

WHISPERING CANOPIES

風樹不靜

By Frank Tang 鄧啓耀



WHISPERING CANOPIES 風樹不靜

FRANK TANG 鄧啓耀

Cover Image:

Tree Portrait #3 - Dragon Chinese Juniper 樹木肖像 #3- 龍柏
ink and colour on silk, 118 x 83.1cm, 2023

25TH NOVEMBER 2023 - 6TH JANUARY 2024

INTRODUCTION

Karin Weber Gallery is excited to announce 'Whispering Canopies', a solo exhibition by Hong Kong artist Frank Tang, which explores the historical development of a place through its urban landscapes, memorial gardens and local plants.

Tang's brand-new series 'Tree Portraits' reflects the artist's engagement with a commemorative theme based around landmark subjects, drawing from his personal interest in trees and monuments. Trees have long lifespans and those towering in urban areas bear witness to city development, social events and peoples' livelihoods through generations. Moreover, the unique form of each tree is shaped by its organic growth. From the perspective of appearance and temporality, ancient trees may hold more landmark significance than many types of architecture. What have these ancient trees witnessed? Are there any events they have forgotten?

Using trees as his central theme, Frank Tang uncovers forgotten histories via geographical locations and their background. Hong Kong was once a barren and desolate environment. The British colonial government undertook large-scale afforestation and introduced foreign tree species planted in British-style gardens, nurturing a sense of nostalgia for the expat population. The Hong Kong Zoological and Botanical Gardens is a key example of this practice, and is the inspiration for Tang's *Tree Portrait #4 - Lysidice*, which is based on the lysidice trees in the garden.

An artist residency in Taiwan in 2022 introduced Tang to Dutch and Japanese colonial histories. His new creations from the 'Memorial Garden' series including paintings such as *Green Island*, *In the Eyes of King George VI*, and *Sunset At Sun Yat Sen Memorial Park* reflect his exposure to a parallel culture with a comparable historical narrative.

Parks and trees carry different histories and have been integrated into urban landscapes, providing spaces for future generations to enjoy and play, accompanying their growth. Although their stories remain unchanged, they gain in significance over the years, becoming a part of personal and urban memories.

Karin Weber Gallery, November 2023

引言

凱倫偉伯畫廊很高興地宣布香港水墨畫家鄧啟耀的個人展覽「風樹不靜」，探索了一個地方通過其城市景觀、紀念花園和當地植物的歷史發展。

展覽「風樹不靜」延續鄧啟耀以往的創作方向，從城市景觀、紀念公園、和植物了解一個地方的歷史進程。是次展覽以新的系列「樹木肖像」作為導引，展示藝術家對「紀念」和「地標」的感受和思考。

「樹木肖像」系列創作源起自鄧氏對樹木以及紀念碑的興趣：樹木壽命綿長，聳立在城市中的樹木在世代更替中見證城市發展、社會事件及人民生活，又基於樹木作為生命體的有機成長造就每棵的獨特形態，從外觀與時間性來看有些老樹甚至比某些建築地標更具地標意義，更具紀念性。這些老樹見證過甚麼？又有哪件事被遺忘了？

鄧啟耀再次以樹木為題，從樹木身處的地理位置及歷史背景了解一個個似要被遺忘的歷史。英殖時期的香港曾經是荒蕪一片的爛頭山，港英政府除了大規模植林之外，還帶來外來的樹種在英式設計的公園裡栽種，為英國人一解鄉愁。香港動植物公園便是其中一例，所以他為園中的儀花創作了《樹木肖像 #4 — 儀花》。2022年，鄧氏到臺灣參與藝術駐留，得悉荷殖時期和日治時期的臺灣，殖民者因著異地懷鄉，將自己國家的樹種帶到臺灣，想像自己回到家一樣。十七世紀荷蘭人將金龜樹帶到臺灣，二十世紀日本人將龍柏帶到臺南栽種，從此這兩個樹種便在臺灣定居下來。

展覽同時展出鄧氏「紀念公園」系列的全新創作，包括《綠島》、《喬治六世眼下的風景》、《黃昏下的中山紀念公園》等。這些公園和樹木背負著不同的歷史，它們置入城市當中讓後人暢遊嬉戲，陪伴著各人的成長。雖則它們的歷史沒有改變，但隨著歲月多了一些意義，成為個人和城市記憶的一部分。

公園和樹木承載著不同的歷史，並已融入城市景觀中，伴隨著後代的成長，供他們享用和遊玩。雖然它們的故事始終不變，但隨著時間的進程，它們變得越來越重要，成為個人和城市記憶的一部分。

凱倫偉伯畫廊，2023年11月

GAZING AT TREES, REFLECTING ON URBAN AND MENTAL IMAGES

Trees do not walk, they do not speak, yet they are living witnesses of local history. There is a Chinese saying, "The trees wish to stay still but the wind keeps blowing." There is a sense of tug-of-war in this, but also a sense of consistency, epitomising how individuals are affected by the larger environment. Leaves may be blown into disarray, but trees stand, continue to thrive silently throughout vicissitudes. Frank Tang's creations have always been inspired by the trees and vegetation of the city. Imbuing his paintings with traditional *gongbi* (refined) techniques and a mindful philosophy, Tang works on themes such as man and society, history and memory, and their metaphors. His latest series 'Tree Portraits' in this solo exhibition is akin to sitting among trees and looking at each other, while our inner, mental images gradually manifest.

