BRILL MODERN ASIAN ART AND VISUAL CULTURE 5

Imagining Taiwan

The Role of Art in Taiwan's Quest for Identity (1987–2010)

SOPHIE McINTYRE

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The Nation De-mythologised – Yao Jui-Chung

BORN IN 1969, the artist, writer and curator Yao Jui-chung (姚瑞中) (fig. 6.0) emerged on the local art scene in the early 1990s and his satirical and subversive artworks are regarded as emblematic of the post-martial law generation. This generation, sometimes referred to as 'Generation X',[1] grew up during a period of unprecedented political and socio-cultural change, when Taiwan transformed from a one-party state into a democratised, economically prosperous and culturally pluralistic society. Unlike his predecessors, Mei Dean-E, Yang Mao-lin and Wu Mali, who were all born in the 1950s, Yao was too young to have directly experienced the more repressive effects of martial law, including artistic censorship; or to have participated in the democratisation movement. Furthermore, with the relaxation of restrictions on the media and the growth of the internet and digital media, Yao did not feel compelled to go overseas in search of creative freedom as did his predecessors. This generational distinction not only sets Yao apart from the three other artists but is fundamental to an understanding of his art and views on Taiwan's identity and its place in the world.

Combining photography, painting, performance and installation, Yao's work explores notions

6.0 Yao Jui-chung. Image courtesy of the artist and photographer Meg Lin, 2007.

Yao Jui-chung, *Long Live Landscape I*, detail of fig. 6.31.

of history, identity and memory through the twin lens of politics and power. While the artist was an advocate of Taiwan consciousness, he did not use art as a vehicle to promote Taiwan's identity. In fact, he purposefully set out to ridicule official nationalist discourses that called attention to the nation, which he perceived to be a politically invented construct. As a young artist whose parents were mainland Chinese and Taiwanese, Yao's views on identity were arguably more fluid and less oppositional than those of some of his older peers, whose works Yao characterises as 'serious' and 'negative' because they seek to expose the trauma and injustices of Taiwan's history.[2] In contrast, Yao employed parody and humour to critique notions of identity, highlighting what he describes as the 'absurdities' of Taiwan's history and relationship with China.[3] This is reflected in a series of works including *Roaming Around the Ruins* (1991–2011), *Territory Takeover, Recover Mainland China* (1994–96), *Long March – Shifting the Universe* (2003) and *The World is for All – China Beyond China* (1997–2000), which are discussed here. Yao's individualism, irreverence, and open-minded outlook exemplify not only generational change, but also a wider paradigm shift in the art field. With the intensification of globalisation, increased mobility, and advances in digital technologies, long-established ideological and belief systems were contested and supplanted by new ideas, values and practices. These were both local and global, and prioritised the individual and societal concerns over the collective and notions of nationhood.

A 'NEW' GENERATIONAL OUTLOOK

Local art writers and curators typically view Yao's generation as existing 'in-between' two different phases in Taiwan's history that are symbolically demarcated by the lifting of martial law. For Yao, the lifting of martial law signified a new epoch in Taiwan's history. He called on his generation of artists to develop 'a new aesthetics' that would reflect the spirit of the times while also transcending the cultural dichotomies and the oppositional logic of previous generations. In a manifesto entitled 'New Human Species', Yao declares:

> 'Chinese Knowledge as Core, Western Knowledge as Application' should be abandoned by the new generation … In a diverse, tumultuous and materially tempting world, the art career for artists will be especially frustrating. They will not only have to find a new aesthetics reflecting their time but also will have to arm themselves up to face the rebellions from the world as well as from their own mind. The rebellions from both sides have shaped the personality of the New Human Species.[4]

During the 1990s, Yao often employed the term 'New Human Species' (*Xin Xing Renlei* 新腥人類)[5] to refer to his generation, and to the opportunities and challenges they face. This term derives from the phrase 'New New Humans' (*Xin Xin Renlei* 新新人類) that gained currency in Taiwan and East Asia more generally in the late 20th century. In China, the term is associated with the interests, behaviours, beliefs and styles of youth and the growth of popular culture, digital technology and consumerism.[6] The 'New New Humans' have been described as:

> Astute, cool-headed, a fast-food lover, a hedonist, changeable, easily moved, embracing the era in which you live. You wouldn't have the scars or burdens of history weighing you down ….[7]

According to Yao's more critical and culturally specific interpretation, however, the 'New Human Species' is less about hedonism, fashion or technology than it is about proposing a new way of thinking and a 'new aesthetics' that reflects the *zeitgeist* and awareness of the world as a whole. Elaborating on this concept during interviews, the artist emphasises the importance of 'identity consciousness', which he distinguishes from the term 'identity'. The former he defines in terms of self-awareness, as an expression of the *essence* of one's self, whereas 'identity' is a political concept based on exclusive and imagined notions of citizenship and belonging. This critical distinction underpins Yao's work and

is exemplified in his statement: 'We must first have consciousness (*zhu ti yishi* 主體意識), then we can know our identity'.[8]

Yao's views on identity have been significantly influenced by his background and artistic training. Born and raised in Taiwan, Yao identifies as Taiwanese, although he also has relatives in China. His mother is Taiwanese while his father, who was an officer in the KMT army, came to Taiwan in 1949 from mainland China, where his first wife and family remained. In Yao's generation, it is not uncommon to have mixed Taiwanese–Chinese heritage and this, along with the effects of globalisation, contributed to the collapse of native–foreign binaries and to less fixed conceptions of identity in Taiwan. For his part, Yao rejected simplistic and over-determined notions of identity based on ethnicity and political ideology. Contemplating his family origins and identity, Yao reflects, 'if people ask are you Chinese or Taiwanese most people say Taiwanese. I'm not sure. Maybe I am Chinese and Taiwanese'.[9] Arguably, it was this ambiguity about his origins and the myths generated about China that inspired him to investigate the meaning and power mechanisms underpinning Taiwan's identity discourse.

Paradoxically, notwithstanding Yao's irreverent attitude towards the past and the rewriting and politicisation of Taiwan's history, a significant number of the artworks he created between the years 1988 and 2008 focused on Taiwan's history. During an interview with the artist in 2007, Yao ruminates on this fact and concludes that, in order to know oneself and attain identity consciousness, it is necessary to know one's history, which he regards as 'the process and exploration of identity'.[10] In this context, it is important to note that Yao's generation was the last to have been educated under the KMT's system in which students were taught Chinese history pre-1949, when the Chinese Communists gained power. Yao says that, growing up, he learned very little about Taiwan's history since it was not part of the curriculum until the 1990s. In relation to his background and education the artist reportedly said:

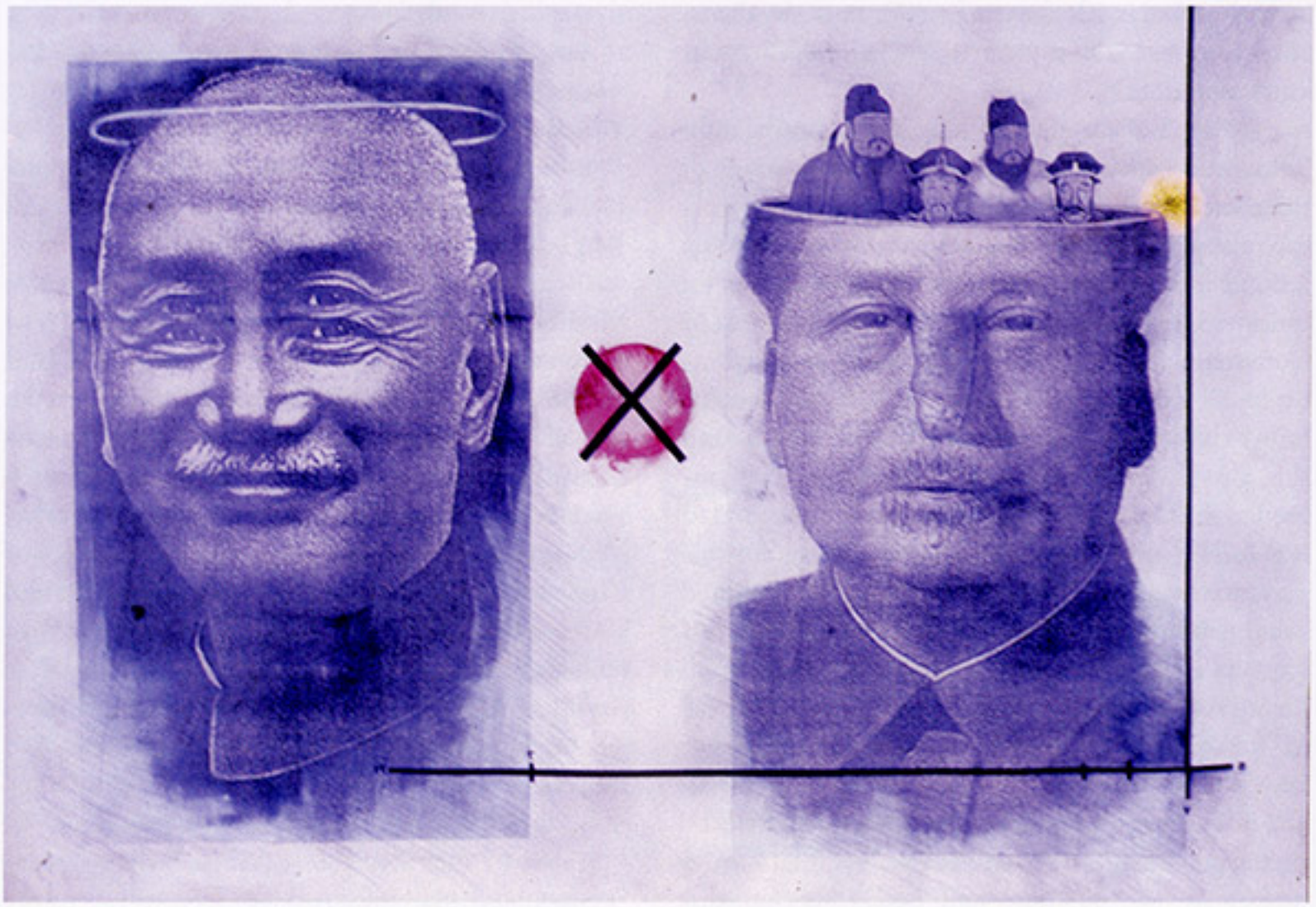
> I received the national education that was compulsory in Taiwan at the time. One day I realised our familiar history textbook was filled with lies and tended to avoid difficult issues while emphasising trivial ones. This realisation, in addition to my father's death, made me both suspicious and curious about my own origins, of which I was completely ignorant.[11]

After completing his military service in 1996, Yao visited mainland China for the first time. For him personally, this visit was formative and triggered a critical breakthrough, as he began to reflect more deeply on his identity, origins, education and, on a broader level, the relationships between politics, ideology, history and memory. Yao's experience of China was shared by many people from Taiwan and by the broader Chinese diaspora who returned to their 'Motherland' only to realise their alien status. Recalling his experience in China, and the overwhelming sense of displacement he felt there, Yao reflects:

> I was a tourist. I never touched the land even though it's the Motherland. I go everywhere but I never land there. I don't have too much feeling – even though my father came from China. I wanted to see my [step] brother and [step] sister but I decided later I didn't want to see them. It's a tragedy and it's very common in Taiwan. My father never went back either.[12]

Between 1990 and 1994, Yao attended the National Institute of Arts (renamed Taipei National University of the Arts in 2001).[13] He majored in art theory, which, he explains, was 'never really taught' as art schools mainly focused on art history, especially pre-20th century Chinese art, and some aspects of Western art history. Courses on Taiwan art history were offered in some art schools in the early 1990s, but Yao says 'none of the teachers really knew it' because they themselves had only learnt about China's history.[14]

During this period the artist produced his first politically inspired works. Collectively titled *Exploded Metropolis (I–V)* (1990), these highly symbolic, figurative paintings bear some semblance



6.1 Yao Jui-chung, *Untitled* (1990), mixed media, 100 x 70 cm. Image courtesy of the artist.

to Wu Tien-chang and Yang Mao-lin's early works, except that Yao's paintings are considerably more subdued. In these works the artist explores the concept of 'historical truth' in relation to notions of power, authority, knowledge and belief. In several of these works the form of a shadow appears lurking behind corners, and projected on elevated walls, metaphorically referring to the 'ghost of history', and the hidden aspects of history. In *Untitled* (1990) (fig. 6.1), the shadow acquires political and historical significance, as China and Taiwan's former political leaders, Mao Zedong and Chiang Kai-shek, are depicted side by side. Mao's head has been split open and miniature Chinese scholars peer out from the former leader's gaping skull. On the left of the image, Chiang is depicted with four eyes, and a halo drawn around his head parodies his mythical god-like status. Yao recalls that his teachers' responses to his expressionistic paintings were less than encouraging, regarding them as too 'avant-garde and aggressive'. Yao says: 'they think we should do painting from traditional treasures – but I was not influenced by them … art's function is to search for something new and be free of the past.'[15]

Seeking to experiment with new forms of media, in 1992 the artist co-founded the 'Ta Na Experimental Group' (*tian da na shiyanti* 天打那實驗體), a theatre collective comprising fellow students. During this period Yao developed a strong interest in the experimental theatre and performance art that emerged in the late 1980s with the rise of democratisation in Taiwan (see Chapter Five). Between 1992 and 1993 he participated in a series of performances including *Energy, Move-*

ment, Light and Body (1992), which utilised new media technologies to explore the relationship between body, time and space. Yao's desire to experiment and develop a new aesthetic echoes comments made by installation artist Wu Mali, who was also critical of the pre-eminence of painting in Taiwan. Yao observes that:

> at that time we don't like painting and realism as it's very traditional. We want to use a more aggressive style. The 1990s was a new age in Taiwan – the art world had grown and you can see any kinds of art, not just painting or sculpture.[16]

As emphasised in the 'New Human Species' manifesto, Yao believed artists must respond to the *zeitgeist* and, in 1991, he abandoned painting and began to experiment with photography and installation.[17]

As a result of one of his many hiking expeditions in the mountains, the artist created a series of photographic-based environmental interventions. The first of these, entitled *Middle* (1992) (fig. 6.2), visually explores the conceptual relationship between site, space and time. In these abstracted images, the camera lens is purposively tilted towards the sky at an object floating in space – such as a handmade aircraft made of silver foil. At this time, Yao often used silver and gold foil in his work and the skyward perspective re-emerged in later works, including *Recover Mainland China*, in which the artist himself became the object floating in space. These black-and-white images are stark and ethereal and they visually express what the artist describes as a 'cold detachment' from reality in which there is no sense of place or time.[18]

Another environmental intervention created during this formative period was *Permeate, Meas-*

6.2 Yao Jui-chung, *Middle* (1992), photograph, 40 x 60 cm. Image courtesy of the artist.

urement (1993) (fig. 6.3) in which Yao explores concepts of identity, history and tradition in relation to the land. As a visual parody on the Chinese ink landscape tradition (*shanshui*) the artist etched a line of black ink into a blanket of virgin white snow on the mountain. The ink-stained snow was collected and siphoned into a small coke bottle. According to the artist, the black ink, coke bottle and the physical site, signify the 'three polarities: Chinese tradition, Western influence, and localism' that, together, Yao believes have shaped Taiwan's cultural identity. In the final installation, *Melt, Permeate, Crystal Measurement* (1993) (fig. 6.4), that was shown at New Paradise art space in Taipei in 1994, a splattering of ink on the floor, and two photographic images depicting the ink-stained site and the coke bottle, were displayed together, as a critique of notions of cultural origins and authenticity.

