



# Teaching and Learning: A Close Affinity between Teachers and Students

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Before the 1960s, art education in Hong Kong was only available in private tutoring schools and art associations founded by artists, or private art schools. Among the influential, Hong Kong Academy of Fine Arts, founded by oil painter Chan Hoi-ying, provided rather comprehensive art training. The situation did not change until the late 1950s.

At the beginning of 1957, Ch'ien Mu, Head of New Asia College and a renowned Chinese historian and philosopher, invited ink painter Ding Yanyong and oil painter Chen Shih-wen to launch the two-year Fine Arts Specialized Training Program. Ding studied in Japan and created Chinese paintings infusing them with new spirit by merging past tradition and modern expression from east and west, owing to his artistic endeavor in oil painting and then Chinese painting. Chen had been to France for art training. In two years, the Program grew to become the Department of Fine Arts, offering a four-year undergraduate program. It was later integrated into the newly established The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) in 1963, together with its mother college, New Asia College; a specialized art curriculum is also developed. Promoting the study of Chinese art and culture and the exchange of Chinese and western art, the Department offered courses in art history (art history and theory) and in studio art (artistic practice). In general, the Department's teachers could be divided into several categories: first, accomplished and widely known artists working with various artistic media; second, veteran art historians, scholars and experts in painting, calligraphy and antiques; third, visiting scholars, artists-in-residence and adjunct professors invited from abroad, the Mainland or locally. The teachers of the third category further encouraged diversity in the Department's teaching resources. There have been numerous inspiring teachers and talented graduates at the Department since its establishment sixty years ago. The limited space available here means it is not possible to discuss every one of them. This article talks about the remarkable artists who graduated from the Department,

advanced their independent careers by opening up a fresh horizon of art, and received awards at the Contemporary Hong Kong Art Biennial Exhibition (renamed as the Hong Kong Art Biennial Exhibition and then Hong Kong Contemporary Art Biennial Awards), the first platform provided by the Hong Kong Museum of Art to present official prizes to emerging artists. This article also describes how those artists were drawn to the Department's teachers, how the students and teachers helped each other improve during the teaching process, and how the artists drew inspiration and developed what they had learned to create their own style. By discussing the relationship the artists have with the Department, the article affords a glimpse of the contributions the Department made towards nurturing art professionals.

### Li Tung-keung John and Liu Siu-jane

Born in 1936 and brought up in Hong Kong, noted painter Li Tung-keung John (Plate 1) entered the New Asia College in 1956, majored in western art and minored in philosophy and religion. Through the professional training he received at the school, he did not only acquire a solid foundation of both western artistic techniques and skills, but also absorbed the essence and aesthetic values of Chinese art and culture, as inspired by masters of Chinese studies and famous painters and calligraphers like Ding Yanyong, Zeng Keduan, Gu Qingyao, C.C. Wang, Zhang Bihan and Zhao Heqin. Li graduated from the New Asia College in 1962 and was among the first batch of the Department's graduates. He taught at the Department after graduation and went to the US to further his studies between 1971 and 1974. He returned to the Department to take up the post of Lecturer from 1978 to 1982. He re-visited the



Plate 1 (left)

Printmaker and ink painter Li Tung-keung John. Image provided by the writer.

Plate 2 (right)

Li Tung-keung John, *Restful Spirit* (2013), ink on paper, 59 x 47 cm. Image provided by the writer.



Department of Fine Arts in 1995 and served as an artist-in-residence at the Hong Kong Museum of Art and the Hong Kong Visual Arts Centre afterwards. In 2000, he won the Hong Kong Arts Development Council's Visual Art Development Award. He now lives in Canada.

Li is very accomplished in printmaking and ink painting, typically depicting figures as well as characters from the Bible. Through his works, he explores the rich tradition of Chinese ink painting and its essence, the sharp, crisp lines of prints, the color variations of printmaking, and a variety of calligraphic strokes suggestive of flexibility, flow, jerkiness or rhythm, transcending to the level where the brush is directed by the heart as much as by the hand. For his figure paintings, sketch lines and Chinese brushwork are the threads that run through the imagery of his lively characters. The contours of his figures and their limbs, mostly drawn with dry brush and dark ink, are characterized by defined fluent and forceful turns, while their hair and clothes, either shaded in by dry brush or brushed with pale and darker ink washes, sometimes supplemented by washes of light colors, show the pace and rhythm of his brush. Li puts emphasis on rendering people's emotions and capturing their thoughts, expressions and moods in the blink of an eye. (Plate 2) "I like painting figures," he said. "The main subject matter of my work is people. The value of human dignity is supreme and our souls are precious. An old saying compares the nobility of humanity to heaven and earth. We have to know how to respect and appreciate if we are to get along with one another." His figures in ink are an elevation of the spirit through art. His artistic achievement and dedication to teaching have contributed significantly to the wide and continuous spread of ink painting and especially printmaking in the Hong Kong art scene.

Graduated in 1976, Liu Siu-jane (Plate 3) was among the early graduates of the Department of Fine Arts, CUHK. She received general art training in sketching, life drawing and painting in secondary school, and studied art history as a compulsory subject in form six, achieving a good grade in art history in the Certificate of Education Examination. Her elder sister, a New Asia College student ahead of her, kindled her further interest in art and opened her mind to western art movements like impressionism and others. She decided to enroll in the Department of Fine Arts, and Liu Guosong sat at her admission interview. In the first half of her four-year curriculum, the courses Liu attended included Introduction to Art (by Li Chu-tsing), Drawing (by Liu Guosong), Painting of the Four Gentlemen and figures (by Shaw Li-sheng), Landscape painting (by Zhang Bihan) and Art history (by Mayching Kao). She began the study of oil painting and printmaking in years three and four, studying drawing and printmaking under Li Tung-keung, who had just returned from the U.S. and created prints with techniques such as woodcut, metal etching and lithography. She meanwhile took Ink painting (by Ding Yanyong and Van I-pong) and Calligraphy (by Zeng Keduan). Ding's use of lines in his paintings of figures, birds and flowers, bamboo and rocks has left a deep impression on her. Li Tung-keung is also an ink painter in his own right, teaching mainly drawing, etching, metal engraving and lithography. He always stresses the importance of being an artist-type printmaker instead of an artisan-type printmaker who knows only techniques. He admires Matisse's and Picasso's print works enormously because he thinks they are reminiscent of the resonance of fluid lines in Eastern art. To carry the "New Asia



