

書苑

流芳園典藏書法作品展

袁志祥題

# A GARDEN OF WORDS

THE CALLIGRAPHY OF LIU FANG YUAN

PART 1

# INTRODUCTION

Words are everywhere in Liu Fang Yuan. Names adorn rocks and buildings; poetic couplets frame entryways and vistas. Since 2007 The Huntington has commissioned more than thirty contemporary artists to create the original works of calligraphy—artful brush writings in ink on paper—that served as the models for these inscriptions. The artists include professional calligraphers and avid amateurs, scholars and physicians, a Chinese painter living in New York and a New York photographer residing in China.

These artists' works demonstrate the tensions that lie at the heart of calligraphy. Although calligraphy is crafted with the simplest materials (brush, ink, and paper), its visual forms are myriad. Though written according to rigid rules, it enables sophisticated forms of self-expression. Though rooted in three thousand years of tradition, it remains fertile ground for experimentation in the present.

This exhibition provides four foundational perspectives for contemplating calligraphy: its content, its materials, its forms, and its futures. A short description accompanies each work; biographies of the artists are available in the gallery guides and on the exhibition webpage; two videos provide further insight into their practices and approaches. As you view these inscriptions, we hope that your eyes—and mind—will be opened to new ways of appreciating the garden of words that flourishes outside.

# AESTHETICS

Calligraphy is perhaps most easily appreciated as a dance-like art of line. Imagine the brush as a dancer that rises and falls, twists and turns in space, leaving lines of ink on the paper as indexes of its motion. Individual brushstrokes are like dance steps: viewers might note their sense of lightness or heaviness, smoothness or roughness, fluidity or hesitation; and they might appreciate the ways in which the calligrapher subtly varies the form of strokes that are repeated in the same character. Viewers might assess the balance of each character's structure like the posture of a dancer—balance either stable or dynamic; structure either symmetrical or asymmetrical, loose or compressed. Ultimately, viewers might trace the implied line woven among the characters in an inscription, paying special attention to its rhythm—which may be regular, syncopated, or completely free.

Historically, however, calligraphy was often read in physiognomic terms. Readers looked for the “bones,” “flesh,” and “sinews” of a calligrapher's characters, drawing inferences about the writer's personality or mental state. Indeed, a common idiom claims that “characters are like the person [who brushed them].” This belief in the identity of characters and character led many commentators to conceive of calligraphy's simple lines as a medium of imaginative communion that linked calligrapher and viewer, past and present.



**WAN-GO H. C. WENG**

(born 1918, Shanghai; active United States)

***Garden of Flowing Fragrance*, 2007**

Handscroll, ink on paper; calligraphy written in clerical script  
B2007.34

The heavy forms of Wan-go Weng's characters paradoxically seem ready to take flight. On the one hand, Weng emphasizes the solidness of each character: their every stroke begins with an oversized head; their horizontal and vertical lines are minimally modulated; and the joints between strokes, as in the upper and lower right corners of the character at left (*yuan* 園, "garden"), are almost exaggerated in their sturdiness. On the other hand, the dramatic flourishes with which the strokes end—thrusting upward to left or right to reveal the individual hairs of the brush tip, a visual effect known as "flying white"—fill the inscription with an alluring lightness. Weng thus creates a dynamic balance between weight and levity.

As a child, **WAN-GO H. C. WENG** was immersed in classical Chinese culture. His great-great-grandfather Weng Tonghe (1830–1904)—an imperial tutor—had amassed a significant collection of Chinese painting, calligraphy, and books that the younger Weng studied closely. Since leaving China in 1938, he has made his home in the United States, working as a scholar, poet, artist, and author. He was a pioneer in the production of documentary films about Chinese culture, and he served as one of the original members of the advisory committee for Liu Fang Yuan, the Garden of Flowing Fragrance.

## CONTENT

Chinese calligraphy is, simply, the art of writing *hanzi*, or Chinese characters.

Every character is composed of a series of strokes written in a standard order. The left side of a character is generally written before the right, the upper part before the lower. Collectively, these strokes communicate meaning—and, often, pronunciation. A small number of characters pictographically mimic what they signify; for example, *shan* 山, which means “mountain,” presents the abstracted form of soaring peaks. Other characters function as ideographs, conveying ideas without directly depicting them. Most commonly, characters link semantics and phonetics: one component suggests its general sense; another indicates its pronunciation.

In the works displayed in this exhibition, characters are joined to record the names of garden landmarks or to transcribe poetic couplets. These inscriptions are read according to historical convention: horizontal placards are traced from right to left; vertical writings, from top to bottom; couplets, from the right column to the left. However, content is only one dimension of calligraphic art. Inscriptions can also be enjoyed purely as graphic, even abstract, artworks.



### ZHU CHENGJUN

(born 1946, Zhenjiang, Jiangsu Province, China; active China and United States)

#### *Forest Fragrance Court, 2018*

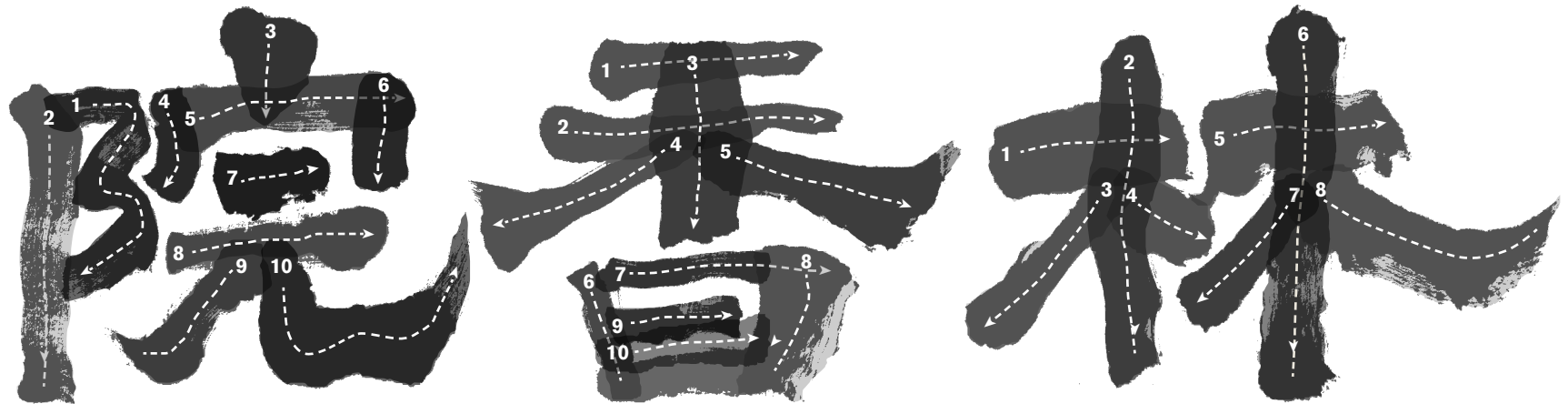
Handscroll, ink on paper; calligraphy written in clerical script  
B2018.2.3

Although Zhu Chengjun's heavily inked characters are arresting in their boldness, the artist's subtle variation of the contours of his lines and the saturation of his ink fills them with unexpected dynamism. Note that no stroke is perfectly straight, nor is any line perfectly parallel to its neighbors; instead, each mark quakes and quivers, spurring the viewer to imagine the tremulous motion of the artist's brush. Further, in certain passages, Zhu has intentionally allowed the outer hairs of his brush to run almost dry, scratchily transferring ink to paper—an effect most clearly visible in the middle of the downward vertical stroke on the left side of the left character (*yuan* 院, “court”). Collectively, such transformations of otherwise solid lines imbue the inscription with playful energy.