This work was part of the *Land Survey* series, which explores the interrelationship between the land and the processes of (de-)territorialisation and identity formation. The meaning and significance of the land as a physical and metaphorical site is a recurring theme in Yao's work. It is important to emphasise, however, that, unlike artists such as Yang Mao-lin, Yao did not view the land as a signifier of 'purity' or cultural authenticity; in fact Yao is more interested in the idea of land as a space of exploitation, dispossession and neglect, and also of 'contamination', and this is most clearly reflected in his two series *Roaming Around the Ruins*.

6.3 Yao Jui-chung, *Permeate, Measurement* (1993), photographic documentation of performance. Image courtesy of the artist.

6.4 Yao Jui-chung, *Melt, Permeate, Crystal Measurement* (1993), mixed media, dimensions variable (at New Paradise art space, 1994). Image courtesy of the artist.

THE SPECTRE OF HISTORY: ROAMING AROUND THE RUINS

While at art school, Yao embarked on the series *Roaming Around the Ruins* (1991–2011) (figs. 6.5–6.8), which he has worked on for more than two decades, amassing hundreds of works to form a photographic archive. This discussion will focus on the four main bodies of work he produced as part of this series prior to 2012.[19] In these black-and-white photographs, the land is typically portrayed as a ruin, as the artist explores the intersection between land-

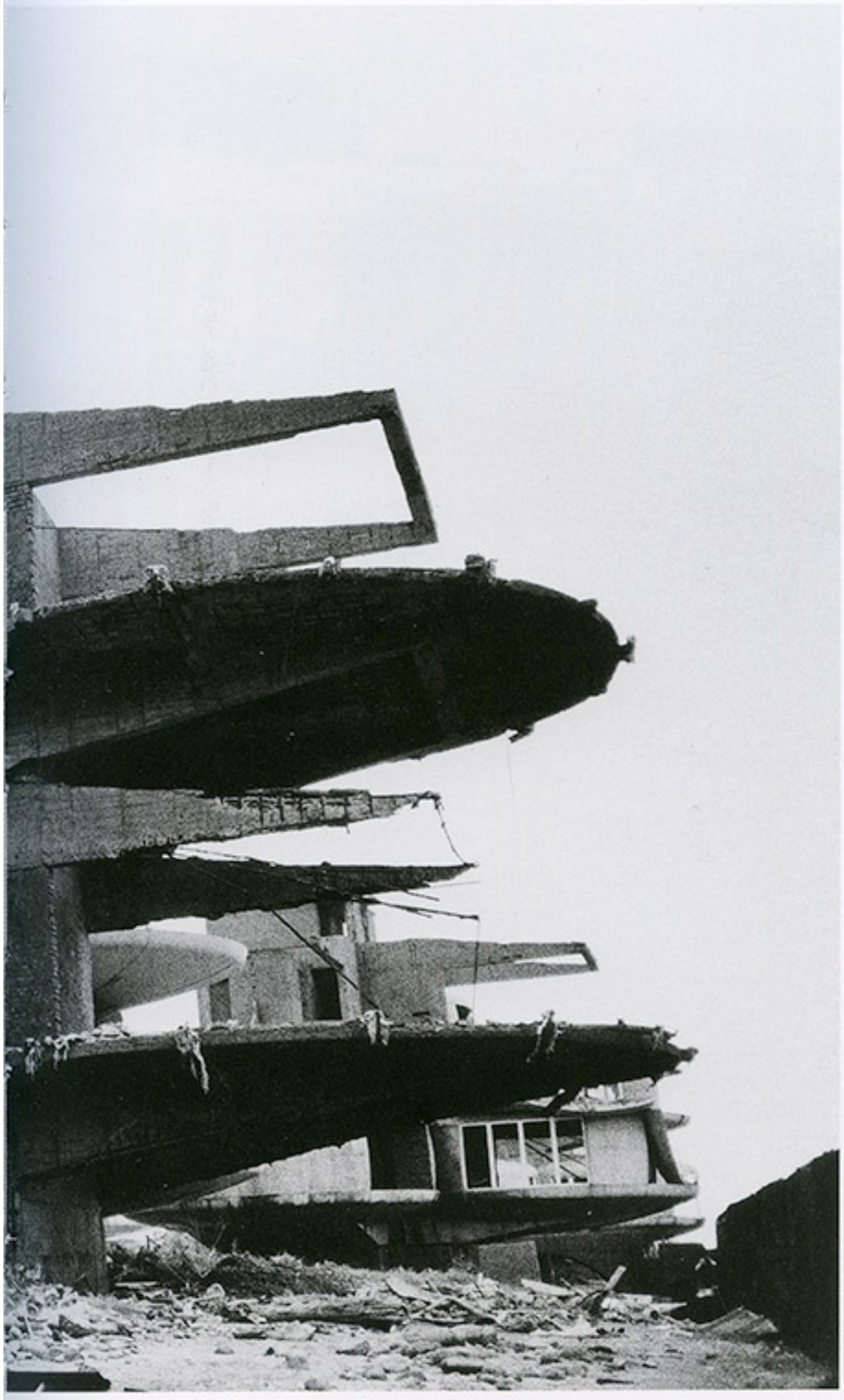
scape, memory and myth. The artist travels across the island and visually documents dilapidated buildings, including military bunkers, abandoned temples, amusement parks and residences, as well as assembly halls, monuments and statues associated with the former KMT. These works are not time specific but span half a century or more, from the Cold War period to more recent histories when the global recession forced the closure of many of Taiwan's manufacturing plants and businesses, several of which relocated to mainland China. For more than 17 years Yao obsessively photographed these ruins, creating an archive of over a thousand photographs that he used in subsequent works. Yao did not have a predetermined purpose in taking the photographs, saying it was the journey itself and the process of discovering and documenting these sites located on the urban fringes of society that was of utmost importance. The *Ruins* series meditates on notions of existence, reality and illusion, while also exploring national and postcolonial issues relating to the land as a visual signifier of Taiwan's history of modernisation and territorial control.

These images of abandoned, weather-beaten residential and industrial buildings, and of shattered concrete statues and religious deities are devoid of human life. On a metaphysical level they reflect the cycle of life and death. Although not a Buddhist, in his statement about these works, Yao recalls the Buddhist Diamond Sutra: 'a star, a grain of sand, a temple or a ruin – everything is just an idea and a thought that reflects a secret landscape deep in peoples' heart.' He adds, 'although our brief existence is accompanied by decay, the silent ruins may be a symbol of the constant birth and death'.[20] These images have a raw and almost surreal quality. Visually they reflect Yao's conception of these ruins as an outward manifestation of himself and of human existence; he describes them as a 'mirror' into which he gazes, only to be faced by the shadow of his own image.[21]