With Trees, Documenting Humanistic Landscape

In traditional portraiture, the recorded subjects were often powerful individuals, their portraits used as a means of circulation and exchange. Time changes, now everyone can record their appearance. Thus in contemporary art photography, apart from serving a recording purpose, the emotions and aura of the subject must also be captured. Through this state of gaze, contemporary photography reveals the uniqueness of its subjects. There is also a significant amount of creative work focusing on minorities, their marginalised faces made visible and empowered through photography. As for the reasons behind Frank Tang's 'Tree Portraits', the artist has shared with us a behind-the-scene story. Tang's family members were emigrating. Before their departure, everyone in the family decided to take a family photo at a studio. He laughed and said, "We usually take photos when we meet for meals, of course, but if not for someone emigrating, we wouldn't take the trouble of going to a studio. First we take photos of the core family, then a group photo of everyone together." This age we live in forces Tang to come face-to-face with this gaze in all earnestness (and similarly being gazed upon). The urge to capture the moment is a result of an impending separation which, in turn, inspires his creations.

"I have always had a deep fondness for trees. 'Tree Portraits' focuses solely on that one old tree, which has been there for a very long time,

witnessing many things, yet somehow lonesome," says Frank Tang. When in conversation with him, I can feel a sense of restrained emotion, something similar to his meticulous brushworks. Starting from a personal perspective, he embeds indescribable emotions and stories within his artworks. Over the years, when he paints trees, Tang always delves into the historical background of different species. The tree species featured in 'Tree Portraits' are all connected to the colonial history of Hong Kong and Taiwan, hinting at transformation of the locales, while sketching a kind of 'urban image.' At the same time, the visual treatment magnifies the gazing experience through the use of fictional backgrounds and soft tones. Reminiscent of studio photography, this treatment highlights the posture of the old tree. As viewers quietly appreciate the painting, it prompts introspection into the most intimate emotions, reflecting on the individual's 'mental image.' Gazing is a focused act, and focus leads to introspection. The artwork perhaps also reflects the desire of the viewer, or the artist's own yearning for a stable life. With its interplay of 'urban image' and 'mental image,' the artwork is both universal and individualistic, creating a sense of displacement that cannot be anchored in the present moment.

Tang's exploration of city through trees can be traced back to his residency in Switzerland in 2014. While chatting with an old cafe owner in Zurich, the owner talked about how his grandson was swinging under a tree in the garden, the very tree that he played underneath when he was young. The same tree that three generations of people engaged with was sadly ill, and the family were trying everything to save it. This revelation led Tang to realize that travel maps of cities are often only about landmarks, shopping malls, and restaurants, neglecting the trees and the beautiful stories they nurtured. These memories are valuable to him but have disappeared from history. Hence, Frank Tang created 'Tree Mapping', specifically drawing only the trees around him, while deliberately eliminating other buildings, using only the trees as memento to a city. Trees, like other species, have always been in a controlled and marginalized position in our human-centric societies. Tang continues to reflect the power relations in urban spaces through the lens of trees, metaphorically also highlighting the marginality of individuals within the system.

Oscillating between Macro and Micro Histories

“History is always changing; what imprints do we leave? Trees, they should be one of the softer objects, proving that something existed.” Starting from personal experiences, Tang’s works often reveal macro-conditions, actively exploring the relationship between history and the present. In the prelude to ‘Tree Portraits’, *A Night in Shing Mun Reservoir* (2023), Tang depicts a poignant scene of rain and falling leaves. The old tree, however, remains serene, its leaves giving off a mineral-green glow. One does not need to know Tang’s original intent, but understanding that his artworks are often related to local history allows for imagination. If you are familiar with Hong Kong’s military history, you will know that Shing Mun Reservoir was once a British garrison. During the defence of Hong Kong, soldiers were ambushed and left unsupported in the dead of the night during World War II. The place has since become a popular hiking spot. Using trees as a metaphor, Tang communicates the forgotten memories of a place.

In Tang’s artistic practice, ‘activating’ memory is an essential part. His explorations of parks and maps, has led to series such as ‘Pocket Park’, ‘Our Audible City’, and later, the ‘Memorial Garden’. Parks and maps contain specific viewpoints, showing the designers’ decisions around use of space, or what information is commemorated, presented, and transmitted, signifying the discursive power of history. However, artists continue to reshape these spaces and memories. To formulate these works, Tang has sketched at places like the Hong Kong Zoological and Botanical Gardens, Sun Yat Sen Memorial Park, and Green Island in Taiwan, then followed up with meticulous study of the historical context of these places. In *Victoria Park* (2020), multiple historical footnotes were compressed into a single composition. Tang extracts the ‘objects’ and ‘events’ from the park into the painting, reflecting the complex political and cultural entanglements in Hong Kong, presenting the grand narrative of ideologies. He aptly portrays the statue of Queen Victoria holding a football from a horizontal angle, while the six football fields in the background are seen in aerial view. These symbols metaphorically represent various traces of citizens using the park, imbuing the most daily or physically meaningful significance into the place, showcasing this public space with a rich civic history. If ideological and historical narratives are the ‘big’ stories, individual stories might seem ‘small,’ but the latter are profoundly real. Individuals should reclaim their autonomy on collective memories and turn them again into reference points in the present.

