

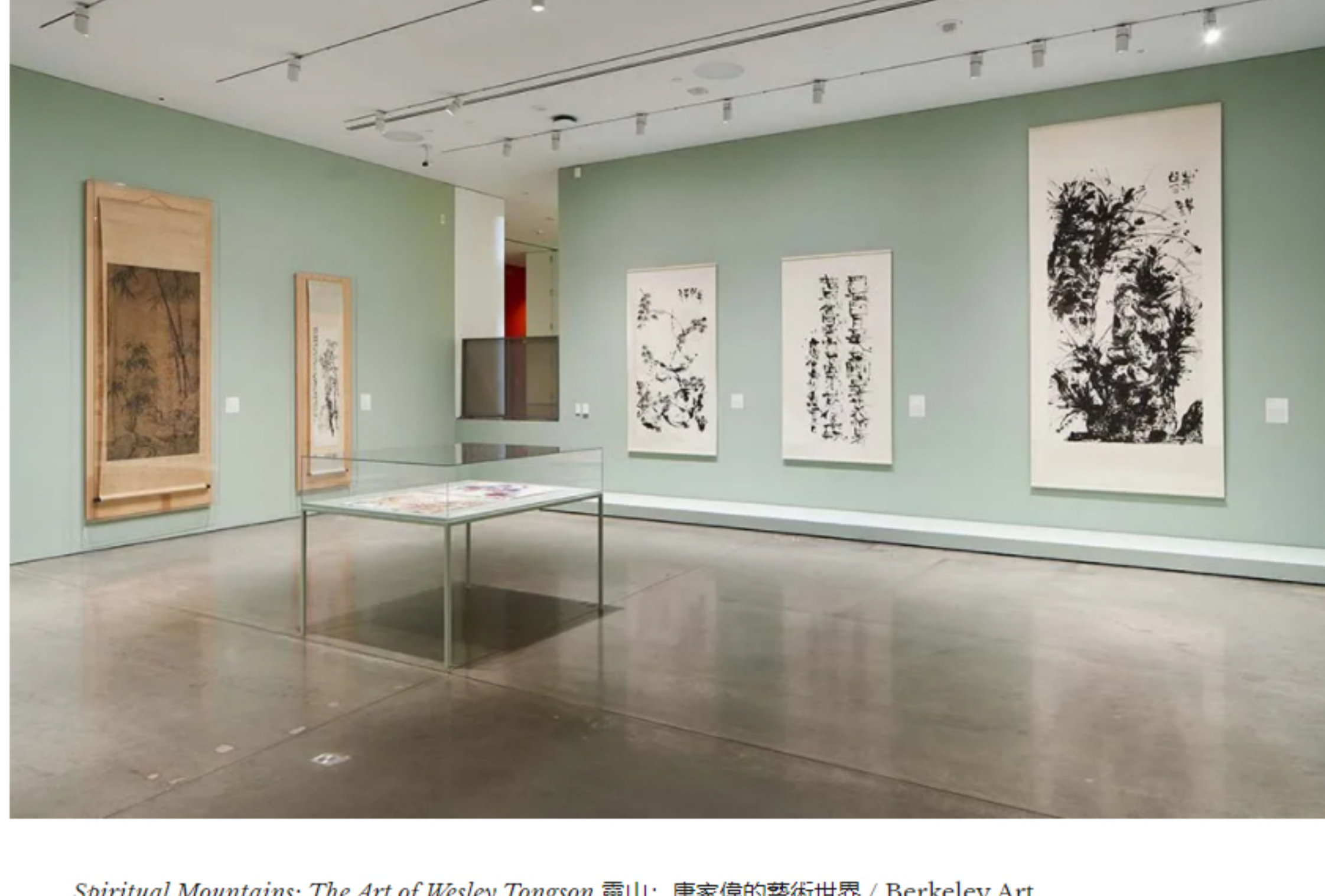
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REVIEWS

