China: the pioneers of abstraction

Group exhibition
January 21 to February 27, 2021

Chuang Che © Vazieux Art Gallery
At the end of the 1940s, in the troubled political context of the Chinese civil war and the subsequent seizure of power by Mao Zedong, over a million Chinese left the mainland to seek refuge in Taiwan. In the new world that opened to them, the artists gradually discovered the abstract art of the schools in New York and Paris.

Abstraction became a means for them to become part of the international modernist movement, while expressing their deep cultural roots. At the crossroads of the East and West, they created a unique art that led to the regeneration of twentieth-century Chinese painting.

- Chuang Che
  Fong Chung-Ray
  Hsiao Chin
  Hu Chi-Chung
  Hsiao Ming-Hsien
  Tsai Hsia-Ling
As a specialist in post-War abstract painting in Europe, my knowledge of Chinese painting during this period was limited to two major painters associated with the School of Paris: Zao Wou-Ki and Chu Teh-Chun.

The beauty of their works, in which the East was represented expressively suggested that there were other Chinese painters who had followed the same abstract approach.

During my research, I subsequently discovered a whole group of abstract artists who were unknown in Europe. The beauty and originality of their work inspired me to take my research yet further. What began as mere curiosity developed into a real passion that led me, over a five-year period, to encounter these artists who live around the world.

Enthusiastic about my interest in their work, they warmly welcomed me into their studios. Their confidence, talent, generosity, and contagious dynamism enabled me to devote myself entirely to the exhibition project that I had promised to bring to fruition.

I am delighted to have been able to bring together this collection of works discovered around the world and to pay tribute to these artists by giving them the place they so rightly deserve in the history of art.
Chuang Che

Untitled

1981, Oil and acrylic on canvas,
153 × 128 cm
Chuang Che comes from a family of scholars. His father was a well-known calligrapher and curator of the Palace Museum in Peking. In 1948, he played an active role in the transfer of the Palace Museum’s works to Taipei. Chuang Che was fourteen when this important event took place. Throughout his career, traditional Chinese painting has remained an inexhaustible source of inspiration.

In 1954, Chuang Che entered the Department of Fine Arts at the Taiwan Provincial Normal University, where he met Chu Teh-Chun, who was a teacher there.

Having discovered Western art and keen to explore new forms, he joined the Wuyue Group (Fifth Moon Group) in 1958, in which he played a major role.

In 1966, he received an endowment from the Rockefeller Foundation that enabled him to make his first trip to the United States, providing him with the opportunity to study Western art in greater depth.

The following year, he was selected to take part in the Carnegie International Exhibition in Pittsburgh, along with other artists such as Zao Wou-Ki, Chu Teh-Chun, and Richard Lin. He visited Europe in 1968 and spent six months in Paris, where he met up with Zao Wou-Ki, with whom he had already engaged in correspondence on the subject of abstraction after Zao Wou-Ki’s trip to Asia in 1957. He also met up with Chu Teh-Chun, and then went to Spain, where he also met Antoni Tapiés.

In 1973, he moved to the United States and settled in Michigan, fascinated by its grandiose landscapes and seasonal variations. The omnipresence and beauty of this natural environment led Chuang Che to explore existential matters, which complemented the aesthetic and philosophical characteristics of the painting of the great masters of the North Song Dynasty. These new landscapes marked an aesthetic turning point in his work. Henceforth, he adopted a freer approach, using much larger formats that were enriched with new colors.

Chuang Che invented the Third Way, a unique artistic concept that sought to merge Asian and Western aesthetics: ‘Like two rivers flowing alongside each other, these two traditions of painting will eventually merge into the sea’.