Plate 3

Printmaker Liu Siu-jane. Image provided by the writer.

spirit,” he paid particular attention to fostering the Chinese culture and developing the personality of future art practitioners when he was a teacher. Nevertheless, he abandoned the traditional pedagogy of passing on his knowledge directly to his students, and took a laissez-faire approach by encouraging them to create freely. Embracing the traditions of Chinese figure painting and calligraphy for his printmaking, he emphasizes showing feelings and capturing emotions and fleeting facial expressions of people like his family members, friends, students and contemporaries. His attitude towards making art and teaching philosophy has exerted a subtle influence on Liu’s artistic cultivations. In addition, Li is a true pioneer in Hong Kong printmaking. The Department’s printing machines were very primitive in the early stage of development. When Li returned to Hong Kong in 1974, he actively promoted the art of printmaking. Coincidentally, the Department moved to the present New Asia College campus, and formed a cradle of Hong Kong printmaking practitioners by setting up a printmaking studio and purchasing new equipment for producing engravings and lithographs.

Liu Siu-jane pursued further studies at the Saint Martin’s School of Art, London after obtaining her bachelor’s degree, and graduated with a Higher Certificate in Painting and Printmaking in 1980. She wanted to concentrate on metal etching, but changed to lithography when she went to the University of Illinois, Chicago, where she received a Master of Fine Arts (Printmaking) degree in 1982. After returning to Hong Kong, she took up a teaching post at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, which she held for seventeen years, and later taught at the Academy of Visual Arts of Hong Kong Baptist University and art specialist course on printmaking at the Hong Kong Visual Arts Centre. Liu was an



award winner (for printmaking) at the Contemporary Hong Kong Art Biennial Exhibition 1985. In 2000, she founded the “Art Horizon Printmaking Workshop” and has organized many workshops, talks, courses and solo exhibitions and displayed her work ardently. Since Li Tung-keung, she has been the mainstay of Hong Kong printmaking, contributing greatly to the continuous development of the local art scene.

Although Liu has practiced different techniques in printmaking, she is more devoted to lithography. In lithography, she is particularly fond of and skilled at adopting the technique of reversal to reverse the tones of objects and take the white areas for black and the blacks for white. Such printing process is truly complicated, requiring sophisticated techniques to modulate lines and shapes in a composition and bring out the spirit of ink painting. Among her representative works are themes of ox, tortoise, snake, rabbit and other creatures. (Plate 4) Later she acquired the new skill of “waterless lithography” from Canadian professor Nik Semenoff, who invented the use of caulking silicone in lithography to process

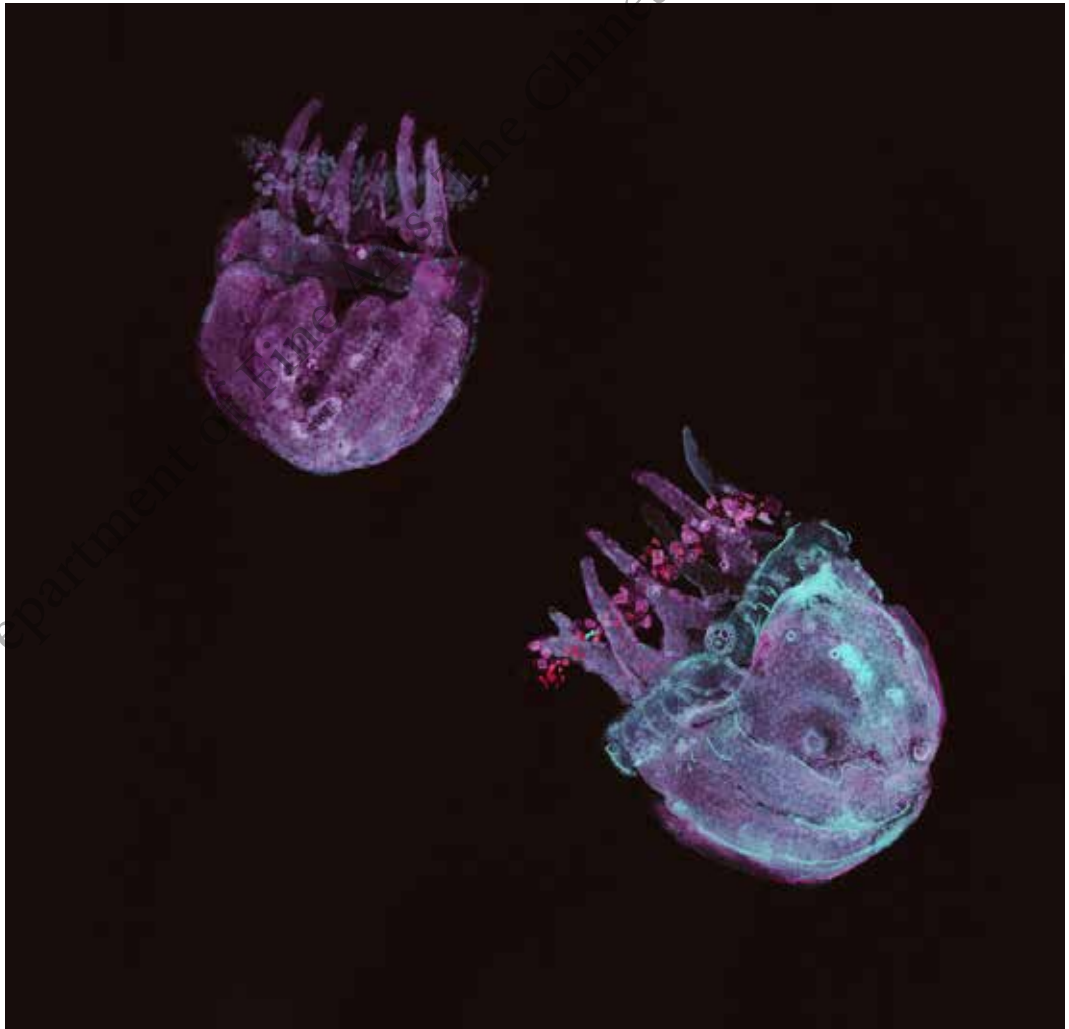


Plate 4 (left)

Liu Siu-jane, *Untitled* (1985), lithograph, 68 x 85 cm. Collection of Hong Kong Museum of Art. Image provided by Hong Kong Museum of Art.