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Wesley Tongson 唐家偉

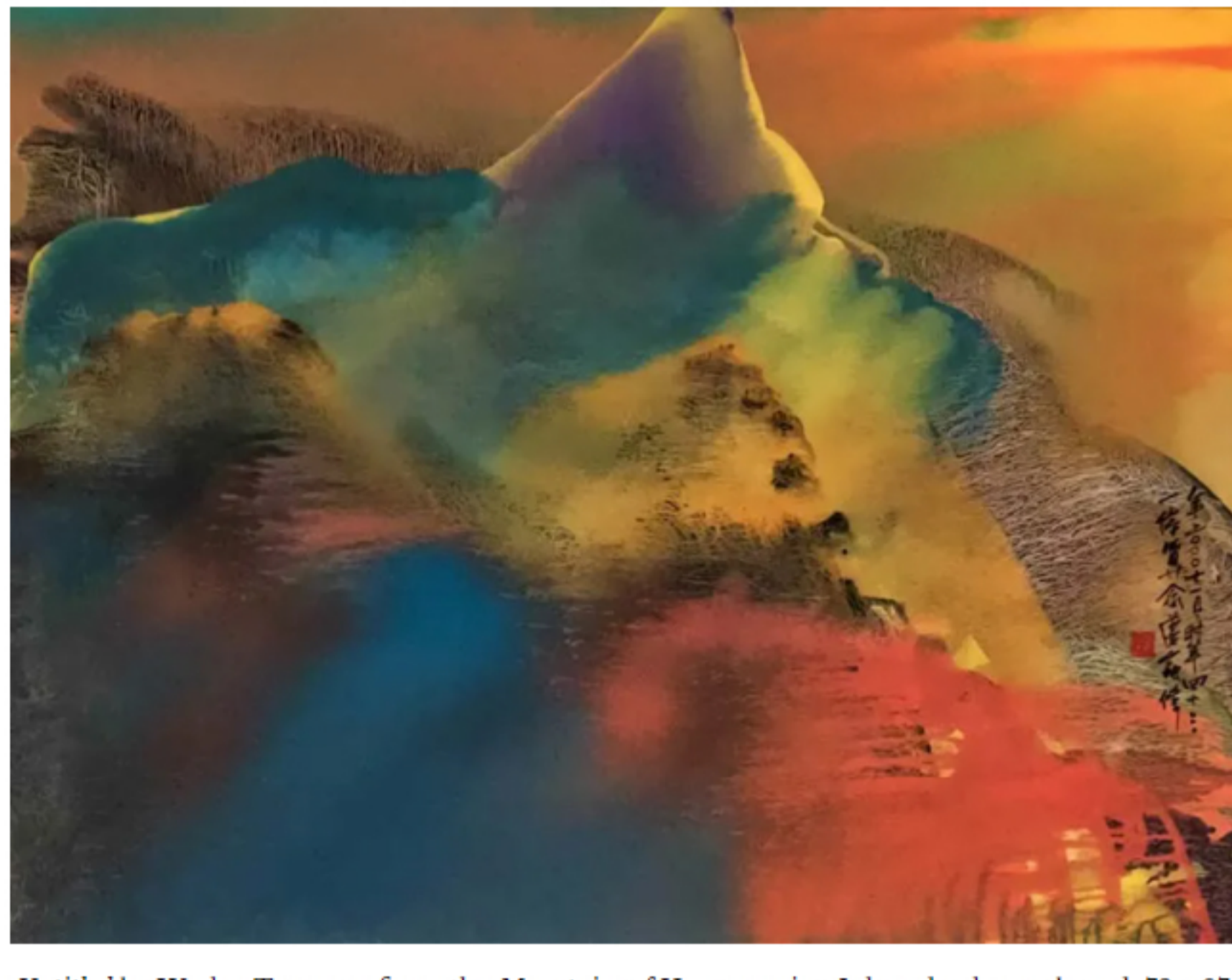
written by Artomity Magazine



Spiritual Mountains: The Art of Wesley Tongson 靈山：唐家偉的藝術世界 / Berkeley Art Museum: 美國柏克萊大學藝術博物館 / Jan 12–Jun 12, 2022 2022年1月12日至6月12日 / DeWitt Cheng /

Originality is the tacitly assumed essence and *sine qua non* of creative art. Young artists in the ultra-individualistic US sometimes avoid looking at older artists' work for fear of being influenced or contaminated – to their detriment. Artists of the past learned from the masters by copying and assimilating. Arshile Gorky famously copied Picasso ("If he drips, I drip"), himself an omnivorous eye; and Ben Shahn praised the artists of the past as friendly ghosts, not obstacles or enemies. Creative talent may be inherent but it has to be developed.

