

CREATIVE GENES
Alisan Fine Arts founder
Alice King and her
daughter Daphne are
stalwart supporters of
Lui Shou-kwan's work



Indelible Influence

An intriguing new exhibition celebrates the enduring impact of seminal Hong Kong artist **Lui Shou-kwan**, writes **Rik Glauert**

IT'S FOUR DECADES since Hong Kong mourned the death of the master credited with revolutionising the ancient Chinese art of ink painting and developing a genre unique to the city. Lui Shou-kwan's legacy is celebrated this month in an exhibition by Alisan Fine Arts that analyses the artist's evolution and enduring influence by juxtaposing his masterpieces with works by his protégés and emerging artists of today.

"Lui Shou-kwan contributed tremendously to Hong Kong's art scene and culture," says Daphne King-Yao, the director of Alisan Fine Arts, founded in 1981 by her mother, veteran curator Alice King. The women have long collected and exhibited Lui's work, appreciating his pioneering expressive style fusing Eastern and Western aesthetics. "He created an artistic identity for Hong Kong and, in doing so, laid the foundations for the rich cultural life that the city enjoys today."

The new exhibition, *A Legacy of Ink: Lui Shou-kwan 40 Years On*, which is being staged at the Hong Kong Arts Centre, showcases some of the painter's most revered pieces alongside works by prominent local artists of today, such as Wucius Wong, Leung Kui-ting and Kan Tai-keung, and promising younger artists and students. In presenting Lui's

paintings with the work of those he taught and inspired, the mother-daughter team aim to illuminate Lui's enduring impact on the city's artistic community.

The story of one of Hong Kong's most important artists began in Guangzhou with the birth of Lui in 1919. The young Lui came to maturity amid the devastation of World War II and took refuge from the horrors of the time in art. Inspired by his scholar-artist father, he studied the famous Chinese ink painters, including Bada Shanren (1626-1705), Shitao (1642-1707) and Huang Binhong (1865-1955). He began replicating their line and form, creating the classic, stylised landscapes of mountains and rivers.

In 1948, Lui joined the flood of Chinese fleeing the revolution to the safety of Hong Kong. Back on the mainland, as the communists forced art into the service of national ideals, there was no room to alter, adapt or progress ink painting. But in the British colony, Lui was free to develop his own style. By day he worked as an inspector at Yaumati Ferry Company to support himself, but his free time was spent depicting the landscape of his new home with ink and brush.

Lui Shou-kwan, *Farmland at Dawn* (1962)





Lui Shou-kwan, *Zen Painting* (1972)

During this period Lui was exposed to a range of international influences. He was intrigued by the romantic landscapes of the English master Turner (1775-1851) and imbued his own work with similarly evocative portrayals of nature and an atmospheric use of light. In the rich and moody skies of Lui's *Victoria Gap* (1959), one of the works on show in this month's exhibition, the influence of Turner is clear. The painting marks Lui's

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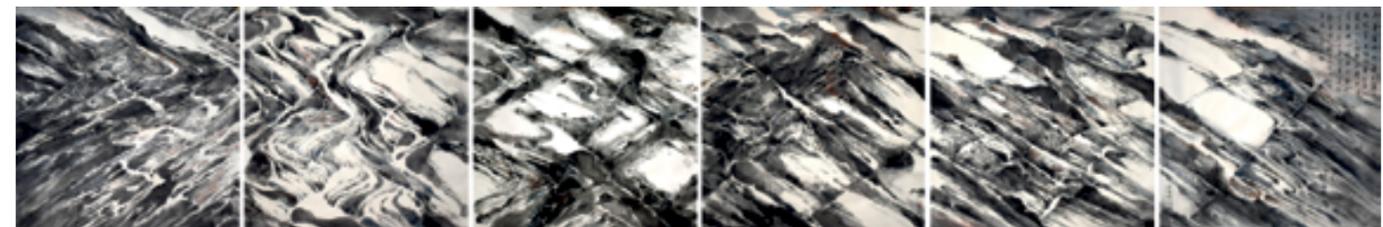
departure from the traditional line and form of Chinese ink painting.

As overseas painters continued to influence Lui, he became bolder with his forms. Inspired by the 20th-century abstract expressionists in the United States, including Robert Motherwell and Jackson Pollock, his ink landscapes became more conceptual. In *Farmland at Dawn* (1962), also on show this month, buildings, animals and landscapes are represented by abstract shapes.

Lui's abstraction reached its zenith in his “wet” and “dry” *Zen* series. In the wet paintings, lotus flowers and other spiritual symbols are created in blotchy, watery strokes, while in the dry works, such as *Zen Painting* (1972), the landscape is pared back to heavy, black shapes. This expressive use of brush and ink became known as the New Ink Painting Movement.