Tang’s works often present strong contrasts, such as history and the individual, normality and absurdity, sense and sensibility. Wandering through his paintings, these contradictory feelings prompt viewers to introspection, questioning their choices and thoughts, perhaps opening up new possibilities. Finally, a word on *The Wind Is Rising! We Must Try To Live! (The Wind Rises)* (2022), Frank Tang’s movie inspired work. A work inspired by the Studio Ghibli animated film, the canvas depicts a scene of war, nevertheless, the sky above remains clear. He says, “In turbulent times, people feel a lot of pain. However, sometimes the sky, seems indifferent to our pain, is still bright and clear, and the sun rises and sets, regardless of our desperation. But as the movie suggests, even if the wind rises, we should still try to live.” In the painting, amidst the swirling clouds and the world in chaos, the bamboo in the foreground stands resilient, true to itself.

Siu Tung

Arts writer, facilitator, curator

An advocate for arts appreciation and critique, Siu Tung’s articles have been published in both printed and online publications. Two of her articles were selected for the archive of “Hong Kong Oral History Reference Resources” of the Hong Kong Public Libraries. In 2023, she initiated the WeView project to bring public discussions about arts exhibitions, and founded Shychat Art, a dialogue platform on Instagram. She curated “It’s Stuffy Here” (2023), “Transcending the Days” (2022) in Hong Kong, as well as “Re-imagining Home” (VR tour, 2021) for the 18th Street Arts Center in Los Angeles.

與樹對望 觀照城象心象

樹不會走路，不懂說話，卻是見證地方歷史的生命體。所謂「樹欲靜而風不惜」，句子展現一份拉鋸，其實也可看成某種恆常，個體受大環境影響之態。然而，儘管葉子被吹得搖晃，但樹仍屹立，默默在變幻中生長。鄧啟耀的創作一直受城市中的植物風景啟發，從傳統工筆技法與觀世哲學入畫，比喻人與社會、歷史、記憶等主題。今次個展最新「樹木肖像」系列，彷彿與樹席地相望，漸漸顯化出人的心象。

以樹身影 記人文風景

傳統肖像畫中，主體容貌被記錄下來，多是有權勢之人用以流傳和交流。一直發展至今，現在每個人都可以容易攝下樣貌。除記錄用途，當代藝術攝影更講求肖像照捕捉人的情感和氣場，透過凝視的狀態，讓人流露其獨特。鏡頭聚焦小眾社群的創作亦不少，通過攝影讓人看見被邊緣化的臉孔，並展示其力量。至於甚麼驅使鄧啟耀畫「樹木肖像」？藝術家分享畫中看不到的故事，原來他近來有家人移民海外，臨走前特意一家大小到影樓拍家庭照。他笑笑說：「平時食飯見面當然會拍拍照，但不是要離開，都不會如此認真去影樓。每個核心家庭拍一拍，再來個全家幅。」時代讓他遇上這份認真的凝視（與被凝視），欲去定睛定格，皆因將要分開，並步步啟發創作。

「我一直很鍾愛樹。『樹木肖像』只聚焦那一株老樹，它在一個地方很久很久，見證很多東西，卻有點孤寂。」鄧啟耀說。跟他聊天，我會聽到情緒點到即止，就像工筆般克制。由個人出發，他將那份難以名狀的情感和故事藏在作品之中。鄧氏多年來繪畫樹木，亦會研究品種背後的歷史。「樹木肖像」中的樹種均與香港、台灣的殖民歷史有關，暗指一個地方的格局變遷，表達出一種「城象」。同時，畫面處理放大了凝視的觀賞經驗。鄧氏特意使用虛構背景與柔和色調，正正就如影樓攝影，突出老樹的姿態。當觀者靜靜看畫相對之時，竟讓人看回自己內心，勾起私密情感，對照個體的「心象」。凝視是一場專注，而專注帶來內觀。或者，畫面反映觀者或創作者立身安命的渴求。城象、心象互相影響，作品處於既集體又個人的狀態，一同交織當下無從安放的感覺。

