



YANG YANPING:  
LOTUS HEAVEN

M I C H A E L  
G O E D H U I S

Yang Yanping  
楊燕屏

Lotus Heaven  
荷花天堂

30 October - 8 November 2014  
66 St James's Place  
London SW1A 1NE

Asian Art in London  
Late Night Opening:  
Sunday, 2 November 2014, 18:00 - 21:00

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M I C H A E L  
GOEDHUIS

MICHAEL GOEDHUIS

## *Yang Yanping: Lotus Heaven*

THIS EXHIBITION COINCIDES with the 80th birthday of Yang Yanping. It is also her most recent exhibition in Europe following the major retrospective at the The Art Museum of Beijing Fine Art Academy, last year.

Michael Sullivan, the late authority on modern Chinese art, recounts how Yang Yanping one beautiful day in the fall of 1978, free at last from the humiliating excesses of the Cultural Revolution, came upon a farm with a long neglected lotus pond in which the plants were fast fading but still alive. With her primitive pen, she drew them on a sheet of coarse yellow paper. This chance encounter ignited a life-long immersion in the subject matter, symbolism and pictorial language of the lotus flower. Into the theme she has poured her thoughts, feelings and memories. ‘The twists and turns of every stem,’ she later wrote, ‘were a testimony of a stubborn fight against the passage of nature.’

The theme of the lotus flower is the dominant subject of this exhibition and has been an enduring, as well as sustaining, source of inspiration for Yang over many years. Though it serves not as a subject in itself, but as a convenient catalyst for her to express her *weltanschauung* – her reading, her experience in life, her knowledge, and her intellectual hinterland.

Nevertheless, the lotus for the Chinese has profound associations, mainly connected with Buddhism. In particular, it is a graphic symbol of the possibility of spiritual purity as its stem rises from the muddy sludge at the bottom of the pond to unfold, floating in pristine beauty, on the surface above.

In the early years after Mao’s death, Yang painted a series of the lotus as its glory ebbs away in autumn and winter. This was a way to express the deep melancholy and frustration of the intellectual class witnessing the precariousness of man’s freedom of spirit during the trauma of the past quarter century. In her words, the sight of the flower ‘set in the flowing light of an autumn sun seemed to reveal the lotus as a representation of all living things, with all its different destinies, some weaker, some stronger.’

As a child, Yang displayed little interest in painting although she was a voracious reader and enjoyed writing. Her outstanding intellectual gifts earned her a place at the elite Tsinghua University where she elected to study architecture. Shortly after this, she met and married one of her painting teachers, Zeng Shanqing, who had already established a name as one of the most promising artists of his generation.

She graduated in 1958 and after a brief spell of teaching factory design decided to study art at the Oil Painting department of the Beijing Art Academy. She also embarked on a rigorously disciplined study of traditional Chinese painting on her own.

During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) her husband was sentenced to hard labour in the countryside and Yang herself, though escaping this fate of so many intellectuals, was obliged to spend years painting large oil paintings of Mao Zedong and glorified depictions of workers and peasants. By 1978, the worst of the political excesses had subsided and Yang's work began to be regularly exhibited in prestigious exhibitions in China. Her growing reputation domestically led to her inclusion in a number of international exhibitions - in Tokyo in 1979, in Paris in 1982, the Brooklyn Museum and San Francisco in 1983 and Vienna in 1985.

At this point, both Zeng and Yang's international recognition was such that they felt confident enough to accept fellowships from the State University of New York at Stony Brook in 1986 and they have remained in America ever since.

Since then Yang has become a pivotal international figure in the dialectic emanating from cultural life in China for a century or more. In essence, the story is one in which artists and intellectuals grapple with how to revitalize Chinese culture. Are they to jettison the rich but burdensome legacy of China's glorious past and adopt Western ideas? Or should they dig into the fertile sub-soil of their own culture for guidance and meaning? Or even better, incorporate some of the invigorating currents from the assertive West and link them into their own vision, conditioned as it was by a rigid but sophisticated orthodoxy on the one hand and an intelligent awareness of their world absorbing momentous changes on the other?

These implacable issues are still in doubt, although the battle lines have been more clearly delineated. Broadly speaking, there are four more main tendencies in Chinese art today. First is the strenuously conservative backlash adhering ever more tenaciously to the great classical traditions, with just the occasional meaningless nod in the direction of modernism. Then there is the vast factory of artists trained in the western social-realist oil painting in the Maoist era who have left a legacy of technically accomplished painting that can be seen all over China. Thirdly, there is an avant-garde movement, which has annexed much of the more provocative work of the Western cutting edge, without often having truly assimilated the conditions in which it is being produced. And finally there is a minority of artists, of whom Yang is one of the most successful, who see themselves as re-animating those elements of Chinese painting that, together with a multiplicity of other influences, can now best convey contemporary reality in all its accelerating and confusing complexity.

And Yang has never succumbed to the 'transgressive' effusions of current chic academic theory and abdicated her commitment to artistic excellence. The cult of novelty, which has recently been so aesthetically limiting, has held no appeal for her or her husband. What has mattered are the ideals of high visual quality and the artistic autonomy that allows her to embrace modernism without flouting the lessons of her art-historical past.

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It is fascinating to compare Yang's earlier works with those painted after her arrival in America in 1986. The tone of that era of paintings reflects her optimism of working and living for the first time in the heady air of a free country. Then in works such as *Scent of Summer Night* (page 26), the colour becomes brighter and richer and significantly the lotus is now also portrayed in the more promising seasons of spring and summer.

More confident also in her increasing technical control, the brushwork reaches new heights of subtlety and touch, while at the same time admitting a greater role for spontaneous effects. And while her outstanding gifts as an uninhibited colourist became as evident as her virtuosity as a draftsman in her later works, she continues to produce darker autumn and winter paintings, such as *Vigorous Autumn* (page 34) and *Early Evening in Winter* (page 20), under no illusion about the inevitable variety of human existence.

With reference to Yang's calligraphic works, such as *Clouding Dancing* (page 32) and *Full of Power and Grandeur* (page 42) Michael Sullivan wrote the following 1997:

Among her more challenging works are those that explore the interface between word and image. She was not altogether the first to do this. Ancient Chinese legends tell of the origin of written characters and pictures from the same god-given source, and throughout the history of Chinese art the intimate relationship and interaction between word and image has been recognised: the bringing together in a single work picture, poetry and calligraphy constituted the 'three perfect things', *san jue*. But Yang Yanping was one of the first to write characters, often in the archaic 'big seal' semi-pictographic form, in such a way as to seem to depict the idea or thing they signified.

So in many ways she doesn't conform to the Western concept of a modern master. She has no interest in using provocative pictorial language as a polemical (or politically correct) weapon. Her message, if she has one beyond the creation of beautiful paintings, is about the meaning of freedom, real freedom, of which she can speak with the authority of one to whom for much of her life it was denied. But it is expressed in a traditionally Chinese way, as food for reflection, through the patient presentation of images symbolizing the undulation of life's journey, both the inevitable sorrow and its fleeting, life-enhancing periods when hope is reignited. Again, in Michael Sullivan's words:

At the beginning of the twentieth century, it seemed that Chinese painting (*guohua*), was a dying tradition, feeding upon itself. Many artists and critics thought that it could only be revived by a strong infusion of Western realism and techniques. Yang Yanping, and a handful of other gifted modernists, have shown that by reaching back into the very roots of the Chinese aesthetic tradition, and combining this rediscovery with imagination, feeling and a mastery of the discipline of the brush, the tradition has, with very little stimulus from Western art, been reborn, and its future development assured.

麥克 格豪士

## 楊燕屏：荷花天堂

楊燕屏

荷花天堂個展是我們獻給楊燕屏女士的八十歲生日禮讚。這也是繼去年北京畫院美術館舉行的大型回顧展後，楊燕屏最近一次的歐洲個展。

已故現代中國藝術史權威，麥克蘇利文 (Michael Sullivan) 曾細述有關1978年一個美好秋日的故事，當時文革鬥爭的殘酷熱浪已逐漸消褪，楊燕屏偶然在農場上發現一座無人整理的荷花池，池中荷花雖已凋零，但未枯死。當時她隨手在粗糙黃紙上匆匆畫下這池殘荷。這個機緣巧遇點燃了畫家終身對荷花題材、象徵及繪畫語言不滅的執著與熱情。她將個人的思想、感受和記憶都投注到荷花身上。日後她在回憶時寫道：「每條莖幹的柔曲彎折都是頑強抵抗大自然洗禮的鮮明見證。」

荷花是本次個展最大主題，也是畫家多年來綿延不絕、生生不息的靈感泉源。但是，荷花本身並非只是繪畫題材，更是畫家藉以表達自身世界觀 (weltanschauung) – 個人的閱讀、人生體驗、知識與學養的重要觸媒。

楊燕屏

然而，荷花對中國人而言蘊含無比豐富深刻的寓意，主要與佛教思想息息相關。最特別的是，荷花自池底淤泥深處出水茁發，亭亭玉立於水面，超然脫俗，因此成為品格高潔的圖像表徵。

毛澤東剛去世的那幾年間，楊燕屏曾描繪一系列秋冬時節芳華凋盡的荷塘，試圖表達知識份子目睹過去十多年來，心靈自由飽經摧折的深沉憂思與頹喪。畫家自己曾說，「在秋陽浮動的光影映襯下，荷花似乎成為各種生命際遇的寫照，它們有各自不同的宿命，有的柔弱，有的堅強。」

楊燕屏兒時並未對繪畫有太大興趣，但是酷愛閱讀與寫作。天資聰穎的她順利進入清華大學研習建築。不久之後與她的繪畫老師，曾善慶相遇並共結連理。當時曾善慶已是同時代最具潛力的優秀年輕畫家之一。

楊在1958年畢業後曾教過一小段時間的工廠設計，之後決定進入北京畫院學習油畫。同時開始認真研究傳統中國繪畫。

文革期間 (1966-1976)，曾善慶下放鄉間勞改，而楊雖比其他許許多多知識份子幸運，免於勞改之苦，但卻奉命為毛主席畫大幅油畫肖像以及其他歌頌農工階級的作品。1978年，政治風暴逐漸平息，楊的作品也開始在中國重要展覽中亮相。由於在國內名聲日益響亮，使她有機會參與許多國際大展 – 1979年在東京、1982年巴黎、1983年布魯克林美術館與舊金山，1985年維也納等。

此時楊燕屏與曾善慶已打開國際知名度，兩人都有信心能取得紐約州立大學石溪分校研究獎金，夫妻倆的旅美生涯也從此展開。

此後，楊燕屏以重要的國際性畫家身分，參與了有關中國文化近百年發展走向的辯證論爭。在思考如何振興中國文化的過程中，藝術家與知識份子是该揚棄悠久但沈重的中國傳統文化，擁抱西方思想？抑或是從中國文化豐饒的

沃土中發掘出方向與意義？甚至能夠擷取一些充滿活力的西方思潮，擴展自己的視野，儘管過去這些視野一方面受限於僵化又複雜的傳統規範，一方面卻又敏銳地感受到自己的世界正面臨巨大變化？