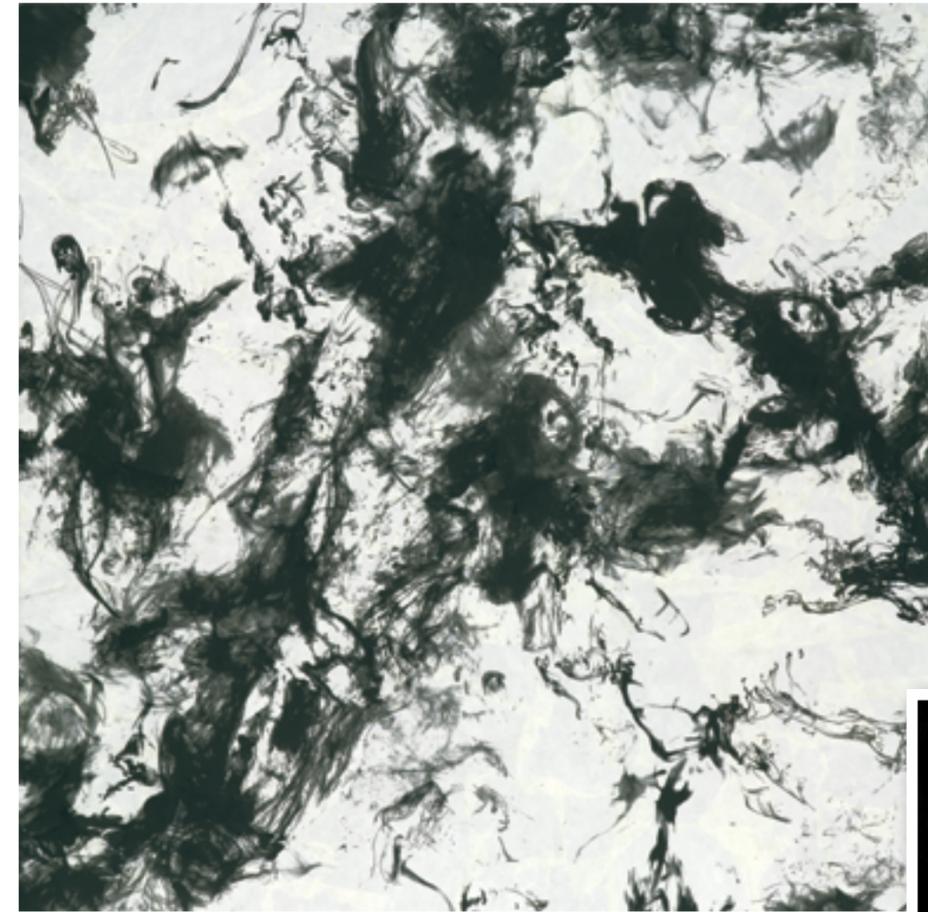
Wucius Wong, *Water Represents Ultimate Goodness* (2015)



Lui imbued his work with evocative portrayals of nature and an atmospheric use of light. In the rich and moody skies of Lui's Victoria Gap (1959), the influence of Turner is clear



Lui Shou-kwan, *Victoria Gap* (1959)



CC Ling
Pui-sze, *It all Begins in the Sea* (2015)



SCHOOL OF THOUGHT As well as being a great painter, Lui Shou-kwan was a vocal advocate for art education and taught hundreds of students

Before Lui, the Hong Kong art scene was divided into two streams: traditional Chinese ink art similar to that practised on the mainland, and the Western style associated with the city's colonial background. Lui's work was pivotal in forging Hong Kong's own artistic identity, fusing the two streams. In the words of Claire Hsu, co-founder and executive director of the Asia Art Archive, Lui's work "embodies a uniquely Hong Kong history and position as both a Chinese and British colonial city at the time."

Lui was also a vocal advocate for art education in the city. He founded associations, wrote monographs and taught hundreds of students at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the University of Hong Kong. Wucius Wong, one of the city's best-known ink artists and critics of today, studied under Lui in the late 1950s and himself blends the Chinese ink tradition with modern Western aesthetics. In Wong's monochrome series *Water Represents Ultimate Goodness* (2015), abstract shapes and lines evoke a riverbed, and much of his other work incorporates geometric shapes and graphic design.

As this new exhibition demonstrates, Lui's influence stretches far beyond the artists he taught. Tsuen Wan-based artist CC Ling

Pui-sze, who was born in 1989, well after Lui's death in 1975, sees herself as part of the New Ink Painting Movement. In her series *It all Begins in the Sea* (2015), she forms collages from torn up ink-jet-printed images depicting the atomic make-up of cells and water molecules. The medium may seem far removed from traditional ink painting, but the young artist sees a direct correlation between her and Lui's work. "Lui Shou-kwan expanded the boundaries of ink painting. Ink artists, such as myself, are no longer restrained by traditional form," she says.

And so the master's legacy continues to evolve through the city's new pioneers. ❶

A Legacy of Ink: Lui Shou-kwan 40 Years On runs from September 23 to 30 at the Hong Kong Arts Centre. Students of Lui, including Wucius Wong and Chui Tze-hung, will give a talk on September 26. A preliminary exhibition of the new generation of artists inspired by Lui runs from September 14 to 30. alisan.com.hk