In his abstract landscapes he combined bright colours, a turbulence of forms, a sense of transparency, and various paint effects. From this improbable chaos arose a perfect harmony, filled with joy and melancholy, from which emanates a sense of boundless freedom.
**Selected Solo Exhibitions**

2020  “Chuang Che Anniversary Solo Exhibition: As Lofty as a Mountain 1960-2019”, Asia Art Center, Taipei
2017  (Group) “From China to Taiwan: Pioneers of Abstraction (1955–1985)”, Museum of Ixelles, Ixelles, Belgium
2015  “Effusive Vitality: CHUANG CHE Retrospective Exhibition”, Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei
2012  “Holistic View ・Microscopic Vision”, Asia Art Center, Taipei
2010  Solo exhibition, David Findley Jr. Gallery, New York
2008  “Green Rock and Splendid Cloud”, Asia Art Center, Taipei
2006  Chuang Che Solo exhibition, Asia Art Center, Taipei
2005  “Taiwan Modern Art: 2005 Record of Kuandu Heroes”, Kuandu Museum of Fine Art, Taipei
       National University of the Arts, Taipei
       “Primal Form - An Exhibition of Chuang Che’s Painting”, National Museum of History, Taipei
2002  “International Exhibition of Abstract Art of Overseas Chinese”, Art Commune, Hong Kong
Guangdong Art Museum, Guangdong
       He Xian Chine Art Museum, China
       Special Invitation for Taiwanese Artist at Fall Paris Salon
       Alice King Gallery, Hong Kong
2001  Han Art Gallery, Quebec
       Galerie Madelaine Lacerte, Quebec
2000  456 Gallery, New York
1998  Cork Gallery, Lincoln Center, New York
1996  Horwitch-Newman Gallery, Scottsdale
1994  Haenel-Kent Gallery, New York
1993  Alice King Gallery, Hong Kong
1990  Yung Han Gallery, Taipei
       Lung Men Gallery, Taipei
       Robert Kidds Gallery, Detroit, Michigan
       Davidson Gallery, Seattle, Washington

**Public Collections**

Centre Pompidou, France
Museum Cernuschi, France
National Museum of History, Taipei
Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei
Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, Ohio
The Detroit Art Museum, Detroit
Hong Kong Art Museum, Hong Kong
Art Museum, The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan
Taiwan Provincial Science Museum, Taichung
Shanghai Art Museum, Shanghai
Guangdong Art Museum, Guangdong
Art Museum of China Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing
Fong Chung-Ray

*Untitled*

2017, Oil on canvas,
107 x 181 cm
At the age of fourteen, Fong Chung-Ray was obliged to leave his family and go into exile, due to the Chinese Civil War. During this period, he enlisted as a lieutenant in the navy. As the army moved to different locations and various political events occurred, he settled in Taiwan in 1949.

His passion for art and inquiring mind led him to take an interest in Western abstract art, which he discovered through reading journals and books, which were available in the American Library in Taipei.

In 1957, he founded the Four Seas Artists Association with his friend, Hu Chi-Chong. During this period, he experimented with abstraction and used new Western techniques, such as painting with oils on canvas. In 1961, he became a member of the Wuyue Group (Fifth Moon Group) and participated in many exhibitions. In 1963, on the advice of Liu Guosong, a painter and the Group's theorist, he abandoned painting with oils on canvas and returned to the traditional Chinese technique of ink painting.

Fong Chung-Ray then invented a brush made from palm tree fibers, which added a highly personal touch and a rougher quality to his sweeps of color.

The abstract ink works from this period, with their blend of subtle coloring, dynamic strokes, wet sweeps of color, and poetry, were rooted directly in the tradition of the Chinese master landscape painters.

In 1971, he was awarded a Rockefeller Foundation grant that enabled him to travel to Europe and the United States. When he settled in San Francisco, in 1975, he began to work with acrylic paints.

Initially, his work focused on abstract landscapes, but he gradually moved away from this movement when he turned to Buddhist spirituality. This fresh source of inspiration resulted in a more abstract approach, related to temporality, which he studied in the sacred texts.

