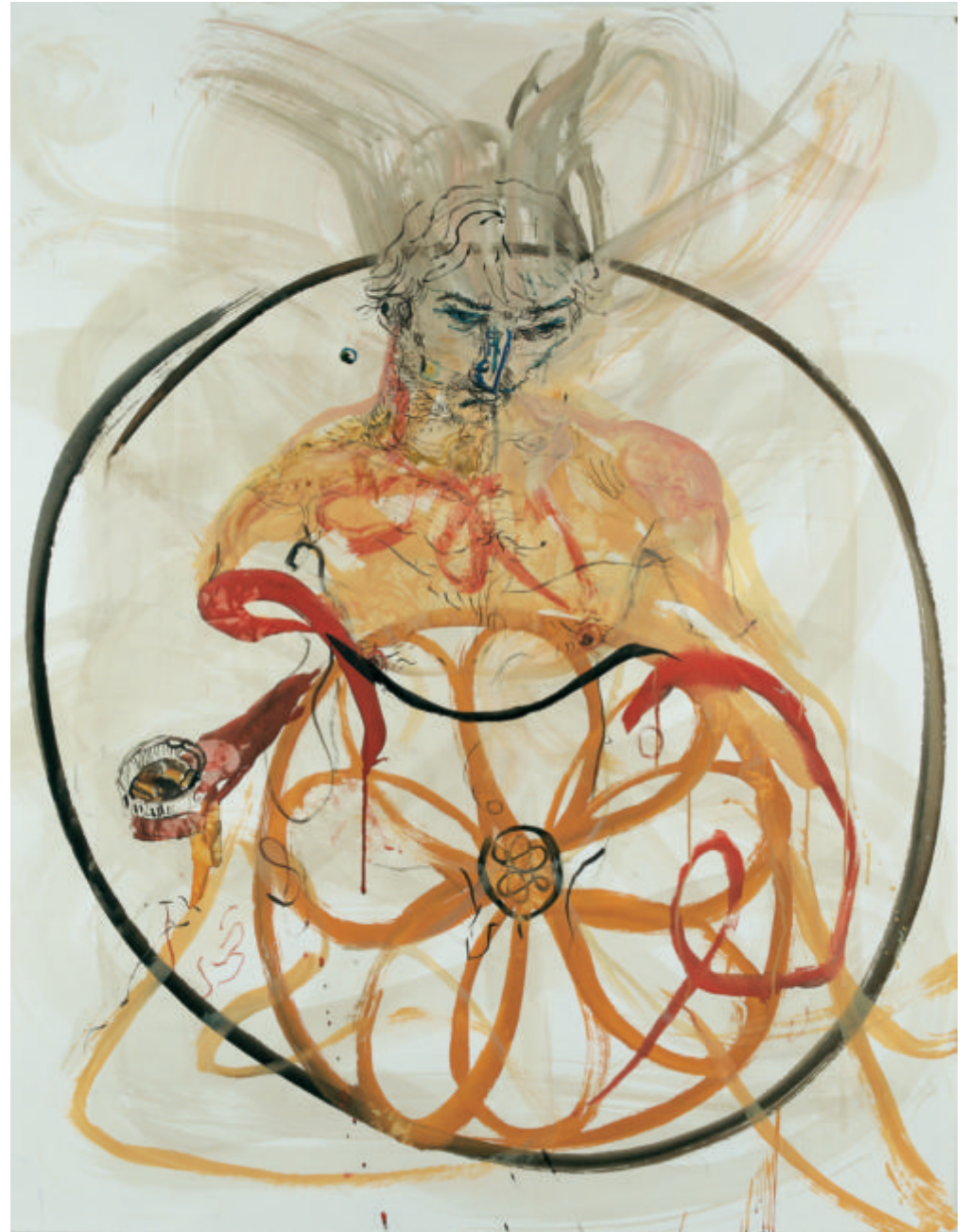


OPPOSITE :
 PLATE 32: Nick Miller, "One: release", watercolour/ink on paper, 152.4 x 121.9 cm



ABOVE:
 PLATE 33: Nick Miller, "N.C: enclosed form", watercolour/ink on paper, 152.4 x 121.9 cm

OPPOSITE :
 PLATE 34: Nick Miller, "E.L: golden flower & ashtray", watercolour/ink on paper, 152.4 x 121.9 cm





ABOVE:
 PLATE 35: Nick Miller, "E.L.: back", watercolour/ink on paper, 152.4 x 121.9 cm



OPPOSITE :
 PLATE 36: Nick Miller, "N.C.: absorbing form ", watercolour/ink on paper, 152.4 x 121.9 cm



ABOVE:
PLATE 37: Nick Miller, "N.C: pressing blue", watercolour/ink on paper, 152.4 x 121.9 cm



OPPOSITE :
PLATE 38: Nick Miller, "E.L: male Da Vinci form", watercolour/ink on paper, 152.4 x 121.9 cm



ABOVE:
 PLATE 39: Nick Miller, "E.L.: front form with bird", watercolour/ink on paper, 152.4 x 121.9 cm



OPPOSITE :
 PLATE 40: Nick Miller, "N.C: female Da Vinci form", watercolour/ink on paper, 152.4 x 121.9 cm



ABOVE:
PLATE 41: Nick Miller, "E.L.: torso", watercolour/ink on paper, 152.4 x 121.9 cm