Since the age of sixteen, **ZHU CHENGJUN** has devoted himself to the study of calligraphy and Chinese painting, first learning from masters in his home province of Jiangsu. Before immigrating to the United States in the 1990s, he taught calligraphy and painting in local art academies and served as a member of many municipal, provincial, and national arts organizations. Today, he lives and works in both Beijing and Southern California. His works have been widely exhibited in China and the United States, and he has served as a lecturer at colleges and art academies throughout both countries, as well as in Finland, Spain, and Thailand.

# STROKE ORDER

Every Chinese character is composed of a series of strokes written in a standard order. The left side of a character is generally written before the right, the upper part before the lower. Calligraphers only rarely vary the sequence or directionality of brushstrokes to create a particular visual effect. This diagram reveals the stroke order for each character in the inscription; it also shows the heads and tails of strokes that have been hidden by overlapping lines.



# THE CONTENT OF CHARACTERS

Chinese characters convey meaning and sound in a variety of ways. This inscription exemplifies several of the most common means by which characters communicate.



## LIN

**“Forest”**

Pictograph

*Lin* depicts a “grove” or “forest” of two trees (木+木).



## XIANG

**“Fragrance”**

Ideograph

The modern character *xiang* consists of an upper component depicting “grain” 禾 and a lower component that indicates neither meaning nor sound. An earlier variant joins “grain” 黍 with “sweetness” 甘, connoting its deliciousness and fragrance.



## YUAN

**“Court”**

Phonetic Ideograph

*Yuan* combines a semantic component depicting “mounds” 阝 and the sound component “wan” 完—hence its meaning, “a space surrounded by walls and pronounced like *wan*.”



## MATERIALS

Writing calligraphy requires only three basic materials: an animal-hair brush, some soot-based ink, and a sheet of paper or silk. In combination, these materials can create an almost infinite variety of visual effects. Experimenting with the softness of the brush, the diluteness of the ink, and the smoothness of the paper allows a calligrapher to imbue the same character with an entirely different spirit. Particular brushes, inks, and papers are also sometimes conventionally associated with the writing of individual script types and with specific contexts of display.

Before a work is considered complete, the artist signs their name in ink and impresses one or more seals that have been dipped in an oily red paste. The work is then mounted on thick backing paper and surrounded with a silk border. The mounting provides an aesthetic frame for the calligraphy and protects it as it is rolled and unrolled for storage and display.

## BRUSH

A calligraphy brush is composed of an animal-hair tip embedded in a shaft of bamboo or lacquered wood (or even jade or ivory). The tip typically consists of four layers: an inner core of long, stiff hairs that give structure; a mantle of shorter hairs; a small open space that serves as a reservoir for ink; and an outer layer of longer, flexible hairs that sensitively transcribe the motion of the artist's hand. By adjusting the pressure with which the brush contacts the paper, the calligrapher can create both wiry lines and dramatic dots. Shafts of various lengths and tips of varied hairs are employed to write different scripts.

## INK

Although some contemporary calligraphers use synthetic bottled ink, many still employ ink sticks. These small tablets are composed of soot produced from pine wood or various tree oils that is bound with a glue (often derived from boiled animal hides) and formed in a mold. The ink stick is ground against a soft inkstone with a small quantity of water and/or bottled ink to create a dense black liquid that flows smoothly but does not run.

## PAPER

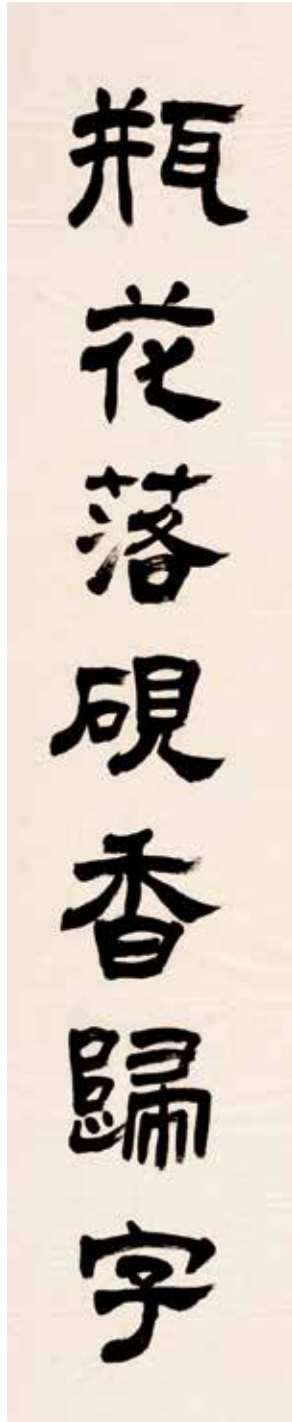
Chinese calligraphers use paper composed of fibers derived from various plants, including both trees and grasses. Xuan paper, made primarily from the bark of the blue sandalwood tree (*Pteroceltis tatarinowii*), is particularly prized. Its consistent surface absorbs ink evenly, while its soft, flexible fibers allow it to hold ink even after repeated washing—for example, during mounting and conservation. Papers are often treated with solutions of alum sizing (potassium aluminum sulfate) to create a smoother, less absorbent surface better suited to precise, detailed brushwork.

## SEAL

The red marks that adorn the works of calligraphy in this exhibition are known as seals. Each mark is produced by a stone—or sometimes a piece of metal, wood, or ceramic—engraved with the artist's name, sobriquet, or a phrase of particular personal meaning. The engraved seal is dipped in a red paste consisting of cinnabar, castor oil, and Chinese mugwort (*Artemisia argyi*); it is then impressed on the paper with great pressure. Historical works of painting and calligraphy often bear the seals of collectors or viewers who have admired the object.