The effects of time on materials and an exploration of the technique of collages and imprints have become fundamental aspects of his artistic approach. By going beyond the formal representation of nature, Fong Chung-Ray has revived the spiritual essence that emanates from the paintings by the great old masters and invites the viewer to contemplate.
Selected Solo Exhibitions

2019  "Wakes of Time", Galerie Sabine Vazieux, Paris, France
2017  (Group) "From China to Taiwan: Pioneers of Abstraction (1955–1985)", Museum of Ixelles, Ixelles Belgium
2017  "The Eternal Abstract: Fong Chung-Ray", Asia Art Center, Taipei, Taiwan
2015  "Fong Chung-Ray – A Retrospective", Galerie du Monde, Hong Kong
       "Fong Chung-Ray Solo Exhibition", Modern Art Gallery, Taichung, Taiwan
2014  "Between Modern and Contemporary", Chinese Culture Center of San Francisco, San Francisco, USA
       "Fong Chung-Ray Solo Exhibition", Modern Art Gallery, Taichung, Taiwan
2013  "Fong Chung-Ray Solo Exhibition", Modern Art Gallery, Taichung, Taiwan
2011  "Fong Chung-Ray Solo Exhibition", Modern Art Gallery, Taichung, Taiwan
2008  "Fong Chung-Ray Recent Paintings 1997-2008", Modern Art Gallery, Taichung, Taiwan
2004  "Fong Chung-Ray Solo Exhibition", Modern Art Gallery, Taichung, Taiwan
1992  "Fong Chung-Ray Solo Exhibition", The Allrich Gallery, San Francisco, USA
1990  "Fong Chung-Ray Solo Exhibition", Carmel Gallery of Modern Art, Carmel, USA
1987  "Fong Chung-Ray Solo Exhibition", Landell Galleries, Carmel, USA
1986  "Fong Chung-Ray Solo Exhibition", M.M. Shinno Gallery, Los Angeles, USA
1984  "Fong Chung-Ray Solo Exhibition", M.M. Shinno Gallery, Los Angeles, USA
1983  "Fong Chung-Ray Solo Exhibition", Gallery New World, Carmel, USA
1982  "Fong Chung-Ray Solo Exhibition", Triangle Gallery, San Francisco, USA
1979  "Fong Chung-Ray Solo Exhibition", M.M. Shinno Gallery, Los Angeles, USA
1978  "Fong Chung-Ray Solo Exhibition", Triangle Gallery, San Francisco, USA
1975  "Fong Chung-Ray Solo Exhibition", Bank of America World Headquarters Gallery, San Francisco, USA
1974  "Fong Chung-Ray Solo Exhibition", National Museum of History, Taipei, Taiwan
1973  "Fong Chung-Ray Solo Exhibition", Galerie Marianne Schreiber, Munich, Germany
       "Fong Chung-Ray Solo Exhibition", Arizona Commission on the Arts, Arizona, USA
1972  "Fong Chung-Ray Solo Exhibition", Downtown Gallery, Hawaii, USA
       "Fong Chung-Ray Solo Exhibition", Lee Nordness Gallery, New York, USA
       "Fong Chung-Ray Solo Exhibition", San Diego Art Museum, San Diego, USA
       "Fong Chung-Ray Solo Exhibition", American Culture Center, Hong Kong
1968  "Fong Chung-Ray Solo Exhibition", Ju Bao Pen Gallery, Taipei, Taiwan
1967  "Fong Chung-Ray Solo Exhibition", Hai-Tien Art Gallery, Taipei, Taiwan
1965  "Fong Chung-Ray Solo Exhibition", The National Taiwan Art Museum, Taipei, Taiwan

Public Collections

Centre Pompidou, France
Museum Cernuschi, France
Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), USA
Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University, Boston, USA
Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, UK
Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, United States
Baltimore Museum of Art, Maryland, USA
Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio, United States
de Young Museum, San Francisco, United States
Denver Art Museum, Colorado, USA
Guangdong Museum of Art, Guangzhou, China
Hawaii Cultural Foundation, Hawaii, USA
Kaohsiung Art Museum, Kaohsiung, Taiwan
M+, Hong Kong
Hsiao Chin

Untitled

c.1980, Ink on paper,
60 x 90 cm
Hsiao Chin grew up in an artistic environment. His father, a musician, was considered a pioneer in the field of contemporary Chinese music. He transmitted his passion for music to his son and this played a fundamental role in his approach to abstraction.