這些問題無法輕易獲得定論，此刻也仍然懸而未決，但至少我們已能較清楚地區分出不同陣線的分野。大致說來，中國現代藝術可分成四條主要陣線。第一條是堅持師法古人與傳統的保守死硬派，對於現代主義只偶爾投以漫不經心的一瞥。其二則是在毛澤東時期接受西方社會寫實主義油畫訓練的眾多藝術家，他們在全中國各地留下大量技術性取向的繪畫作品。第三類前鋒派則大量借鏡西方較具煽動性的前衛作品，但往往未徹底了解這些作品的社會生產條件。最後一派則是以楊燕屏為首的少數畫家，他們有意識地活用最能傳達當代現實複雜面貌的中國繪畫元素，並融合多元影響，自成一格。

楊燕屏從不隨波追逐當前時髦「激進」的西方學術理論，而停止磨練自身藝術技巧。凡事求新求怪的藝術潮流近來已遭遇美學上的困境，更無法獲得楊燕屏夫婦的認同。他們著眼於更精緻的型是美感與藝術自主性，在擁抱現代主義的同時，絕不輕忽自己寶貴的藝術傳統。

如果將畫家早期作品與1986年赴美後作品相互對照，會有許多有趣的發現。旅美時期的創作筆調反映出畫家首次在自由國度生活與工作的樂觀情緒。而在夏夜氣息(頁26)等作品中，畫面色彩更為明亮豐富，並將視角轉向較具朝氣的春夏荷花。

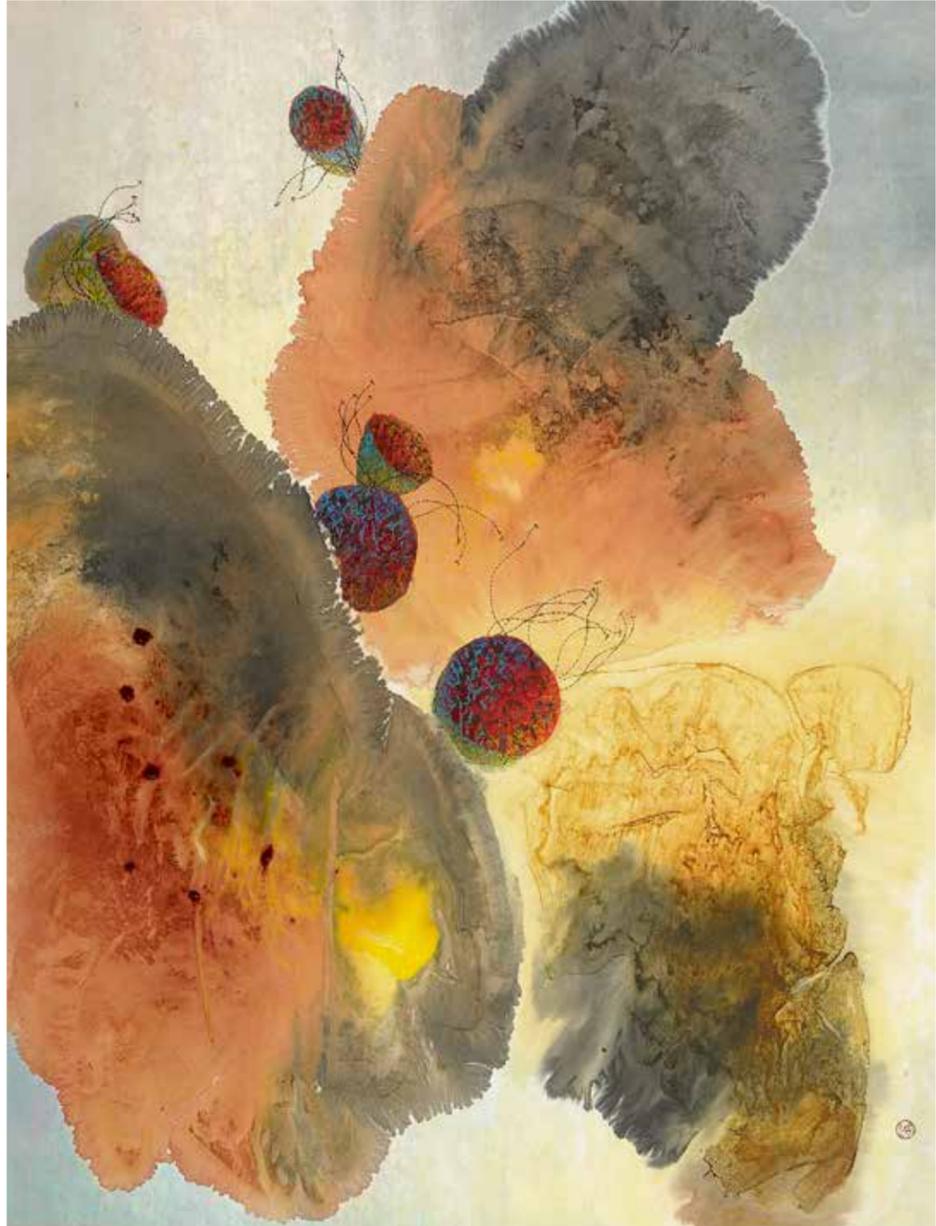
此時畫家的技巧更純熟自在，筆觸更精妙細緻，同時留下更多自然迸發的意外之趣。雖然晚期作品充分展現出瀟灑恣意的色彩天份與才華洋溢的繪圖技巧，但畫家仍不忘描繪晦暗的秋冬景色，例如活力之秋 (頁 36) 和冬日下午 (頁 32)，冷眼觀照人世滄桑變化。

麥克蘇利文在提到楊燕屏書法作品，如雲舞 (頁 34) 和力與美 (頁 45) 時，如此寫道：

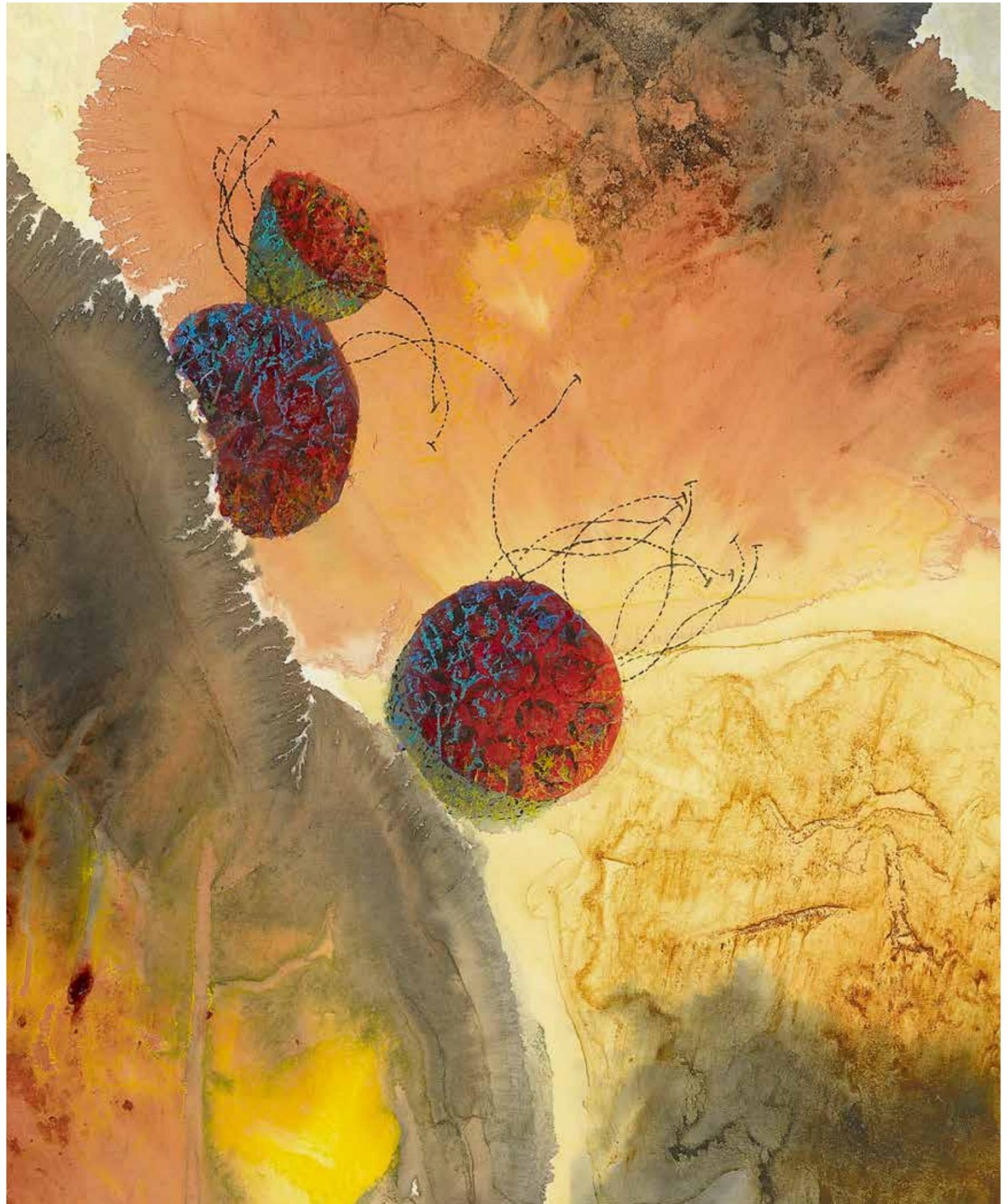
「她較具挑戰性的作品包括那些探索文字與圖像之間界線的創作。她不是第一個秉持這種看法的人。中國古老神話便已提到文字符號與圖像都源自天授，而中國藝術史更十分重視書畫之間的親密與互動關係：將詩歌、書法與繪畫等藝術融合於一幅作品中，形成所謂「三絕」。但楊燕屏是最早以「大篆」這種半象形形式書寫文字符號的藝術家之一，並成功達到寫意，或表達喻意的境界。」

也因此，從許多層面來看，楊都不算是西方嚴格定義下的現代派大師。她無意使用大膽煽動的繪畫語言作為論辯 (或政治正確) 的武器。除了創造賞心悅目的作品之外，她想表達的，是身為一位大半輩子都與自由無緣的畫家，對自由，真正無憂無懼的自由的看法。但她運用的是傳統中國繪畫技巧，悉心描繪每一個意象，以象徵高低跌宕的生命之旅、無可避免的憂傷以及重燃希望後，充滿生命能量的短暫片刻。容我再次引用蘇利文的評語：

「二十世紀初，中國畫（國畫）傳統似乎已委靡不振，坐以待斃。許多藝術家與評論家認為，只有大量融合西方寫實主義思想與技巧才能振興國畫傳統。楊燕屏和少數幾位極有天份的現代主義藝術家讓我們看到，其實只要深究中國美學傳統的根柢，再結合藝術家的想像力、感受力和運筆功力，即使沒有西方藝術的刺激，國畫傳統也能重現生機，蓬勃發展指日可待。」



*Autumn Afternoon, 2010*  
Ink and colour on paper  
94 × 73 cm (37 × 28¾ in)



*The Fragrance After A Thunderstorm*, 2009

Ink and colour on paper  
69 x 96 cm (27¼ x 37½ in)



