

Various Artists

Word Play

Alisan Fine Arts
Hong Kong
Sep 19 – Nov 30, 2024
Christine Chan Chiu

Chinese calligraphy has always been an intimidating genre, carrying with it an academic weight that makes it appear impossible to grasp without a solid background in Chinese history and literature. That was all the more reason to visit *Word Play*, a contemporary calligraphy showcase of 19 artists from diverse backgrounds from the 1980s to the present day. The well-curated presentation was divided into four thematic galleries to allow for a better appreciation of the various styles and approaches within this vast genre. This was not some stuffy presentation of faded scripts and crinkly scrolls; it was as much a testament to the relevance and relatability of Chinese calligraphy in contemporary art as it was a celebration of creative individuality.

The Contemporary Calligraphy section was the first and largest gallery, containing works by Chui Pui Chee, Fung Ming Chip, Gu Wenda, Hon Chi-fun, Li Huasheng, Ren Tianjin and Wang Dongling. Greeting visitors as they entered was a pair of bold, monumental calligraphic scrolls by Gu, *Calligraphy Couplet* (1986), a prime example of the unconventional approach of the artist, who is known for reinterpreting symbols and ideograms. The scrolls contain characters that appear Chinese but don't mean anything. Gu's works prompt visitors to rethink what calligraphy means to them if the meaningless brushstrokes still fulfil its aesthetic criteria.

Displayed next to the couplet are three works by Wang, a master of calligraphic painting. Expressive and intuitive, he has long challenged the conventions of the genre, producing works that verge on the performative qualities of Gutai; he challenges semantics by making the meaning of the characters secondary to their ephemeral, performative function. The brushstrokes in *Laozi – Dao De Jing* (2024) display not only spontaneity and passion but also a frenzy that comes from being caught up in a rapture.



Installation view of *Word Play* (Abstraction) at Alisan Fine Arts, Hong Kong. Courtesy Alisan Fine Arts.

In the centre of the gallery stands a steel scholar's rock sculpture by Ren, *Taihu Rock: Eastern Garden* (2024). Referencing a monumental sculpture in the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco, the Chinese characters for "eastern garden" can be deciphered on one gnarly surface, prompting visitors to prolong their gaze and to reconsider sculpture as a medium for calligraphy. *Shirley Yamaguchi in Running Script* (2024) by Chui, the youngest artist exhibiting, embraces contemporary local culture by incorporating the lyrics of an iconic Jackie Cheung song, elevating them to the status of poetry.

Encapsulating the Chinese literati ideal of "poetry within painting", artists in the Composing with Words section include Chu Chu, Chui Tze-hung, Pat Hui, Hung Keung and Wucius Wong. Departing from using purely text, they embrace modernity in their practices by incorporating artistic elements such as colour, geometry and even AI.

For example, Hung presents his calligraphic art digitally in *See the words as Tathagata (II)* (2023), as an ephemeral piece that can be

enjoyed repeatedly at a press of a play button. Furthermore, by inverting the characters, which appear and disappear erratically on the screen, and by encouraging visitors to look at the adjacent mirror in order to read the script properly, he has revolutionised not only the medium for presenting calligraphy but also the viewing process.

Fresh off the heels of his Hong Kong solo show earlier this year at Alisan Fine Arts, Wong's *Expression in Calligraphy 30* (1999) is a testament to his foresight and innovation. True to his style, the artwork showcases a classic passage from the *Tao Te Ching*, featuring his instantly recognisable script overlaid on his signature landscape grids. The diffuse softness of the ink renders it poetic and romantic, with an almost graphic juxtaposition of text and scenery.

Featured in the Word as Image gallery are Gu Gan, Kan Tai-keung, Wei Ligang and Xu Bing, who portray landscapes using brushstrokes from the written word, blurring the line between painting and calligraphy. In Kan's *True Man Meditates* (2022), a lone scholar sits atop

a misty mountain looking out into the horizon. Closer inspection reveals that the gestural strokes that make up the mountain spell out the characters for "mountain" and "happiness".

Xu's *Read View (Landscape)* (2001) is a bold, playful piece with a pun in its title. In using the characters for "stone" and "tree" to depict those things, the artist dives into a metaphorical examination of topographical features. Prompting visitors to "read" the various geographical symbols, his piece is also an investigation of spatial awareness.

The final section, Abstraction, highlights the works of Hao Shiming, Fabienne Verdier and John Way. With powerful echoes of various post-war abstractionist movements, they are a coalescence of eastern calligraphy with western aesthetics. Here, script not only gives way to rhythm and gesture that are amplified by a poetic simplicity, but individual expressions also play an important role.

French artist Verdier, who has spent 10 years studying Chinese ink in China, is the only non-Chinese artist and one of only three women to feature in the exhibition. *Archipel 1-9/15* (2005) encapsulates her experimentation with abstraction. The simple yet powerful brushstrokes illustrate well her distillation of energy and dynamism, manifesting her beliefs as a keen practitioner of meditation.

Word Play was an ambitious presentation – one which sought to redefine and recategorise Chinese calligraphy within a contemporary context.

