



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 MACLEHOOSE
麥理浩勳爵
1971-1982

Formerly Sir Murray Maclehoose
前稱 麥理浩爵士



Plate 15

Shieh Ka-ho Wilson, *The Twenty-Eight British Hong Kong Governors (22nd to 28th)* (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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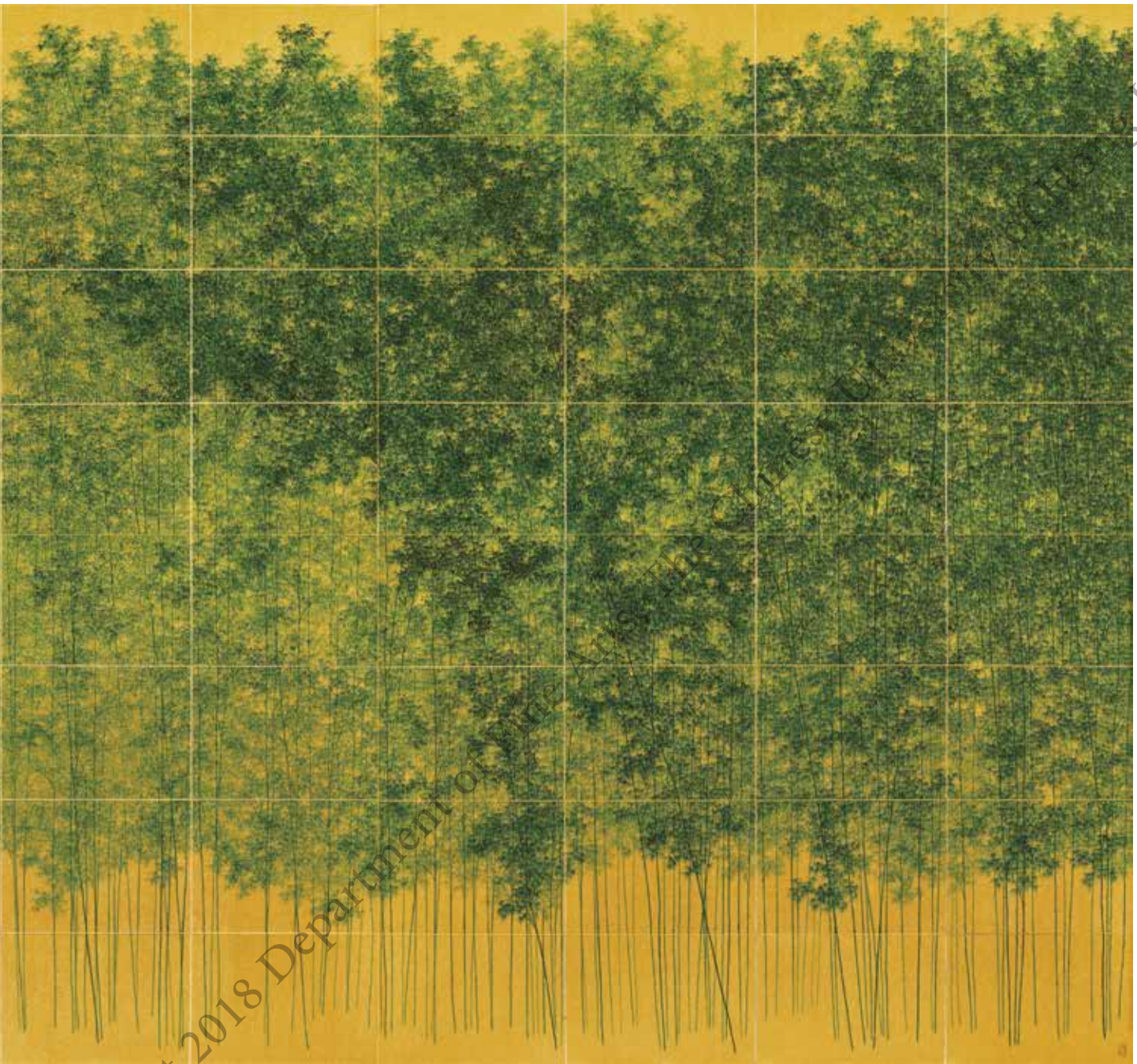


Plate 20

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.