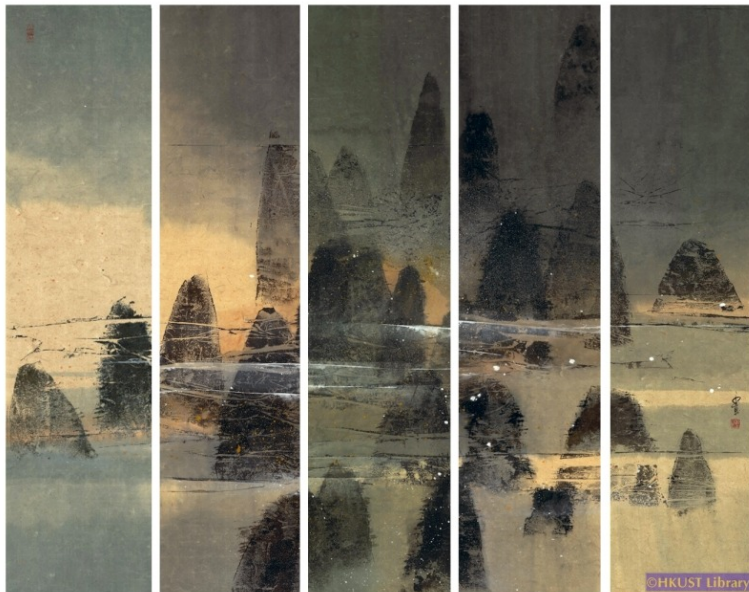


Catalogue-Entry Style Essay



Raymond Fung
In the Mountains 2017
Ink & color on paper
135 x 35cm each

Inspired by the landscape he has been surrounded with throughout his life, Raymond Fung depicts a scenery familiar to every Hong Kong native. “In the Mountains” consists of five narrow rectangular panels and depicts a natural landscape of hills and water. Fung is not the first to create paintings on multiple panels – his predecessors used this technique to make artworks easier to transport. However, it seems like for Raymond Fung, the use of panels goes beyond functionality.

Fragmenting the painting allows Fung to make his art more flexible – the owner can choose to display the panels as an ensemble or individually, and depending on the arrangement the artwork will appear differently to its viewers. When the panels are placed in close proximity, the viewer’s attention is drawn to the center of the painting since most of the mountains are clustered in the middle panel. It allows us to see a panoramic overview of the beautiful landscape and through the use of blank space (leftmost panel) emphasizes the contrast between the sea and the sky, or as an alternative interpretation, the contrast between earth and heaven.

However, if displayed individually, the panels seem more abstract. For instance, if one were to see the left-most panel on its own, it would be less obvious that the grey/blue color below the hill is water. Instead, one could see a mountain-top covered by cloud.

Unlike the rounded mountain-tops, the shape of the panels is angular and rigid. This may represent the contrast between Fung’s art and his architecture. While his paintings usually have subtle and delicate features, his architecture has sharp edges. This becomes particularly apparent if we compare “In the Mountains” to Fung’s home-design called “Flowerbox”. “Flowerbox” is rigid and geometric, some features are symmetrical and others are at strictly ninety-degree angles. His painting much less structured; while the mountains fit together into a beautiful composition, they are not arranged in a controlled pattern.

Comparing this painting to “Flowebox” allows us to also analyze Fung’s use of layering. In this sense, his style across the works is similar because layering is used both in his art and in his architecture to create perspective and a 3D effect. With “In the Mountains”, layering the hills on top of each other makes the hills in the background fade into the distance. This might inspire the viewers to imagine what is beyond the hills, thereby ensuring that people have individual interpretations of the painting.

Fung believes that creating own interpretations of the paintings is an essential part of appreciating this form of artistic expression. This is precisely why Fung leaves some blank space on the paper (particularly left-most panel); he thinks it is especially important to know when to stop adding detail to a painting, so that the composition is not overly crowded. This way, he avoids creating a sense of chaos in his masterpiece – the painting instead inspires a sense of calmness and tranquility. This helps Fung bring out a transcendental realm, providing an escape for people living in Hong Kong’s stressful and tense urban environment.

The artist used traditional Chinese rice paper for this piece. However, Fung crumpled the paper to create an interesting textural effect. Fung may have been encouraged to use this technique by other artists, such as Wang Giqian, whom Fung admired and who introduced paper crumpling into their art before Fung’s time. Although likely inspired by other artists, Fung used the crumpling technique in order to create a unique landscape effect. In this painting, crumpling emphasizes the horizon line and creates a cloudy effect. Since ink does not sink into the creases completely, it seems like a layer of fog is covering the mountains. This allows Fung to add more detail to his painting without actually adding more ink to the paper. Therefore, the painting becomes even more captivating without being too crowded.

We can also note the use of color in “In the Mountains”. The grey shades are consistent with the period, since after the 1990s, Fung stopped using many bright colors in his art and transitioned to more subtle tones, and some argue that this implies that Fung’s art matured as the artist got older. While the precise reason behind the choice of color scheme is unknown, the grey ink mixed with some blue color creates a certain mood in the painting. It seems that the hills are presented in the evening, at dusk, when the sun is beginning to set. Nevertheless, we can still see the mountain ranges, particularly since the white streaks in the middle of the painting lighten the mood. These streaks create visual variations and a balance between darkness and light.

In this painting, Fung does not use a brush. Instead, he uses a printing technique which marks a big transition from traditional Chinese ink painting and an adoption of more modern and Western tools. The use of printing means that Fung’s art is less planned, because he can only see where the ink will sink in after applying pressure to the paper. Thus, the work becomes almost purposefully careless.

“In the Mountains” exquisitely combines history with modernity. It is representative of Raymond Fung’s signature style, whereby uses a traditional medium to paint a familiar landscape, but combines it with new techniques to create a truly unique piece.