鄧氏從樹木看城市，可回溯至2014年在瑞士的駐留經歷。當時，他在蘇黎世的咖啡店跟老店主聊天，講到店主的孫子花園的樹下盪鞦韆。老店主對他分享自己細細個就在此樹下玩，同一樹蔭經歷三代。然而老樹生病了，他們找了樹醫生正想盡辦法拯救。這引發鄧氏發現城市的旅遊地圖總是記錄地方的名勝、商場、食府等，偏偏忽略了樹，和因樹而滋養出來的美好故事。這些個體記憶對他來說可貴，卻消失於歷史。鄧啟耀因而創作《樹本紀錄》（Tree Mapping），只畫下眼前景緻內的樹木，刻意消除其他建築物，以樹的身影記住一個城市。樹木至其他物種，在人類為中心的社會一直處於被管控、被邊緣化的位置。鄧氏持續以樹木的目光，折射城市空間的種種權力關係，更雙重比喻個體在機制之中的邊緣性。

遊走宏微歷史之間

「歷史一直在改變，我們有什麼印記？樹，應該是其中一個比較柔的東西，證明某些東西存在過。」由個人感受出發，其作品往往呈現宏觀狀態，積極探問歷史與當下的關係。「樹木肖像」的前奏《城門水塘的晚上》（2023）繪畫了下雨、落葉的景緻，散發淒楚感覺，老樹卻非常恬靜，葉面發出礦物綠色的暗光。你不必知道鄧氏原意為何，須知其畫作不時與地方歷史有關，就能想像更多。如果你有留意香港軍事歷史，就會知道城門水塘曾是英軍要塞，香港保衛戰期間士兵被夜襲無援，但現已成為市民行山消閑的好地方。借樹而語，樹木有著被忽視的地方記憶。

在鄧氏藝術的實踐中，「啟動」（activate）記憶乃重要一環。他探索公園和地圖，發展出包括「口袋公園」系列（Pocket Park series）、「聽得見的城市」系列（Our Audible City series），及後「紀念公園」系列（Memorial Garden series）。公園與地圖均蘊含一些指定觀點，設計者決定空間如何運用，或什麼資料被記住、呈現及流傳，代表歷史的話語權。然而，藝術家卻不斷重新塑造這些空間和記憶。他在香港動植物公園、中山紀念公園、台灣綠島等等寫生，並仔細研究背後歷史，以建構畫作。於《維多利亞公園》（2020年），畫面壓縮多個歷史註腳。鄧氏抽取公園內的「物件」和「事件」入畫，反映香港一直處於複雜的政治文化糾葛，呈現意識形態的龐大敘事。巧妙的是，他讓水平角度的維多利亞銅像手持一個足球，背後亦有鳥瞰角度的六個足球場。這些符號比喻市民使用公園的各種痕跡，乃為地方注入最日常或最身體力行的意義，呈現這個極具公民歷史的公共空間。如果意識型態、歷史敘事為「大」，人的故事彷彿「小」，但後者卻對個體深刻無比，至為真實。那樣，個體應當可以重奪集體記憶的自主性，再次成為當下的參考點。

鄧氏的作品往往呈現強烈對比，例如歷史與個體、正常與荒謬、理性與感性等。遊走在其畫中，就因為這種矛盾感覺，不禁引起觀者再次內觀自己的心象，追問種種選擇和所想，甚至打開一些新可能。最後，提一提鄧啟耀以電影為靈感題材的作品《即使風起，也要試著活下去（《風起了》）》（2022），他受宮崎駿動畫電影啟發，繪畫了戰爭場景，惟上方藍天依然明澄。他說：「在動蕩的時候，人尤其感到很多苦楚。然而有時個天好像很無情，依然可以天清氣朗，太陽依然會升起落下，即使已是絕境。但就如電影中講到，即使風起了，也要試著活下去。」就似畫中風雲捲起，世態無明，惟前景豎立的青竹依然堅韌，依然故我。

小東

藝文賞析及評論工作者、策展人

小東推動藝術書寫及對話，文章見於《明報》、《虛詞》、《微批》、芝鵠及個人平台。兩篇文章曾獲香港公共圖書館收錄為「香港口述歷史參考資源選」。2023年，她共同發起WeView分享會計劃，旨在刺激公眾觀賞展覽後的討論，並於Instagram建立藝術對話平台Shychat Art。小東策劃展覽或表演包括「物池」、梁錦華個展「過日辰」、「香港文學選段X聲」，及為美國洛杉磯18th Street Arts Center共同策劃網上展覽Re-imagining Home。