Plate 5 (right)

Liu Siu-jane, *Dancing in Water K* (2011), digital print, 46 x 43 cm. Image provided by the artist.



negative images, and launched a series of works in a new style. The prevalence of digital technology also gives her greater flexibility to alter images and tones when printing digital works. Liu follows Li Tung-keung's idea of emphasizing feelings, and pays special attention to the relationship between and interaction of themes and personal emotions in her artworks, for which natural beings are a frequent subject matter, and they are injected with awareness of social and environmental issues. She once visited the jellyfish aquarium in Ocean Park and made life sketches of the sea creatures. Since then, she has been fascinated by the swimming jellyfish, whose billowing form is like a marine ballerina, as well as creating the "Dancing in Water Series" using waterless lithography and digital printing. The bright yet unobtrusive colors evoke a sense of gracefulness and vitality. (Plate 5) In *Bliss* of the "Metaphor Series," Liu sketched the movements of the free-swimming goldfish and subsequently converted the images from sketches to prints, singing praises to the freedom of life. In the "Lotus" series, her prints do not only project the purity and elegance of the lotus, but also suggest the natural charm found in Ding Yanyong's casual execution of lotus ink paintings. The "Metaphor Series" contains quite a number of works printed with waterless lithography, and some with traditional methods, creating the ink effect of contrasting black and white on paper with the loose delicate washes produced by copier toner. The "Longing for Home Series" depicts polar bears and penguins in crisis situations and the destruction of their natural habitats. Using the intensity of ink and colors, she brings out the melancholy and heaviness that are meant to help people reflect upon the need for environmental protection. Her "Life Series", inspired by the structure of a walnut, and the recent "Magnolia Series" show the artist's imagination of and express her hope for the continuation of the life cycles of plants.

### Cheung Yee and Ho Siu-kee

Born in Guangzhou, China in 1936, Cheung Yee (Plate 6) received his art training at the Department of Fine Arts, National Taiwan Normal University. In 1958, he graduated and returned to Hong Kong. Together with Hong Kong artists like Van Lau and Hon Chi-fun, Cheung founded the "Circle Art Group" in 1963, one of the earliest arts organizations to introduce western art movements and modernism to Hong Kong. In 1965, he went to the U.S. and Europe for further studies. Between 1968 and 1973, he was a part-time tutor in the Department of Extramural Studies of both The Chinese University of Hong Kong and The University of Hong Kong. He worked as a part-time lecturer in the Department of Fine Arts, CUHK in 1976, before taking up a teaching post at the Swire School of Design of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. In 1983, he taught at the Chinese University of Hong Kong again, where he was appointed Chair of the Department of Fine Arts in the following year, and he worked there until 1992. He now lives in the U.S.

Cheung was one of the masters who started a new chapter for sculpting in Hong Kong. He has worked in printmaking, but he is most acclaimed for his sculptures, including wood carvings, stone carvings, bronze sculptures, bronze castings and cast paper murals. He arduously studied the ancient Chinese characters like oracle bone script, tortoise shells, patterns made by worms, and the mysterious imagery



Plate 6

Sculptor Cheung Yee (middle). Image provided by Department of Fine Arts, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

that symbolizes spiritual beings, rituals and divination, such as the four phenomena, the eight trigrams, the nine palaces, the four numina, birds and crabs, and tried interpreting them in a modern way. His sculptures, whether they are in abstract shapes or in regular forms, project strength, boldness and archaism. Even more so are his large-scale wood carvings and bronze castings, which take us across time and space like totems. The bright red and intense black colors, heightened dynamism and rustic texture are his signature features. (Plate 7) His artistic achievement has won him an MBE, the Sculptor of the Year Award 1988 from Hong Kong Artists' Guild and many more acknowledgements. Having been frequently commissioned to display his works in public places, museums and private and commercial organizations, he has had numerous solo exhibitions and has taken part in exhibitions, many on an international scale, at home and abroad.

Cheung mainly taught courses on printmaking and sculpture at the Department of Fine Arts. Instead of giving detailed instructions, he adopted a broad, open approach to teaching. For example, he would draw some sketches for the students to freely demonstrate their artistic expression, give his opinions only when they were needed during the process of art making, and often he would go to tea rooms with his students to talk about everything they could think of, mostly art and people, which provided inspiration to his friends and students. During the time he was teaching at the Department, he nurtured many artists who subsequently became famous, including Ho Siu-kee, who chose a different path rather than emulating the form and style of his teacher's sculptures.

Ho Siu-kee (Plate 8) (born 1964) graduated from the Department of Fine Arts in 1989. His pursuit of knowledge in the Department offers a different kind of example. He originally studied art and design at the private school First Institute of Art and Design, where oil painter Wong Pui-kong worked as a



Plate 7

Cheung Yee, *Crab #4* (1985), bronze, 80 x 70 x 45 cm. Collection of Hong Kong Museum of Art. Image provided by Hong Kong Museum of Art.