OVERLEAF

*Intoxicated Autumn*, 2012

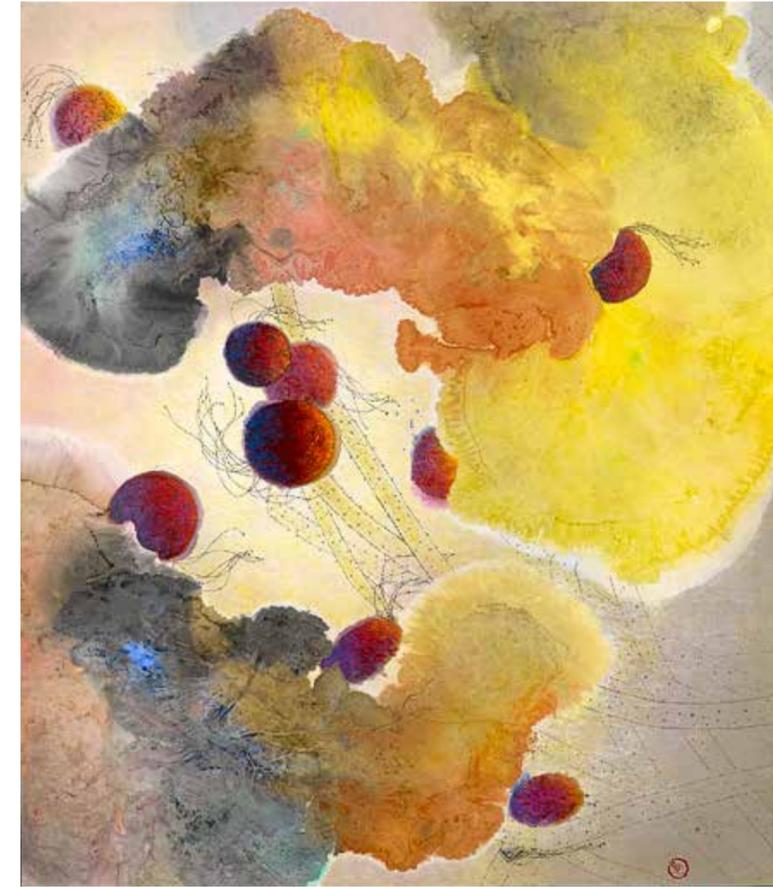
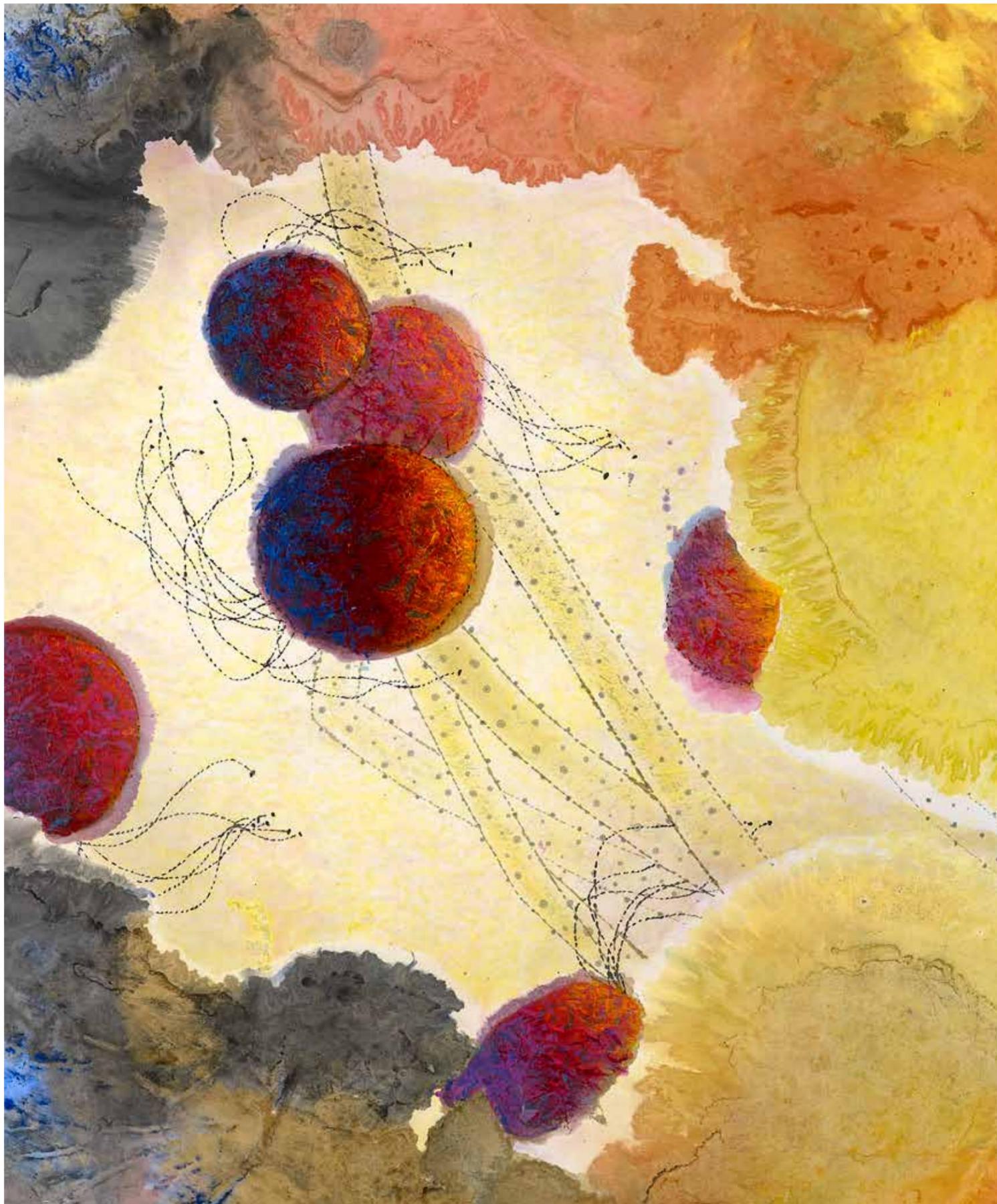
Ink and colour on paper  
96.5 x 172 cm (38 x 68 in)



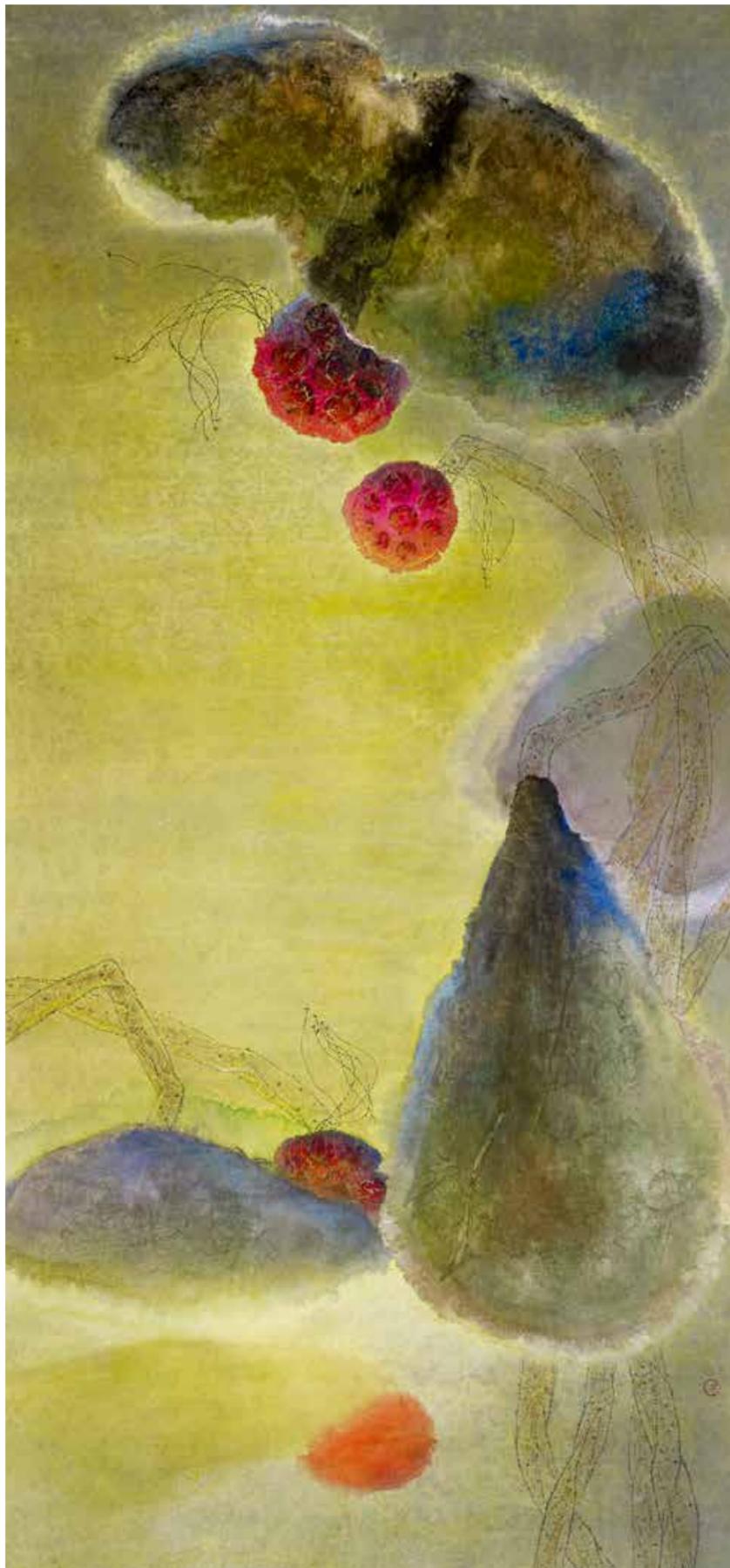


*Lucky Tiger, 1998*  
Ink and colour on paper  
175.3 × 78.7 cm (69 × 31 in)