群展

字得其樂

藝倡畫廊

香港

2024年9月19日至11月30日

Christine Chan Chiu

中國書法一直是個讓人望而生畏的藝術門類，蘊含深厚的學術內涵，彷彿沒有扎實的中國歷史與文學功底就難以駕馭。正因如此，就更有必要去參觀是次展覽「字得其樂」（Word Play）了。這個當代書法展，呈現了 19 位不同背景的藝術家自上一世紀八十年代至今的作品。展覽經過精心

策劃，分為四個主題展廳，方便觀眾領略這一宏大藝術門類中各式各樣的風格和創作手法。展覽絕非刻板展示那些已然褪色的書法作品與皺巴巴的捲軸；而是證明中國書法在當代藝術世界中的緊密關聯性與獨特親和力，亦是對創作個性的讚頌。

「當代書法」是首個也是此次規模最大的展廳，這裡陳列徐沛之、馮明秋、谷文達、韓志勳、李華生、任天進、王冬齡的作品。參觀者一步入展廳，首先看到的便是谷文達那對氣勢恢宏的《書法對聯》（1986年）。他以重新闡釋符號和表意文字見稱，創作手法背離傳統，這幅作品便是典型範例。捲軸上的字符看似中文，卻毫無意義。其作品促使觀者重思：若這些無意義的筆觸依然符合書法的美學準則，那麼書法對他們有什麼意義？

在這幅對聯之側，陳列著書法大師王冬齡的三幅作品。其作品豪邁奔放，予人直觀的視覺衝擊。長久以來，王冬齡不斷挑戰著書法的傳統規範，他所創作的作品幾近呈現出「具體派」的表現特質。他將文字的意義置於從屬地位，轉而凸顯其短暫的表演性功能，借此挑戰語義。在作品《老子 — 道德經》（2024年）中，那些筆觸既展現出自然隨性之態與澎湃激昂之情，又流露出一種因沈浸於狂喜之中而產生的狂熱情緒。

展廳中央矗立著任天進的鋼鐵太湖石雕塑《太湖石：東園》（2024年）。這件作品以其在舊金山亞洲藝術博物館中的一座大型雕塑為參照，在凹凸不平的表面上，「東園」二字清晰可辨，引得參觀者駐足凝視，也促使人們重新審視雕塑作為書法載體的可能性。在是次展覽中最年輕的藝術家徐沛之的作品《行書·李香蘭》（2024年），融入了張學友的一首經典歌曲歌詞，以此擁抱當代本土文化，將其提升至詩歌的高度。

在「畫中有詩」部份，藝術家儲楚、徐子雄、許雪碧、洪強和王無邪完美詮釋了中國文人「畫中有詩」的理想境界。他們不再局限於單純使用文本，而是在創作中融入諸如色彩、幾何乃至人工智能等藝術元素，從而擁抱現代性。

例如，洪強在《見字如來(II)》（2023年）中以數碼形式呈現他的書法藝術，這是一件轉瞬即逝的作品，只需按下播放按鈕就可以反覆欣賞。此外，他將屏幕上不規則出現和消失的字符上下顛倒，並鼓勵觀者看向旁邊的鏡子以正確閱讀文字內容。如此一來，不僅革新了書法的呈現媒介，還改變了觀看過程。

王無邪在香港藝倡畫廊舉辦的個展在今年較早前落幕，其作品《書興三十》（1999年）足以見證其遠見卓識與創新精神。一如其風格，這件藝術作品展示了一段來自《道德經》中的經典內容，其標誌性的山水網格之上，疊加著他那極具辨識度的書法字體。墨色柔和地擴散開來，賦予作品詩意與浪漫氣息，文字與風景之間形成了一種近乎平面設計般的精妙並置。

在「『字』畫像」展廳中呈現有古乾、靳埭強、魏立剛、徐冰等人的作品。他們以文字的筆觸勾勒出風景畫卷，巧妙地模糊了繪畫與書法之間的界限。在靳埭強的《仁者靜坐》（2022年）中，一位學者孤身坐在雲霧繚繞的山頂上眺望天際。若仔細觀察，便會發現，構成這座山的寫意筆觸竟形成了漢字「山」和「樂」。

徐冰的《文字山水》（2001年）是一件大膽且富有趣味的作品，其標題語帶雙關。藝術家通過使用漢字「石」和「樹」來描繪這些事物，以隱喻手法深入審視地形特徵。作品引領觀者去「閱讀」各類地理符號，亦是對空間意識的一種探索。

最後的「抽象概念」部份，展出了郝世明、法比恩·維迪爾、魏樂唐的作品。這些作品與各類戰後抽象主義運動強烈共鳴，可謂是東方書法與西方美學的完美融合。在這裡，文字退居其次，讓位於被充滿詩意的簡潔之美所放大的節奏與姿態；同時，藝術家的個人表達也充分凸顯。

法國藝術家維迪爾曾在中國研習水墨畫長達十年，是此次展覽中唯一的外籍藝術家，也是僅有的三位女性藝術家之一。《Archipel 1-9/15》（2005年）體現了她在抽象藝術方面的嘗試。她用簡潔有力的筆觸精妙凝練出能量與活力，體現出她作為一名熱忱的冥想實踐者的信念。

「字得其樂」是一場雄心勃勃的展覽——意在當代語境下對中國書法進行重新定義與重新歸類。



Installation view of *Word Play* (Contemporary Calligraphy) at Alisan Fine Arts, Hong Kong. Courtesy Alisan Fine Arts.