VERSO



RECTO

## CHOU CHENG

(born 1941, Yilan County, Taiwan; active Taiwan)

*A flower from the vase falls onto the inkstone, its fragrance returning to the characters* (after a couplet by Zeng Guoquan, 1824–1890), 2018

One of a pair of hanging scrolls, ink on paper; calligraphy written in clerical script B2018.4.3a

Viewed from the front, Chou Cheng's inscription simply appears to have been executed in saturated ink applied by a brush that moved smoothly over the surface of the evenly textured paper. The verso of the scroll tells a more nuanced story. The interplay between heavily inked dots and mottled lines reveals when, and with how much pressure, Chou applied his brush to the paper or moved it across the surface. Note, for example, the rightward diagonal (leftward when viewing the front) in the fifth character (*xiang* 香, "fragrance"). The stroke begins with a small, distinctly articulated head. Chou then pushed his brush diagonally, moving quickly at first but pausing slightly as he gradually inked the flaring tail of the stroke. Ultimately, he concluded with a heavily saturated dot that he lightly pulled upward.

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Best known for his work as a painter and art educator in Taiwan, **CHOU CHENG** is also a well-regarded poet, calligrapher, and seal carver. He has shown his paintings and calligraphy throughout Asia, the United States, England, and Canada. In 2003 he became the first contemporary Taiwanese artist to exhibit his works at the Palace Museum in Beijing. Today, he serves as an advisor to multiple arts organizations in Taiwan, and he is artist-in-residence at Tamkang University in Taipei.



**LO CH'ING [LO CH'ING-CHE]**

(born 1948, Qingdao, Shandong Province, China; active Taiwan)

*Listening to the Pines, 2007*

Hanging scroll, ink on paper; calligraphy written in seal script  
B2007.15

Textually invoking the sound of wind blowing through pine needles, Lo Ch'ing's characters visually evoke the trees' moss-covered limbs. The artist has chosen to write on thin paper composed of long, loosely aggregated fibers that quickly absorb and disperse ink. Further, he has diluted the liquid to encourage it to spread even more chaotically. Consequently, the simple brushstrokes of his characters are obscured, creating the impression of trunks and branches covered in organic accretions. Ultimately, the characters partially lose their status as linguistic signs, appearing instead as images produced through the almost miraculous interaction of ink, water, and paper.

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A poet, painter, and calligrapher, **LO CH'ING** long served as chair of the English Department at Mingdao University in Taiwan and director of the school's Tiemei Art Center. He previously held a distinguished professorship at National Taiwan Normal University. He is widely published, and his award-winning works of poetry have been translated into eleven languages. Lo's paintings and calligraphy have been collected by such museums as the Ashmolean Museum (Oxford), the British Museum, the National Art Museum of China (Beijing), the St. Louis Art Museum, and the Taipei Fine Arts Museum.



## **XUE LONGCHUN**

(born 1971, Gaoyou, Jiangsu Province, China; active China)

### ***Jeweled Blossoms Slope*, 2018**

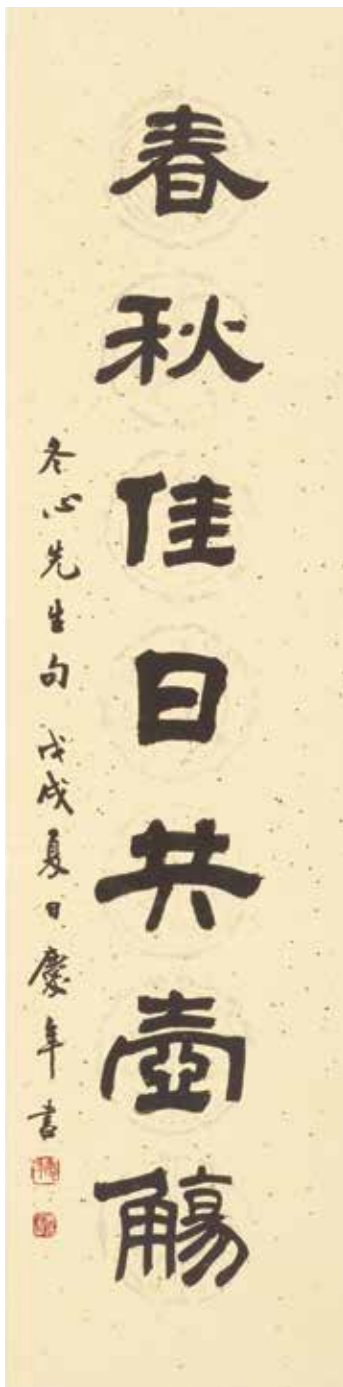
Hanging scroll, ink on paper; calligraphy written in running script  
B2018.12.2

Xue Longchun has rendered his inscription on evenly textured paper that precisely registers the motion and progressive drying of his brush. For example, in the final character (*po* 坡, “slope”), Xue quickly pulled his brush downward when writing the left-hand vertical; this caused the outer hairs of the brush tip to dry, creating a dynamic “flying white” effect. However, ink from the tip’s reservoir rapidly replenished its exterior, allowing Xue to create the wet, lightly haloed heads of the center and right-hand vertical strokes. As Xue then directed his brush downward while lifting it gently from the paper, the brush tip again became dryer, creating the smooth contours visible at the bottom of these strokes.

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**XUE LONGCHUN** earned his doctorate in the history of calligraphy from Nanjing University of the Arts and currently serves as a professor in the School of Art and Archaeology of Zhejiang University in Hangzhou. His research has been published in both Chinese and English, including in the catalogue for *Out of Character: Decoding Chinese Calligraphy* (San Francisco: Asian Art Museum, 2012), the most important exhibition of calligraphy in the United States in recent decades. Xue is also an accomplished practitioner of calligraphy in his own right and has shown his work in a number of major exhibitions in China.





## TANG QINGNIAN

(born 1956, Beijing; active United States)

*Relaxed talk and languid laughter are fit for bamboo and rocks; fine days in spring and autumn pair with cups and goblets* (after a couplet by Jin Nong, 1687–1763), 2018

Pair of hanging scrolls, ink on paper; calligraphy written in clerical script  
B2018.6.6a–b

Tang Qingnian's inscription is a study in archaism. It is written on paper that bears designs of antique roof tiles, each functioning as a frame that highlights a character. These remnants of ancient architecture further serve to emphasize the venerable flavor of Tang's calligraphy, which combines elements of both clerical and seal scripts. The flaring tails of his diagonals (as in the first and second characters of the left column) testify to his study of clerical script, while the unusual structure of characters such as the first and sixth at right come directly from seal script. Through his combination of archaizing paper and unconventional character forms, Tang playfully appropriates the past to create an inscription that is decidedly of the present.

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A graduate of the Central Academy of Art and Design in Beijing, **TANG QINGNIAN** first entered the art world as a critic and editor for the influential magazine *Meishu* (Art Monthly) during the mid-1980s. Notably, he served as a member of the organizing committee for the seminal *China Avant-garde* exhibition held in Beijing in February 1989; the show became an international news sensation after it was twice shut down by government forces. Since relocating to the United States in 1991, Tang has worked in a variety of media, including graphic design, painting, sculpture, and video. He was the 2019–20 Cheng Family Foundation Visiting Artist in Liu Fang Yuan.

