

**EXHIBITION OF CONTEMPORARY CHINESE LANDSCAPES
AT HARVARD'S ARTHUR M. SACKLER MUSEUM INTRODUCES
AN EMERGING STYLISTIC GENRE**

Artists Strive to Revitalize an Ancient Tradition through the Integration of Modern Techniques, Styles, and Inspirations



Liu Dan, *Ink Landscape*, 1991. Hanging scroll; ink on paper, 236.7 x 121.8 cm. Arthur M. Sackler Museum. Purchase through the generosity of Alexandra Munroe and Robert Rosenkranz (Law School Class of 1965) in honor of Henry Whitney Munroe (Class of 1943), 2005.87. © Liu Dan. Photo: Katya Kallsen © President and Fellows of Harvard College.

CAMBRIDGE, MA (May 30, 2006)—*The New Chinese Landscape: Recent Acquisitions*, an exhibition showcasing the Harvard University Art Museums' most important contemporary Chinese acquisitions to date, will be on display from **August 12 to November 12, 2006** at the Arthur M. Sackler Museum. This small exhibition of six paintings and one sculpture represents an often overlooked category of works that push the boundaries of what the term "contemporary" means in non-Western contexts. Identified as contemporary Chinese ink paintings, these works are characteristic of both classical ink landscapes and contemporary art. The artists' use of new techniques, styles, and both Western and Chinese sources of inspiration, while working within the framework of traditional materials, formats, and subjects, clearly sets their works apart from traditional Chinese ink paintings and distinguishes them as contemporary.

Modern and contemporary Chinese art is only now coming to the attention of Western audiences, and most exhibitions of contemporary Chinese painting feature Western-style works that follow international trends. Historical factors are a significant source of the pervasiveness of this singular view of contemporary Chinese art. In the early 20th century, many younger Chinese painters were eager to explore foreign styles, as China experienced a drive to modernize and

debate raged about the value of old, or classical, learning. Over the course of the 20th century, political upheaval and social change in China brought about three factions of artists, each searching for recognition and identity. One group remained strictly allegiant to tradition, but another chose to travel to and study in Western countries and adopt foreign styles. Since this second group of artists no longer works in the traditional style, their work is more easily identified as contemporary. The third group, including those artists featured in *The New Chinese Landscape*, experimented with a synthesis of foreign and traditional styles, resulting in works that challenge the notion of contemporary Chinese art.

To this latter group, contemporary Chinese ink painting is a genre of great importance, because it represents a reinvigoration of an ancient tradition with a very distinguished lineage. Accepting the validity of their ancient artistic legacies, they work within the framework of traditional materials (brush, ink, and paper), formats (hanging scroll, handscroll, and album leaf), and subjects (landscapes). However, these artists reject the formulaic compositions, prescribed stylistic modes, and codified brushwork that for centuries were the foundation of classical Chinese painting, and incorporate into their works new media, techniques, or elements borrowed from foreign styles. In some instances, it is an entirely new approach to the Chinese landscape. In others, it is a newly invented type of brushwork or a reliance on classical Chinese models different from those sanctioned by earlier generations of traditional artists.

“It is important to ask why these artists choose to paint in the traditional style,” said Robert D. Mowry, Alan J. Dworsky Curator of Asian Art and organizer of the exhibition. “They have all lived and trained in the West, and one has even taught art at a university in the U.S. However, they have also had access to the great repositories of classical Chinese painting in Beijing, Taipei, and the United States. They have great admiration and respect for the classical Chinese tradition, just as they also have a passionate desire to revitalize it and rescue it from becoming stagnant and languishing in the past. Through this exhibition, we hope to create a dialogue by awakening interest in this heretofore neglected field and encouraging scholarship on it.”

The exhibition is also one of the first to incorporate works by contemporary Chinese artists working in geographically diverse parts of the world, both East and West. Exhibitions of modern

and contemporary Chinese paintings typically include works by painters from just one region. *The New Chinese Landscape* includes works by Chinese artists working in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and abroad. These artists identify strongly with the legacy of their Chinese ancestry and feel it is their responsibility to perpetuate that legacy and advance Chinese culture. They want to be recognized not just as accomplished artists but as accomplished Chinese artists. “In that context,” says Mowry, “the artists and their works are strongly patriotic, representing a love of their country while still, at times, being critical of its political or social circumstances. Given that audiences typically expect contemporary artists worldwide to work in an international style, it might be argued that these artists have chosen the more difficult path—to redirect and reinvigorate an old tradition and to make it relevant to the contemporary world.”