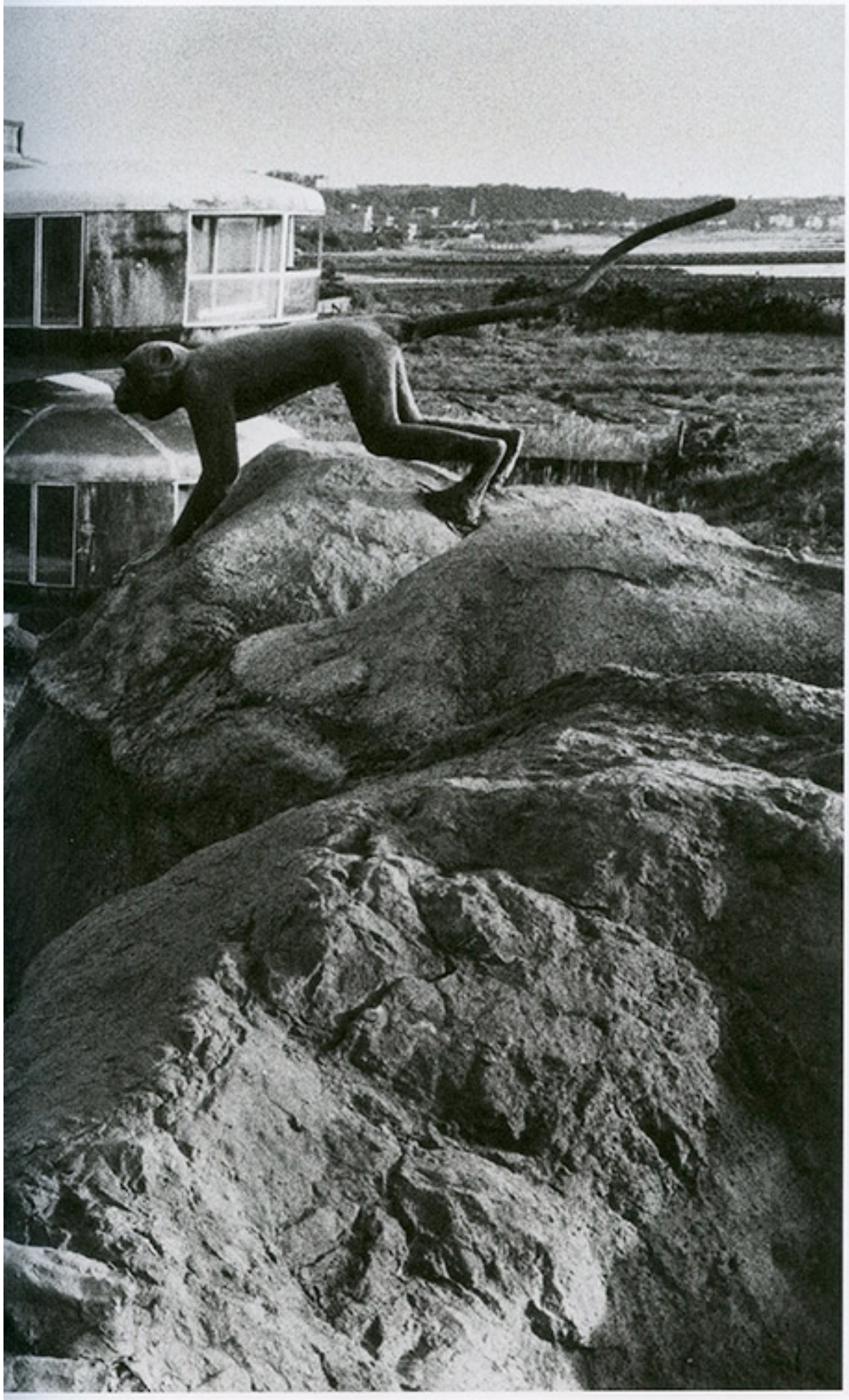
Roaming Around the Ruins offers an alternative account of Taiwan's national history. Rather than celebrating the more progressive aspects of Taiwan's 'Economic Miracle' and modernisation, symbolised by the industrial and urban sprawl of factories, office blocks and shopping centres, Yao focuses his lens on Taiwan's 'wastelands'. He explores its marginal spaces and the more troubling aspects of Taiwan's history that are commonly overlooked in the rewriting of national histories. Taiwan's successive regime changes and their conflicting ideologies, have left an indelible imprint on the urban topography.[22] These political regimes have radically altered Taiwan's landscape, including its public buildings, statues and monuments, which have either been reclaimed, renamed or erased according to the prevailing political ideology. The ruins depicted in Yao's images are located on the urban periphery and are deemed to have little historical significance. Consequently, they have largely been ignored, which Yao pointedly remarks, is analogous to Taiwan's marginal geopolitical status in the world.[23] The series, however, is not a visual commentary on Taiwan's struggle for national identity; rather it seeks to shed light on the concealed or unseen aspects of Taiwan's history. Reflecting on the abandoned and dilapidated sites he discovered while creating his *Ruins* series, Yao observed:

> There can be no civilisation without ruins, just as there won't be a heaven if there is no hell [...] Compared to our so-called happy existence, the wasteland is ... more 'real' than the real world, and more 'perfect' than perfection.[24]

Roaming Around the Ruins was a precursor to several photographic bodies of work, including *Barbarians Celestine* (2000), *Savage Paradise* (2000), *Heaven* (2001), *Libido of Death* (2002) and *Hell* (2003). The first three of these series each comprised 15 black-and-white photographs, and they incorporated several of the same motifs and details of ruins; but, in these works, they are recast in gold. The *Ruins* series was also a source of inspiration for Yao's more recent project, *Mirage — Disused Public Property in Taiwan* (2010–16), which is a major photographic archive the artist has developed, with the help of his students, of vacant or abandoned public buildings and facilities across Taiwan, and which I later discuss.



6.5 Yao Jui-chung, *UFO Villa, Qianshuiwan St., Sanzhi Dist., New Taipei City, Taiwan* (1992), photograph, 100 x 150 cm (from the series, *Roaming Around the Ruins: Far off Home*). Collection of Queensland Art Gallery. Image courtesy of the artist.



6.6 Yao Jui-chung, *The Sanzhi UFO Houses: The Monkeys* (1993), photograph, 100 x 150 cm (from the series, *Roaming Around the Ruins: Gods and Idols Surround the Border*). Image courtesy of the artist.

6.7 Yao Jui-chung, *Shuinandong Smelting Refinery IX* (1999), photograph, 105 x 140 cm (from the series, *Roaming Around the Ruins: The Civilisation Built by Skeleton*). Collection of Queensland Art Gallery. Image courtesy of the artist.

6.8 Yao Jui-chung, *Army Command, Orchid Island, Taitung, Taiwan* (2005), photograph, 100 x 150 cm (from the series, *Roaming Around the Ruins: Quiet on the Western Front*). Collection of Queensland Art Gallery. Image courtesy of the artist.

The *Ruins* series reveals what the artist describes as the 'black hole' of Taiwan's history, in which dilapidated and crumbling buildings can be viewed as memorials or monuments.[25] French historian Pierre Nora perceptively argues that there are two types of monuments: 'places of refuge, sanctuaries of spontaneous devotion and silent pilgrimage, where one finds the living heart of memory'; and monuments that are 'imposed from above by a national authority or by an established interest' and have a 'spectacular and triumphant' quality.[26] For Yao, these sites of ruin are comparable to a refuge or sanctuary, opening up a contemplative space through which he explores the nature and meaning of history, identity and place. These ruins are, in effect, shrines or tombstones commemorating the forgotten, overlooked or marginalised aspects of Taiwan's history. By contrast, in other works, including *Territory Takeover*, *Recover Mainland China* and *Long March – Shifting the Universe*, Yao turns his attention to monuments deemed to have *national* significance, which are more widely recognised, celebrated and commemorated as public sites and markers of national identity.

TERRITORY TAKEOVER

In March 1994, Yao Jui-chung placed a full page advertisement in Taiwan's leading art magazine, *Artist* (*Yishujia*), declaring that he was going to 'Attack and Occupy Taiwan'. Drawing from the Chinese Nationalist political tenet, 'Expel the Barbarians and Recover China' (*Quzhu Dalu huifu Zhonghua* 驅逐韃虜恢復中華), Yao then embarked on a journey, travelling to the six different locations

where successive colonial and military powers, from the Dutch to the Chinese Nationalists, landed on the island.[27] Upon reaching each point of arrival, Yao stripped naked and, like a dog marking its territory, urinated on each site.