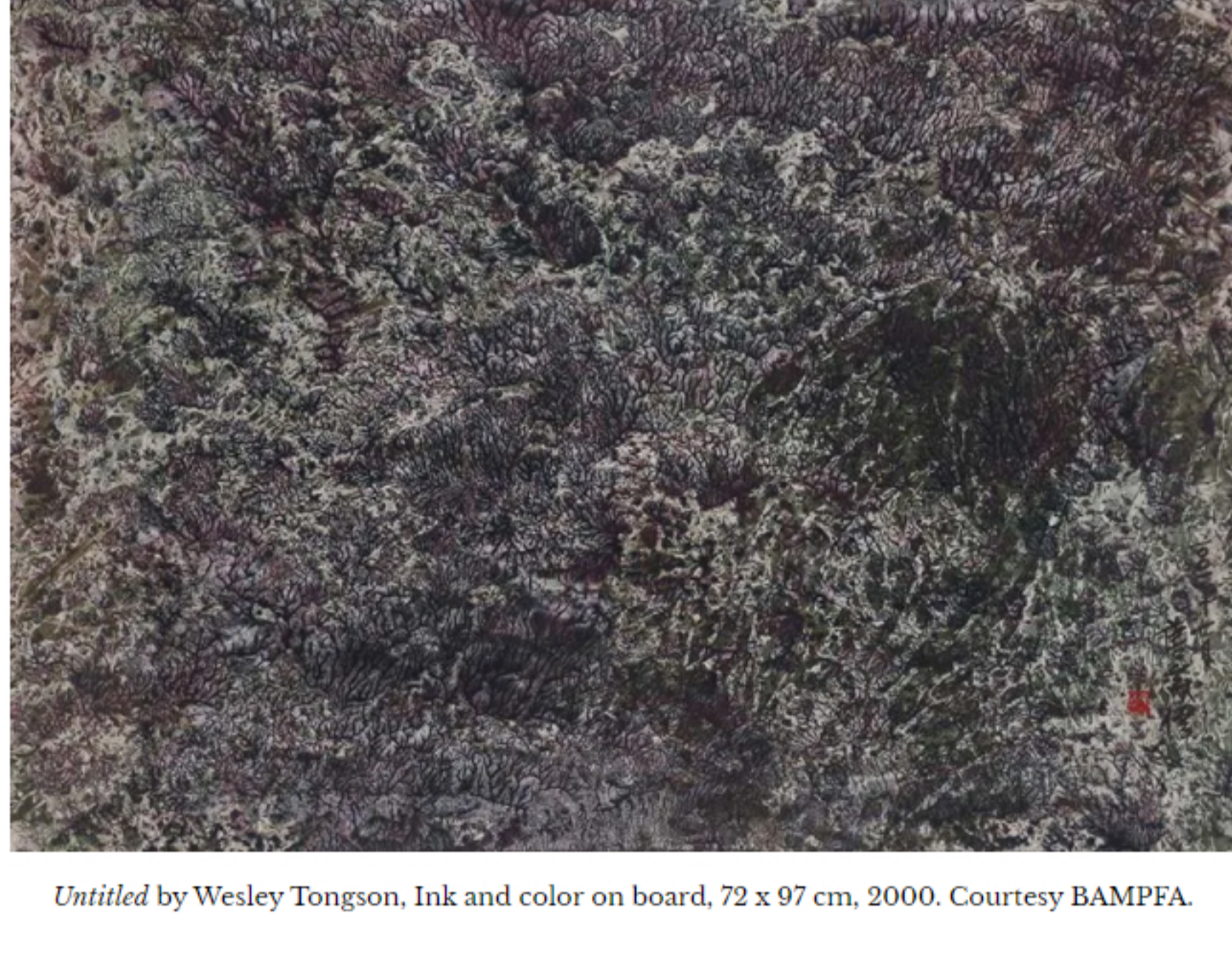
Postmodernist theory has added to the confusion in recent decades. The deaths of the author or artist and of individuality itself have been widely accepted in academia. Jorge Luis Borges parodied the death of originality in his prescient 1939 pseudo-article considering the literary achievement of "Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote". "His admirable ambition," wrote Borges, "was to produce pages which would coincide – word for word and line for line – with those of Miguel de Cervantes." And then there are the complexities of digital art, with appropriation and plagiarism shading into each other.



Untitled by Wesley Tongson, from the *Mountains of Heaven* series. Ink and color on board, 72 x 97 cm, 2000. Courtesy BAMPEFA.

The Hong Kong painter Wesley Tongson (1937–2012) exemplifies the synthesis of tradition and innovation. In 2018, the Chinese Cultural Center of San Francisco presented *The Journey*, a small but impressive exhibition of his work. Curator Catherine Maudsley noted that Tongson's ink paintings were grounded in the natural motifs and calligraphy of classical Chinese painting, but enlivened by daring abstract expressionist brushstrokes, ink splattering, marbling, resists, decalomania (pressing painted pieces of paper onto the surface and peeling them off) and even painting with fingers and hands. She cites his training by Gu Qingyao in Toronto and Huang Zhongfang in Hong Kong, but concludes that "Tongson's journey was primarily a solitary one". Hongkongers will need no introduction to the artist, whose genius was recognized early in his hometown.