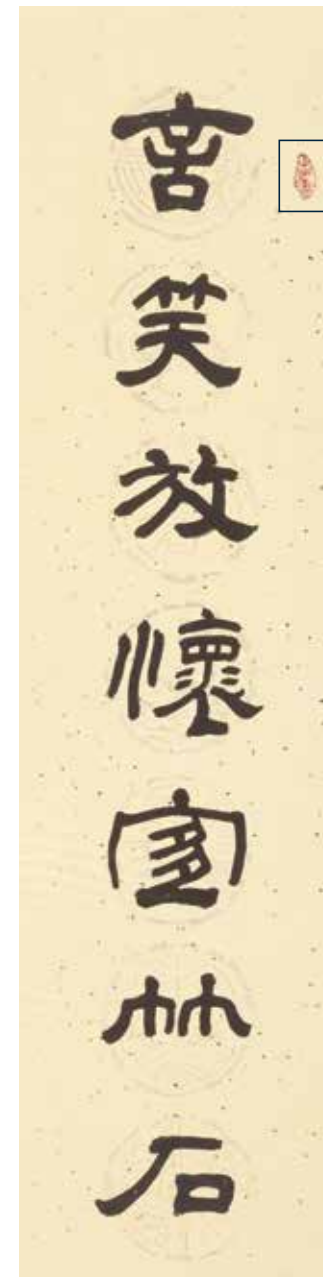
# THE ELEMENTS OF AN INSCRIPTION

Whereas brush, ink, and paper are the physical tools with which a work of calligraphy is produced, various kinds of writing constitute its textual materials. This couplet includes the fullest complement of such materials—a main inscription, the artist’s signature, the date the work was executed, multiple artist’s seals, and a notation concerning the source of the main inscription.



## MAIN TEXT 2

“Fine days in spring and autumn pair with cups and goblets”



## MAIN TEXT 1

“Relaxed talk and languid laughter are fit for bamboo and rocks”

## FORMS

Five basic types of calligraphic scripts are generally recognized today: seal, clerical, regular, running, and cursive. Each has its own standardized visual features and particular contexts of use.

Both in the past and in the present, calligraphers typically begin with the study of regular script. After mastering its highly precise brush movements, they may turn to the dynamic abbreviation of running or cursive scripts, or they may study the archaic forms of seal and clerical scripts. They gain important experience by methodically copying the works of earlier artists. Fusing their study of various script types and of individual calligraphers' works, they develop their own unique style.

Scholarly gardens such as Liu Fang Yuan typically are filled with inscriptions in running script, an informal, personal form of writing. Seal and clerical scripts are often used to showcase an artist's (or garden owner's) extraordinary personality or erudition. Highly formal regular script and abstract cursive script are found less frequently in gardens.



## SEAL SCRIPT

Named for its common use on seals, seal script derives from the earliest forms of Chinese writing—brush-written characters engraved with a stylus in bone, clay, bronze, or stone. When writing seal script, calligraphers generally strive to maintain even lines, smooth curves, and a balanced, often symmetrical structure. To achieve these effects, they write with an upright brush manipulated more slowly than for other scripts. The strokes themselves are constructed differently. For example, a seemingly continuous horizontal line may actually be written in two motions: from left edge to center, and then from right edge to center. Because of its antiquity, seal script can confer a sense of gravitas; its dramatic visual difference from other scripts, however, has often provided calligraphers with the impetus to experiment.



### VINCENT TONG [TONG KAMTANG]

(born 1960, Hong Kong; active Hong Kong)

#### *Terrace for Idle Chanting*, 2013

Handscroll, ink on paper; calligraphy written in seal script  
B2013.1.2

Vincent Tong's characters are ridden with tension. On the one hand, their balanced, symmetrical forms create an impression of distinct stability; on the other hand, their stalactite-like verticals seem ready to impale the viewer. To create this captivating effect, Tong writes with a brush held perfectly upright, varying the exterior contours of his lines only by applying slightly more or less pressure to the paper. At the end of each vertical and diagonal, he gradually relieves the pressure to create fear-inducing tips. The form of Tong's characters speaks to the transformation of seal script over several millennia: they are inspired by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century adaptations of a style used on stone steles in the first centuries of the Common Era.

VINCENT TONG pursued both his undergraduate and graduate education at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, where he now serves as a professor. An award-winning teacher, he leads studio courses in painting, calligraphy, and seal carving, and he also advises graduate students. He has exhibited widely in Asia and abroad. His works are held in the collections of the Hong Kong Museum of Art and the Hong Kong Heritage Museum.



## YAO GUOJIN

(born 1958, Wanrong County, Shanxi Province, China; active China)

### *Medicinal Garden*, 2018

Hanging scroll, ink on paper; calligraphy written in seal script  
B2018.11.4

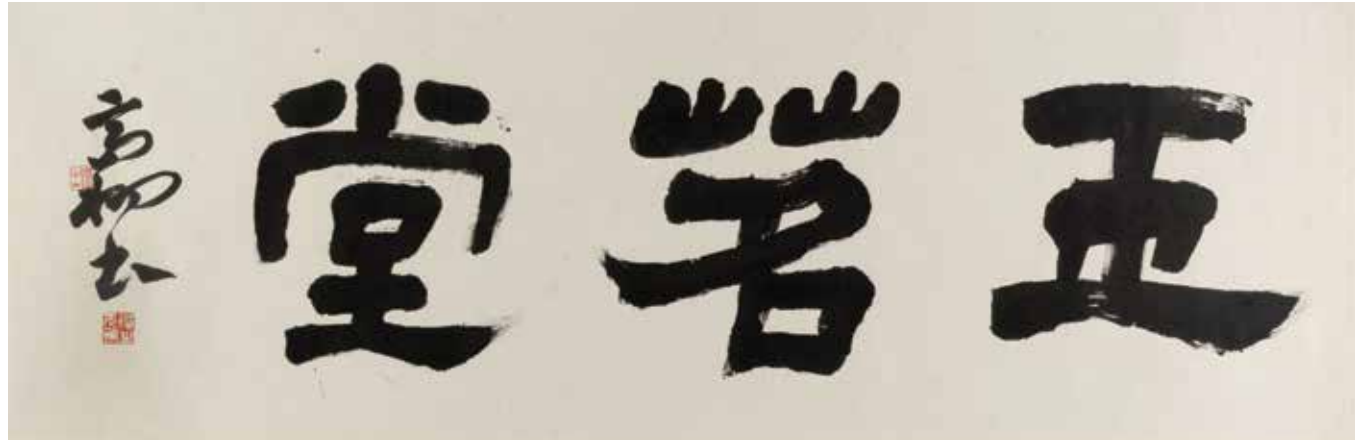
At first glance, the eccentric forms of Yao Guojin's characters appear like extraterrestrial pictographs. In fact, their attenuated forms and playful combinations of uniform circles and lines take inspiration from the most archaic forms of Chinese writing. These include inscriptions on cattle bones and tortoise shells used in divination practices more than 3,000 years ago, as well as writings cast in bronze vessels in subsequent centuries. Although such inscriptions were engraved with pointed implements, they are thought to have been traced first by brush. Yao's characters, however, insist on their existence as products of a brush: for example, the slightly exaggerated head of each stroke directs the viewer to imagine the pressure with which the hairs first contacted the paper.