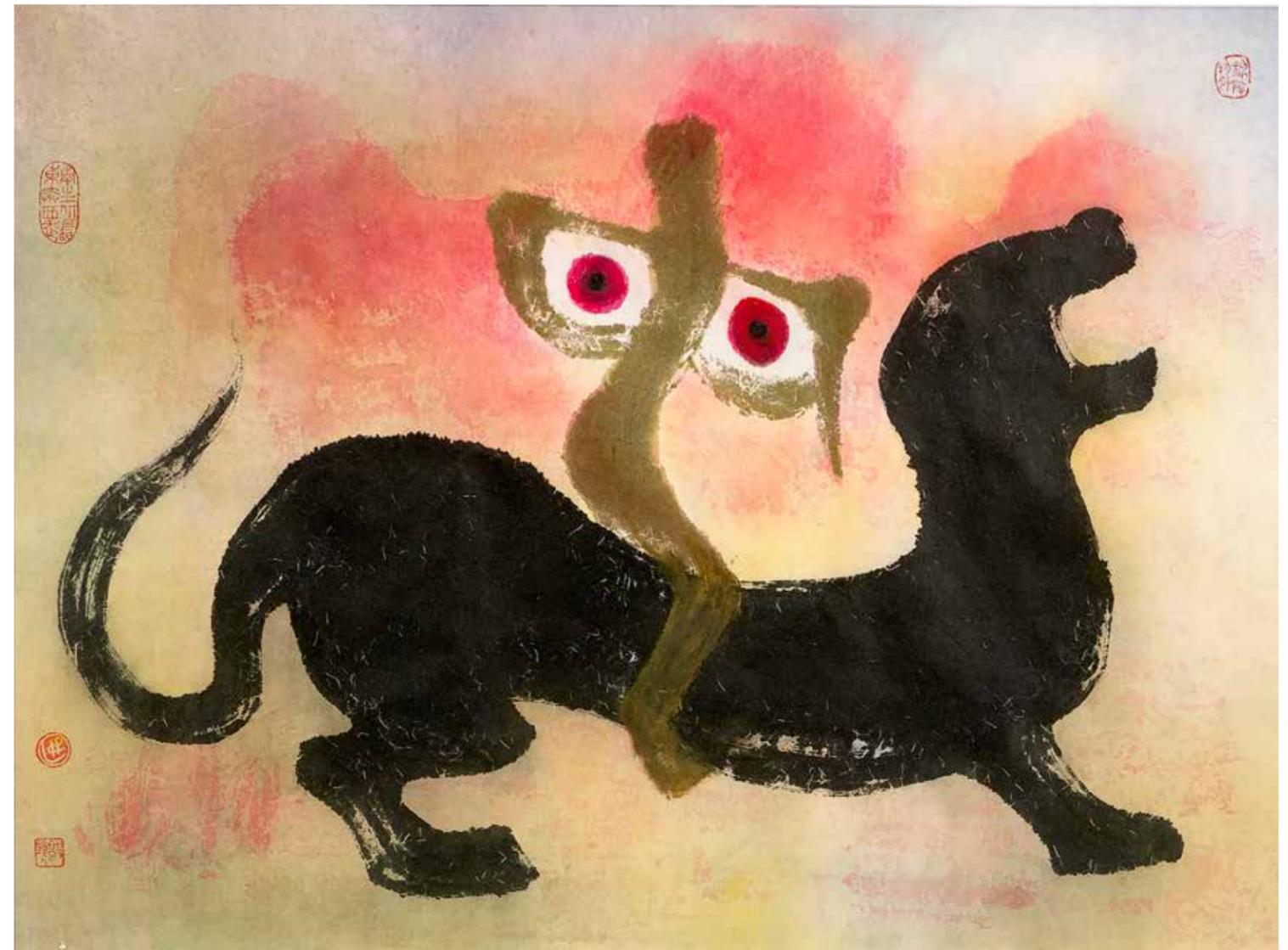




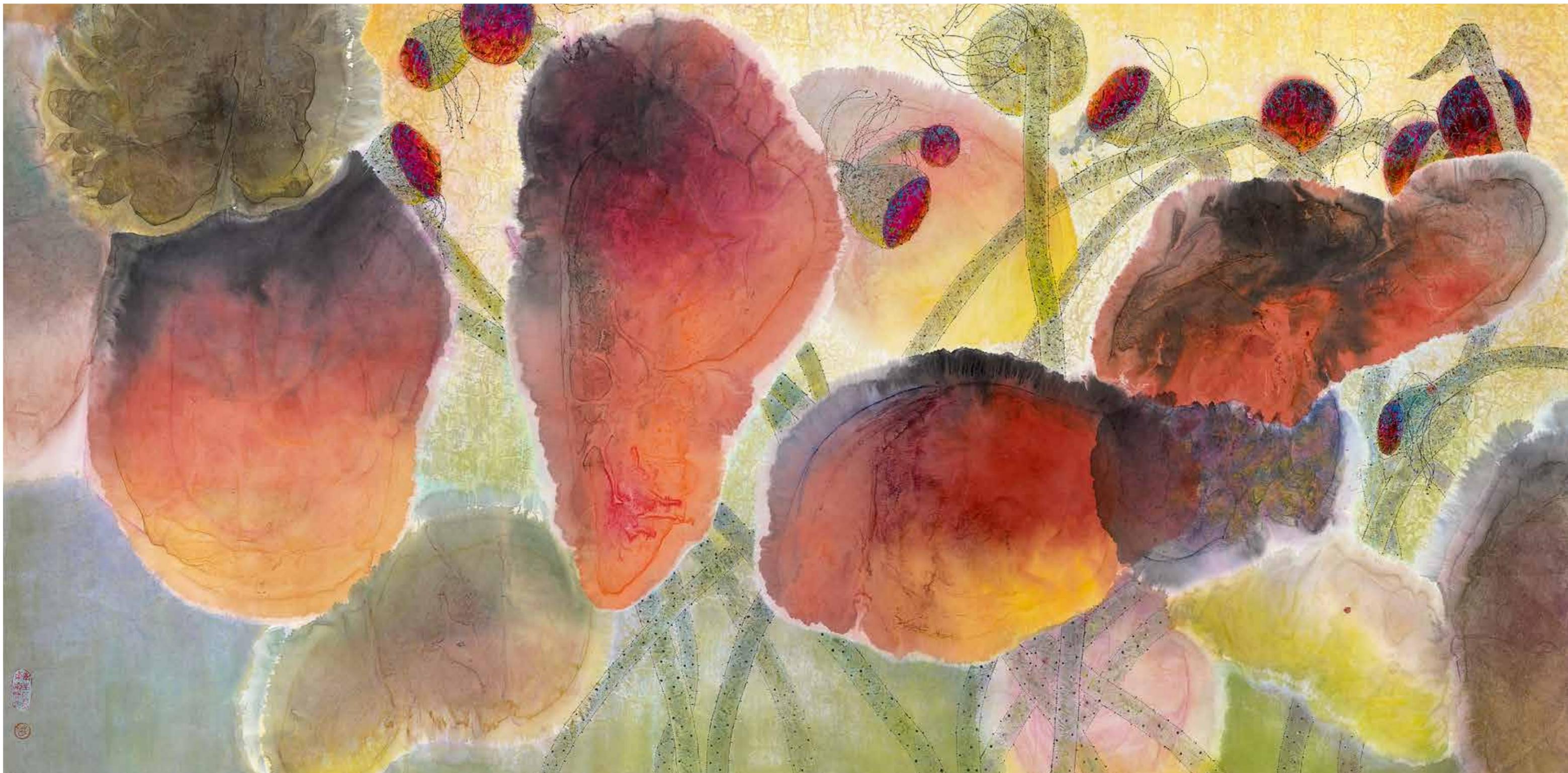
*Late Autumn, 2006*  
Ink and colour on paper  
110.7 × 117.5 cm (43¼ × 46¼ in)



*Early Evening in Winter, 2006*  
Ink and colour on paper  
137.8 x 64.8 cm (54¼ x 25½ in)



*Mountain Spirit, 2007*  
Ink and colour on paper  
77.5 x 102.2 cm (30½ x 40¼ in)



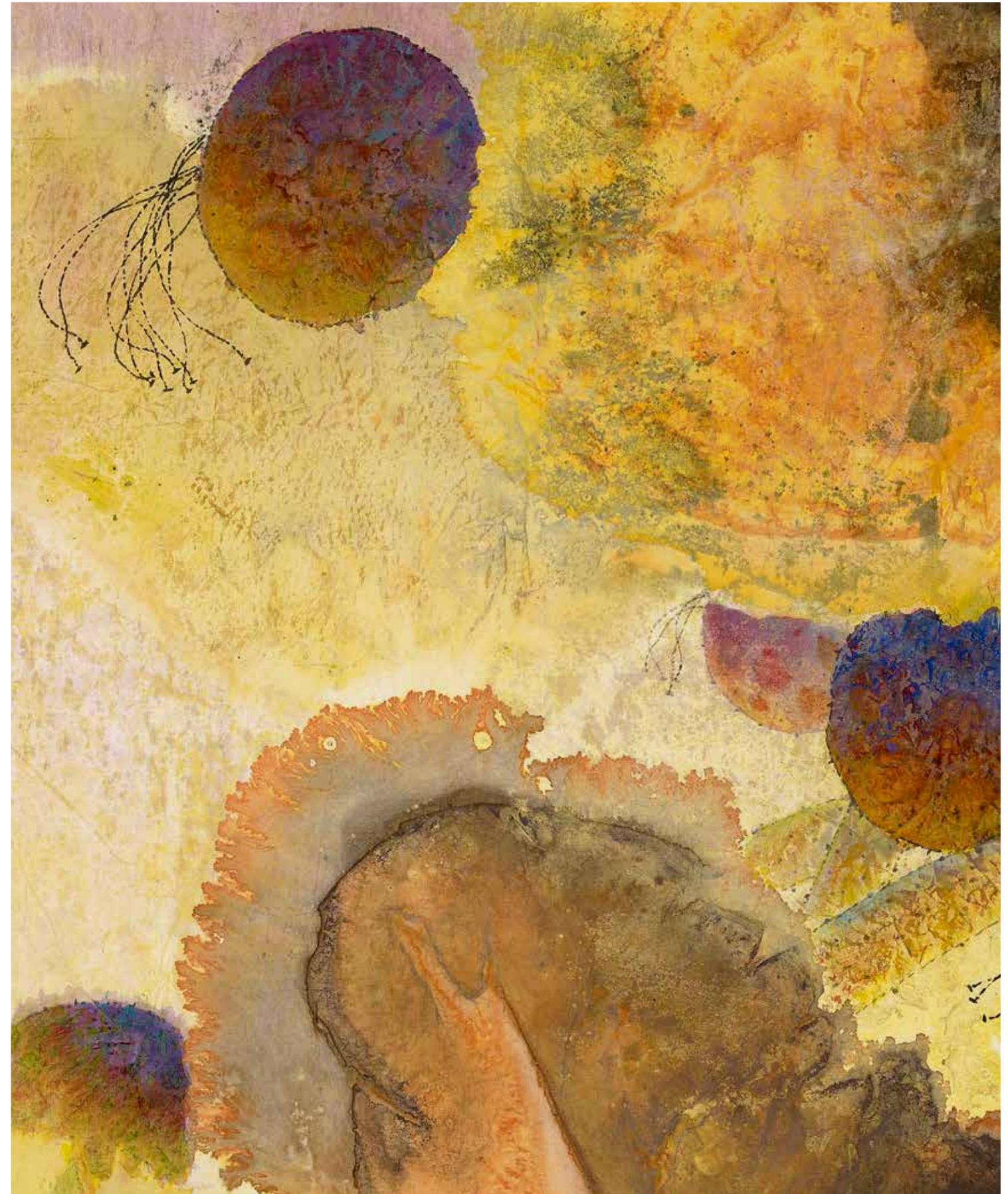
*Glorious Autumn*, 2012  
Ink and colour on paper  
123 × 245 cm (48 × 96½ in)



*Golden Autumn*, 2002-2004  
Ink and colour on paper  
60 x 85 cm (23½ x 33½ in)

