

Kit-Keung Kan | 靳杰強

Chinese calligraphy has been long admired as an abstract art. Although cursive calligraphy is hard to read for many people, it can be admired as dances of the brush. The phrases "flying dragon and crouching tiger" 龍騰虎踞 or "flowing water and shifting cloud" 流水行雲 are often used to describe the movements recorded in a masterpiece of calligraphy. Such perception is abstract, to be sure.

The contemporary art of installation is the best art form in bringing out the abstract nature of calligraphy. It liberates the visual elements from the text and allows the calligraphy to be viewed in many different and unexpected perspectives. Whether it is presented sideways, upside down or from the back, it often creates new vitality of the strokes and forms. Kan continues to explore calligraphy installations in this exhibition.

In "Deconstruction and Reconstruction", a piece of calligraphy of the phrase, "The Way follows Nature" 道法自然, is cut into eight hanging scrolls and installed in an array. The four characters are deconstructed into fragments of strokes and then reconstructed into a three dimensional entity. The fragments of strokes form abstracted pieces in the individual scrolls and in the whole array. The four characters recombine and reemerge when the piece is viewed far away to its front.



*Deconstruction and
Reconstruction of
'The Way Follows Nature'*
Chinese ink on rice paper
80" x 80" x 24"
2022

Calligraphy 書法 has been viewed as art for more than two millennia in China.

The practical use of handwriting has been waning in modern times, especially in this age of computers, where handwriting has been replaced by word processing inputs. However, as an art form, calligraphy is still a viable genre that attracts many artists from East and West. On the other hand, the waves of new art movements in the last several decades have liberated many areas of art from the bounds of their traditional media, tools, and method of presentation. Calligraphy is no exception and we have witnessed many new directions in contemporary calligraphy.

The four artists in this exhibition are all masters in traditional calligraphy. They are re-examining calligraphy with contemporary concepts and have experimented with their ideas to create work in their own new directions. They are Xiaosheng Bi, Kit-Keung Kan and Yuming Sun of Chinese descent, and Myoung Won Kwon of Korean descent.

In this exhibition, Kwon composes portraits and other visual images with his superbly brushed Korean characters, Sun overlaps and superimposes his characters and texts to create pieces akin to abstract painting, Kan uses ink and acrylic calligraphy in his installations, and Bi uses expressive and broad strokes as well as water stains to transform his calligraphy. We hope this exhibition will promote more interest in contemporary calligraphy in our art community.



Chinese American Museum DC
1218 16th Street NW
Washington, DC 20036

www.ChineseAmericanMuseum.org

Words Re-Examined: Contemporary Calligraphy by Four Artists

字的反思
當代書法四人展



Yuming Sun | 孫宇明



A Thousand Miles of East Wind and a Dream Away
Ink and acrylic on rice paper
37" x 25"
2020

Yuming Sun is a well-known Chinese calligrapher, writer, and photographer. He was born in China and studied at Tsinghua University in the 1980s. During that time, he served as President of the Tsinghua Calligraphy Society and was a member of the Beijing Calligrapher Association. He immigrated to the US in 1991 and currently serves as the vice-president of the Seven Seas Institute of Chinese Calligraphy.

Trained in traditional Chinese calligraphy, but wanting to add his own unique twist, Yuming Sun explored new contemporary ways to let ancient calligraphic art breathe.

First, he uses a dense composition instead of the traditional balanced columns and space. He applies this technique to every script, especially on bronze scripts. With characters connecting to each other, and brush strokes beyond the ordinary square space, he creates a new artistic freedom with an innovative visual effect.

Secondly, he introduces the layer concept to calligraphy. With overlapping thick and light inks, sometimes even combining with dropping colors, he generates not only a special visual effect, but also creates different moods within the artworks. Finally, he utilizes repeated characters to form shapes within his works.

Yuming Sun is a master of seal engraving. In 2021, Xiling Seal Engraver's Society, a prestigious institute in the seal engraving field, published his solo seal album with more than 120 seal artworks.