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**YAO GUOJIN** currently serves as professor of calligraphy at Taiyuan Normal University in his home province of Shanxi. Since the 1990s, he has shown his works in exhibitions throughout China. In conjunction with his practice of calligraphy, Yao has become a historian of the art, publishing on a wide range of topics. He is perhaps best known for his research on Fu Shan (1607–1684), who revolutionized calligraphy in the seventeenth century—and who, like Yao, was a native of Shanxi.

## CLERICAL SCRIPT

Clerical script may have been developed by governmental scribes in the last few centuries before the Common Era. Charged with drafting vast numbers of documents, they required a form of writing that could be executed more quickly than seal script. Clerical script is distinguished by the comparatively broad, horizontal composition of the characters and by the wide, exuberant ends of certain strokes, particularly diagonals. To create these tense lines and flared finishes, calligraphers must dramatically vary the pressure that they apply to the brush tip. Much like seal script, the archaic visual drama of clerical script has long inspired calligraphic play.



### GAO XIANG

(born 1973, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, China; active United States)

#### *Hall of the Jade Camellia*, 2007

Handscroll, ink on paper; calligraphy written in clerical script  
B2007.5

Gao Xiang's inscription is a study in formal parallelism. The conventional structure of each character is subtly manipulated so that every element—even the leftward diagonals in the middle of the central character (*ming* 茗, “camellia”)—is rendered as horizontal or vertical. In each character, however, a single stroke is enlivened with a flaring end that introduces a sense of motion into the otherwise stable forms. Such structures and strokes harken back to early forms of clerical script employed on stone steles and in documents brushed on strips of wood or bamboo, materials that were commonly used for inscriptions before the advent of paper.

**GAO XIANG** holds doctoral degrees in medicine (MD) and nutrition (PhD) and currently serves as associate professor and director of the Nutritional Epidemiology Lab in the Department of Nutritional Sciences at The Pennsylvania State University. A serious student of seal carving and calligraphy, Gao has been selected for several exhibitions at the National Museum of China since 1994. In addition to his professional publications on medicine and nutrition, Gao has written in depth about calligraphy and seal carving of the past and present.



## LUI TAI

(born 1926, Wuzhou, Guangxi Province, China; active Hong Kong and United States)

*Poetry is like the spring wind, embracing all things; prose is like the autumn water, unsullied by dust, 1982*

Pair of hanging scrolls, ink on paper; calligraphy written in clerical script

Gift of the artist

B2015.1.2a–b

Lui Tai's couplet possesses an alluring visual tension. Her characters' wide, horizontal forms; balanced, symmetrical structure; emphatically parallel horizontal strokes; and dramatically flared diagonals are all hallmarks of classical clerical script, which reached its mature form by the second century CE. However, Lui also imbues her clerical script with an elegant wiriness. She dramatically modulates the exterior contours of many strokes; for example, her diagonals begin with hair-thin lines but expand into trumpetlike flourishes. Further, she boldly varies the wetness and dryness of her ink: many strokes almost appear imposing in their rich saturation, while others are so dry that they seem to have been clawed into the paper.

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During her youth in Guangzhou and Hong Kong, **LUI TAI** studied painting, calligraphy, and seal carving with artists associated with the Lingnan School, which sought to reconcile Chinese and Western modes of painting. While working as an art critic and scriptwriter in Hong Kong, Lui began exhibiting her artworks throughout East Asia. By the 1970s and 1980s, she had also established herself as an important teacher of calligraphy, inspiring generations of students in Hong Kong. After immigrating to California in the late 1980s, Lui continued to teach and exhibit her work widely. A major retrospective exhibition of her paintings and calligraphy was held at the Silicon Valley Asian Art Center in 2018.



## REGULAR SCRIPT

Likely the last script type to have reached its mature form, regular (or “standard”) script provides the foundation for the typefaces employed in most publications and digital applications today. Its characters are generally square in composition, the left side anchoring the right. Its lines are moderately, but not dramatically, modulated. Each stroke begins and ends with distinct brush movements that create implied connections to the preceding and following strokes. The resultant characters are highly legible and comfortably balanced but imbued with an internal energy. When written by hand, regular script is usually reserved for formal contexts, such as transcribing scriptures or inscribing the name of an important building; consequently, it is rarely used in the informal space of a garden.



### WANG SHIXIANG

(1914–2009, born Beijing; active China)

#### *Love for the Lotus Pavilion*, 2007

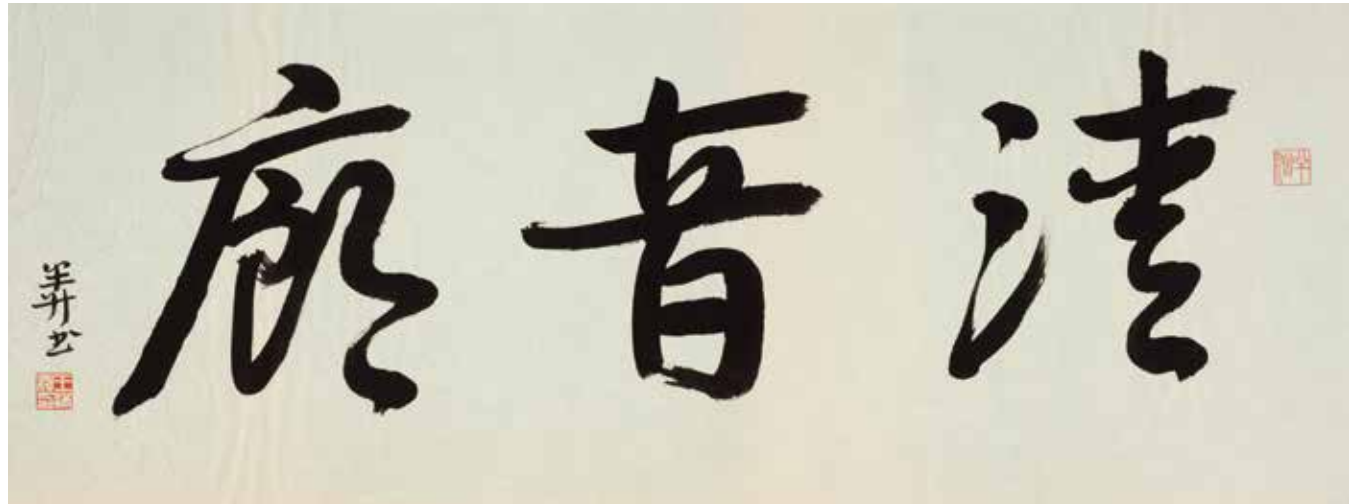
Handscroll, ink on paper; calligraphy written in regular script B2007.10

This bold inscription, with its resolute verticals and slight variations in character size and structure, was brushed by Wang Shixiang at the age of ninety-three, only two years before his death. To a greater degree than other script types, each stroke in regular script begins and ends with clearly articulated motions. For example, note that the right-hand vertical of the leftmost character (*xie* 榭, “pavilion”) emerges from a triangular head formed through distinct motions of the brush. Holding his brush upright, the calligrapher then traced the unwavering vertical, ending in a slight leftward hook. The left-facing point was added by pushing the brush in a final display of calligraphic force.