OVERLEAF

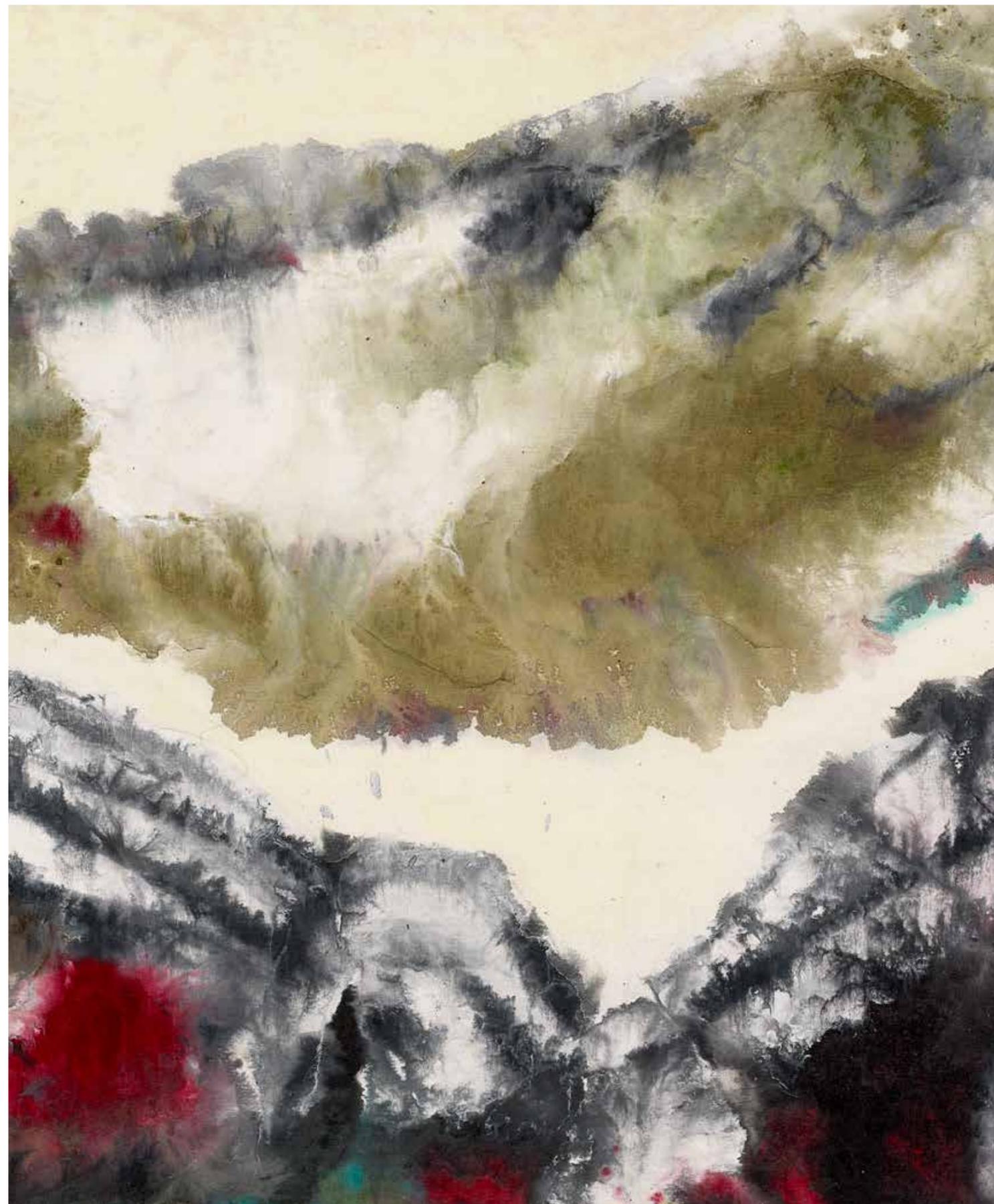
*Scent of Summer Night*, 2000  
Ink and colour on paper  
68.6 x 127 cm (27 x 47½ in)

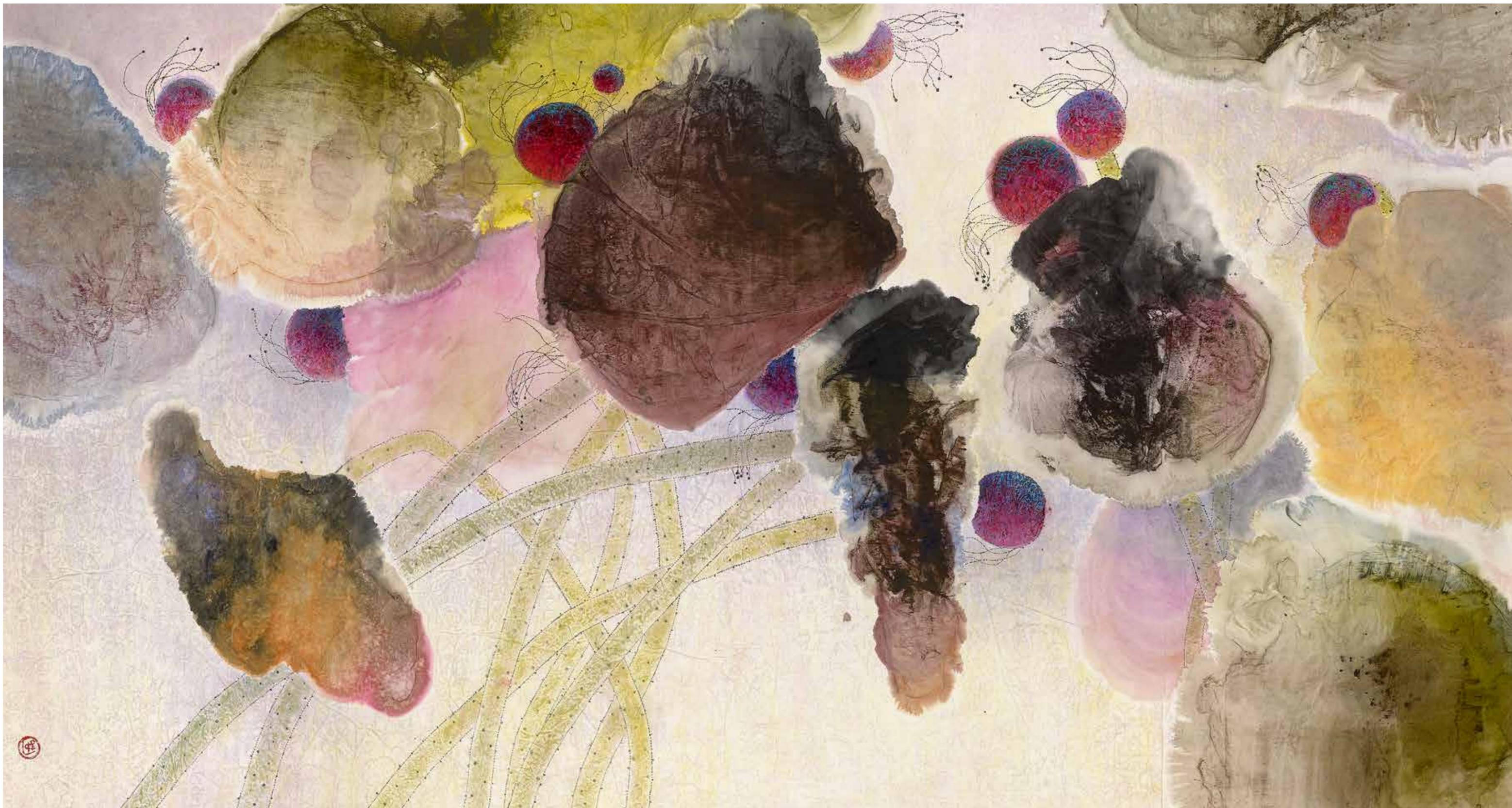




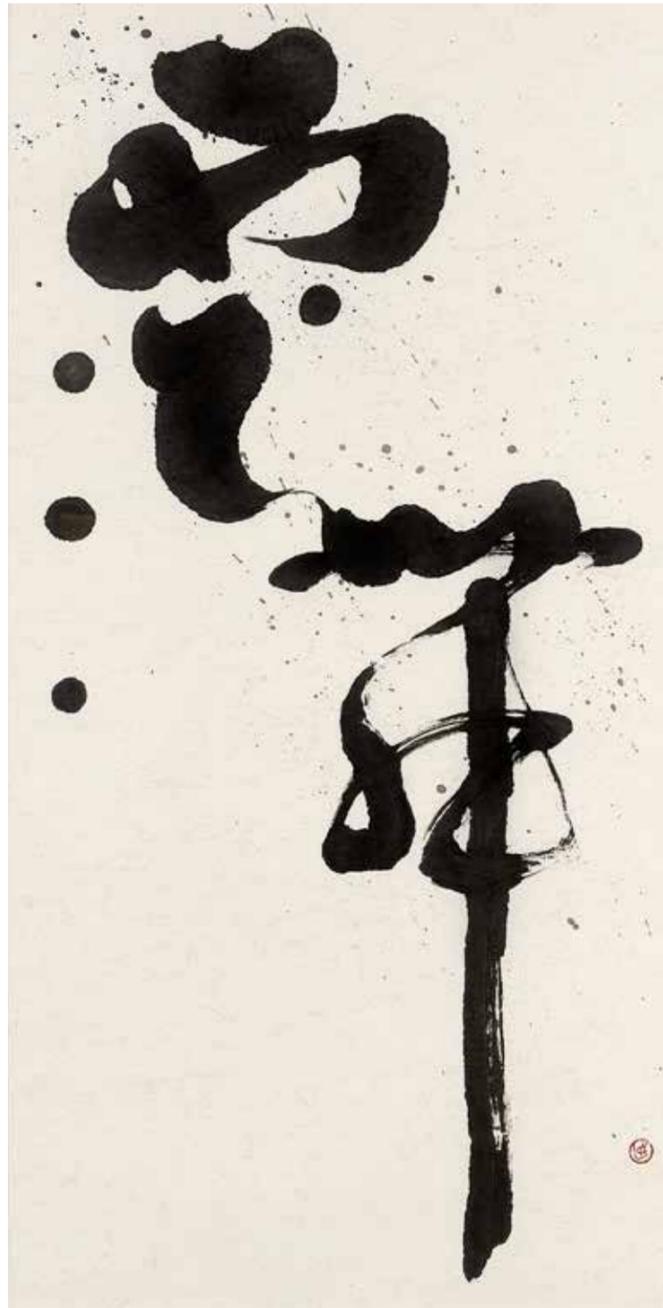


*Thawing in Early Spring, 2001*  
Ink and colour on paper  
66 × 86.4 cm (26 × 34 in)