In this series, entitled *Territory Takeover* (1994) (figs. 6.9–6.14), Yao literally inserts himself into Taiwan's grand narrative, engaging with issues relating to its national identity and its history of foreign colonisation. The artist reclaims the site by urinating on it, an illegal act that he likens to the processes of 'unlawful colonisation'. The six images of him performing this illict act effectively commemorate or memorialise each historical moment. These photographs highlight the legacies of Taiwan's history of military conquest and political struggle and, according to the artist, they responded to 'how people think at this time about Taiwan's sad and terrible national history but in an absurd and witty way'.[28] It is noteworthy that the idea of urinating on a monument emerged during a mountain climbing trip Yao made to Jade Mountain (*Yushan*), the tallest mountain on the island. When the artist reached its summit he discovered a bronze statue that had been 'planted' there in 1966 of the Chinese scholar and politician Yu Youren (于右任), who came to Taiwan with the KMT. Yao says he was confused by the large statue of this prominent Chinese figure and questioned why it was on the peak of Taiwan's highest mountain. Since he needed to relieve himself, he urinated on it.[29]

The series *Territory Takeover* directly engages in Taiwan's identity discourse and with issues concerning the rewriting of Taiwan's history and the assertion of Taiwan's sovereignty, which were subjects of significant debate amongst politicians, intellectuals and in the media during the 1990s. As a reflection of the rise of Taiwanese nationalism, new definitions of the term 'Taiwanese' also became the subject of heated discussion as people were labelled ethnically and politically 'Taiwanese' (*benshengren*) or 'Chinese' (*waishengren*) depending on when they arrived on the island (see Introduction). As a younger artist of Taiwanese and Chinese heritage, Yao viewed this binary as a political construct, and with a mix of curiosity and scepticism. In the context of his work *Territory Takeover*, he reflects on this issue:

> at the time there was a lot of discussion about Taiwan's national identity, and politicians were actually accusing each other of not being 'Taiwanese'. Taiwanese identity is very confused but inside this confusion we can talk. I wanted to ask who are the *real* Taiwanese? I find there are none. I wanted to remind people that Taiwan is a colonised country and that we need to open our minds up more to constructing a new identity.[30]

For this series the artist's extensive research into Taiwan's history is evident in the text labels that he wrote for each work explaining in detail what occurred at each of the six sites. For example, the first work was accompanied by the text:

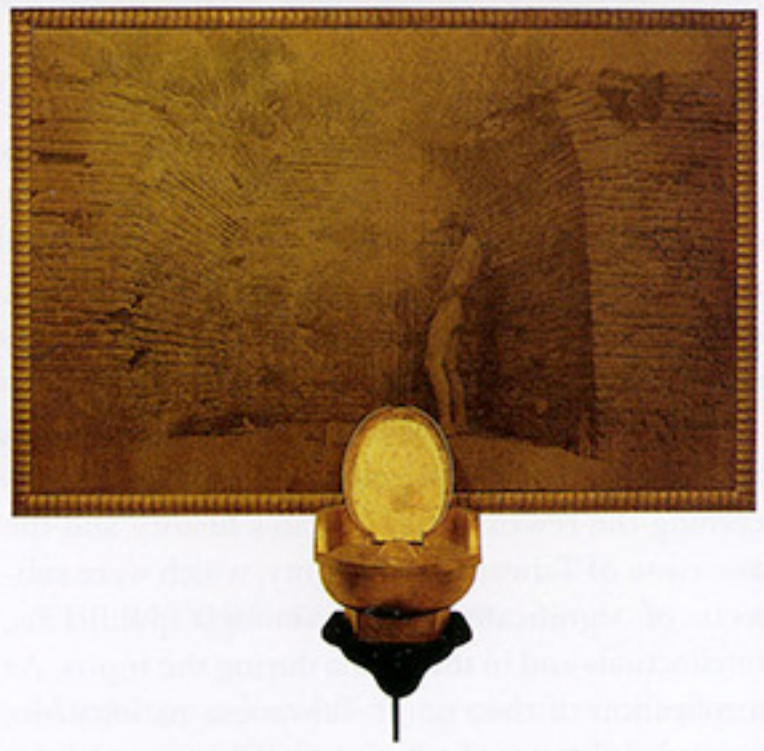
> *Landing Point: Fort Zeelandia*: On 26 August 1624, the Dutch withdrew from the Penghu Islands under the terms of a peace settlement with the Ming court. They sailed east across the Taiwan Strait to the south-west coast of Taiwan to enter the Tai River at Luerhmen. They landed at Taoyuan (now Anping Harbor) and occupied Anping and the Tainan area. While visiting this site, Yao Jui-Chung pissed here marking his territory.

Most importantly, in these works the artist does not seek to visually chronicle or rewrite Taiwan's history, as Yang Mao-lin endeavoured to do in his *MADE IN TAIWAN* series. Instead, Yao draws on official nationalist histories to question their authority and validity. While he recognises the value of historical scholarship, as both artist and writer, Yao also believes in the importance of questioning and critiquing the agendas and writing of history. He states that the 'recording of "truth" does not equate [with] "truth"'; and, given the subjective nature of historical interpretation, an 'authentically objective history' is not possible.[31] In his critical analysis of the politicisation and rewriting of Taiwan's history, sociologist Hsiau A-chin discusses how both the KMT and DPP governments have reinterpreted Taiwan's history to suit

6.9 Yao Jui-chung, *The Dutch Occupation (1624–1662) (Landing Point: Fort Zeelandia)* (1994), performance/ photograph, 150 x 100 cm (from the series, *Territory Takeover*). Collection of MOMA Contemporary. Image courtesy of the artist.

6.10 Yao Jui-chung, *The Spanish Occupation (1626–1642) (Landing Point: Sheliao Island)* (1994), performance/ photograph, 150 x 100 cm (from the series, *Territory Takeover*). Collection of MOMA Contemporary. Image courtesy of the artist.

6.11 Yao Jui-chung, *The Rule of Ming Loyalist Cheng Family (1661–1683) (Landing Point: Luerhmen)* (1994), performance/ photograph, 150 x 100 cm (from the series, *Territory Takeover*). Collection of MOMA Contemporary. Image courtesy of the artist.



6.12 Yao Jui-chung, *Qing Rule (1683–1895) (Landing Point Fort Provintia – Center of Administration of the Ming Loyalist Family)* (1994), performance/ photograph, 150 x 100 cm (from the series, *Territory Takeover*). Collection of MOMA Contemporary. Image courtesy of the artist.

6.13 Yao Jui-chung, *The Japanese Occupation (1895–1945) (Landing Point: Aoti)* (1994), performance/photograph, 150 x 100 cm (from the series, *Territory Takeover*). Collection of MOMA Contemporary. Image courtesy of the artist.

6.14 Yao Jui-chung, *The Republic of China 17 October 1945 – recent (Landing Point: Keelung)* (1994), performance/photograph, 150 x 100 cm (from the series, *Territory Takeover*). Collection of MOMA Contemporary. Image courtesy of the artist.

their own political agendas. He notes that '… different components of history are highlighted, and different meanings are attached to the same figure or event. Political actors and their current concerns motivate the recollection of the past'.[32]

In *Territory Takeover*, Yao contests and subverts the notion of historical truth. He purposefully sets out to ridicule the ways that the land is territorialised and commemorated, highlighting what he describes as 'history's false authenticity'. He writes, 'all supposed history is nothing but a story told and interpreted by succeeding generations … our memories are an artificial construct and have been manipulated'.[33] Seeking to undermine the concepts of historical truth and authenticity, upon the surface of each of these six black-and-white photographs, the artist applied a brown sepia-toned glaze so they appear deceptively historical. Each of the photographs has been set in a European-style gold frame, which accentuates the sense of *faux* historicism the artist was seeking to achieve.[34]

When exhibited, these six gold-framed photographs were hung above six infant-size gold-painted toilet bowls attached to the walls. These toilet bowls explicitly express Yao's views of Taiwan's history, which he derisively describes as 'shitory', mischieviously engaging in an act of wordplay since 'history' and 'shit' are homophones in Chinese. In Taiwan, the colour gold symbolises wealth and happiness, or human desire, and is customarily applied to objects of worship, such as religious statues and shrines. Yao declares, however, 'for me gold is shit – it has an opposite meaning – history and even art can be like shit as it becomes power and money and reveals Taiwan's imitated culture and fakeness'.[35]

Territory Takeover has been shown in various configurations nationally and internationally. In 1994, when the work was exhibited at IT Park, the artist installed in the middle of the room an upside-down wooden dinghy that was elevated from the floor (fig. 6.15). Beneath it was an empty steel dog's cage from which emanated a soft beam of blue neon

6.15 Yao Jui-chung, *Territory Takeover* (1994), photographs, gold-painted toilet seats, wooden boat and cage, dimensions variable (exhibition display at IT Park, 1994). Collection of MOMA Contemporary. Image courtesy of the artist.