A renowned expert on Chinese furniture and scholars' objects, **WANG SHIXIANG** held key curatorial positions at the Palace Museum in Beijing and was a member of China's Central Research Institute of Culture and History. His groundbreaking publication *Classic Chinese Furniture: Ming and Early Qing Dynasties* (London: Han-shan Tang, 1986) was based on over forty years of research. He also developed a significant body of scholarship on the craft traditions of China, including lacquerware and bamboo carving.

## RUNNING SCRIPT

Running (or “semi-cursive”) script refers to a variety of calligraphic forms, ranging from characters that are almost illegibly abstract to others that differ little from regular script. Strokes within a character may physically connect to one another, their beginnings and ends less distinctly articulated than in regular script. Individual characters, however, remain physically separated from one another. It is often thought that artists can most clearly express something of their personality in running script. Such a script is, then, what a calligrapher might use when signing their name or when writing a letter. The script is frequently employed in informal contexts, such as inscriptions of the names of garden features.



## WANG MANSHENG

(born 1962, Taiyuan, Shanxi Province, China; active United States)

### *Corridor of Refreshing Sound*, 2018

Handscroll, ink on paper; calligraphy written in running script B2018.5.4

When viewing Wang Mansheng’s inscription, one begins to envision his brush as a dancer inspired by the eponymous “refreshing sound” of the text. Writing with smooth, saturated, flowing ink, Wang’s brush seems to jump effortlessly from stroke to stroke. In the right-hand character (*qing* 清, “refreshing”), for example, he begins with the upper dot at left, then springs through the air to create the dot in the middle; continuing downward, he lightly lifts his brush from the paper and quickly reapplies it to render the final dot. The balletic dynamism of the inscription is balanced by the comparatively unmodulated contours of the horizontal and vertical strokes, a feature that attests to Wang’s extensive study of early clerical script.

A native of Shanxi Province, **WANG MANSHENG** graduated in 1985 from the Chinese Department of Shanghai’s Fudan University, where he majored in classical literature. He subsequently worked for over a decade as an editor, director, and producer at China Central Television in Beijing. Since moving to the United States in 1996, he has devoted himself to reinterpreting classical Chinese painting and calligraphy. His work has been shown and collected worldwide, including in China, Japan, Hong Kong, Europe, and the United States. He resides with his family in the Hudson River Valley outside of New York City.



**TERRY YUAN [YUAN ZHIZHONG]**

(born 1954, Shanghai; active United States)

*Idly strolling in springtime beyond the painted halls—among plum blossoms and shady willows, limitless fragrance* (after a couplet in *The Peony Pavilion* by Tang Xianzu, 1550–1616), 2013

Pair of hanging scrolls, ink on paper; calligraphy in running script  
B2013.1.9a–b

The visual form of Terry Yuan’s couplet perfectly embodies its content: his characters seem to float lightly on the paper, as though they are “idly strolling in springtime.” Yuan achieves this effect by carefully choreographing multiple forms of visual variation. For example, in the next-to-last character of the right-hand scroll (*hua* 畫, “painted”), none of the nine horizontal strokes is written in exactly the same manner—or even at the same angle. Further, he introduces a subtle bend to the vertical axis of the character, creating the impression that it is twirling in midair. Ultimately, he weaves a wavy line among all of the characters in the scroll, reinforcing the overall impression of carefree leisure.

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As a child in Shanghai, **TERRY YUAN** studied painting and calligraphy under Liu Haisu (1896–1994), one of the most important painters and art educators in twentieth-century China. Yuan subsequently studied with the avant-garde calligrapher Aoyagi Shirō in Japan. Since 1992 he has taught Chinese calligraphy in the Los Angeles area and has exhibited his works throughout the United States and Asia. His calligraphy has been collected by institutions in both the United States and Asia and was featured in the film *Rush Hour 3*. He currently lives with his family in Arcadia, California.



## CURSIVE SCRIPT

Cursive (or “draft”) script emerged as a quickly written variant of seal and clerical scripts when these scripts were being formalized. Over time, standardized methods of simplifying the structure of all characters were developed; consequently, cursive script remains legible to those trained in it despite its seemingly chaotic abstraction. The flexible compositional conventions of cursive writing allow calligraphers to vary the size and form of characters, filling the paper with visual drama. Its formal exuberance—lightning-like lines, dramatic dashes and dots, endless verticals that drain the brush of its ink—stimulates the imagination of viewers. One premodern poet, for example, memorably likened cursive script to “whirling winds and driving rains, blowing fetter-free; falling flowers and flying snow, stretching endlessly!”

## KWAN S. WONG

(born 1934, Taishan, Guangdong Province, China; active United States and Hong Kong)

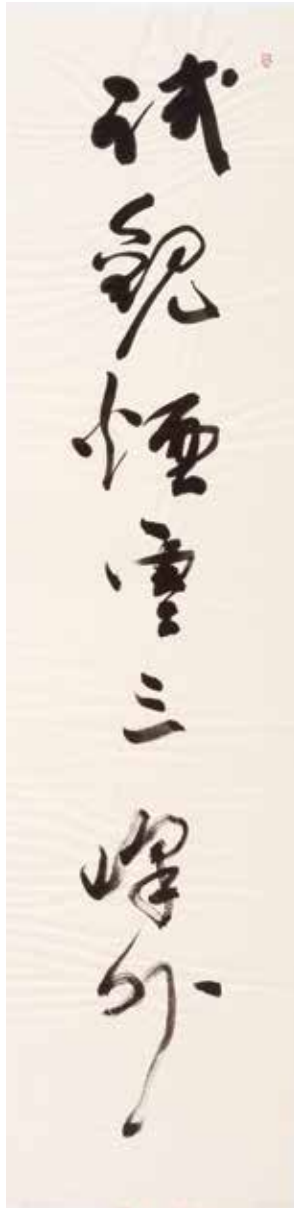
### *Lingering Clouds Peak*, 2013

Hanging scroll, ink on paper; calligraphy written in cursive script B2013.1.4

Bravura displays of calligraphic confidence, cursive-script inscriptions hold an appeal like that of virtuosic violin solos. Kwan S. Wong begins his inscription with a whirlwind of energy. The tornado-like lines of *liu* 留 (“lingering”) propel the viewer toward the central character (*yun* 雲, “clouds”). Consisting of twelve strokes in regular script, *yun* here becomes a seemingly single, seamless, sinuous line. “Peak” (*xiu* 岫) stably anchors the inscription below. Cursive script, however, is often not as quick or continuous as it appears: the horizontal stroke in *yun*, for example, begins with a head at left brushed separately from the diagonal line above, and it ends with a leftward hook that is articulated separately from the rest of the stroke.