teacher. There he learned engraving and etching. He then enrolled in a night course, preparing his application for the university, and eventually was admitted to the Department of Fine Arts, CUHK in 1985. Celebrated sculptor Cheung Yee happened to be one of the examiners in Ho's admission interview. At that time, the Department was running a four-year program, during which Ho chose mostly studio courses, which covered aspects of art practice including sculpture, oil painting and printmaking. He also attended courses on the history of painting, history of calligraphy, contemporary art history and art theory. Although Cheung chaired the Department, Lee Fook-wah Aries and Chu Hon-sun were the sculpture teachers, and Lui Chun-kwong did most of the teaching related to oil painting. Ho has neither taken sculpture and printmaking courses nor benefited from Cheung's teaching during his undergraduate studies. After graduation, he completed the one-year Postgraduate Diploma in Education at The Chinese University of Hong Kong, focusing on art and design, and subsequently taught in the Department of Fine Arts as a tutor, preparing himself to study abroad. Between 1993 and 1995, he studied Sculpture at Cranbrook Academy of Art in the U.S., where he earned a Master of Fine Arts degree. He won an award at the Contemporary Hong Kong Art Biennial Exhibition 1996 the following year. A few years later, he worked towards his Doctor of Fine Arts degree at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), Australia, between 2000 and 2003, with a

research focus on bodily perception as a means of expression in contemporary art practice. A former Associate Professor at the Academy of Visual Arts, Hong Kong Baptist University, he currently teaches in the Department of Fine Arts at his alma mater.

Ho did not express a strong interest in sculpting during his university years. His curiosity about sculpture was aroused when he worked as a tutor in the Department and then as an assistant to Cheung Yee after obtaining his bachelor's degree. Cheung was making preparations for his solo exhibition at the Hong Kong Museum of Art, so Ho gave the fullest support to Cheung to produce wood carvings and bronze castings for a year after the end of his tutor's contract, devoting much of his time to discovering the art of sculpture. Since Cheung's teaching and instructions did not follow a rigid system and allowed his students considerable freedom, Ho gained from his teacher conceptual inspiration and practical techniques. Ho generally worked in Cheung's staff quarters and studio, and thus had privileged access to his sizable collection of books. They have been in a committed teacher-and-student relationship since the time when Cheung let Ho read the books in his study room and made a joke about Ho being "literally the disciple who made his way into the room," paving the way for Ho to have a career as a professional artist.



Plate 8

Artist Ho Siu-kee. Image provided by the writer.



Plate 9

Ho Siu-kee, *Auerola No. 9*  
(2011), brass. Image  
provided by the artist.

As Cheung's assistant, Ho's main responsibility was to assist in the production of three-dimensional works, which included carving wood, preparing moulds and sending them to Taiwan for the creation of large-scale castings in bronze. He was also responsible for working out the logistics of the collaboration between the agency contractors and freight companies. His job allowed him to get a better understanding of the art-making process and learn how to tackle various problems arising from the production. Meanwhile, Cheung was preparing the artworks for his solo exhibition, such as wood carvings and bronze castings, with tortoise shells, worm-like characters, hexagram images, birds and crabs as his themes. Those art pieces emitted vigor and heroic flavor, tinged with antiquity and crudity. He seldom drew up detailed work plans, but made simple sketches for Ho to find inspiration and express artistic freedom. Cheung, in a supervisory position, shared his opinions with Ho, sometimes pointed out a direction, and rectified when necessary during the production. Therefore, Ho derived the abstract and tangled shapes of his sculptures from Cheung's ascetic and disciplined presentation of tortoise shells in a nine-cell grid and worm-like imageries. The mutual influence of teacher and student was evident in the production process, during which Ho accumulated rich experience and obtain enormous benefit.

Afterwards, Ho furthered his studies in the U.S., where he realized that he no longer wanted to carry on with his teacher's sculptures and geometric imagery based on various themes, as he pondered which artistic path to take. Traditionally, sculpture is a work of art produced by shaping material with actual physical labor. This prompted Ho to explore the possibilities of transforming material by bodily



Plate 10

Ho Siu-kee, *Mountain and Sea No.4* (2018), bronze sculpture, water and performance. Image provided by the writer and the artist.

experience so as to get closer to the essence of art. At that time, using bodily performance as a means of expression was a much-discussed cultural topic as well as a contemporary art pursuit. Ho used the body as a new base to expand his creative ideas, with the perceptual body and the expressive body, his focus flitting back and forth between identity and space to give responses. Having veered off the path of physical sculpture, he involved bodily expression and performance in his artistic practice to create interactions and responses in different spaces and settings, employing video, installation and mixed media. At a later stage, his works even took on a religious flavor. The “Aureola Series” is a case in point. The artist designed more than a dozen visual devices that reminded people of the halos and aureola of the holy characters like Jesus and the Buddha. With additional light sources, he then stood inside the device or wore one on his head to give different performances, like chanting in different places of the city, exploring the realm created by the unity of Heaven and man achieved through the three stages of awareness, namely “limited body,” “boundless mind” and “things and me are one and the same,” revealing three levels of understanding in fact belong to one. (Plate 9) “Body Geometry” is another example. He covered the floor of the Artist Commune in the Cattle Depot Artist Village with sand, built a sand cone and put on Tang-style clothing. His installation reminds one of the Japanese garden known as “arid landscape,” carrying spiritual connotations of Shintoism and Zen Buddhism. To share his philosophical ideals of body, lines and concepts, he made use of performances and videos in his work as he struck the singing bowl or left curve marks repeatedly on the sand without end. In Ho’s most recent series, “Mountain and Sea,” the presence of sculptural elements is again felt strongly. He placed a cast bronze rock into a bowl of water. When he struck the bowl, the water rippled around the rock, with its balance drifting a bit. With the laser-carved poems written by the artist himself, the series create images that are at the same time modern and traditional, with the landscape resembling the enchanted isle of the intangible and incorporeal world described in Bai Juyi’s poem, and display signs of influence from Chinese culture, Buddhism and Taoism. (Plate 10) Such a context also reflects the gradual influence of Cheung Yee’s sculptures and the Department’s emphasis on Chinese art and culture.

