

## Sublimity 化境

### Recent Works by Hou Beiren

As one of very few living legendary artists of our times, Hou's most valuable contributions are undoubtedly his audacious experiments and achievements in his successful integration of Western and Chinese painting techniques. Hou has invented a distinctive style of his own within the genre of splash ink and color, which is best demonstrated in his most recent works shown in this current exhibition.

The innovation of contemporary splash ink and color genre in Chinese painting was the result of frequent brainstorming meetings between Hou and the late legendary painting master Chang Dai-chien at Hou's home in the late 1960s. These collaborative explorations in a new genre gave birth to Chang's "blue-and-green" works and Hou's landscapes.

Hou cites 1960s Western painting as an influence on his own practice, "the Abstract Expressionism had inspired me in many ways". In his earlier works, we still could see a well-kept balance between real world natural landscapes and abstract patterns of rich colors and lights. Gradually, the abstract patterns of harmonious yet contrasting colors and lights became predominant while realistic objects have become either undetectable or disappeared completely.

The highest Chinese standard for a sublime masterpiece is never the photographic portrayal of the actual form of the object painted but the unveiling of its innate spirit beneath the physical forms. The true appreciation of a sublime masterpiece is to feel with heart rather than see with eyes. This applies best to Hou's works. As the physical forms of natural landscapes increasingly fade away from us, we are brought increasingly closer and ever more overwhelmed by the innate "spirit" or "soul" beneath.

At the sublime stage, the works of an artist are no longer merely reflections of his painting skills and techniques, but his overall aesthetic and intellectual cultivation. Well-versed in Chinese classics and literature, and a celebrated poet and writer, Hou has mastered a vernacular to communicate the innate subtleties of the spirit.

The abstract expression simplifies and purifies the multitude of physical forms of mountains and waters into two-dimensional color pigments. His erudite aesthetic and intellectual cultivation adds an additional dimension of varied rhythms and patterns for observers to penetrate beneath the physical forms and feel the innate "spirit" or "soul", which makes Hou's works reach an elite level of artistic sublimity.