In 1949, he left China with his uncle and moved to Taiwan, where he stayed for a short period.

In 1952, Hsiao Chin joined Lee Chun-Shan’s famous studio on Antung Street in Taipei, where he was trained by the master for several years. It was at that point that he discovered Western painting and studied abstraction.

In 1956, he actively participated in founding the Ton Fan Group and that year he was awarded a grant that enabled him to study art in Spain.

Despite the fact that he was living in Europe, Hsiao Chin was a very active member of the Group. At a time when information about Western contemporary art was still very limited in Taiwan, he regularly sent articles that were published in the Taipei United Daily News. He also regularly wrote to the artists and organised and held collective Ton Fan exhibitions in Europe and the United States, particularly in New York, Stuttgart, and Turin.

In 1959, he settled in Milan, where he founded the Punto Group 17 and became friends with Lucio Fontana. In 1963, in Taipei, he held an unprecedented exhibition of the work of Western artists, such as Antoni Tapies, Lucio Fontana, and Piero Manzoni, which attracted the attention of the Taiwanese artistic community.

He lived in the United States between 1967 and 1972. He taught painting in various prestigious schools and met artists such as Mark Rothko and William De Kooning. In 1973, Hsiao Chin returned to live in Milan.

Eastern philosophy, Tibetan Buddhist art, calligraphy, and abstraction are endless sources of inspiration in his work. Hisao Chin has managed to bring together these diverse influences and establish a unique œuvre in which colour, light, energy, and the tension created by the technique coexist in perfect harmony.
Selected Solo Exhibitions

2017 (Group) From China to Taiwan: Pioneers of Abstraction (1955–1985), Museum of Ixelles, Ixelles, Belgium
2015 National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Taichung, Taiwan
2010 Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts, Kaohsiung, Taiwan
2006 National Art Museum of China, Beijing, China
2005 Guangdong Museum of Art, Guangdong, China
Museo Civico, Villa Colloredo Melis, Recanati, Italy
Palazzo Acquaviva, Scuderie ducale, Atri, Italy
Zhongshan Museum of Art, Zhongshan, China
2004 Shanghai Art Museum, Shanghai, China
2003 Towards the Spiritual World, Series anthological exhibitions.
2002 Oberdan Space, Milan, Italy
Mudima Foundation, Milan, Italy
1998 Institut Mathildenhohe (retrospective 1958-1998), Darmstadt, Germany
1995 Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei, Taiwan
1994 Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, China
China Academy of Fine Arts, Hangzhou, China
1992 Taiwan Museum of Art (retrospective 1955-92), Taichung, Taiwan
1990 Ente Regionale Studio Universitario, Macerata, Italy
1988 Studio Marconi (antologica 1959-88), Milan, Italy
1986 Nikolaj, Comune di Copenhagen, Copenhagen, Denmark
1985 Università di Messina and Libreria Hobelix, Messina, Italy
The Hong Kong Institute for Promotion of Chinese Culture, Hong Kong
Gallerie Punto, Valencia, Spain
Museum Waterland, Pumerend, Netherlands
Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei, Taiwan
1979 Pinacoteca Comunale, Macerata, Italy
1978 National Museum of History and Lung
Men Art Gallery, Taipei, Taiwan
Galeria Kandinsky, Madrid, Italy
1968 Lisson Gallery, London, UK
Pavilions in the Parks, London, UK
Studio Exhibition, Boothby, Brampton, Cumbria, UK
1967 Lisson Gallery, London, UK
Speakers’ Corner, Hyde Park, London, UK
1966 (Group) Pia Pizzo, Signals Gallery, London, UK
1965 All’Insegna del Pesce d’Oro, Milan, Italy
(Group) Signals Gallery, London, UK