### Chan Tak-hei and Shieh Ka-ho Wilson

Chan Tak-hei (Plate 11) (1936-2012), who graduated from the Nanjing Art Academy, had studied under several renowned painters from Jiangsu and Shanghai, such as Ya Ming and Chen Dayu. He settled in Hong Kong in 1981, and served as a teacher in the Department of Fine Arts and the Department of Extramural Studies, CUHK between 1984 and 1999, teaching landscape, bird-and-flower and figure paintings. He worked as an art consultant to a gallery for a while before opening his art consultancy company in 1992. His paintings impress with their transcended brushwork, spontaneity and bringing the tradition into a modern context to approximate a refreshing quality and achieve a literati expression. Chan was one of the very few teachers who were accomplished in figure painting, regardless of whether his works were painted with fine or spontaneous strokes. The origins of his paintings are traceable to the ancient masters, by whom he was not entrapped in the slightest. (Plate



Plate 11

Ink painter Chan Tak-hei.  
Image provided by  
Department of Fine Arts,  
The Chinese University  
of Hong Kong.

12) Although he did not teach at the Department for long, he inspired a number of successful students, who were able to form a style of their own in their continuing exploration of figure painting. Shieh Ka-ho Wilson is considered to be one of the most representative of those students.

Shieh Ka-ho Wilson (Plate 13) (born 1970) underwent basic training in visual arts, such as painting, drawing and life sketching, in his secondary school days. Initially, Shieh entered the Department of Architecture of The University of Hong Kong in 1989 to study aesthetics and architectural design. Lee Wai-on, who studied painting under Hong Kong modern ink master Lui Shou-kwan, was teaching in the Department of Architecture at that time. Shieh, meanwhile, learned Chinese and western painting and life sketching from Lee, as well as looking into calligraphy by studying model-books. Soon enough, however, he realized that studying architecture did not suit his personality, because as a subject of study, architecture emphasizes creating design concepts rather than painting practically with both hands and mind. As a result, he dropped out and enrolled in the four-year studio program in the Department of Fine Arts, CUHK in 1990. As for the program structure, the students were required to take general studies courses in their first year and were allowed to choose their majors in the second year. In the third and final years, they could do elective courses. The courses offered by the Department were richly diverse, including principles of Chinese painting and calligraphy, introduction to art, Western painting fundamentals, studio courses in oil painting, Chinese painting, calligraphy, printmaking, sculpture and mixed media, and history courses in contemporary art, Chinese painting, calligraphy and Hong Kong art. The students also had the chance to pay visits to working artists. The full-time and part-time





Plate 12

Chan Tak-hei, *Su Shi Holding an Inkstone* (1996), ink and color on paper, 68.5 x 38.5 cm. Collection of the Department of Fine Arts, The Chinese University of Hong Kong. Image provided by Department of Fine Arts, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.



Plate 13

Ink painter Shieh Ka-ho Wilson. Image provided by the artist.

professors and lecturers working in the Department included art historians Mayching Kao and Harold Mok, calligrapher-painters Lee Yun-woon, Cheng Ming and Chan Tak-hei, oil painter Lui Chun-kwong, printmaker Chung Tai-fu, sculptor Cheung Yee, conceptual and installation artist Chan Yuk-keung Kurt, etc. As far as Chinese painting and calligraphy are concerned, Shieh studied landscape painting under Lee Yun-woon, studied bird-and-flower painting under Cheng Ming and studied figure painting under Chan Tak-hei. In addition, Lee Yun-woon and Cheung Yee provided great inspiration for Shieh's calligraphy and seal carving. After gaining his bachelor's degree in 1994, Shieh went on to take an MFA degree in the Department of Fine Arts between 1999 and 2001. Among the teachers at that time were Lee Yun-woon, Tong Kam-tang, Chan Yuk-keung and Lui Chun-kwong to name a few. He was able to concentrate on his artistic practice since the program's focus was on artistic research and a personal approach to making art, and he participated in discussion sessions and received a studentship. In 2003, he won an award at the Hong Kong Art Biennial Exhibition. Throughout the course of his studies and artistic practice, the time he spent studying under Chan Tak-hei and the works he created at that time set him on the path to revolutionizing the traditional Chinese gongbi "meticulous brush" figure painting with his uniquely personal style, bringing this art form to a new horizon.

Chan Tak-hei devised his own method of teaching. He would look for the classic figure paintings created by the ancient masters, such as Gu Kaizhi's *Admonitions of the Instructress to the Court Ladies*, Zhou Fang's *Women Adorning their Hair with Flowers*, *The Eighty-seven Divine Immortals* attributed to anonymous, and even the album leaves of *Woodblock Illustrations of Water Margin* printed in a late-Ming edition, and use them as copying resources in the traditional teaching of painting. As he taught his students about the modulations and turns of the lines for the elaborate-style of outline drawing, he also explained to them the color palette and the skills in filling in colors in detail. The Dunhuang murals, Zhang Daqian's copies of the Dunhuang murals and the late-Ming figure artist Chen Hongshou's



Plate 14  
Shieh Ka-ho Wilson, *Five Tallest Buildings in Hong Kong* (2011), Chinese ink and gouache on silk, 90 x 115 cm. Image provided by the artist.

techniques of figure painting also served as Chan's teaching materials. In fact, Chan also taught freehand figure painting in the Department, and Shieh's graduation work was a freehand figure painting, not a *gongbi* one. Shieh only focused his attention on *gongbi* figure painting after completing his undergraduate degree. Living in Yuen Long for three years to concentrate on his art practice, he then opened his studio in an industrial building in Fo Tan in 2008. He staged a solo exhibition at Grotto Fine Art at the first available opportunity after he graduated with a master's degree, and continued to put on exhibitions. Highly prized for their unique style, his figurative works created an alternative path to great artistic success, which came with high praise from collectors and art galleries, and opened the door to his career as a professional painter.