An internationally respected connoisseur and practitioner of painting and calligraphy, **KWAN S. WONG** received his education in Chinese literature and art in Hong Kong, Japan, and the United States. He worked as a research fellow at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City before joining Christie’s New York, where he helped to establish the Chinese Paintings department. He has exhibited his paintings and calligraphy widely in Asia and the United States and has published compilations of his scholarly writings and artworks.





**MICHAEL CHERNEY [QIU MAI]**

(born 1969, New York; active China)

*Try to contemplate the clouds and mists beyond the three peaks—all are in the palm of a numinous immortal* (after a couplet at Wanjing Shanzhuang, Tiger Hill, Suzhou), 2018

Pair of hanging scrolls, ink on paper; calligraphy written in cursive script  
B2018.3.3a–b

By playing with the saturation of his ink and the abstraction of his characters, Michael Cherney has created an inscription that visually evokes the dreamlike content of its text. Each line of his couplet begins with a character written with a brush heavily laden with ink; the liquid has so saturated the paper that an aqueous halo appears around each character. Moving downward, Cherney's brush began to dry, and the hairs of its tip began to fray. Despite lightly reinking midline, his brush ultimately exhausted its ink, devolving into near abstraction. This movement from saturation to exsiccation, from legibility to graphic play, creates a visual drama evocative of the imaginative transformations suggested in the couplet.

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Born to a Jewish family in New York, **MICHAEL CHERNEY** is perhaps better known to the art world as Qiu Mai, the sobriquet that he has adopted for his artistic practice that bridges China and the United States. A photographer, calligrapher, and book artist, his work thoughtfully responds both to Chinese literati practices of painting and calligraphy and to contemporary American practices of photography (and even music). Today, he lives in Beijing, and his work has been exhibited throughout the world and collected by such institutions as the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Princeton University Art Museum.

## FUTURES

Calligraphers have long sought to invigorate their tradition by seeking past models outside of the conventional canon. After internalizing these archetypes, they are able to introduce unexpected new forms into their medium. The final works in this exhibition exemplify three approaches by which the artists who have contributed to Liu Fang Yuan seek to transform calligraphy for the future while respecting the past.

Some artists employ painterly techniques that violate the norms of calligraphic practice but recall the archaic origins of Chinese characters in pictographic writing. Others take inspiration from script types that have fallen out of favor in order to imbue their calligraphy with an eccentric, and unexpectedly contemporary, spirit. Several subtly transform the appearance of their characters, ensuring that visual form resonates with semantic meaning—a historical practice, albeit a rare one.

Together, the calligraphers of Liu Fang Yuan all draw from the past to write the gardens of the future.



**LO CH'ING [LO CH'ING-CHE]**

(born 1948, Qingdao, Shandong Province, China; active Taiwan)

***Corridor of Water and Clouds*, 2007**

Handscroll, ink on paper; calligraphy written in seal script  
B2007.22

Looking at Lo Ch'ing's aqueous inscription, one begins to see water flowing and clouds filling with rain. Trained in both the visual arts and poetry, Lo approaches calligraphy with a decidedly painterly eye, emphasizing the pictographic elements even of characters that are not, strictly speaking, pictographs. The middle character (*yun* 雲, "clouds") is a clear case in point. It consists of an upper "rain" component (雨) and a lower element (云) that conveys both sound—"pronounced like *yun*"—and meaning—"a twisting cloud." Lo transforms the character into an image of a cloud saturated with rain, which floats above the miniaturized components below. Through such techniques, Lo returns Chinese writing to its mytho-historical origins as a pictographic practice.

A poet, painter, and calligrapher, **LO CH'ING** long served as the chair of the English Department at Mingdao University in Taiwan and director of the school's Tiemei Art Center. He previously held a distinguished professorship at National Taiwan Normal University. He is widely published, and his award-winning works of poetry have been translated into eleven languages. Lo's paintings and calligraphy have been collected by such museums as the Ashmolean Museum (Oxford), the British Museum, the National Art Museum of China (Beijing), the St. Louis Art Museum, and the Taipei Fine Arts Museum.



## ZHU CHENGJUN

(born 1946, Zhenjiang, Jiangsu Province, China; active China and United States)

*Pick a flower and smile; face the wine and sing*, 2018

Hanging scroll, ink on paper; calligraphy written in clerical script  
B2018.2.5

Zhu Chengjun's inscription winks playfully at the viewer. Superficially, its two lines read as a lighthearted celebration of the simple pleasures of life; in fact, the writings that inspired the lines (one, a Buddhist text; the other, a banquet song) are concerned with far weightier questions concerning the nature of existence. Zhu, however, seizes upon the celebratory, writing with a brush (metaphorically) soaked in the wine lauded in the couplet. His every line quivers and quakes, saturating the paper with heavy blots and exploding in sprays of ink. Zhu transforms clerical script into a capricious visual medium that embodies the carefree pleasures seemingly feted in the text, encouraging viewers to leave existential angst for another day.

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Since the age of sixteen, **ZHU CHENGJUN** has devoted himself to the study of calligraphy and Chinese painting, first learning from masters in his home province of Jiangsu. Before immigrating to the United States in the 1990s, he taught calligraphy and painting in local art academies and served as a member of many municipal, provincial, and national arts organizations. Today, he lives and works in both Beijing and Southern California. His works have been widely exhibited in China and the United States, and he has served as a lecturer at colleges and art academies throughout both countries, as well as in Finland, Spain, and Thailand.



### **TANG QINGNIAN**

(born 1956, Beijing; active United States)