6.16 Yao Jui-chung, *Territory Takeover* (1997), photographs, gold-painted toilet seats, gold-painted toy boat, dimensions variable (in *Taiwan Taiwan: Facing Faces,* Venice Biennale, 1997). Collection of MOMA Contemporary. Image courtesy of the artist.

light. The boat signified the island of Taiwan; and the dog's cage can be interpreted as a visual metaphor for authoritarian rule and for the suppression and regulation of aspects of Taiwan's society. Huang Hai-ming argues that the dog's cage signifies the suppression of left-wing intellectuals (including artists) during the White Terror period who, he remarks, subsequently joined the opposition DPP, becoming 'the new Masters of Taiwan'. He questions whether these 'native dogs' have 'recovered their lost territory' or if, in fact, they are now merely following another Master, led by the West?[36]

Notwithstanding the critical and subversive aspects of this work, *Territory Takeover* was selected, amongst other works, to represent Taiwan in *Taiwan Taiwan: Facing Faces* at the 1997 Venice Biennale (fig. 6.16). The selection of this work for the biennale is testimony to the image Taiwan sought to project to the world: as democratic, tolerant and culturally distinctive. In a general review of the 1997 Venice Biennale, Yao (under his pseudonym Yao-I) wrote that Taiwan has become an exemplar of creative freedom and autonomy amongst other participating Asian countries.[37] In this exhibition, Yao controversially replaced the overturned boat from the previous installation with a gold-painted toy military aircraft to signify America's recent military intervention in Taiwan during the Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1996. In reference to this event, the artist said, 'the Taiwan government paid a lot of money to the US military to protect us from the Chinese who fired missiles across the Taiwan Strait'.[38] Although exhibition reviews of *Territory Takeover* were mainly descriptive, according to the artist, the public responded positively to the 'educational' aspects of the work. He comments, in his customary tongue-in-cheek manner, that 'most of them said my penis was very small … but they [the public] still thought it was a good introduction to Taiwan's history as most people know very little about it'.[39]

Yao's participation in the Venice Biennale marked an important turning point in his career. At the age of 28, it was the first time the artist had been involved in a major international exhibition. After this event, he received numerous invitations to participate in artist residencies and exhibitions in Taiwan and abroad. During his travels overseas, Yao says he became increasingly aware of the need to establish his own 'local style' rather than following international trends. While he embraces internationalism, and is critical of nationalism, the artist believes in the importance of local identity consciousness, even if one does not identify as Taiwanese. As his aforementioned manifesto indicates, he asserts that artists should develop a 'new aesthetic' responsive to the times, that reflects one's local environment and expresses a 'real Taiwan style'.[40] In an interview, Yao extrapolated on this idea of a new aesthetic and Taiwan style, which he describes in relation to Taiwanese customs and practices: from the garish colours used in local Taiwanese opera; to the 'electric flower cars' (*dianzi huache* 電子花車), which are highly decorated mobile floats upon which female strippers and pole dancers perform to honour and appease the dead in funerals or religious processions. Yao also discusses the temple festivals (*miaohui* 廟會); local karaoke; and the 'spicy' 'betel nut beauties' (*bingling xishi* 檳榔西施), being women who are typically young and scantily dressed and who sit in bright, neon-lit, glass kiosks on major roads and thoroughfares selling betel nuts and cigarettes.[41]

At the height of Taiwanese nationalism, these and other local customs were widely recognised and celebrated by many Taiwanese as an expression of identity consciousness, particularly in southern Taiwan, traditionally a Taiwanese pro-independence stronghold. According to Yao, these local customs distinguish Taiwan's 'funky style' (su 俗, literally 'common' or 'vulgar') from Chinese and Western aesthetic styles, which Yao claims are 'very different'.[42] Other artists, including Wu Tien-chang (figs. 1.18–1.23) and painter Huang Chin-ho (fig. 1.17) were also inspired, conceptually and aesthetically, by Taiwan's history, folk traditions and religions. These two artists' works were widely exhibited and promoted during the 1990s, since they were seen to embody a distinctively Taiwanese consciousness and aesthetic and, in this regard,

they are likely to have been a source of inspiration for Yao during the early stages of his career.

While Yao promoted identity consciousness and the idea of a 'Taiwanese aesthetic', he vehemently rejected parochial and prescriptive notions of *bentu*, and was highly critical of the commercial and political imperatives and agendas driving the *bentu* debate in art. Given the increasing popularity of *bentu* in the art market, during an interview in 1995, Yao acknowledged there was pressure on artists to respond to local issues. He is nevertheless dismissive of artists who claim their works are *bentu*:

> If you're *bentu* you might be more popular but maybe your art isn't very local. Like now, people say 'I love Taiwan' but maybe he doesn't and likes China more. I don't like artists who say I'm *bentu* … What is *bentu?* … when I go hiking and meet local Aboriginals, actually they are *bentu* … My theory is if you don't have too much confidence so he must use *bentu* to market his work.[43]

The artist insisted that proponents of *bentu* in art needed to develop a new and different way of thinking about identity that transcended the oppositional logic used to define and distinguish people and art as 'Taiwanese' or 'Other'. He remarks, 'they talk about it in the old way [but] they don't have a new concept'. He adds, 'they forget the world is very big and there is a need to understand each other. Taiwan's identity is multi-ethnic and our future is international … artists should not be limited by *bentuhua*'.[44] Yao does not define exactly who 'they' are, but it is clear he is referring to politicians and Taiwanese nationalists who promoted a Taiwan-centred rather than international viewpoint. Yao asserted that his generation must break away from the ideological paradoxes and the combative forms of nationalism that characterised this *bentu* debate and establish a new identity that is both individualistic and local.[45]

RECOVER MAINLAND CHINA

Following his 'occupation offensive' of Taiwan in *Territory Takeover*, Yao embarked on an historical offensive against China. *Recover Mainland China* comprises six distinct bodies of work created in a range of media including, installation, collage, drawings, performance and photographs. These are titled: *(1. Preface*; *(2. Preface – Shitory*; *(3. Do Military – Revolutionary Document*; *(4. Do Military – Book of Chrysanthemum*; *(5. Prophesy*; and, *(6. Action* and they must be read sequentially as a series of steps or manoeuvres in his counterattack on China.

This series, created between 1994 and 1996, derives its name from the KMT's well-worn former slogan 'Recover mainland China' (*fangong Dalu* 反攻大陸). The artist rehabilitates and imbues it with new meaning as he explores the political realities, histories and myths surrounding Taiwan's relationship with China. From 1949, when the KMT retreated to Taiwan, this slogan was the KMT's supreme guiding principle until 1971, when the Republic of China was de-recognised by the United Nations and the slogan was eventually consigned to memory. During the 1950s and 1960s, however, it was used by the KMT to indoctrinate the Taiwanese masses and promote its 'one China' policy. Widely propagated in society, including schools, the artist remembers hearing this slogan as a child: 'We only learnt Chinese history and geography [and] there was just Beijing Opera on TV …, and if you speak Taiwanese in school you had to give the teacher one dollar. So at that time the only way is Chinese'.[46]

Yao visited China for the first time in 1996 and discovered that the present-day realities did not correspond with his father's nostalgic memories of the Mainland, nor did he discover any trace of the ancient China he had learnt about at school. Reflecting on his initial expectations and impressions of China, Yao notes:

> When I go to China I find there is no connection – [it] is just based on memory. [In the 1990s] our economy was very strong and it was before China really opened up … When we go to China they think we are a rich man and

> they will rob you. Even if we speak the same language and have a similar lifestyle you know we are not really Chinese people.[47]

In this series the artist gives visual expression to the profound sense of disillusionment and dislocation he experienced in China. Throughout, there is one recurring visual motif: a floating or hovering figure whose feet symbolically never touch the ground. In *Preface* and *Preface – Shitory*, the figure appears in silhouette and in three-dimensional form with a propeller around its neck. In a darkened room it is suspended above a floor covered in white powder. The space is bathed in an ethereal deep blue light that accentuates the sense of dislocation. In a subsequent series of drawings that Yao completed when he was in military service, including *Do Military – Revolutionary Document* and *Do Military Service – Book of Chrysanthemum*, the same hovering figure with a helicopter's blade spinning around its neck is finely drawn in biro. In the former work, Yao has drawn this figure on the cover page of the monthly air force magazine that was distributed amongst young servicemen as a form of 'spiritual education'.