Maudsley saw Tongson's oeuvre as a spiritual quest through art, but *Spiritual Mountains: The Art of Wesley Tongson*, at the Berkeley Art Museum, shows that he had many teachers and mentors guiding his singular, solitary way. The exhibition features 11 magnificent works recently acquired by the museum, interspersed with paintings by like-minded artists drawn from the museum's permanent collection or borrowed from private collections. Thus it celebrates Tongson not as an artistic *isolato* – though his schizophrenia and reticence make his career mysterious – but as belonging to a tribe or secret order, its members separated by time and space but united by a shared vision. The show deliberately eschews chronology, instead offering, through the erudite wall-label commentary by Julia M White, senior curator for Asian art, a time traveller's tour of a group of Chinese painters, all trained in the way of the brush yet *guai* (eccentric) enough to infuse personality and even dash into a tradition that, by incorporating change, evades formulaic repetition. (Arnold Chang, whose wonderfully anachronistic ink painting *Thinking of Spring* (2010) is included in the show, wrote in 2006: "The response I seek from the viewer is that the work has the look and feel of an old master painting. And yet, one can't point to any specific image or artist that I am copying.")



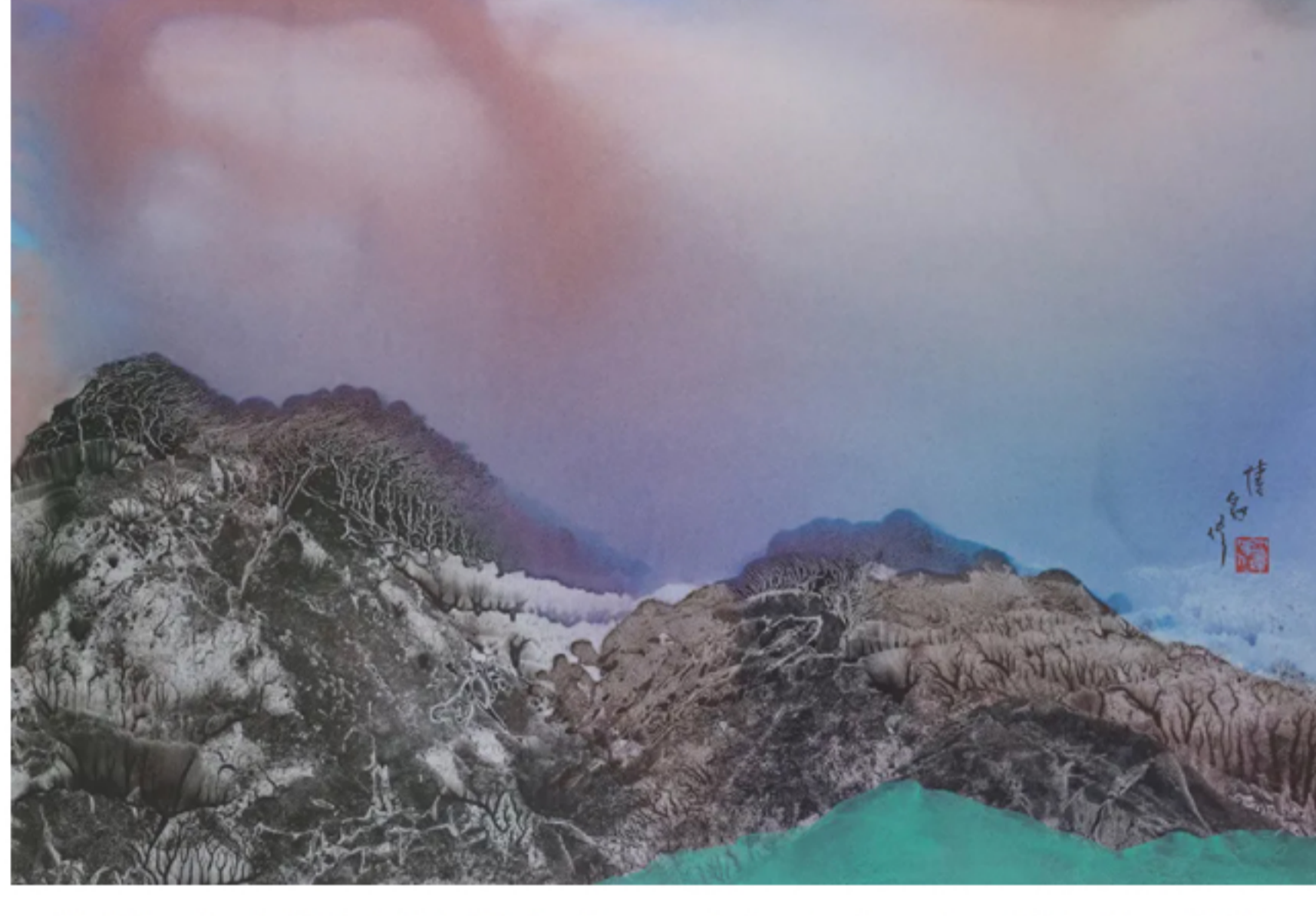
Untitled by Wesley Tongson. Ink and color on board, 72 x 97 cm, 2000. Courtesy BAMPEFA.