Xiaosheng Bi | 畢曉生

書相無界 *Calligraphy: Endless & Boundless*

As a child, I was asked to write every character clearly and neatly. That's the basic requirement for a traditional regular script. It is reserved, placid, and conformist, reflective of eastern people's philosophy of life. I seriously studied calligraphy when I lived nearby the Forest of Stone Steles Museum in my home town Xi'an. I studied the museum's abundant collection, especially the stone sculptures and the stone carved Han Dynasty scribe script. They transmitted the rich history and culture which influences all of my art creation. I have been reflecting on calligraphy and how to transform traditional calligraphy into contemporary art which can be understood by western people.

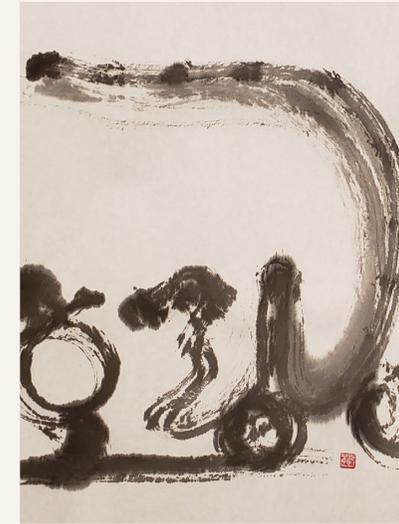
"Simpleness, Straight, Strong, Shock" is the pursuit of my new calligraphic effect. I use simple, straight brush strokes and abstract the space between the characters to create a fully enriched composition. The large areas of black and the harsh lines and angles produce powerful visual effects.



Immortal Life
Ink on rice paper
31" x 17"
2021

The harsh contrast of the black ink, applied with aggressive brush strokes, create the impression of an aged stone carving, while the different values within the characters create the impression of reflective light. The content of my calligraphy is reflective of the current social and political climate. I hope people will see my work as contemporary art, influenced by the rich history of calligraphy.

Myoung-Won Kwon | 權明源



Tiger
Ink on rice paper
18" x 22"
2022

As a child I would watch my elder brothers come home from Chinese literary institutions and practice what they had learned. My interest was sparked and I would follow along with what they did. Then I heard of a saying that said "calligraphy is a mirror of your inner-most feelings." From that point I was inspired to practice calligraphy for wanting a clean mind that was reflected through my writings.

Within my calligraphy I try to illustrate what sounds I hear. Whether the sounds are small or large or even the noisy chatter of a neighbor. This I accomplish by writing with different sized brushes to create the effect that I want. Not only do I illustrate the sound of the words I write, but I try to illustrate the word itself. If the word I write is mountain then I will write the word in a way that it will appear as if it were brush painted to be a mountain rather than a word on its own.

Or I will write the word so that it reflects the meaning that it represents.

What I write is a look into my inner feelings, but the words are a new reflection of me on their own. By dipping my brush into the ink and then laying it on paper then to look at what I've created, I see a new mirror of me in a different position and sound yet still me. When one can look at what I've written and not only see but also hears the words then I know that I have accomplished what I want and that is what I write. The words I write are not empty words. They carry messages and wisdom. These words could be biblical verses or poems or good news, but all reflecting my thoughts and myself.

I was born in Korea and so I shall carry myself with pride, but my home is in the United States and I too am proud to live in such a country. In Korea, I learned and practiced traditional techniques, but now I am experimenting with new techniques. I try to bring the good of both my past and present, tradition and contemporary ways so that what I create will truly reflect my life. Sometimes I include English words alongside Korean so that the West may truly meet the East and vice versa.

Peace of mind is hard to obtain even for a moment, but when those moments come, I write what I see. My works are what I see with a clean mind, when there is nothing to dirty or scatter my thoughts. Those rare moments of clarity are the makings of my inner mind. And those thoughts and feelings I present to the world by a stroke of a brush.