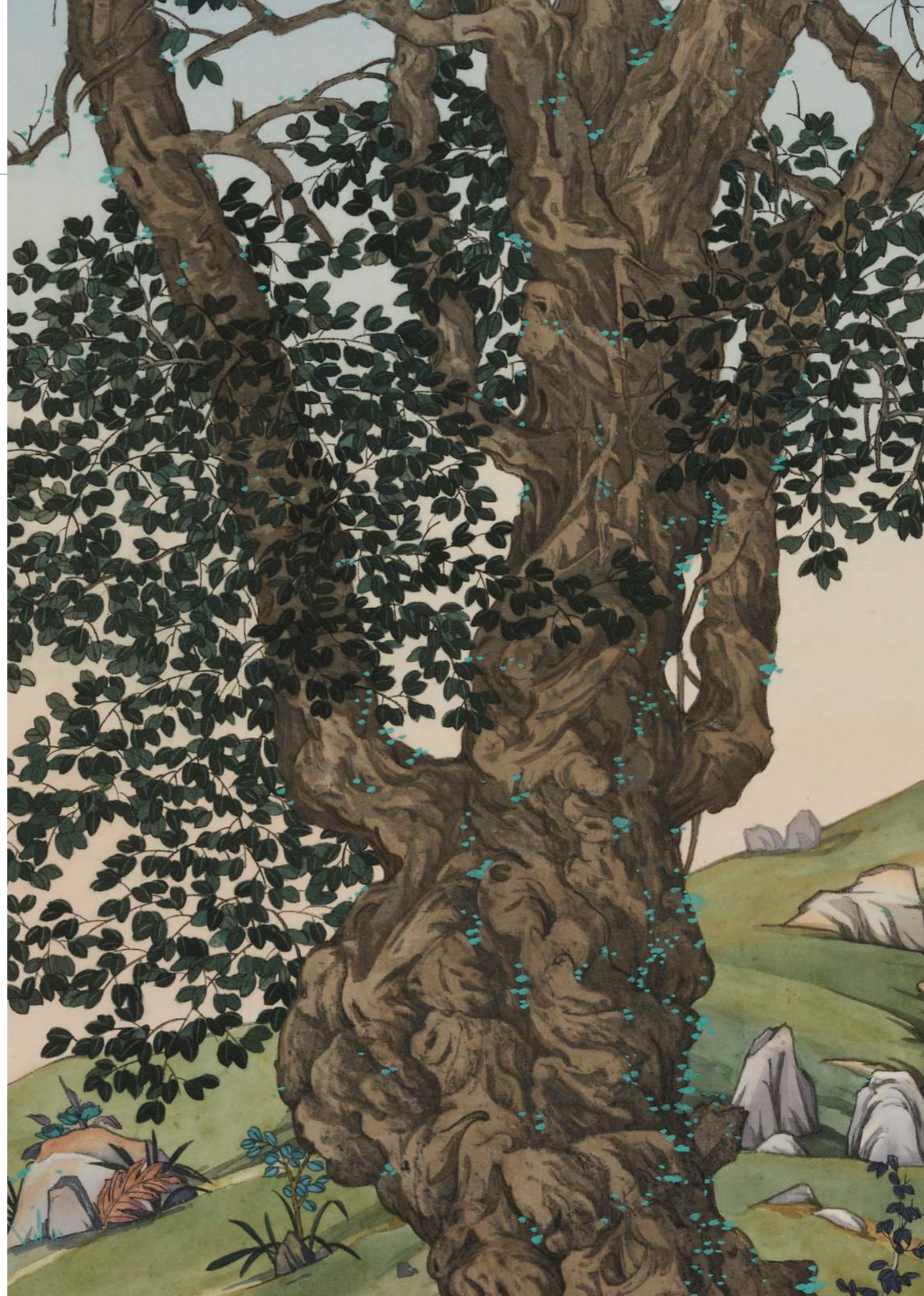
ARTWORKS





Tree Portrait #2 - Manila Tamarind

樹木肖像 #2- 金龜樹
ink and colour on silk
117 x 83.5cm
2023





Tree Portrait #3 - Dragon Chinese Juniper

樹木肖像 #3- 龍柏

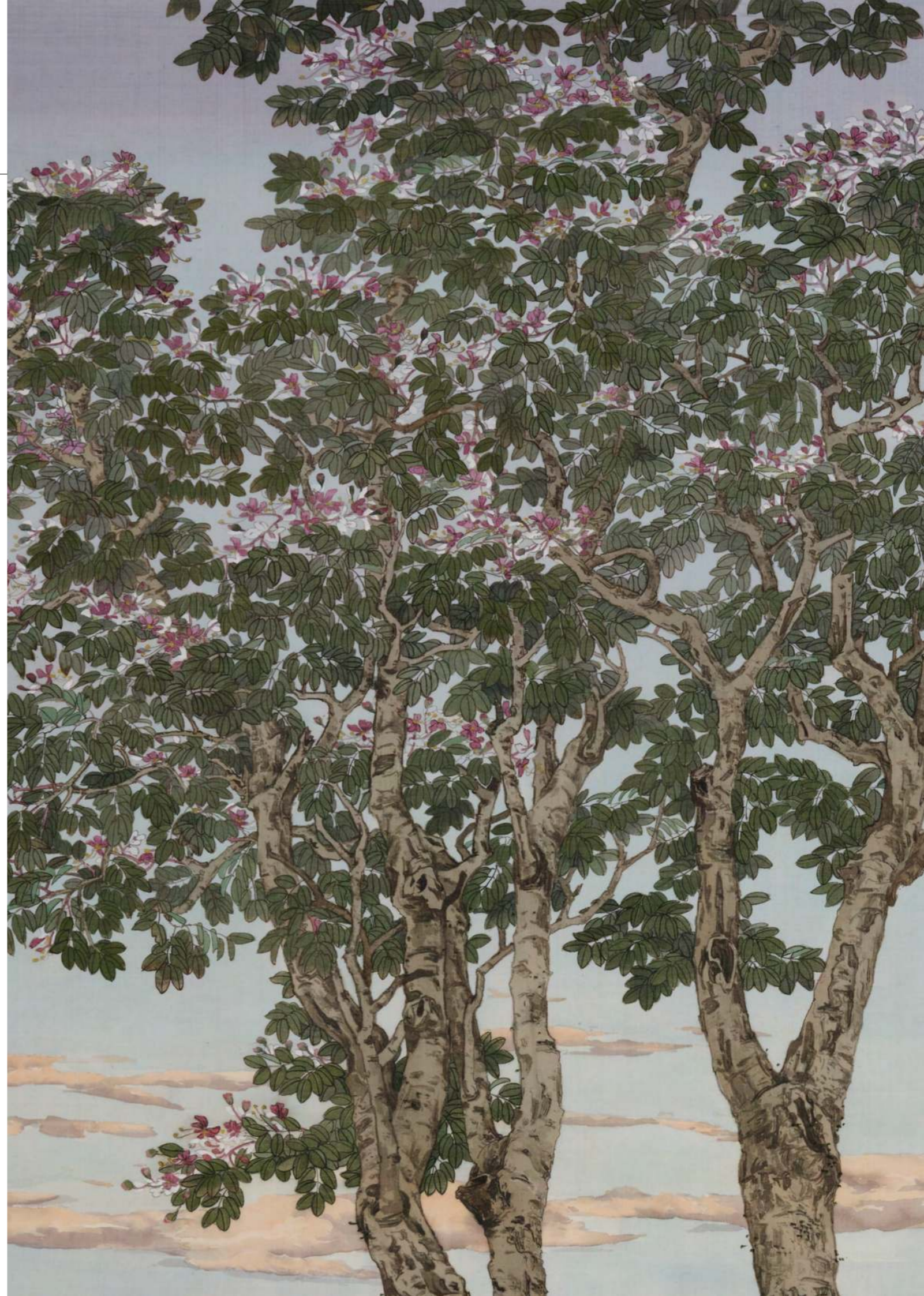
ink and colour on silk

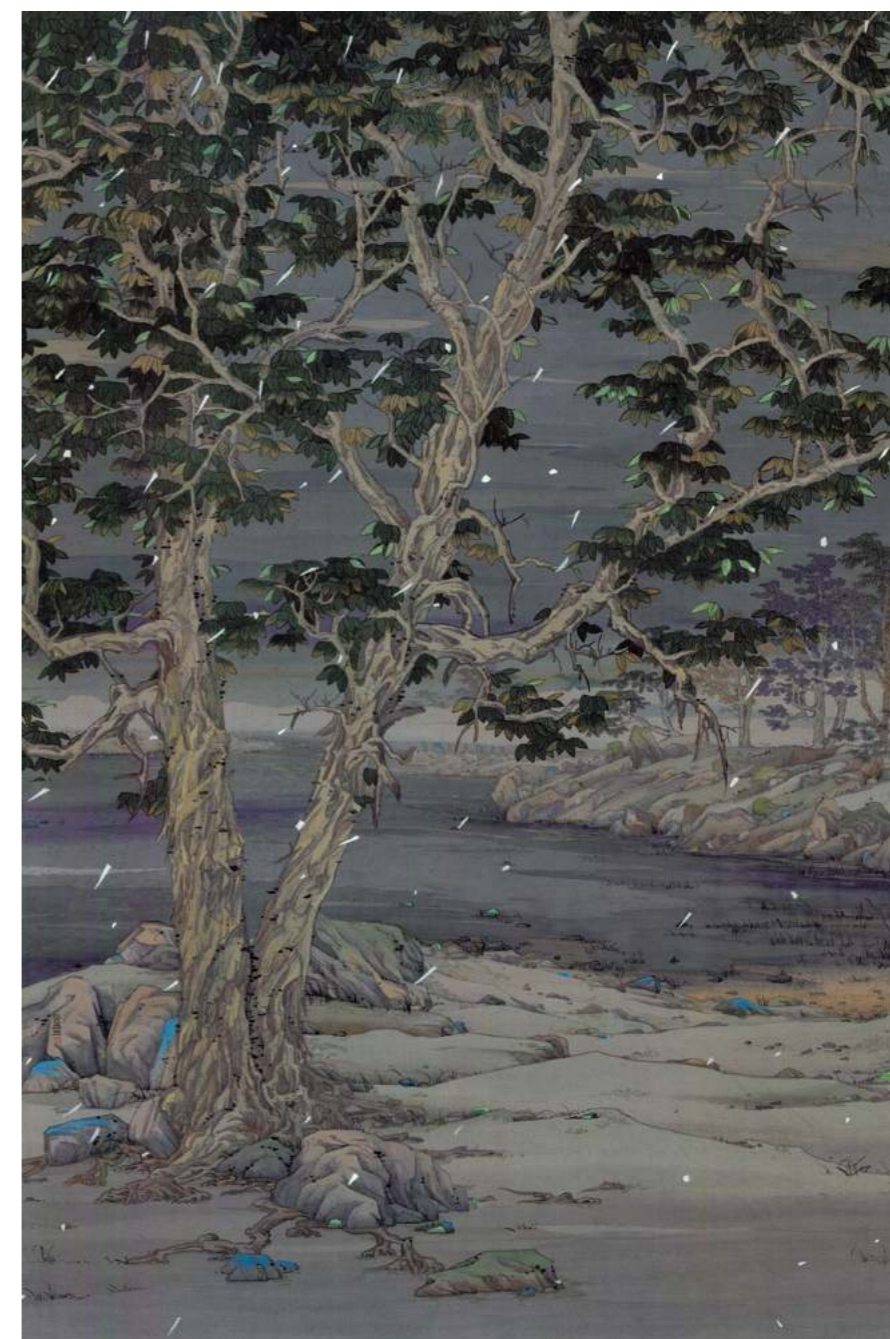