Notably, in these earlier works, the figure is unidentifiable, appearing only in silhouetted form. In Yao's *Action* series, however, the artist becomes the physical embodiment of the figure as he photographs himself, in flight, hovering above the ground. In the background are some of China's most historically significant monuments, including the Great Wall, Tiananmen Square (fig. 6.17), the Forbidden City, and the Hall of Prayer for Good Harvest in Beijing (fig. 6.18); as well as the Bund in Shanghai (fig. 6.19). In this series of 10 photographs, the artist's posture mimics that of a military stance: rigidly straight, with his arms firmly by his sides. Although his late father never returned China, as he thought he might, Yao wanted to convey the sense of disconnection many other retired KMT soldiers experienced when they did go back after the lifting of martial law.

This work brings to mind the internationally renowned German artist Anselm Kiefer's early political interventions, such as *Besetzungen* (*Occupations*) (1969), in which he dressed in paramilitary uniform and was photographed against several European monuments performing the 'Seig Heil' salute. When I asked Yao whether he had been influenced by Kiefer's series, similarly described as 'occupations', he replied that, while fond of Kiefer's work it did not inspire him as much as did other artists' works, such as Yves Klein and also Marcel Duchamp who has had an enduring influence on artists in Taiwan as well as China.[48] During the 1990s, performance art was also becoming increasingly popular in Taiwan and China. Although Yao has not specifically referred to this phenomenon, he would certainly have been aware of artists Lee Ming-sheng and Chen Chieh-jen who played pioneering roles in the development of performance art in Taiwan (see chapters Five and Seven); as well as Chinese artists Cang Xin (苍鑫), Song Dong (宋东), and Zhang Huan (张洹) who also used their bodies to create performative works and explored similar themes relating to history, memory and place.

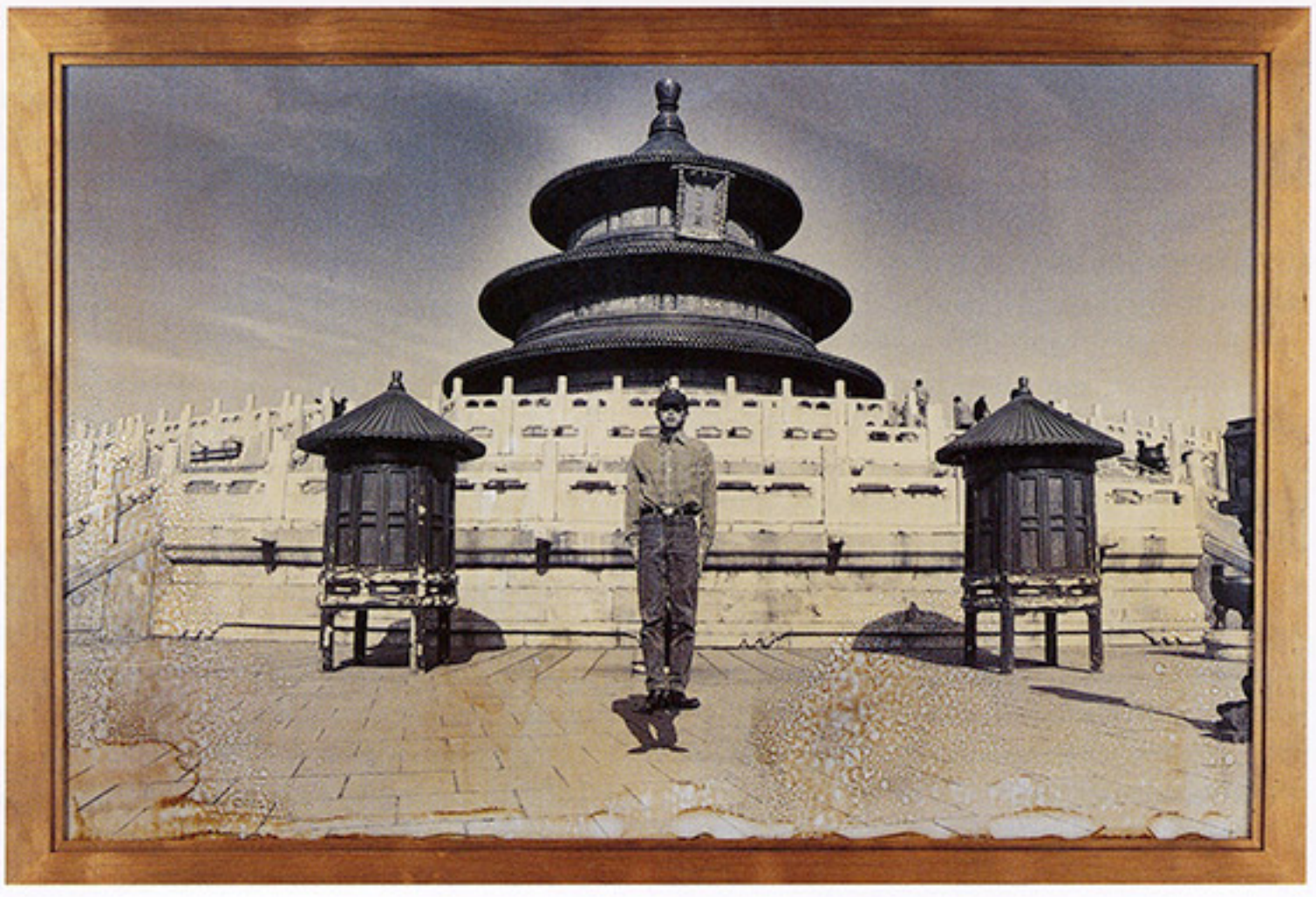
While acknowledging these developments and the autobiographical dimensions of this series, *Action* responds most directly to political issues concerning Taiwan's long-standing and complex relationship with China. These black-and-white sepia-stained photographs lampoon the KMT regime and its quest to retake China. Yao remarked:

> The antagonistic confrontation between the two sides of the Strait has influenced us imperceptibly and become part of our memories and consciousness … For me the whole saga is just as ridiculous as I claiming to have recovered the mainland China with a silly act just like that. It's a complete joke.[49]

It is no coincidence that the artist completed this *Action* series in the same year of the handover of Hong Kong. One of the images in the series symbolically depicts the artist hovering in the air against a large digital clock placed by authorities at the entrance of the National Museum of Chinese His-

6.17

6.18



6.19

6.17 Yao Jui-chung, *Tiananmen Square, Beijing* (1997), performance/ photograph, 93 x 143.5 cm (from the series, *Recover Mainland China – Action*). Collection of Taipei Fine Arts Museum. Image courtesy of the artist.

6.18 Yao Jui-chung, *The Hall of Prayer for Good Harvest, Beijing* (1997), performance/ photograph, 93.3 x 143.5 cm (from the series, *Recover Mainland China – Action*). Collection of Taipei Fine Arts Museum. Image courtesy of the artist.

6.19 Yao Jui-chung, *The Bund* (1997), performance/photograph, 93.3 x 143.5 cm (from the series, *Recover Mainland China – Action*). Collection of Taipei Fine Arts Museum. Image courtesy of the artist.