Public Collections

Museum of Modern Art, The Metropolitan
Museum & The Public Library, New York, U.S.A.
Galleria Nazionale d’Arte Moderna, Rome, Italy
National Art Museum of China, Beijing, China
Staatsgalerie – Stuttgart, Germany
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia
Städtisches Museum, Leverkusen, Germany
Detroit Art Institute, Detroit, U.S.A.
Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Canada
Städtisches Museum, Bochum, Germany
Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld, Germany
Museo de Arte Moderno, Barcelona, Spain
Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne, Switzerland
Centro Storico d’Arte Visiva dell’Università di Parma, Italy
Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei, Taiwan
National Museum of History, Taipei, Taiwan
Galleria Civica di Cagliari, Italy
Museo Civico d’Arte Moderna, Modena, Italy
Palazzo dei Diamanti, Ferrara, Italy
Galleria Civica e Università di Macerata, Italy
Randers City Museum, Randers, Denmark
Fogg Museum of Art, Cambridge, Mass., U.S.A.
Hong Kong Museum of Art, Hong Kong
National Museum of Wales, Cardiff, UK
Museum of Modern Art, Skopje, Macedonia
Galleria Civica, Marsala, Italy
Galleria Civica, Gibellina, Italy
Rose Art Museum, Waltham, Mass., U.S.A.
Hu Chi-Chung

Painting 6701

1967, Oil and sand on canvas,
89 x 116 cm
Hu Chi-Chung came from a humble family that lived in a small mountain village, where he divided his time between fishing and hunting. He became interested in art at an early age; he drew in the sand, as he had no paper. He left his village and family when he was only thirteen years old.

In 1948, during the war, he decided to go to Shanghai and enlist in the navy. Two years later, when he was still in the army, Hu Chi-Chung left mainland China and settled in Taiwan. During this period, he began to paint regularly.

In 1954, a work-related trip to the United States had a decisive effect on his art. During the trip, he visited the de Young Museum in San Francisco and discovered the Impressionists and the abstract work of Willem de Kooning. The discovery of these genres marked a turning point in his pictorial approach and led him towards abstraction.

In 1957, he founded the Four Seas Artists Association with his friend, Fong Chung-Ray, and then joined the Wuyue Group (Fifth Moon Group) in 1961. He experimented with various techniques, which included, in particular, the addition of sand to his oil paints.

In 1967, he was selected to take part in the Carnegie International Exhibition 11 in Pittsburgh, along with other artists such as Zao Wou-Ki, Chuang Che, Chu Teh-Chun, and Richard Lin.

He emigrated to the United States with his family in 1971 and settled in California, in the famous Carmel Village.

His art, which borders on abstraction and combines bright colours, solar disks, and terrestrial forms, depicts dreamlike landscapes suffused with joy and vitality.
Selected Solo Exhibitions