118 x 83.1cm

2023



Tree Portrait #4 - Lysidice 樹木肖像 #4- 儀花
ink and colour on silk
118 x 83.1cm
2023





A Night in Shing Mun Reservoir 城門水塘的晚上
ink and colour on silk
114.5 x 76cm
2023



Green Island
綠島

ink and colour on paper
38 x 147cm
2023





In the eyes of King George VI 喬治六世眼下的風景

ink and colour on paper

38 x 147cm

2023





Sunset at Sun Yat Sen Memorial Park

黃昏下的中山紀念公園

ink and colour on paper

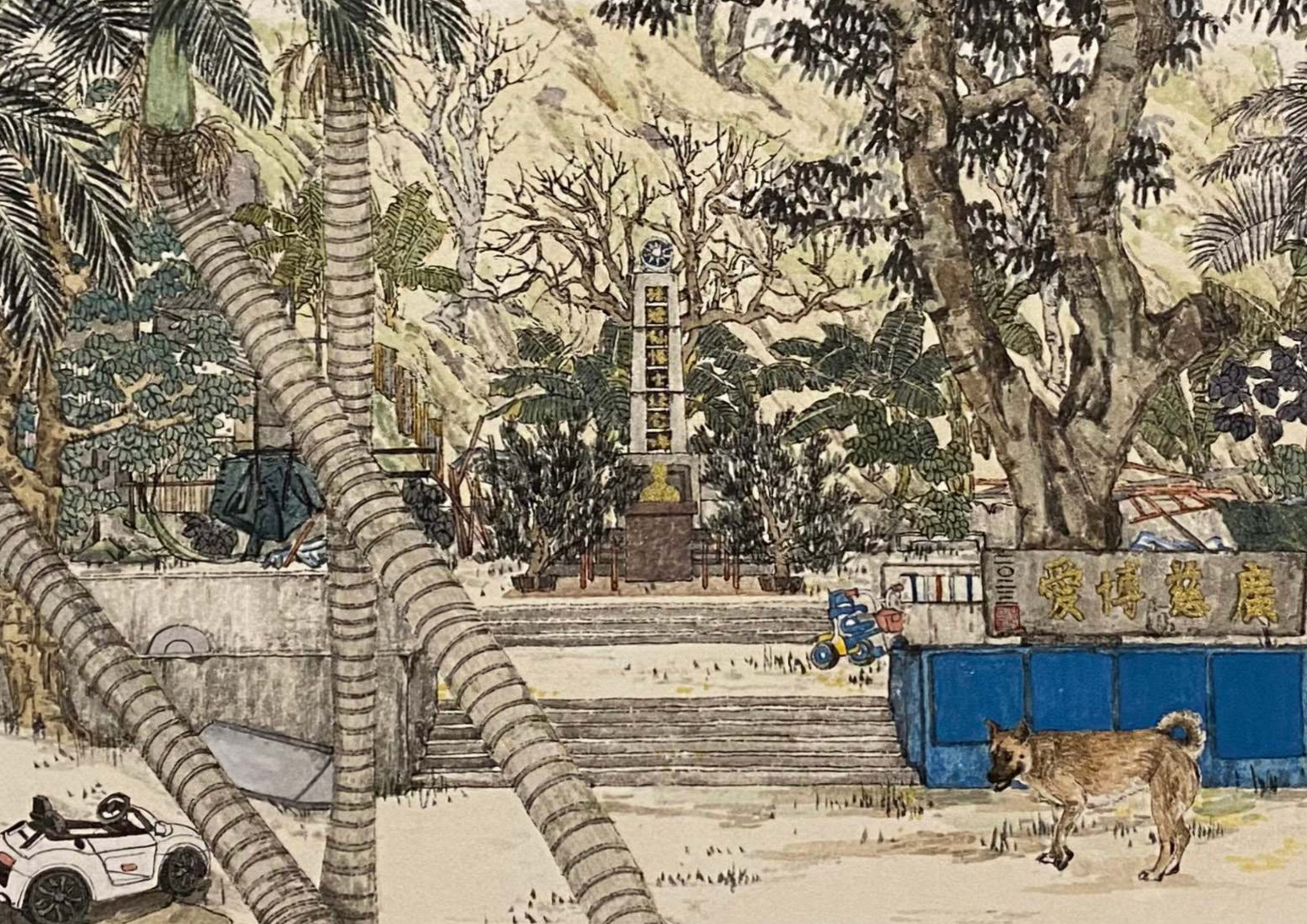
28.5 x 37cm

2023





Zhongshan Park #2
中山公園 #2
ink and colour on paper
41 x 70cm
2023



廣慈博愛



The Wind is Rising! We Must Try to Live! (The Wind Rises)

