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# Hong Zhu An 'Ascetic Serenity'

By Singapore Tyler Print Institute (STPI) Staff and Volunteers

Singapore-based artist Hong Zhu An integrates his deep love of Chinese artistic expression with contemporary influences, thus breaking with tradition. His works exude a quintessential Chinese ethos integral to his heritage and, rather than rejecting the influences of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the artist reconciles the two to create a visual language truly his own.

*Dragon II* acknowledges its cultural lineage, but instead of ruling over his medium in his usual way, Hong deliberately yielded to the hand-made paper that is so central to work at STPI. His gestural strokes are manifested in the worked-up planes of saturated and layered pigment on paper pulp.

In this work, Hong combined spontaneous actions with discipline – alternating sketching and pondering, before grabbing handfuls of wet pulp and applying them with swift vigorous strokes to create *Dragon II*. These masterful movements were a translation of energy rather than figurative or verbal expressions.

Exhibition catalogue essayist Iola Lenzi, places Hong's practice in the larger cultural context of Singapore: "For those based in Southeast Asia, culturally hybrid and for centuries a colonial subject, the search for roots is often an urgent preoccupation. It is perhaps not far-fetched to suggest that the regional ethos – the area's long-established syncretism, cultural openness, geographical porousness, ethnic layering and cross-disciplinary approach to art – has permeated Hong's vision, linking his ideas to place and time, infiltrating his practice in discrete but significant ways."



*Dragon II*, by Hong Zhu An, 2012, acrylic on paper pulp painting, 166 x 131 cm, photo courtesy of the Singapore Tyler Print Institute

During his three-week residency at STPI, Hong explored papermaking from its most basic components, creating over 40 artworks that capture transient states and feelings, transcending language and cultural barriers.

STPI's creative workshop is an incubator for resident artists to explore new concepts and experiment with various artistic mediums to produce fresh, innovative artworks in collaboration with its print and papermaking expertise. Recognised for their versatility, visual appeal and conceptual rigor, STPI residents push the boundaries of artistic creation.

"Throughout his entire residency, Hong was so involved in the process that his energy – both creative and spiritual – became crystallised in the

work itself," says Emi Eu, Director of STPI.

Having traversed continents, it can be said that the artist draws his energy from the cultural ebbs and flows that permeate the geographical and ideological borders of east and west, vividly manifested in modern-day Singapore.

Originally from China, Hong trained in Chinese traditional art at the Shanghai Art and Craft Institute. A full-time artist in Australia and Singapore since 1993, he has received numerous accolades, including the UOB Painting of the Year *Grand Award*. His works have been collected by major institutions such as the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, the Tel Aviv Museum of Art and the Singapore Art Museum.