OPPOSITE :
PLATE 42: Nick Miller, "N.C: resting form", watercolour/ink on paper, 152.4 x 121.9 cm



ABOVE:
PLATE 43: Nick Miller, "A.P: rising- sinking", watercolour/ink on paper, 152.4 x 121.9 cm



OPPOSITE :
PLATE 44: Nick Miller, "A.P: head form", watercolour/ink on paper, 152.4 x 121.9 cm

Chen Zhongsen

Chen Zhongsen is a master of Chinese arts - a calligrapher, painter, musician, scholar, philosopher and most extraordinarily a meditative micro carver and sculptor. He was born in 1941 into an intellectual family and, after the early death of his parents, was raised by his sisters in the Southern coastal city of Fuzhou. He now divides his time between his carving studio in Fuzhou and his home where he paints, deep in the remote countryside of Fujian province.

He was already an artist and a soloist with the Classical Chinese Music Ensemble when the decade-long Cultural Revolution began. Those years of enforced isolation gave him the time for the prolonged and necessarily furtive study of ancient Chinese Arts. He perfected skills in painting, calligraphy and especially in micro carving. Today he is a unique and honoured master of this specialised art form. The works on Shoushan, ‘Eternity Mountain’ stone feature Buddhist and Taoist texts, classical literature, and related imagery. The works cross indefinable boundaries between spiritual practice, ancient tradition, skilled craft, and fine art. They are carved with eyes closed in meditation.

Chen’s work is collected throughout the world. He has exhibited in Hong-Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, Japan, Korea, and Australia as well as in Hawaii, New Mexico, Boston, New York, and Oregon in the US.

Nick Miller

Born in London in 1962. Miller graduated in "Development studies" from the University of East Anglia, Norwich. He moved to Ireland in 1984 and now lives in Co Sligo. He is seen as one of the leading figurative painters of his generation, and was elected to Aosdána in 2001.

Miller has exhibited widely in Ireland, UK, and Europe and in the US. Solo exhibitions include: Rubicon Gallery Dublin, Ireland (1998 & 2000); Art Space Gallery, London, UK (1999 & 2000); The Lowe Gallery, Atlanta, USA (1996); Fenderesky Gallery, Belfast, Northern Ireland (1996); The Irish Museum of Modern Art (1994); Galerie D’Eendt, Amsterdam, Holland (1992); The City Arts Centre, Dublin, Ireland (1991), and The Project Arts Centre, Dublin (1988).

His work is held in collections throughout the world. Public collections include: Irish Museum of Modern Art, Irish Life PLC, The Arts Council, R.T.E, Independent Newspapers, The National Drawing Collection (Limerick), The Niland Collection (Sligo), Ballinglen Arts Foundation, Dublin Institute of Technology, Boyle Civic Collection, Allied Irish Bank, Ulster Bank, Fujian Teachers college, China and The Irish Permanent.

Artists’ Acknowledgments

First and foremost we would like to thank Brian Flaherty and his wife Yuzhi - who for the duration of, and preparations for these exhibitions and events have been translators, guides and support. It could not have happened without them.

Along the way we have received much generous support : material, financial and personal - all of which helped to make these events and publication possible.

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

- Marie & Pat Shortt -
- Barrie Cooke -
- Bono -
- Paul O’Connor, Judo Design -
- Amelia Stein -
- Rose -
- Chungliang Ai Huang & The Living Tao foundation, Urbana, Illanois, USA -
- Keenan Johnson, Johnson & Johnson solicitors -
- Miriam Donohoe, The Irish Times, Beijing
- Suzanne Woods & staff at the Model Arts & Niland Gallery, Sligo -
- Tambara Dillon + Temple Bar Properties Ltd -
- Josephine Kelliher, rubicon gallery, Dublin -
- Clare Pollard & Jenny Siung + Chester Beatty Library, Dublin -
- Staff & students-Fujian Teachers College, Fuzhou, China, “Kung Fu driver” Chen -
- Friends in Fuzhou & Yang Jia Xi, Fujian, China -
- Eamon Robinson, Irish Embassy, Beijing -
- Ciaran Corr, Romy Gray, Sue Hargreaves & Living Tao UK & Ireland -
- The Arts Council, Ireland -
- Department, Institute of Technology, Sligo -
- Michael Harding -
- Michael Ewing Frameworks -
- John Jones Framing, London, -
- Riva & Hilton Miller -
- Reuben & Aaron -
- Eoin Llewellyn -
- Andy Prezkip -
- Cielle Tewksbury -
- katie -
- Patrick Perring -
- Noreen Cassidy -



chen + miller : east - west

19th April - 3rd June 2002

Chen Zhongsen and Nick Miller

Presented by:



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in association with rubicon gallery, Dublin.

PRODUCTION:

PUBLISHER: ©Model Arts + Niland Gallery,
2002

DESIGN: hexagram.

PHOTOGRAPHY: Nick Miller

IMAGES: ©Nick Miller & Chen Zhongsen, 2002

TEXT: ©Nick Miller & Suzanne woods, 2002

MICRO CARVING PHOTOGRAPHY:

Denis Mortell, Plates: 1,4,7,8,9,12,13

Others plates: c/o Chen Zhongsen

REPRODUCTION: The Type Bureau

ISBN 0 9540352 2 4

PRINTED IN IRELAND BY:

NICHOLSON & BASS LTD.

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