Among Tongson's works, an untitled mountainscape from 2000 from the *Mountains of Heaven* series is composed of large, irregularly shaped blocks of bright colour, featuring ink splashed onto the surface and applied using other non-traditional methods, without any preliminary black-ink drawing framework. Its loose, soft-edged, organic forms, which recall the organic abstraction of Helen Frankenthaler, Morris Louis, Jules Olitski and Friedel Dzubas, are given specificity by black ink textures suggestive of rocky scarps and forests. How these effects were achieved remains an enigma, but Tongson's absolute mastery of technique in realising an inner vision inspired by Taoist and Buddhist lore could not be clearer. *Scudding Clouds, Misty Peaks* (1996) is equally virtuosic, with loosely brushed and splashed ink and colour, combined with rubbing and other techniques, suggesting microscopic realism without any concession to photographic reality. On the wall label, White notes that Tongson wished to splash ink to the point of resembling photographs; here he creates, through seemingly random means, a timeless metaphor: the holy mountain rises as a seeming emanation of art materials governed by a shaping intellect. (*Hung* (1990) and *Mountain Range* (1993) are equally stunning cosmic landscapes. *Slope* between these four powerhouse works are two landscapes by Zhang Daqian (1889–1993), one of Tongson's artistic heroes, whose melding of free-form techniques and effects were crucial to the younger artist's path. An untitled work on the opposite wall, a horizon-free landscape from 2001, carries the proliferation of marks to a hallucinatory level.

The works of many other artists, some dating back to the Ming Dynasty and beyond, show that Tongson's spiritual and artistic quest was guided by his artistic ancestors. Similarly, the path forged by the self-styled Mountain Daoist will guide future metaphysical and poetic explorers.

原創性被認為是創舉藝術的本質和必要條件。在極度崇尚個人主義的美國，年輕藝術家們有時會故意避開藝術家前輩的作品，害怕會受其影響或感染，但那是他們的損失。過去的藝術家往往通過複製和模仿來向前輩大師學習。阿爾弗雷德·高爾基以複製畫卡索畫名（「如果我滴畫，我就滴畫」），他自己有一雙廣博的眼睛；班·夏恩讚揚過去的藝術家是友善的幽靈，而非障礙或敵人。創造天籟或許是與生俱來的，但也需要培養。

近幾十年來，後現代主義理論加劇了混亂。作者已死或藝術家已死以及個性本身的死亡等觀念已被學術界廣泛接受。豪爾赫·波爾斯·波納爾（Jorge Luis Borges）在他1939年頗具預見性的虛構小說《「皮朗德」》的作者皮埃爾·博納爾中通過《皮朗德》的文學成就讚揚了原創性的虛構。[「他有一個雄心，」博爾斯寫道，「就是寫出一些同米格爾·德·塞凡提斯逐字逐句不謀而合的篇章。」]此後出現了數碼藝術時代產生的互相盜用和剽竊的複雜局面。



Scudding Clouds, Misty Peaks by Wesley Tongson. Ink and color on board, 72 x 97 cm, 1996. Courtesy BAMPEFA.