2017 “Hu Chi-Chung Solo Exhibition”, Galerie du Monde, Hong Kong
   (Group) “From China to Taiwan: Pioneers of Abstraction (1955–1985)”, Museum of Ixelles, Ixelles, Belgium
   Art Basel Hong Kong, Presented by Galerie du Monde, Hong Kong
1991 “Hu Chi-Chung Solo Exhibition”, Contemporary Gallery, Taipei, Taiwan
1989 “Hu Chi-Chung Solo Exhibition”, Ming Ren Art Gallery, Kaohsiung, Taiwan
1986 “Hu Chi-Chung Solo Exhibition”, National Museum of History, Taipei, Taiwan
1978-80 “Hu Chi-Chung Solo Exhibition”, The Naples Art Gallery, Naples, Florida, USA
1975 “Hu Chi-Chung Solo Exhibition”, Eric Galleries, Inc., New York, USA
1974 “Hu Chi-Chung Solo Exhibition”, Zantman Art Galleries, Palm Desert, California, USA
1973 “Hu Chi-Chung Solo Exhibition”, The Fine Arts Gallery of San Diego, San Diego, California, USA
1972-96 “Hu Chi-Chung Solo Exhibition”, Zantman Art Galleries, Carmel, California, USA
1971 “Hu Chi-Chung Solo Exhibition”, Laky Gallery, Carmel, California, USA
1969 “Hu Chi-Chung Solo Exhibition”, Solo Exhibition, Yu Fong Gallery, San Francisco, California, USA
1967 “Hu Chi-Chung Solo Exhibition”, S.H Mori Gallery, Chicago, Illinois, USA
“Hu Chi-Chung Solo Exhibition”, The Provincial Museum, Taipei, Taiwan
1964 “Hu Chi-Chung Solo Exhibition”, the Club Room of the Grand Hotel, Taipei, Taiwan
1958 “Hu Chi-Chung Solo Exhibition”, Press Building, Kaohsiung, Taiwan
1956 “Hu Chi-Chung Solo Exhibition”, Kaohsiung, Taiwan

Public Collections

National Museum of History, Taipei, Taiwan
M+ Collection, Hong Kong
Hsiao Ming-Hsien

*Totem A*

1963, Encre sur papier,
137 x 35 cm
Hsiao Ming-Hsien grew up in the countryside and drew his first sketches in appreciation of the beauty of nature.

In 1952, he enrolled in the Department of Fine Arts in the National Taipei University of Education 15, where he met Hsiao Chin, who encouraged him to join Lee Chun-Shan's studio. During his time in the studio, his discovery of abstraction introduced him to a different approach to painting and opened up other avenues.

In 1955, he became the youngest of the eight founding members of the Ton Fan Group.

His work received a prize at the São Paulo Bienal in 1957. This distinction was both an encouragement for him and for contemporary Taiwanese art, which had gained international recognition. During this period, he discovered the work of Paul Klee, in which he found similarities with ancient Chinese oracular characters that he is particularly fascinated by.

In 1964, his interest in French painting led him to settle in Paris, where he lived for five years. Curious to learn more and integrate into Parisian artistic circles, he enrolled at the École des Beaux-Arts.

In 1969, he flew to New York, where he took part in several exhibitions. In 1973, he settled for good in New Jersey, where he worked as a painter in a famous porcelain studio.

His expressive and spontaneous style is closely related to his love of classical music, which he always listens as he works, creating in his painting a veritable sense of rhythm that echoes the music.
Selected Group / (Solo) Exhibitions

2017  From China to Taiwan: Pioneers of Abstraction (1955–1985), Museum of Ixelles, Ixelles, Belgium
2012  Da Xiang Art Space, Taichung, Taiwan
       National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Taiwan
2007  National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Taiwan
2005  National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Taiwan
1999  Shanghai Art Museum, Shanghai, China
       National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Taiwan
1997  Modern Art Center, Taichun, Taipei, Kinmen, Taiwan
1996  G. Zen 50 Art Gallery, Kaohsiung, Taiwan
1971  (Solo) Rexmere Gallery, Stamford, New York, U.S.A.
       (Solo) Empire National Bank Offices, Orange County, New York, U.S.A.
       Annual Art Festival, Sands Point Long Island, New York, U.S.A.
       The 36th Annual Exhibition, Cooperstown, New York, U.S.A.
1963  Museum Leverkusen, Leverkusen, Germany
1962  Contemporary Chinese Artists Exhibition, Milan, Italy
1957-1963 Ton Fan Exhibition, New York, Italy, Germany, Austria and Spain
1960-1961 International Exhibition of Malerei Wolfram, Eschenbach, Germany
1960  (Solo) Green Gallery, Middletown, New York, U.S.A.
       (Solo) Galleria Numero, Florence, Italy
       The 1st International Modern Arts Salon, Hong Kong, China
1959  The 5th Biennial de São Paulo, Sao Paolo, Brazil
       The 1st Biennial of Young Artists, Paris, France
1958  The 1st Exhibition of Asia's Young Artists, Tokyo, Japan
1957  The 4th Biennial de São Paulo, Sao Paolo, Brazil
1957-1964 The 1st to 8th 'Ton Fan' Exhibitions, Taipei, Taiwan