Shieh derives his *gongbi*-style figures from the line-drawing technique and the use of color typical of ancient figure paintings, and brings them into a modern context with creative themes as well as new artistic vocabulary. For example, the "Architecture Series" is a series of paintings that interprets

the landmarks in Hong Kong, such as Central Plaza, Bank of China Tower, Shun Tak Centre, International Commerce Centre and International Financial Centre, as ladies. The painter gives the ladies dresses of the iconic buildings or uses gestures and poses to give human feelings to the landmarks for personifications, presenting the stylized figures in the style of traditional paintings of court ladies through the use of architecture. The patterns and motifs found on women's clothes of the Tang and Song paintings are the source of inspiration for Shieh to draw the windows and structural textures. Although basically they wear the same enigmatic facial expression, they have their own personality, visible in the delicate fine lines and rich colors of the personified buildings. (Plate 14) The mysterious quality of the figures and their awkward poses in his paintings can also be seen as metaphors of men and women, homosexuals, transsexuals and the dubious relationship between the two sexes. Transformation of identities and roles is also one of the issues he explores in his figure painting. In the series of heavily colored *gongbi* paintings and color pencil drawings featuring movie stars and singers like Chow Yun-fat, Maggie Cheung and Teresa Teng, the figures dressed in different costumes are placed in different scenes, their hand gestures and poses are designed to show the personality of the characters, their symbolic meanings and social consciousness. Non-commercial subjects and historical characters have come up in his recent works. Shieh felt that the importance of history is not valued in Hong Kong. Therefore he tries reinterpreting the personality, historical background and cultural significance of the historic figures in his works, from Hong Kong governors painted in a series of color pencil portraits on wooden boards (Plate 15), to characters of the late-Qing political figures such as the Empress Dowager Cixi, Emperor Guangxu, Li Hongzhang and Yuan Shikai. With his artistic team in the Dr. Sun Yat-sen Museum's art project "Hi! Houses" presented by the Art Promotion Office, Shieh portrays Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary activities in Japan, Hong Kong and Southeast Asia. His *gongbi* style and use of allegory might have been inspired by the popular subject matter, the shapes of the figures, rich colors and some kind of distorted forms in Japanese *ukiyo-e* prints, animations and mangas. Ultimately, his style of figure painting is grounded in a perfect combination of the colorful Chinese *gongbi* painting and modernism.

His innovation of and accomplishment in figure painting, as well as the massive popularity of his works in the art market, have made an impact on the younger generations of artists and drawn them into re-exploring the heavy colored *gongbi* figure painting. With the figure paintings dealing with a range of topics from local folklore, social issues and allegorical characterizations to everyday occurrences, toys and fairy tales, those emerging artists have created a refreshing trend, as seen in the works by the recent graduates from the Department of Fine Arts, CUHK and other art academies.

### **Chow Su-sing and Koon Wai-bong**

Born into a family of scholars in Suzhou, a town rich in history and culture, in 1923, Chow Su-sing (Plate 16) studied at the Suzhou College of Fine Arts and learned painting and calligraphy from Feng Zishen of the "Three Wus and One Feng" as well as other distinguished painters such as Wu Silan and Zhang Xingjie, who gave him access to antique paintings and helped him build a strong foundation

# 總 GOVERN



22

SIR ALEXANDER GRANTHAM  
葛量洪爵士  
1947-1958



23

SIR ROBERT BLACK  
柏立基爵士  
1958-1964



24

SIR DAVID TRENCH  
戴麟趾爵士  
1964-1971



25

LORD MACLEHOSE  
麥理浩勳爵  
1971-1982

Formerly Sir Murray MacLehose  
前稱 麥理浩爵士



Plate 15

Shieh Ka-ho Wilson, *The Twenty-Eight British Hong Kong Governors (22<sup>nd</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup>)* (2012), colour pencil on cardboard, 102 x 152 cm. Image provided by the artist.



Plate 16

Ink painter Chow Su-sing.  
Image provided by the  
writer.

for his Chinese painting. Later, Chow went south to live in Hong Kong as a result of the significant shift of power in China in 1949, and befriended Zhang Daqian in 1951, forming a friendship through their passion for art. He taught at the Department of Fine Arts at the invitation of Ch'ien Mu of the New Asia College between 1962 and 1971, and moved to the U.S. afterwards. In 1980, he moved again to Vancouver, Canada, where he concentrated on cultivating art and teaching, and published a number of teaching materials for Chinese painting. He returned to Hong Kong in 1988 at the request of the Department of Fine Arts, and stayed briefly in the New Asia College for a month as the S.Y. Chung Visiting Fellow in 1991. During his teaching days and revisits, he was known as a devoted and skillful teacher who provided ceaselessly his students fundamental training and creative inspiration; his contributions were therefore immense and profound to the continuation and revitalization of Chinese painting.

An artist receiving traditional training in Chinese painting, Chow modeled on various schools of painting, ranging in date from the Song to Qing dynasties. His art was particularly influenced by literati painting and the Wu School of painting in the Ming period, and came under the influence of Bada shanren, Shitao and Zhang Daqian. There are no strokes or dabs of ink that are excessive in his lofty, transcendental and elegant paintings, as he broke through to create his own style. Landscape painting is his specialty, and he employs texture strokes and the ink-wash technique spontaneously to impart aloofness and refinedness to his works, which are not contrived at all. He also bears in mind what ancient masters said about painting, like the remark of the Tang painter Zhang Zao that “externally all creation is my master; internally I have found the mind’s source” and that of Shitao, who said “search for the most unusual peaks and then start painting.” He would thus put those words into practice and sought inspiration from natural scenery, paying attention to the plants and light going through seasonal changes. His interest in real landscape views is corroborated by his paintings of Hong Kong’s grassy

hills and clear streams, of China's famous mountains and great rivers, and of the U.S. and Canada's spectacular and majestic scenery. (Plate 17) He also excels in painting the Four Gentlemen and bird-and-flower paintings, and does *gongbi*-style flower paintings occasionally. In fact, he seeks to express himself in every genre of painting, and assimilates the merits of various masters of the past and the present to create a style of his own. A true self-disciplined gentleman, he always wears immaculate suits and is cultured, polite and subtle. His cultivation and scholar demeanor correspond with the literati culture in the past, setting an example for his students. As for teaching, he stressed the importance of preserving and revitalizing Chinese tradition, and by emphasizing brushwork as well as life drawing and detailed analysis, he taught his students about the essence of Chinese painting and how to distinguish whether a painting was good or bad. Although he did not hand down his knowledge and wisdom to a lot of students due to his short stay in the Department of Fine Arts, there are artists under his instructions who grasp the innermost meaning of Chinese painting and find a niche of their own. A good example of this is Koon Wai-bong, an artist who traces his works back to the long tradition of Chinese painting and reinvents it.

