



Ink Art: Past as Present in Contemporary China (Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Maxwell K. Hearn

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The Chinese tradition of “ink art” stretches far beyond works in ink, to embrace a set of aesthetic principles centered on renewal and reinterpretation of the past. The 80 works, by 40 contemporary artists, featured in *Ink Art* range from variations on the written word to radical abstractions to contemporary landscapes, and represent media as diverse as photography, video, ceramic, wood, bronze, and stainless steel—as well as traditional ink (which might be on cardboard, polyester, or the human body). They include such iconic pieces as *Book from the Sky* by Xu Bing and *Han Jar Overpainted with Coca Cola Logo* by Ai Weiwei, “pseudo-characters” by Gu Wenda, handscrolls by Liu Dan, and videos and animation by Qiu Anxiong and Chen Shaoxiong. The illuminating texts give a history of contemporary Chinese ink painting and how it is perceived in the West. A discussion of the works themselves show how they respond to, subvert, or reinterpret the traditional idioms to define a modern artistic identity that remains both Chinese and global.

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