Public Collections

Taipei Museum of Fine Arts Taiwan
National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Taichung, Taiwan
Museum of Modern Art in Barcelona, Spain
Museum of Contemporary Art in Skopje, Slovenia
Museum of History in Taipei, Taiwan
Tsai Hsia-Ling

*Senza titolo*

1958, Huile sur toile
60 x 60 cm
Tsai Hsia-Ling was born to a family of learned doctors. As a child he developed a passion for the fine arts and calligraphy.

In 1949, he left China and settled in Taiwan, where he trained in the fine arts and mathematics at the National Taipei Normal University.

In the 1950s, he frequented the intellectual and artistic elite, and was inspired by the great masters, choosing as his mentors Zao Wou-Ki, Chu Teh-Chun, and Lee Chun-Shan. He was part of a circle of artists that explored painting and modernism and here he met Hsiao Chin, Ho Kan, and Li Yuan-Chia. He was invited by his comrades to be part of the Ton Fan avant-garde movement.

Initially, Tsai Hsia-Ling's oeuvre was inspired by his profound attachment to Chinese culture — philosophy, calligraphy, and ink — and the influence of the Western contemporary art movement. His use of the ink technique naturally led him to adopt the movements involved in action painting, in which he freely allowed his body to interact with the canvas.

Between 1958 and 1960, he took part in exhibitions held by the Ton Fan Group in Taipei and abroad. As of 1959, Tsai Hsia-Ling held solo exhibitions, particularly in Florence. His travels took him to Germany in 1961, where he lived until 1968, when he moved to France.

It was at this time that, inspired by the philosophy of Yi King, he became involved in multidisciplinary studies: painting, sculpture, architecture, philosophy, mathematics, music, dance, the natural sciences, and so on.

His creative process brings together his roots, his mathematical knowledge, and various artistic disciplines, and like the world he sees his creative work as a process of perpetual development. He considers this form of art as the ideal way to reflect the world.
Selected Group Exhibitions

2017  From China to Taiwan: Pioneers of Abstraction (1955–1985), Museum of Ixelles, Ixelles, Belgium
1972  Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, U.S.A.
1971  Salon Grands et jeunes d’aujourd’hui, Paris, France
1970  Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris, France
1969  Galleria Banco, Bolzano, Italy
       Galleria Numero, Florence, Rome, Prato, Italy
1965  Galleria Grattacielo, Lugano, Switzerland
1964  Galerie Senatore, Stuttgart, Germany
       Museum of Art Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, U.S.A.
1963  New Art Gallery, La Jolla, San Diego
       Galleria Numero, Florence, Italy
       Museum Leverkusen, Leverkusen, Germany
1962  Museum Leverkusen, University Missina
1961  Galleria Grattacielo, Lugano, Switzerland
       Galerie Nächst St. Stephan, Vienna, Austria
       Palazzo Pretorio Prato, Italy
       Museum of Art Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, U.S.A
1960  News Daily Press News Building, Taipei, Taiwan
       1st Hong Kong International Salon of Paintings, St John’s Cathedral, Hong Kong
       (Solo) Galleria Numero, Florence, Italy
1959  National Taiwan Art Hall, Taipei, Taiwan
       (Solo) Galleria Numero, Florence, Italy
1958  News Daily Press News Building, Taipei, Taiwan
The exhibition ‘De la Chine à Taiwan : Les pionniers de l’abstraction’ ('From China to Taiwan: the pioneers of abstract painting') retraces for the first time the origins and evolution of twentieth-century Chinese abstract painting, which began in the 1950s.