Koon Wai-bong (Plate 18) was born in Hong Kong in 1974. A graduate from the Department of Fine Arts in 1996, Koon developed his interest in art and laid the basis when he took visual art courses in Western art, oil painting and drawing at the Jockey Club Ti-I College. During his four years of study in the Department of Fine Arts, he focused on two-dimensional art, especially on Chinese painting and calligraphy, and showed little interest in exploring three-dimensional art. He took general studies courses in his first year in the Department. At that time, Lee Yun-woon was the Department's chair, teaching the fundamentals of landscape painting and flower painting, calligraphy and modern ink, along with Cheng Ming and Harold Mok, the former teaching landscape painting and calligraphy and the latter teaching art history. In his second year, he began studying under Chow Su-sing, who had just returned to the Department as a visiting fellow. As a traditional Chinese painter, Chow is old-fashioned about teaching methods, imparting the ideas of Chinese painting, skills of using brush and ink and color application through demonstrations and copying painting drafts. Koon first learned from Chow how to paint the Four Gentlemen, namely plum blossoms, orchid, chrysanthemum, bamboo, and other flowers at different times of the year, doing life drawing, and then landscapes – in which Chow put special emphasis on the composition of trees, rocks, clouds and water, and on how to create atmosphere by paying attention to the differences in the colors and mists of the four seasons. Chow is a great story teller who fascinated his student audience with anecdotes of painters and vivid narration of art history. From his teacher, Koon learned a great deal about how to read a painting, the aesthetics behind the techniques and the essence of literati painting. He also greatly admires Chow for his literati sophistication and scholarly manner, with Chow's words still fresh in his memory, "set apart from three kinds of persons: masters of the past, contemporaries and yourself." That is to say, people who practice art have to kick the habit of copying paintings, reap new knowledge from the ancient and modern times, reflect on their work, look for new ideas and find their own personal style.





Plate 17

Chow Su-sing, *Jiuzhaigou in Autumn* (2003), ink and color on paper, hanging scroll, 126 x 63.3 cm. Collection of Jin Yi Zhai. Image provided by the writer.



Plate 18

Ink painter Koon Wai-bong.  
Image provided by the  
artist.

Koon, knowing that he and Chow are two or three generations apart, began to think about how to be different from his teacher and himself. However, he did not hurry to force new artworks, trying to develop his style by himself without too much influence from other artists. When he became a student in the Department's MFA program, he gained inspiration from works by the proponent of Hong Kong's New Ink movement, Lui Shou-kwan, and started exploring the relationship between tradition and innovation and his artistic journey. In the meanwhile, he attended courses taught by Lee Yun-woon and Tong Kam-tang, the latter of whom opened his mind to *gongbi* painting and the technique. His graduation thesis, entitled *Rethinking of Bimo (brush and ink): The Significance of Bimo in Chinese Painting*, has revealed the direction he was going to take, even though his style did not fully surface when he graduated with a master's degree in 2002. In 2003, he found his distinctive creative style with his mastery of the Chinese painting technique. His progress is attributable to the increased opportunities of exhibiting artworks presented by curators, art galleries and museums during the rise of Hong Kong's art market in the 2000s. In response to their curatorial ideas and demands, Koon moved in a more diversified direction, and won the Hong Kong Contemporary Art Biennial Award in 2009.

Well known for painting landscapes, bamboo and rocks, Koon does not confine his works to the two-dimensional narrative paintings. More often than not, he expands the possibilities of expression and aggregation by transcending from the flat surface of handscrolls, adding multimedia elements and interpreting brushwork and his subjects using different formats and media. For example, *Motifs and Ideas* (2009) uses a juxtaposition of transferred prints of the leaves of rocks, mountains and clouds from the traditional painting manual *Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting* and his own paintings of

rocks and clouds with a calculated composition of light ink and void space, creating a hazy ambience of literati painting. It even features a sound installation and headphones for the audience to listen to the recorded sounds of wind and water, so as to conjure up the aesthetic idea of a dream journey and unity of Heaven and man, the essence of literati landscape painting. (Plate 19) Another work entitled *In the Breeze* (2013) is a group of Chinese round fans painted with bamboo in the blue-and-green style, with the slowly waving fans being controlled by mechanical devices. The fans are suggestive of the Yuan paintings of bamboo by painters like Guan Daosheng, while their movement gives the audience a refreshingly soft breeze. In *On an Odyssey* (2013), Koon painted scenery on Chinese Tang-style upper gown in subtle ink tones to endow the work with a captivating ethereality. The wearability of the gown calls to mind the kind of landscapes through which one may wander and in which one may live, but the artist gained his inspiration from watching Zhang Daqian paint on *changshan* (long gown for men) and *qipao* (Manchu dress for women). Moreover, Koon seeks to change the standard format of Chinese painting to inspire new ideational expression. Grounded in the literal expression in a poem in the *Book of Poetry*, the large-scale painting *Luxuriant Greenery* (2014) (Plate 20) depicts a monumental bamboo grove marked by fine brushwork in the *gongbi* style and a tonal variation of greens. The freshness at play points to the tranquility and serenity of a real bamboo grove. Made up of ninety-six panels, the borders of the panels connote the window frames through which one can appreciate the bamboo grove, as Koon believes that in life people see things through all kinds of frames, and thus uses bordered frames to represent nature. His paintings are hung and combined deliberately in either high or low positions to produce the changing visual effects of landscape imagery. To Koon, feeling and being in touch with nature are the most essential parts of his art practice. The artworks mentioned above show that Koon has broken through from the traditional style of Chinese painting, reinventing the tradition of landscape painting by transforming the literati imagery and brushwork he learned from Chow Su-sing with various forms and materials.