Despite its world-class holdings of traditional Chinese art, the Art Museums began to systematically collect modern and contemporary Chinese ink paintings only in 1993. The works in this exhibition are the most important of the 25 contemporary Chinese works acquired by the Arthur M. Sackler Museum since that time and reflect the Art Museums’ commitment to a new area of concentration in its collections. “Although small in size, this exhibition is an important one in terms of its presentation of this emerging style of Chinese painting,” said Thomas W. Lentz, Elizabeth and John Moors Cabot Director of the Harvard University Art Museums. “We consider these works to be a significant part of a new genre of contemporary art, and we hope this exhibition will be a landmark in demonstrating to our visitors the evolution of this field, as well as specific and valid Chinese responses to modernity and the contemporary world.”

The exhibition borrows its title from the first exhibition of contemporary Chinese painting to tour the United States from 1966 to 1968 and commemorates 40 years of growing interest in this country of Chinese art and modern and contemporary Chinese painting in particular. Organized by Chu-tsing Li and Thomas Lawton, the original *New Chinese Landscape* featured works by six painters from Taiwan. *The New Chinese Landscape: Recent Acquisitions* at the Arthur M. Sackler Museum foreshadows an autumn 2007 exhibition of more than 60 contemporary Chinese ink paintings from the collection of Chu-tsing Li, co-organized by the Harvard University Art Museums and the Phoenix Art Museum.

Funding for *The New Chinese Landscape: Recent Acquisitions* was generously provided by Kaikodo, New York; Conor Mahony; and Christophe Mao and Chambers Fine Art.

Brochure

The exhibition will be accompanied by a brochure with seven color reproductions, a short essay by curator Robert D. Mowry, artist biographies, and a checklist. Production of the brochure was generously funded by Michael E. and Winnie Feng and Jane and Leopold Swergold.

Exhibition Programming

M. Victor Leventritt Symposium:

Arthur M. Sackler Museum, lecture hall
Free admission.

Saturday, October 14, 2006

“The New Chinese Landscape: The Artists Speak”

Li Huayi, Li Junyi, Liu Dan, and Liu Guosong

The artists talk about their lives, their works, and the inspiration for and evolution of their individual styles.

Exhibition Checklist

Li Huayi, *Mount Huang* (2004)

Hanging scroll; ink and light colors on paper; with signature reading *Li Huayi*; with artist's square red relief seal reading *Hua Yi*

Li Junyi, *Sacrifice*, (2005–06)

Set of twenty-four album leaves; ink on paper; each leaf with signature reading *Li Junyi*

Li Junyi, *What a Glorious Land!* (2005)

Handscroll; ink on paper; with signature reading *Li Junyi*

Liu Dan, *Ink Landscape* (1991)

Hanging scroll; ink on paper; with artist's square red intaglio seal reading *Liu Dan Zhi Yin*

Liu Guosong, *Early Spring* (1966)

Horizontal wall scroll mounted on a panel; ink and colors on cotton paper; with signature reading *Liu Guosong*; with artist's square red intaglio seal reading *Liu Guo Song*

Liu Guosong, *Water and Clouds Share the Same Source* (1977)

Hanging scroll; ink and colors on cotton paper; with signature reading *Liu Guosong*; with artist's square red intaglio seal reading *Liu Guo Song*

Zhan Wang, *Sculpture in the Form of a Nine-Hole Scholar's Rock* (2001)

Hammered, welded, and highly polished stainless steel set on a wooden base designed by the artist; edition 3/8; with incised signature reading *Zhan Wang*

The Harvard University Art Museums

The Harvard University Art Museums are one of the world's leading arts institutions, with the Arthur M. Sackler, Busch-Reisinger, and Fogg art museums, the Straus Center for Conservation, the Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, the HUAM Archives, and the Archaeological Exploration of Sardis, in Turkey.

The Harvard University Art Museums are distinguished by the range and depth of their collections, their groundbreaking exhibitions, and the original research of their staff. As an integral part of the Harvard community, the three art museums and four research centers serve as resources for all students, adding a special dimension to their areas of study. The public is welcome to experience the collections and exhibitions as well as to enjoy lectures, symposia, and other programs.

For more than a century, the Harvard University Art Museums have been the nation's premier training ground for museum professionals and scholars and are renowned for their role in the development of the discipline of art history in this country.

Location and Hours

The Fogg Art Museum and the Busch-Reisinger Museums are located at 32 Quincy Street, Cambridge. The Arthur M. Sackler Museum is located next door at 485 Broadway. Each museum is a short walk from the Harvard Square MBTA station.

Hours are Monday through Saturday, 10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Sunday 1:00–5:00 p.m.; closed on national holidays. Admission is \$7.50; \$6 for seniors; \$6 for students; and free for those under 18 years of age. The Art Museums are free to everyone on Saturday mornings, 10:00 a.m.–noon. The Harvard University Art Museums receive support from the Massachusetts Cultural Council. More detailed information is available at 617-495-9400 or on the Internet at www.artmuseums.harvard.edu.

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For more information on this exhibition or the Harvard University Art Museums, please contact:

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