

Wesley Tongson: Solo Exhibition in Beijing

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Press Release

Following his well-received retrospective at Hong Kong Arts Centre in 2014, Pékin Fine Arts in partnership with D3E Art is proud to present Wesley Tongson's first solo show in Beijing showcasing artworks created between 1992 and 2012.

Born in Hong Kong in 1957, Wesley Tongson spent his childhood and early teenage years in Hong Kong from the 1950's to 1970's, a period coinciding with the New Ink Movement initiated primarily by Lui Shou-Kwan (1919-1975) and his followers. Deeply influenced by traditional Chinese literati painting, Tongson began to paint formally at the age of 17. He sought inspiration first from traditional Chinese paintings and gradually established his own style through studying the essence of Western and Chinese art. He was heavily influenced by Zhang Daqian (1899 - 1983) and Picasso (1881 - 1973). He continued his study of Chinese traditional painting in Toronto, Canada where he also exhibited his work. After he moved to Hong Kong in the early 1980's, he continued to exhibit in galleries and museums in Hong Kong and the United States. His lifelong exploration in art epitomizes the development of ink art of Hong Kong from a diasporic perspective. He passed away in 2012.

Tongson struggled with schizophrenia since his teenage years. Painting was undoubtedly his sole emotional outlet and a source of true happiness. The philosophy of Zen was a constant source of inspiration for him. The artist once stated in his middle age that, "All these years, I have never stopped creating, working every day and dedicating myself to the arts and the study of Zen philosophy."

The act of painting became a vehicle for a metaphorical travel, using the depiction of a familiar mountain scene (spiritual mountains/lingshan 靈山) and a small dwelling to express his thoughts and emotions. One could interpret his landscape paintings as a series of mindscapes that situate the audience in between realism and abstraction. In his splash ink paintings, the artist would demonstrate his mastery with techniques such as ink rubbing (拓印) and marbling (水拓石紋) to create a rich texture that references the texture strokes/cun (皴) of traditional Chinese rock and landscape painting. Since 2001, Tongson began to experiment with finger painting. By 2009, the artist eventually got rid of the brushes, working primarily with his fingers, fingernails and fists to produce a series of monochromatic paintings that celebrate creative freedom.

This solo exhibition showcases a selection of Wesley Tongson's works that reflect the artist's aesthetic evolution across two decades. The show is divided into two sections. In the first section, a wide variety of works that illustrate Tongson's bold and relentless artistic experiments in terms of materials and subject matter spanning from the 1990's to 2005 will be on display. The selection of artworks encompasses splash ink paintings, calligraphy, bamboo paintings which make reference to traditional Chinese literati painting and an intriguing style of landscape painting which renders a bodily form, epitomizing the artist's bold vision.

The second section is dedicated to the monochromatic finger paintings of varying subject matters from plum, pine tree and recurring landscape. The emergence of the finger paintings took place approximately in the last decade of the artist's all-too-brief life. This new direction was a significant breakthrough, as he eventually abandoned the use of ink brush. By directly interacting with the materials using different parts of his hands and executing the paintings on a large table at a ferocious pace, the artworks express immediacy while steeped with a deep sense of solitude and control. The interplay between void and substance as well as the palpable energy shown in the paintings further reflect the spiritual dimension of Tongson's artistic temperament.

Wesley Tongson Biography:

After moving to Canada in 1977, Wesley Tongson studied Western painting at Ontario College of Art, Toronto as well as Chinese brush painting with the renowned Madame Koo Tsin-yaw (Gu Qingyao 顧青瑤, 1896-1978). He also began to explore and teach himself splash-ink painting. He returned to Hong Kong in 1981 and continued to study painting with Harold Wong (Huang Zhongfang 黃仲方, 1943 -), the distinguished collector, connoisseur and painter as well as Liu Guosong (劉國松, 1932 -), widely known as the Father of Modern Ink. His works are in various public and private collections in Hong Kong including Hong Kong Museum of Art, Hong Kong Art School, Morgan Stanley Asia Limited and different parts of the world such as Australia, Canada, Japan, Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, United Kingdom and United States.