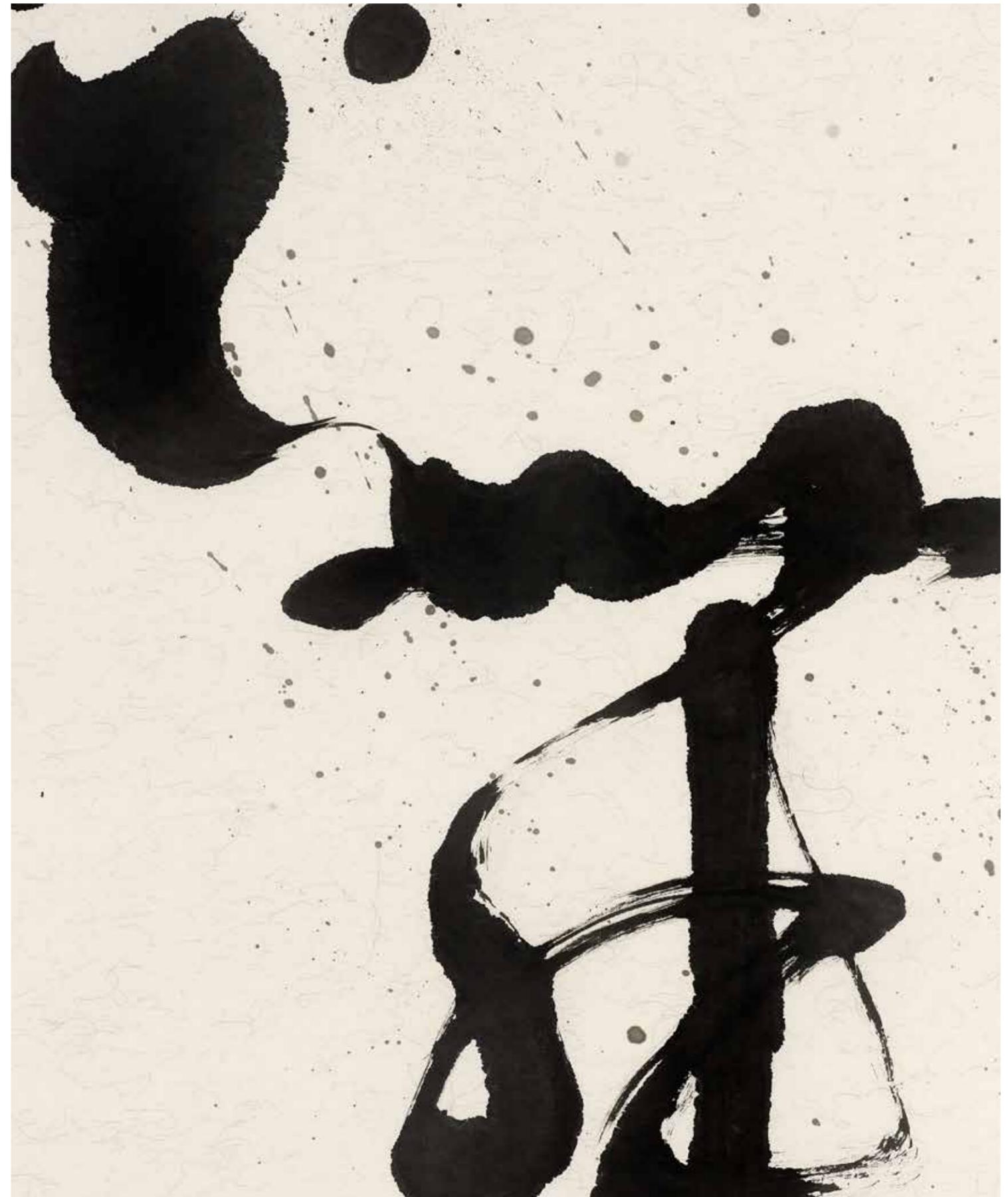




*Deep Autumn*, 2012  
Ink and colour on paper  
96.5 x 179 cm (38 x 70½ in)

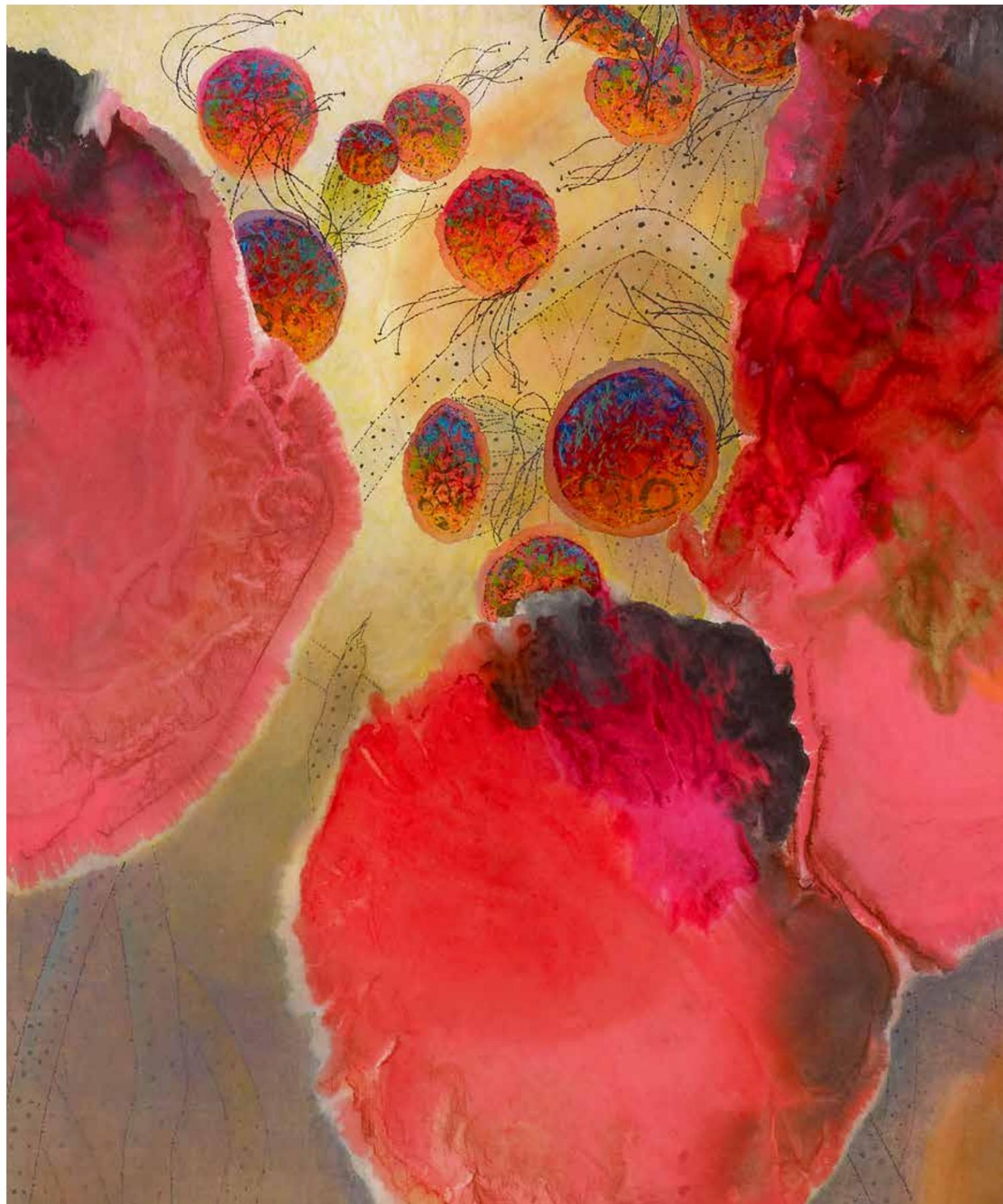


*Clouding Dancing*, 2010  
Ink and colour on paper  
138 × 69.5 cm (54 × 27½ in)



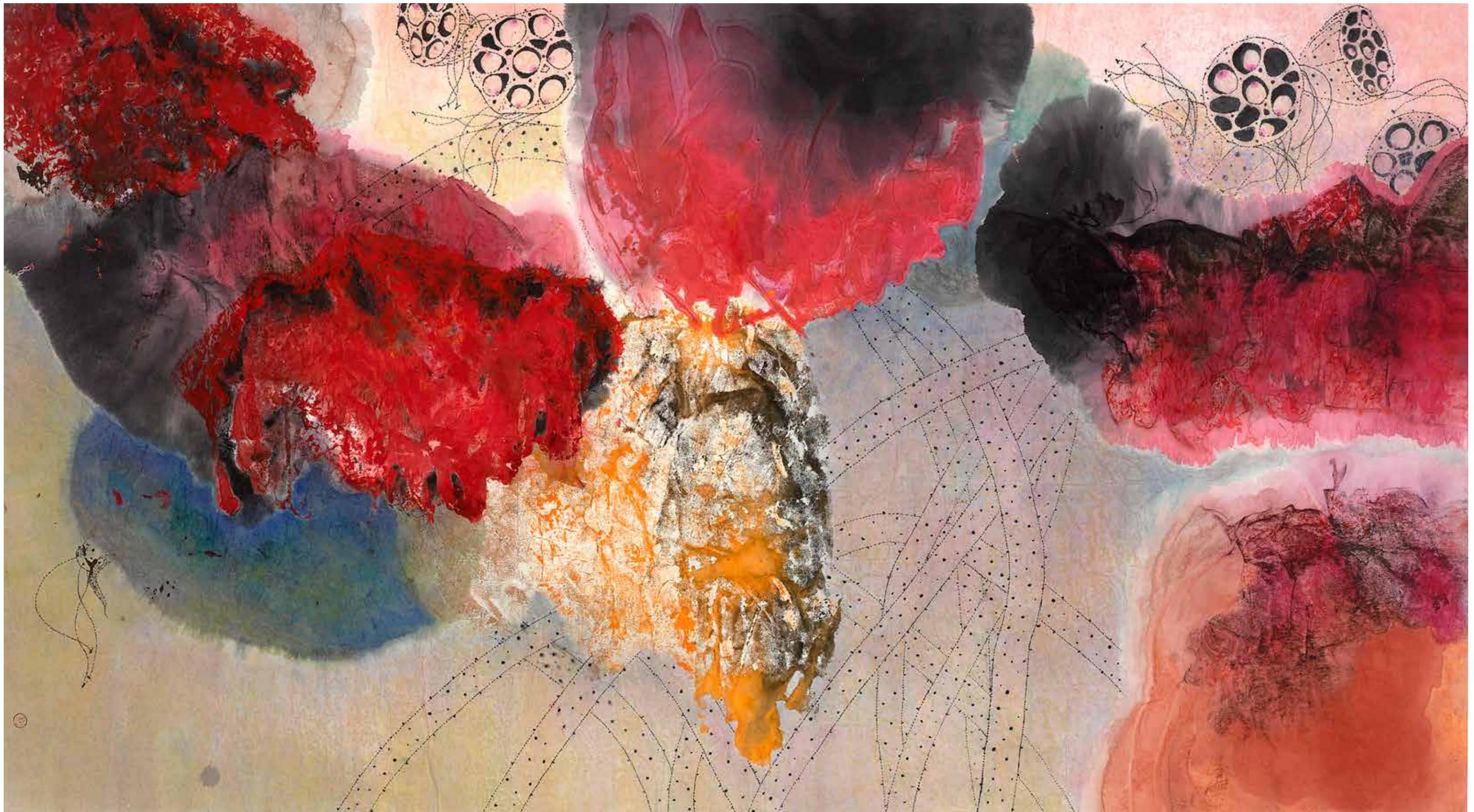


*Vigorous Autumn, 2003*  
Ink and colour on paper  
97 × 179.5 cm (38 × 70¼ in)





*Snow Pond*, 2009  
Ink and colour on paper  
68 × 137 cm (26½ × 54 in)