#### ***Verdant Microcosm*, 2018**

Handscroll, ink on paper; calligraphy written in bird-and-worm script

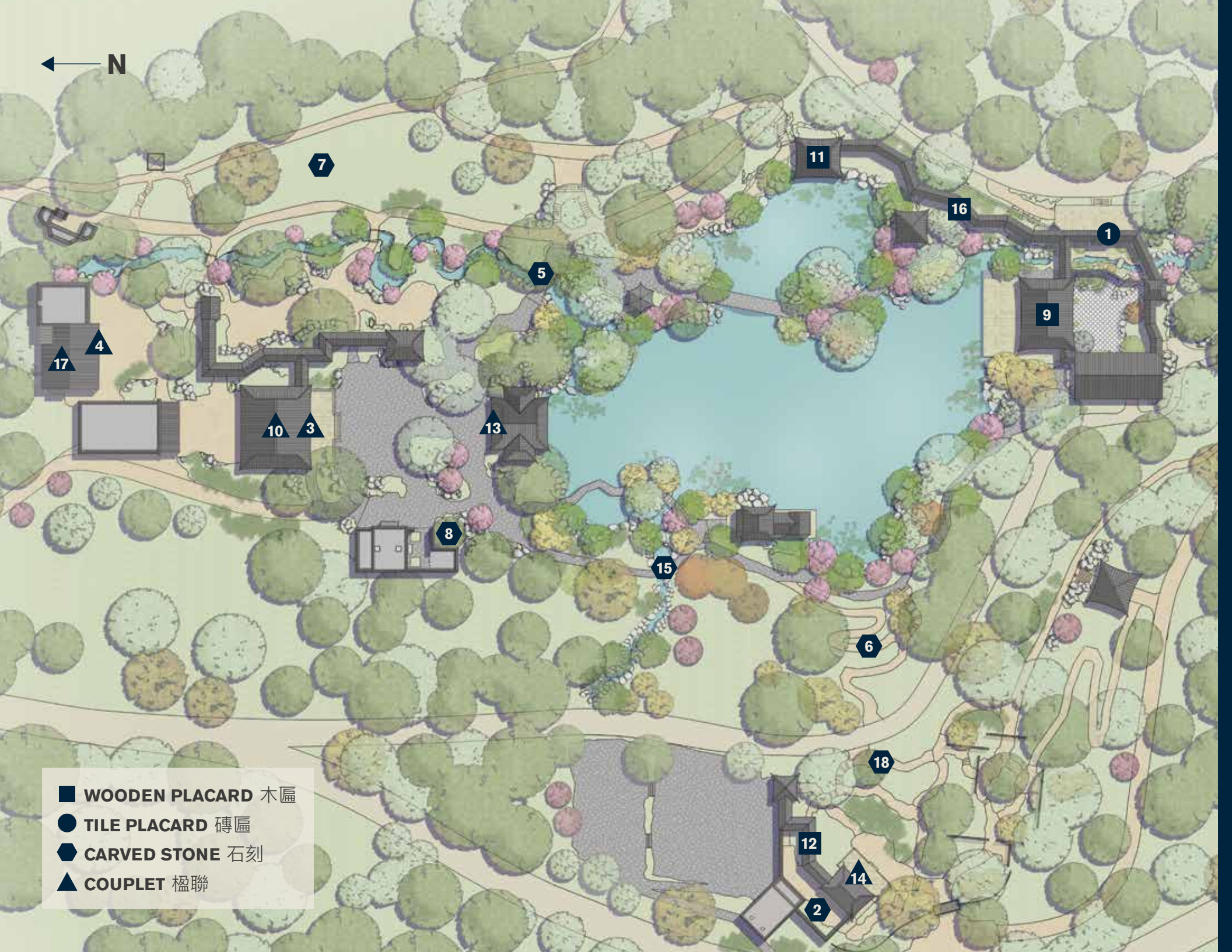
B2018.6.1

The sinuous forms of Tang Qingnian's characters writhe with life. Their smooth, even lines are produced with an upright brush whose tip is "hidden," remaining perfectly centered in every stroke. Tang draws inspiration for these baroque characters from "bird-and-worm script," a 2,500-year-old form of writing that was occasionally employed on later seals. (See, for example, the upper-right-hand seal on Kwan S. Wong's *Lingering Clouds Peak*.) The script was named for its resemblance to the forms and tracks of its eponymous creatures; some calligraphers even adorned their characters with schematic drawings of birds' heads and feathers. Tang, however, is not content with merely revitalizing a past model. Instead, in his characters' playful linearity, one senses his interest in contemporary graphic design.

A graduate of the Central Academy of Art and Design in Beijing, **TANG QINGNIAN** first entered the art world as a critic and editor for the influential magazine *Meishu* (Art Monthly) during the mid-1980s. Notably, he served as a member of the organizing committee for the seminal *China Avant-garde* exhibition held in Beijing in February 1989; the show became an international news sensation after it was twice shut down by government forces. Since relocating to the United States in 1991, Tang has worked in a variety of media, including graphic design, painting, sculpture, and video. He was the 2019–20 Cheng Family Foundation Visiting Artist in Liu Fang Yuan.



← N



- WOODEN PLACARD 木匾
- TILE PLACARD 磚匾
- ⬡ CARVED STONE 石刻
- ▲ COUPLET 楹聯

Please use this map to explore the wooden placards, carved tiles, and engraved stones created from the inscriptions in this exhibition. You may be surprised at how different the calligraphy appears when viewed in the garden.

請在流芳園內使用此地圖去探索以本展覽書法作品為底本製成的匾額、楹聯以及磚石刻題字。您可能會驚訝於園林之中展現的書法作品竟顯得如此不同。

# 編號	CALLIGRAPHER 作者	TITLE 標題
1	WAN-GO H. C. WENG 翁萬戈	Garden of Flowing Fragrance 流芳園
2	ZHU CHENGJUN 朱稱俊	Forest Fragrance Court 林香院
3	CHOU CHENG 周澄	A flower from the vase falls onto the inkstone, its fragrance returning to the characters 瓶花落硯香歸字
4	TANG QINGNIAN 唐慶年	Relaxed talk and languid laughter are fit for bamboo and rocks; fine days in spring and autumn pair with cups and goblets 言笑放懷宜竹石，春秋佳日共壺觴
5	LO CH'ING 羅青	Listening to the Pines 聽松
6	XUE LONGCHUN 薛龍春	Jeweled Blossoms Slope 寶花坡
7	YAO GUOJIN 姚國瑾	Medicinal Garden 採藥圃
8	VINCENT TONG 唐錦騰	Terrace for Idle Chanting 閑吟臺
9	GAO XIANG 高翔	Hall of the Jade Camellia 玉茗堂
10	LUI TAI 呂媿	Poetry is like the spring wind, embracing all things; prose is like the autumn water, unsullied by dust 春風大雅能容物，秋水文章不染塵
11	WANG SHIXIANG 王世襄	Love for the Lotus Pavilion 愛蓮榭
12	WANG MANSHENG 王滿晟	Corridor of Refreshing Sound 清音廊
13	TERRY YUAN 袁志鍾	Idly strolling in springtime beyond the painted halls—among plum blossoms and shady willows, limitless fragrance 春望逍遙出畫堂，間梅遮柳不勝芳
14	MICHAEL CHERNEY 秋麥	Try to contemplate the clouds and mists beyond the three peaks—all are in the palm of a numinous immortal 試觀烟雲三峰外，都在靈仙一掌間
15	KWAN S. WONG 黃君寔	Lingering Clouds Peak 留雲岫
16	LO CH'ING 羅青	Corridor of Water and Clouds 水雲廊
17	ZHU CHENGJUN 朱稱俊	Pick a flower and smile; face the wine and sing 拈花微笑，對酒當歌
18	TANG QINGNIAN 唐慶年	Verdant Microcosm 翠玲瓏