即使風起, 也要試著活下去 (《風起了》)

ink and colour on silk

53.5 x 28.5cm

2022





A Heart is a Heavy Burden (Howl's Moving Castle)

心是那麼重(《哈爾移動城堡》)

ink and colour on silk

70 x 90cm

2022

ARTIST



FRANK TANG 鄧啟耀



Born in 1988, Hong Kong
Currently lives and works in HK

Education

2023
Master of Fine Arts, Department of Fine Arts, The Chinese University of Hong Kong
2010
Bachelor of Visual Arts, Academy of Visual Arts, Hong Kong Baptist University

Solo Exhibitions (selected)

2023
'Whispering Canopies', Karin Weber Gallery, HK
2022
'De-', Creative Lounge, Treasure Hill Artist Village, Taipei, Taiwan
'You Are Here', Gallery EXIT, HK

Group Exhibitions/projects (selected)

2023
Ink Asia, HK
Taipei Dangdai Art & Ideas, Gallery EXIT, Taipei, Taiwan
Art Basel Hong Kong, Gallery Exit, HK
Art Central, Karin Weber Gallery, HK
2021
'Humor in Ink', Taoyuan Children's Art Center, Taiwan
'Ink City' curated by Katherine Don & Tobias Berger, Tai Kwun Contemporary, HK
2019
'Hidden Forest' Curated by Katherine Don and Joyce Wong, Asia Society Hong Kong Center, HK

Artist in Residency (selected)

2022
Treasure Hill Artist Village, Taipei, Taiwan

Collections

Soho House Hong Kong
Private Collections

For full CV: <https://www.karinwebergallery.com/artists/frank-tang/>

1988年生於香港
現生活並工作於香港

學歷

2023
香港中文大學藝術碩士（藝術創作）
2010
香港浸會大學(榮譽)視覺藝術文學士

個展（擇錄）

2023
「風樹不靜」，香港凱倫偉伯畫廊
「紀念未來」，香港中文大學文物館
2022
「De-」—鄧啟耀個展，臺灣台北寶藏巖國際藝術村創藝小客廳
「你在此」，香港安全口畫廊

聯展（擇錄）

2023
水墨藝博，香港
台北當代藝術博覽會，安全口畫廊，臺灣臺北
巴塞爾藝術展，香港安全口畫廊
Art Central，香港凱倫偉伯畫廊
2021
「優墨」，臺灣桃園市兒童美術館
「墨城」，由Katherine Don & Tobias Berger策展，香港賽馬會藝坊 JC Contemporary，香港大館
2019
「尋林覓趣」，亞洲協會香港中心

藝術家駐留計劃（擇錄）

2022
藝術家駐留計劃，臺灣台北寶藏巖國際藝術村

收藏

Soho House香港
私人收藏

詳細履歷：<https://www.karinwebergallery.com/artists/frank-tang/>

KARIN WEBER GALLERY 凱倫偉伯畫廊

Established in 1999 by German-born Karin Weber and now in its 24th year, Karin Weber Gallery is one of Hong Kong's oldest contemporary art galleries. Situated on Aberdeen Street, in the heart of SoHo, the gallery presents a year-round programme of curated exhibitions, talks, and collector events.

As unique network of partners based in London and Mumbai allows us to source emerging and established contemporary art from around the world. We are equally passionate about presenting works by local artists. The gallery assists artists through exhibitions, art fairs, and residency programmes throughout the world. Small in size, yet global in outlook, Karin Weber Gallery is one of Hong Kong's truly international boutique galleries.

凱倫偉伯畫廊在1999年由德國的Karin Weber女士創立，今年踏入第24年，是香港其中一間最具歷史的當代藝術畫廊。畫廊位於蘇豪區鴨巴甸街，我們每年策劃不同的展覽、講座及活動給藏家參與。

我們的合夥人於倫敦和孟買有辦事處，使我們能夠幾乎遍布世界各地為客戶提供服務並蒐尋新晉和有豐富經驗的藝術家。我們熱愛把香港本地的藝術推介給全球的藏家。我們畫廊代表的藝術家通過藝術博覽會，與其他畫廊的交流，還有駐留計畫發展自己的事業。面積雖不大，但放眼全球，凱倫偉伯畫廊是香港真正國際化的精品畫廊之一。



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karin weber gallery
Contemporary Fine Art

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