Aside from the works, it also explores the fabulous and epic careers of these Chinese artists, who were obliged to leave their homeland and seek refuge in Taiwan.

In China, during the eight years of the Japanese invasion (1937–1945), the populations sought refuge in the country to escape from the hardships of war. These years of oppression and suffering were followed by the defeat of the Kuomintang and the rise to power of Mao Zedong in 1949. Over a million Chinese left the mainland to live in Taiwan, to where Chiang Kai-shek's government-in-exile had moved.

The young artists were displaced and followed the army or their parents to Taiwan. Mostly from comfortable families, they were separated from their families and friends on the mainland and often left their property behind. This younger generation, which was left in turmoil and never knew peace, was not allowed to return home and had no other solution but to take their fate into their own hands.

In 1950, the United States, fearing a conflict with mainland China, protected the island and introduced Western culture. The artists soon discovered Impressionism and the abstract art of the New York school in the magazines and books in the American Library in Taipei.

Chiang Kai-Shek's political regime was committed to perpetuating Chinese traditions, but the young painters rejected this conservatism and embraced Western culture. In this context of change, new schools of art sprang up.
The teachers had been through the same trials and experienced the same upheavals. Chu Teh-Chun lectured on art at Taiwan Provincial Normal University (between 1951 and 1955) and Lee Chun-Shan taught students in his studio on Antung Street in Taipei (from 1950 to 1955).

Although they were quite different, both teachers shared a knowledge and great interest in Western art. They encouraged their young students to develop their own style and their teaching methods broke away from an ancestral Chinese tradition that advocated scrupulously copying the master’s works, leaving little room for individual creativity.

In 1956 and 1957, the two most important avant-garde Taiwanese movements were formed: the ‘Ton Fan Group’, founded by eight of Lee Chun-Shan's pupils and the ‘Wuyue Group’, also known as the ‘Fifth Moon Group’, some of whose members were followers of Chu Teh-Chun.

Given the government’s opposition to avant-garde art, the two groups had to keep a low profile and sometimes were even obliged to hold exhibitions outside the country.

In the 1960s, the Rockefeller Foundation awarded travel grants to artists who wished to familiarise themselves with the West. There was increasing interchange and some of the artists decided to move to Europe or the United States. The journey to Europe took one month and three boats were required to travel from Hong Kong to Marseille. Many artists subsequently embarked on this long voyage.

On mainland China painting was restricted to social realism, while in Taiwan, for the first time, Chinese artists were fascinated by the contemporary Western avant-garde and sought to be a part of the international contemporary movement.

This approach was quite unprecedented. Until that point, the pre-war Chinese painters who had travelled to Paris to study art had sought their inspiration in nineteenth-century European realist painting. Although they were divided into two distinct groups, the artists shared the same fascination for Abstract Expressionism, which bore similarities with their own culture.
Post-war Western abstract art — which was inspired by nature and sought spontaneity in the brushstrokes and equilibrium between the painted and empty spaces — included every element present in Chinese painting. The artists soon assimilated this abstraction, which became the ideal approach for expressing their deep roots.

Whether they adopted a minimalist approach or drew their inspiration from nature, the Taoist and Buddhist philosophies lay at the heart of their work. Minimalist art combined with Chan Buddhism or Taoism, which advocated simplicity through the use of minimal colours and forms.

Nature interpreted through the prism of abstraction echoed the tradition of the Northern Song landscape painters, according to which the formal appearance of things must disappear and give way to the essence and spiritual breath.

Abstract Expressionism, which requires spontaneous gestures and expressive lines, was combined with cursive calligraphy and the instant illumination sought by Chan Buddhism. The artists soon adopted this language, with which they were familiar, and entirely refreshed it.
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