香港畫家唐家偉（1937–2012年）是將傳統與創新結合的典範。2018年，三藩市中國文化中心為其舉辦了一場小規模但令人印象深刻的作品展——「旅靈」。策展人毛岱康指出，唐家偉的水墨畫根植於中國古典繪畫的自然主題和書法，而後通過大膽的抽象表現主義筆觸瀉出飛揚神采。其以潑墨、大理石紋加工法、印花油法（將繪於紙上的圖案壓在物體表面再將紙剝離），甚至手指和手畫。毛岱康提到唐家偉曾在多倫多和香港分別跟隨戴青蓮及黃仲方學習，但總結到「唐家偉的整個旅程是孤獨的」。在香港，這位藝術家的成就無須介紹，因為他的天才早就在家鄉得到了認可。

毛岱康將唐家偉的畢生之作視為一場借由藝術的精神探索，但在伯克利美術館舉辦的展覽「靈山：唐家偉的藝術世界」表明，在這條非凡而孤獨的道路上他曾得到許多導師的指引。是次展覽中還呈現了美術館近期收入的11件佳作，其中包括一些來自博物館永久收藏及由私人捐贈的與唐家偉有著相似意念的藝術家畫作。因而，展覽所呈現的唐家偉並不是一位藝術世界中的與世隔絕者，雖然他的精神分裂和沉默寡言讓他顯得非常神秘；相反，其所呈現的唐家偉屬於某個群體或秘密組織，它的成員散佈在不同的時空，因共同的歸屬聯合在一起。展覽特意搜集了年代排序法，而是通過貼於牆上、來自亞洲藝術部資深策展人Julia M White博古通今的評論，為觀者展現了一群中國畫家的時空旅行。他們全部接受過正統的畫家培養，卻因他們的怪而注入獨特的個性，甚至打破傳統，通過變革避免公式化的重複。（展覽還納入了Arnold Chang（張洪）那副異常與時代脫節的水墨作品《Thinking of Spring》（2010年），他在2006年寫道：「我從觀者處尋得的回饋是，這幅畫看起來和感覺上像是古代大師的作品。可他們無法指出我具體模仿的是哪一副畫或哪一位畫家。」）



Slope by Wesley Tongson. Ink and color on board, 142 x 137 cm, 1990. Courtesy BAMPEFA.

所展出的唐家偉作品中，有一幅創作於2000年隸屬《天界》系列的無題山景畫。畫作由大塊不規則形狀的灰色塊構成，藝術家採用潑墨和其他非傳統手法，沒有用黑色墨水繪製的初步框架。其鬆軟、輪廓模糊的有機形態讓人想起海倫·佛蘭肯豪瑟、莫里斯·路易士、朱爾斯·奧列斯基和弗裡德爾·杜巴斯的有機抽象畫，而黑色墨水紋理又賦予了這些形態以岩石崎嶇和森林的特質。這些效果是如何實現的依然是個謎，但顯然，唐家偉已完全掌握此種技藝——以佛教和道教傳統為靈感而得到內心的領悟。作品《Scudding Clouds, Misty Peaks》（1996年）同樣不凡。鬆軟的筆刷、潑墨以及色彩，配合擦抹及其他手法，均體現出微觀現實主義，同時沒有任何對照相寫實的讓步。White在牆上的評論中指出，唐家偉希望能用潑墨達到仿若照片的程度；他通過看似隨意的方式創造出一個穿越時間的隱喻——在人為智慧支配下的藝術素材表面散發後，聖山升起。《山坡》和《Mountain Range》（1993年）是兩幅同樣令人歎為觀止的風景畫。這四幅非凡作品之間掛著兩幅張大千（1889–1993年）的水墨畫。他是唐家偉非常敬仰的藝術家，其融合了自由式技藝和效果，深刻影響著年輕一輩的藝術家。對面牆上掛著一副創作於2001年的無題風景作品，畫中沒有水平線，大量的標記浮現出幻覺效果。

展覽中還有許多其他藝術家的作品，其中一些可以追溯到明代或更早，這體現出唐家偉在精神和藝術的探索之路上都受到了藝術祖先的指引。同樣，這位以「山斗道人」自居的大師他所開闢的道路也將引領著未來探索玄學及詩意的人。

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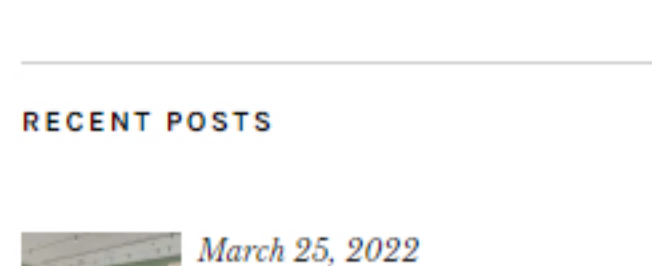
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