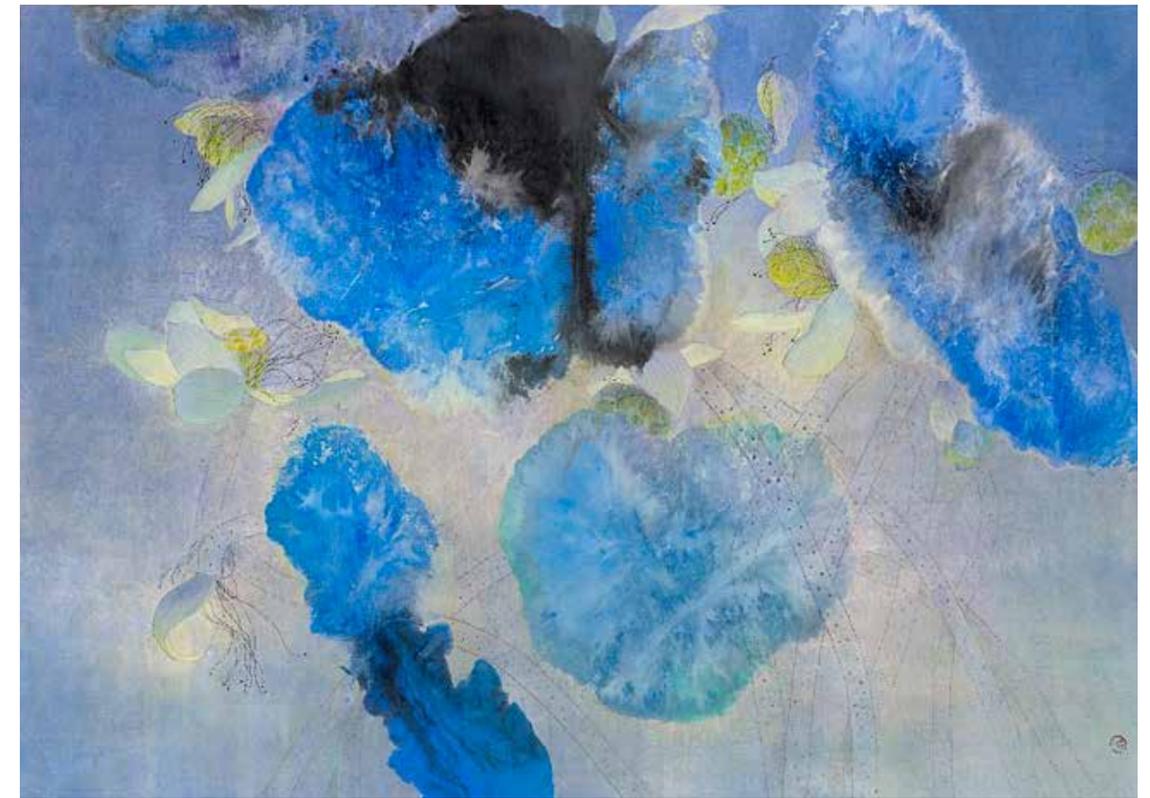
*Autumn Red, 2001*  
Ink and colour on paper  
83.2 × 151.5 cm (32¾ × 59¾ in)



*Autumn Pond*, 2002  
Ink and colour on paper  
83 × 111.7 cm (32¾ × 44 in)



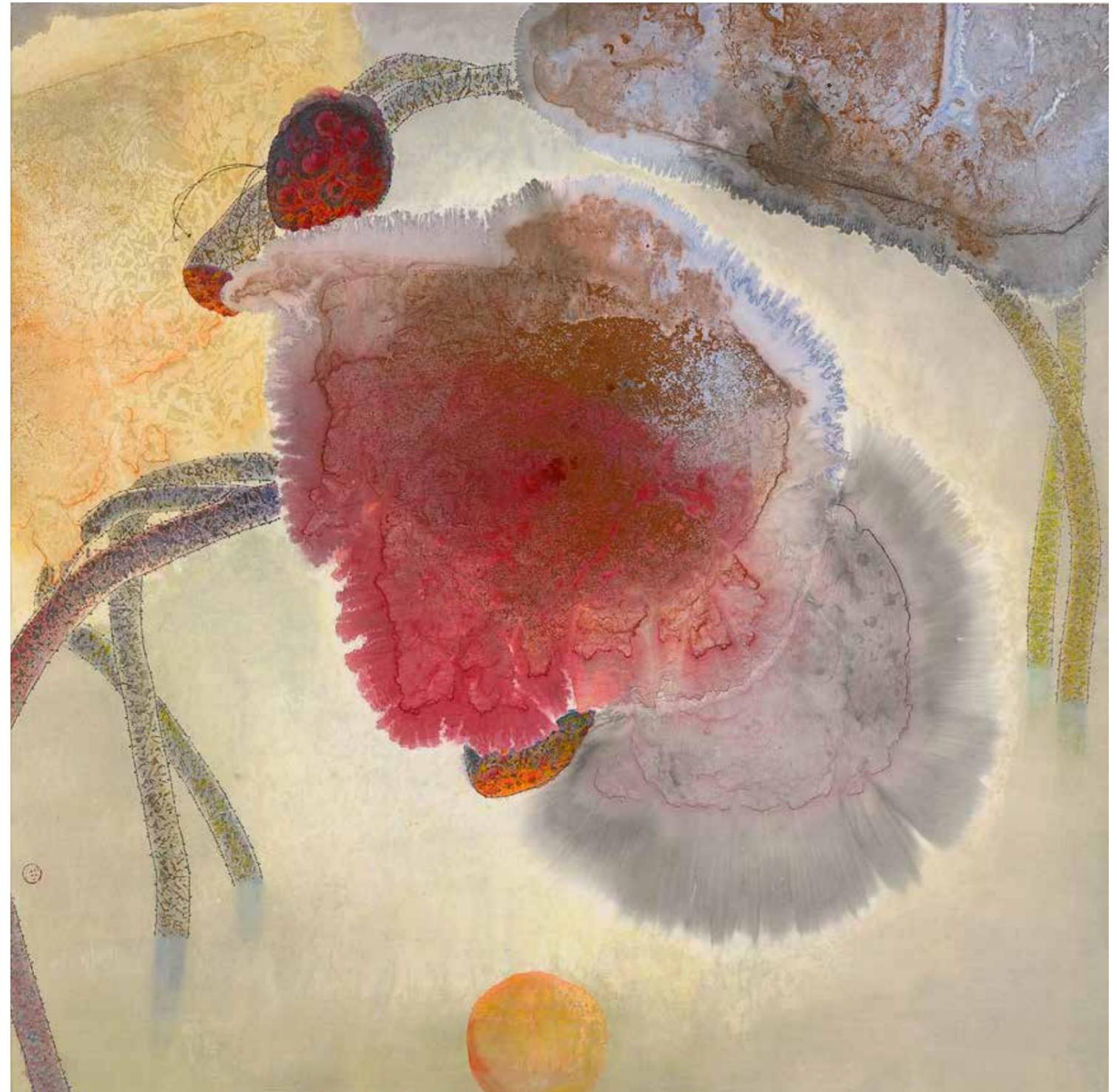
*Full of Power and Grandeur, 2006*  
Ink and colour on paper  
69.9 × 135.9 cm (27½ × 53½ in)



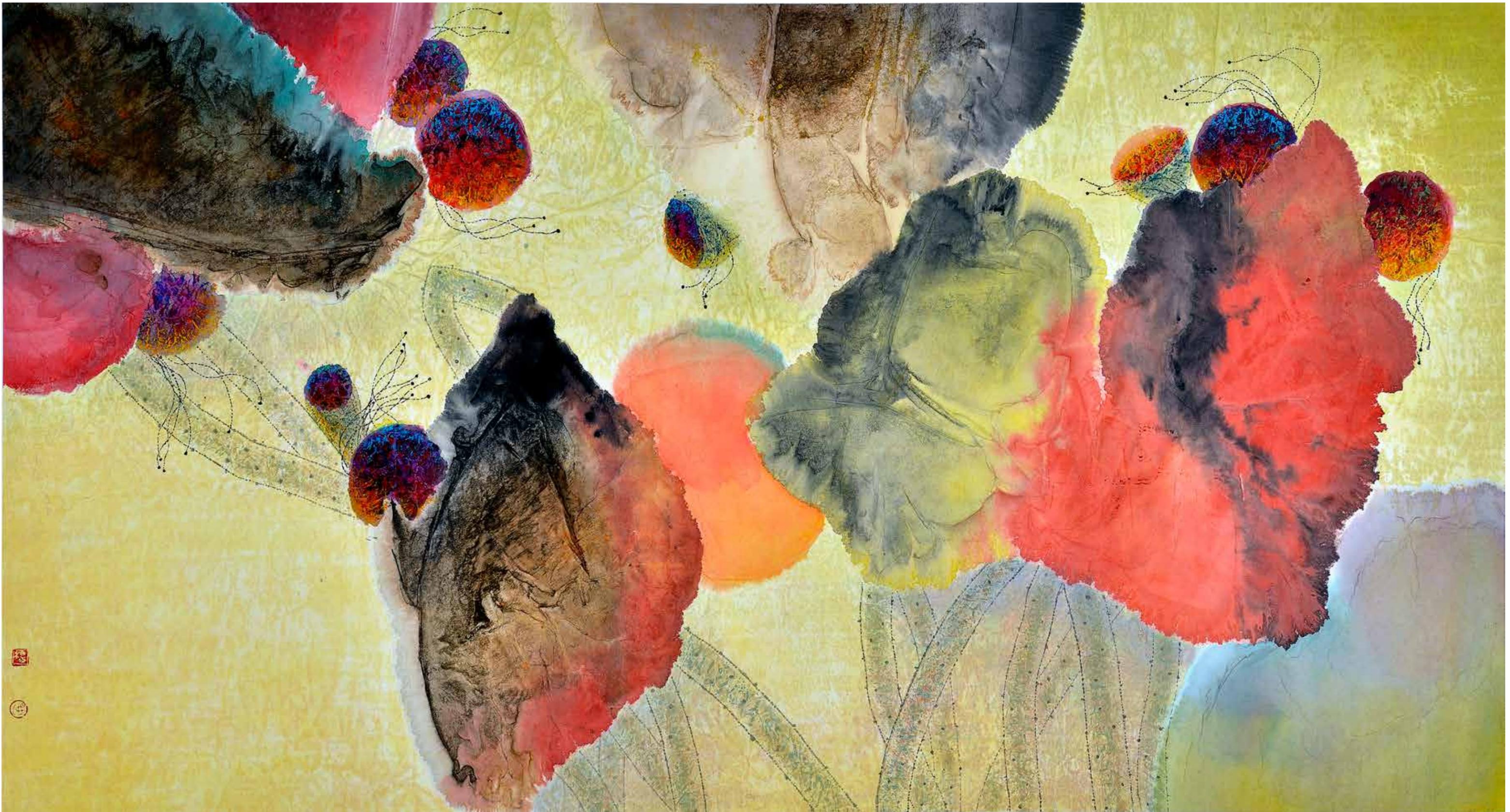
*Fragrant Night Rain*, 2000  
Ink and colour on paper  
68.6 × 98.4 cm (27 × 38¾ in)



*The First Frost, 2009*  
Ink and colour on paper  
84.5 × 122.5 cm (33¼ × 48¾ in)



*The Moment of Winter Sunlight, 1996*  
Ink and colour on paper  
83.8 × 83.8 cm (33 × 33 in)