Ever since the establishment of the Department of Fine Arts, CUHK sixty years ago, there have been numerous full-time and part-time inspired teachers, including world-renowned scholars and experts, and influential and talented artists. The teachers mentioned here are just four examples of the myriad teachers who have taught in the Department. Teachers joining the Department in the early days, such as painters Ting Yin-yung, Gu Qingyao, Zhang Bihan and Shaw Li-sheng, have all given a new interpretation of tradition and the contemporary, while both Lee Yun-woon, who chaired the Department, and Cheng Ming have made a huge contribution to the teaching and creation of Chinese painting and calligraphy. Liu Guosong, acclaimed as the “father of modern ink painting,” has devoted more than twenty years of his life to teaching at the Department, and spared no effort to promote modern ink and to introduce more new styles and techniques, deeply influencing the students of the Department of Fine Arts and of the Department of Extramural Studies. Lui Chun-kwong, excelling in watercolor and oil painting, has made a valuable contribution to the teaching of western art in the Department. Chan Yuk-keung, affectionately known by his students as the “godfather of the art world,” has taken conceptual art and installation art to a new level and nurtured a whole generation of Hong



Plate 19

Koon Wai-bong, *Motifs and Ideas* (2009), sound installation with four transferred prints, four painting panels and four headphones, size varied, 25 x 25 cm each transferred print and painting panel. Image provided by the artist.

Kong artists working with conceptual art, installations, multimedia or cross-media. Acclaimed scholars and art historians, including Mayching Kao, Lee Yun-woon, Yeung Kin-fong, So Fong-suk Jenny and Harold Mok, have each made a profound contribution to their fields of study. Famous artists and scholars invited from mainland China and abroad to join visiting programs, teach part-time courses or give academic talks are as numerous as the stars in the sky. Together, the teachers have helped the Department of Fine Arts grow, expand, and by finding its place in the international art scene, achieve dominance in making and researching art in Hong Kong.

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(Note: Special thanks to Ms. Liu Siu-jane, Dr. Ho Siu-kee, Mr. Shieh Ka-ho Wilson and Dr. Koon Wai-bong for doing interviews for this article and for providing the images.)



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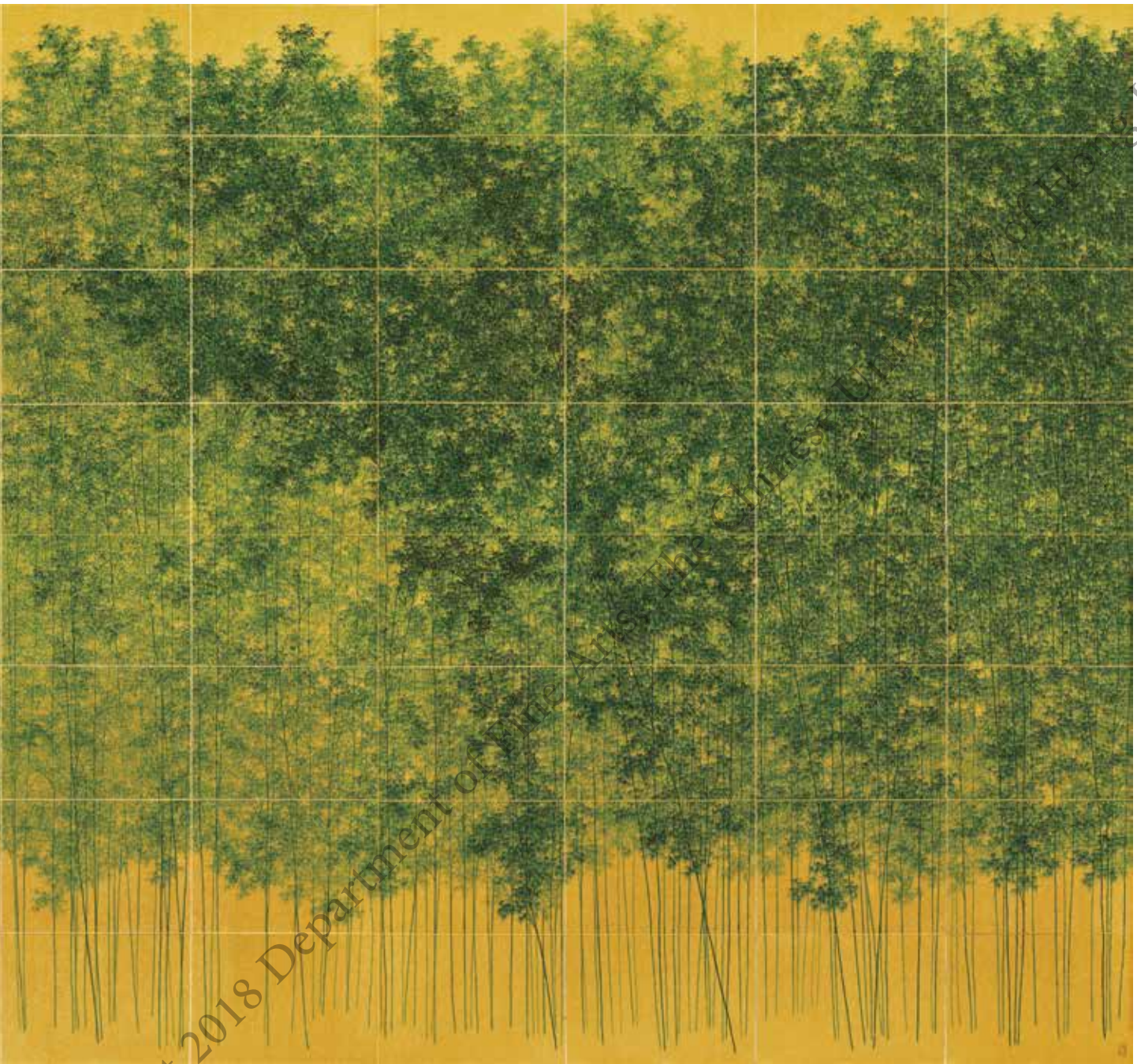


Plate 20

Koon Wai-bong, *Luxuriant Greenery* (2014), colour on gold cardboard, polyptych with ninety-six panels, 35 x 50 cm each, 280 x 600 cm in total. Image provided by the artist.