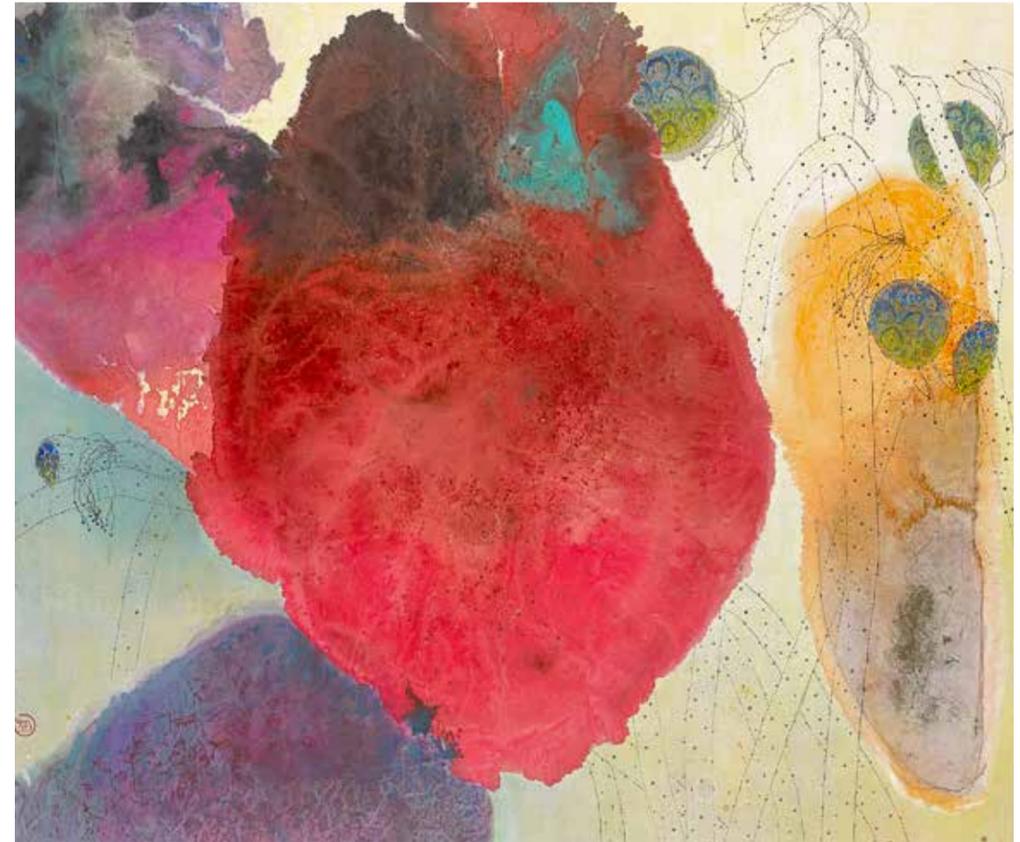
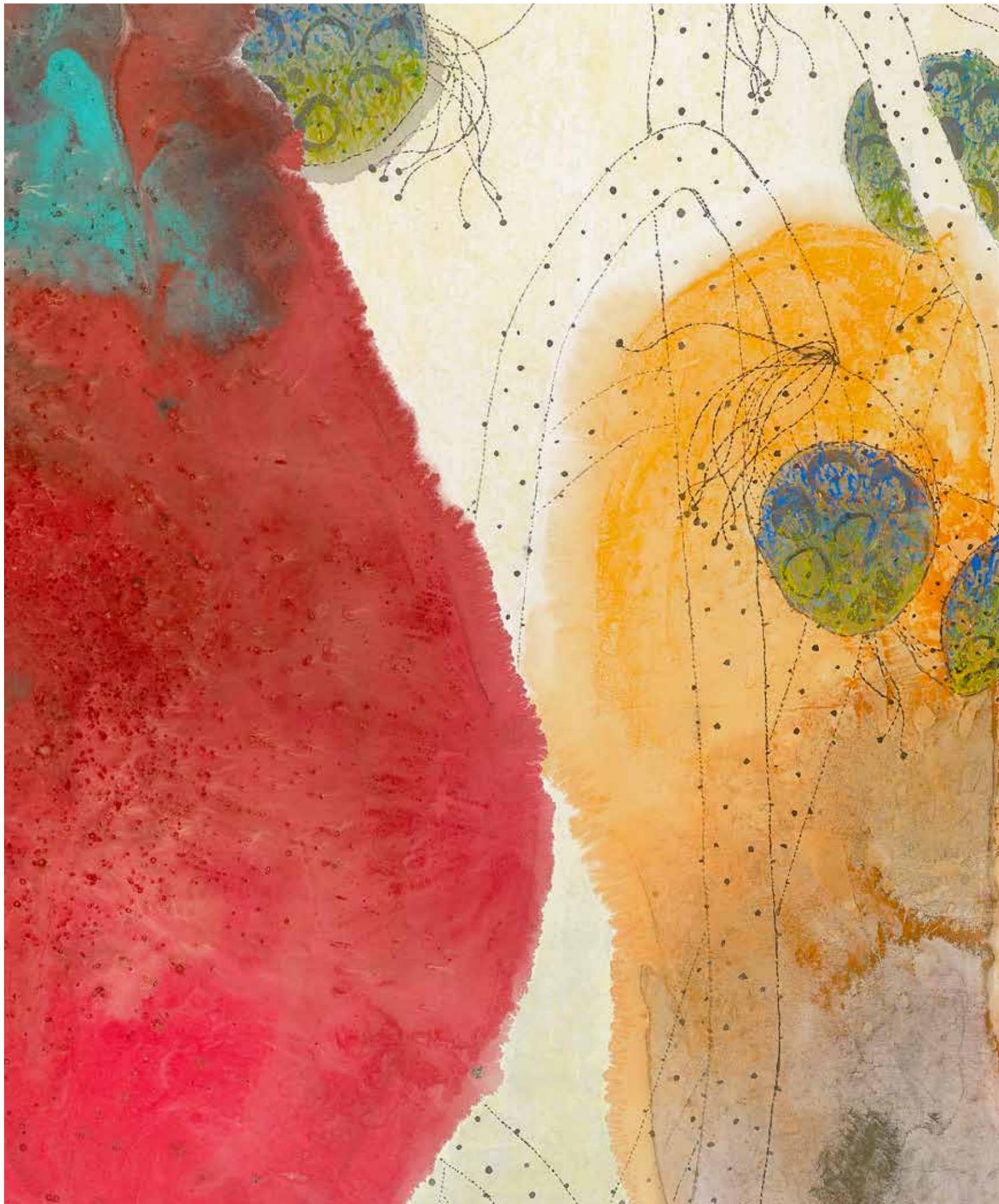


*Soulful Autumn*, 2013  
Ink and colour on paper  
68 x 126 cm (26¾ x 49¾ in)



*Autumn Hue in Meadow, 2006*  
Ink and colour on paper  
87 × 100 cm (34 × 39¼ in)





*Brilliant Autumn, 2009*  
Ink and colour on paper  
96.5 × 114 cm (38 × 45 in)

## YANG YANPING

1934	Born in Nanjing, China
1958	Graduated from the Architecture Department at Tsinghua University, Beijing, China
1966	Transferred to the Art Design Department at the Beijing Art Company, Beijing, China
1968 – 75	Entered the Oil Painting Department at Beijing Art Company to study traditional Chinese painting independently
1975 – 80	Transferred to China National Museum to create, and lead other Chinese artists in creating, historical paintings
1980	Selected Artist in the Beijing Fine Art Academy
1986	Awarded the CEEC fellowship for culture and education exchange with China at SUNY, Stony Brook, New York, USA
1995	Had a painting, <i>Dawn</i> , chosen for the Zander Art Calendar in honor of the 50th Anniversary of the United Nations
1999	Selected for the ‘World Artists at the Millennium’, an international travelling exhibition by the Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts, held at the United Nations Center, New York Currently lives and works in New York

### *Selected Solo Exhibitions*

2013	The Art Museum of Beijing Fine Art Academy, Beijing, China
2012	Michael Goedhuis, London, UK
2008	Peter Findlay Gallery, New York, USA
2007	Goedhuis Contemporary, New York, USA
2004	Goedhuis Contemporary, New York, USA
2003	Peter Findlay Gallery, New York, USA
2001	Goedhuis Contemporary at Dickinson Roundell Inc, New York, USA
1998	Michael Goedhuis in association with Beadleston Gallery, New York, USA
1997	Michael Goedhuis, London, United Kingdom
1995	Godfrey Far Eastern Art Gallery, London United Kingdom
1994	Fine Art Centre Roperhof Gallery, Hamburg, Germany
1993	BAWAG Foundation Art Gallery, Vienna, Austria
1992	Takashimaya Art Gallery, Yokohama and Tokyo, Japan
1991	Alison Fine Arts Gallery LTD, Hong Kong, China

### *Selected Collections*

The Art Museum of Beijing Fine Art Academy, Beijing, China  
The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, UK  
The Albertina, Vienna, Austria  
Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, USA  
Beijing Artists Association, Beijing, China  
The British Museum, London, UK  
Gallery Beer-Sheba, Tokyo, Japan  
Kasser Art Foundation, Vienna, Austria  
Krannert Art Museum, Urbana-Champaign, Illinois, USA  
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, USA  
The National Historical Museum, Beijing, China  
The Olenska Foundation, Geneva, Switzerland  
The Estella Collection, New York, USA  
BAWAG Art Foundation, Vienna, Austria



## 杨燕屏

1934	生於中國南京
1958	中國北京清華大學建築系畢業
1966	進入中國北京畫院藝術設計系
1968-75	進入北京美術公司油畫部門，研究傳統中國繪畫
1975-80	進入中國國家博物館創作，並領導其他中國藝術家創作歷史繪畫
1980	成為北京畫院藝術家
1986	榮獲美國紐約州立大學石溪分校中國文化教育交流委員會研究獎金
1995	畫作，旦 (Dawn) 入選聯合國成立五十週年 Zander 紀念年曆
1999	在伊莉莎白藝術基金會於紐約聯合國總部舉辦的國際巡迴展中獲選為「千禧年的世界藝術家」

現居紐約

### 主要個展

2013	中國北京畫院美術館
2012	英國倫敦格豪士畫廊
2008	美國紐約彼得芬利畫廊
2007	美國紐約格豪士畫廊，個人喜悅的形式
2004	美國紐約格豪士畫廊，楊燕屏近作展
2003	美國紐約彼得芬利畫廊
2001	美國紐約迪金森朗道爾藝術公司格豪士畫廊
1998	格豪士畫廊與美國紐約畢德思頓畫廊畫展
1997	英國倫敦格豪士畫廊
1995	英國倫敦加富瑞遠東藝廊
1994	德國漢堡羅伯霍夫畫廊美術中心
1993	奧地利維也納勞動與經濟銀行基金會藝術中心
1992	日本橫濱與東京高島屋畫廊
1991	中國香港愛莉森藝廊

### 重要收藏記錄

中國北京畫院美術館  
英國牛津愛詩墨林博物館  
奧地利維也納阿爾貝蒂娜博物館  
美國舊金山亞洲藝術博物館  
中國北京美術家協會  
英國倫敦大英博物館  
日本東京貝爾謝巴畫廊  
奧地利維也納凱斯藝術基金會  
美國依利諾大學香檳分校克蘭內藝術博物館  
美國波士頓美術館  
中國北京中國歷史博物館  
瑞士日內瓦奧蘭斯卡基金會  
美國紐約仕丹萊基金會  
奧地利維也納勞動與經濟銀行基金會

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