6.20 Yao Jui-chung, *The National Museum of Chinese History* (1997), performance/photograph, 143.5 x 93 cm (from the series, *Recover Mainland China – Action*). Collection of Taipei Fine Arts Museum. Image courtesy of the artist.

tory (fig. 6.20) (which was subsequently integrated into the National Museum of China). From 1986 this clock counted down the days, hours and minutes to the handover in July 1997, after which time it was removed. Furthermore, in the wake of the 1989 Tiananmen uprising, and the aforementioned 1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis, Taiwan–China relations became increasingly tense and hostile, and attracted significant media attention. When questioned about his political views of China in an interview in 1998, Yao remarked:

> China always says they want to fight Taiwan so they are the enemy. Sometime they say we are family and other times they say we will kill you. If your mother says if you don't come back I'll kill you … then of course you don't come back.[50]

In *Prophesy*, which is the fifth stage in *Recover Mainland China*, these political tensions between Taiwan and China are metaphorically explored through the prism of power, sex and mythology. In this audio-visual installation and performance, which were presented at Dimensions Endowment of Art in Taipei in 1997, Yao satirises the Taiwan–China relationship by eroticising it. He designed a series of discrete and softly lit rooms around which are placed figurative drawings of erect phalluses symbolising desire and power. One of the spaces was transformed into an empty bridal chamber resembling the bedroom that an emperor would have customarily shared with his concubines. From this room, the soft, alluring voice of woman is heard repeatedly singing the lyrics, 'waiting for you to come back', sourced from a famous Shanghai song.[51] Interpreting this work, the local art critic, JJ Shih reflects, 'The absent "she" and the bed in the room signify China, a site so envied and longed for by … "they" [Taiwan]'.[52]

Taiwan's political impotence and *de facto* national status are emphasised in this work and are explored in relation to the KMT's unrealised ambition to reclaim mainland China and the DPP's aspirations for national sovereignty. In a series of text panels, the artist delivers a 12-point prophesy, based on the ancient Chinese text *Push-Back Prophecy* (*Tui Bei Tu* 推背图), which forecasts China's future.[53] Yao's prophesy spans the past, present and future: addressing the KMT's withdrawal from China and visualising a future when Taiwan 'divorces' China and thereby triggers a cross-strait war. Finally, in this prophesy the artist imagines a world that 'is for all' where peace reigns and national boundaries no longer exist. This idea of a borderless community is further explored in the series *The World is for All – China Beyond China* (1997–2000), which I later discuss.

Recover Mainland China is an important body of work, especially in relation to Taiwan's identity discourse, and it was a precursor to *The Cynic* (2004–05), *The Cynic Republic* (2006) and *Long March – Shifted the Universe* (2002). The two *Cynic* series are among the few works Yao produced that directly engage in contemporary party politics, which he explores in relation to Taiwan's cross-strait and international relations. These two series, comprising drawings on paper with gold leaf, are imbued with political symbolism. They typically depict figures that are part human, dog, and devil in either red, blue or green, signifying 'Red Communist China', the (blue) KMT, and the (green) DPP[54] respectively; and they are often shown copulating. For example, in his work entitled *TAIWANESE* (2004) (fig. 6.21), a red-horned man (signifying China), is shown having sex with a woman sporting a dog's head (signifying the DPP). From her mouth there is a large speech bubble bearing the word 'Taiwanese' in English. Yao phonetically translates this word into Chinese as '*ta wan ni si*', meaning 's/he play you die', referring to China's threatening gestures to thwart the DPP's campaign for independence.[55] Several years later, in 2011, a large reproduction of this work was displayed outside the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in Taipei advertising Yao's exhibition. It attracted media attention after a city councillor reportedly described it as 'derogatory' and 'self-defamatory' (referring to the dog, signifying Taiwan, appearing to be raped) and it was subsequently relocated to a less conspicuous space within the museum.[56]


他玩妳死
TAIWANESE

LONG MARCH – SHIFTED THE UNIVERSE

In 2002, Yao launched his final historical 'counterattack' on China in *Long March – Shifted the Universe* (2002). In this series of 10 black-and-white photographs the artist returns to China to visit particular sites along the route of the Long March in southern and western China and has his photograph taken – upside down. Yao sets out literally to turn history on its head and highlight the 'absurdity' of history and human destiny:

> If we say that resignation is the destiny of a generation lost in the fog of history, then the least we can do is make commentary on our plight. It's just like I once said, the historical destiny of humanity has a certain incurable absurdity![57]

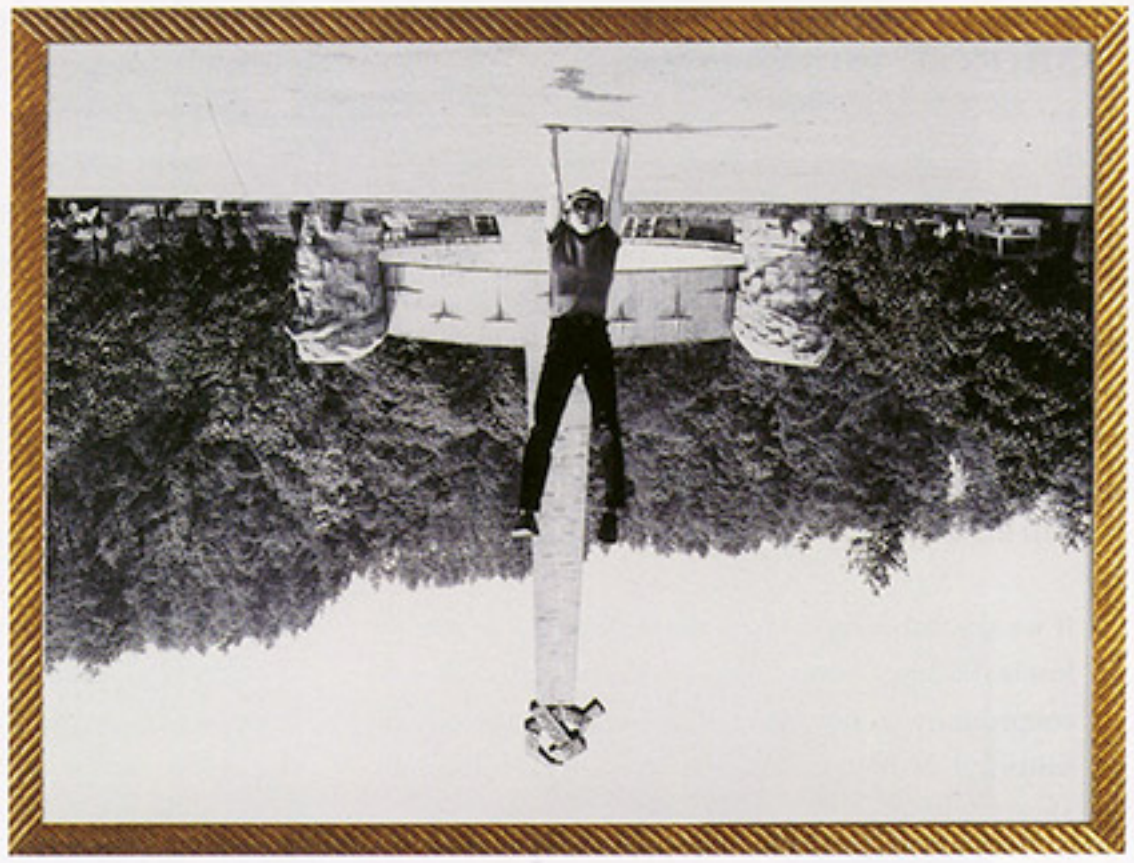
This series of photographs was taken when Yao was invited to join the 'The Long March', a large, multi-platform, participatory-based travelling art project that involved more than 250 local and international artists, curators, scholars and members of local communities.[58] The title of this arts project is derived from the Long March (1934–35),[59] one of the most well-known and mythologised events, or series of events, in China's history. It effectively secured the victory of Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communists (CCP) against Chiang Kai-shek and the Chinese Nationalists (KMT), who were forced to retreat to Taiwan. The Long March changed the future of China and, in Yao's view, it 'created' the destiny of Taiwan. It triggered the widespread migration of Chinese who fled not only to Taiwan, Hong Kong and South-East Asia, but also to the United States and Europe, becoming part of the vast Chinese diaspora that Yao explores in his series *The World is for All – China Beyond China*. Yao says, 'If we reversed this situation [and the KMT wasn't defeated] maybe there wouldn't be a Taiwan – maybe it'd be one China … and maybe [Chinese] people wouldn't be living overseas'.[60]

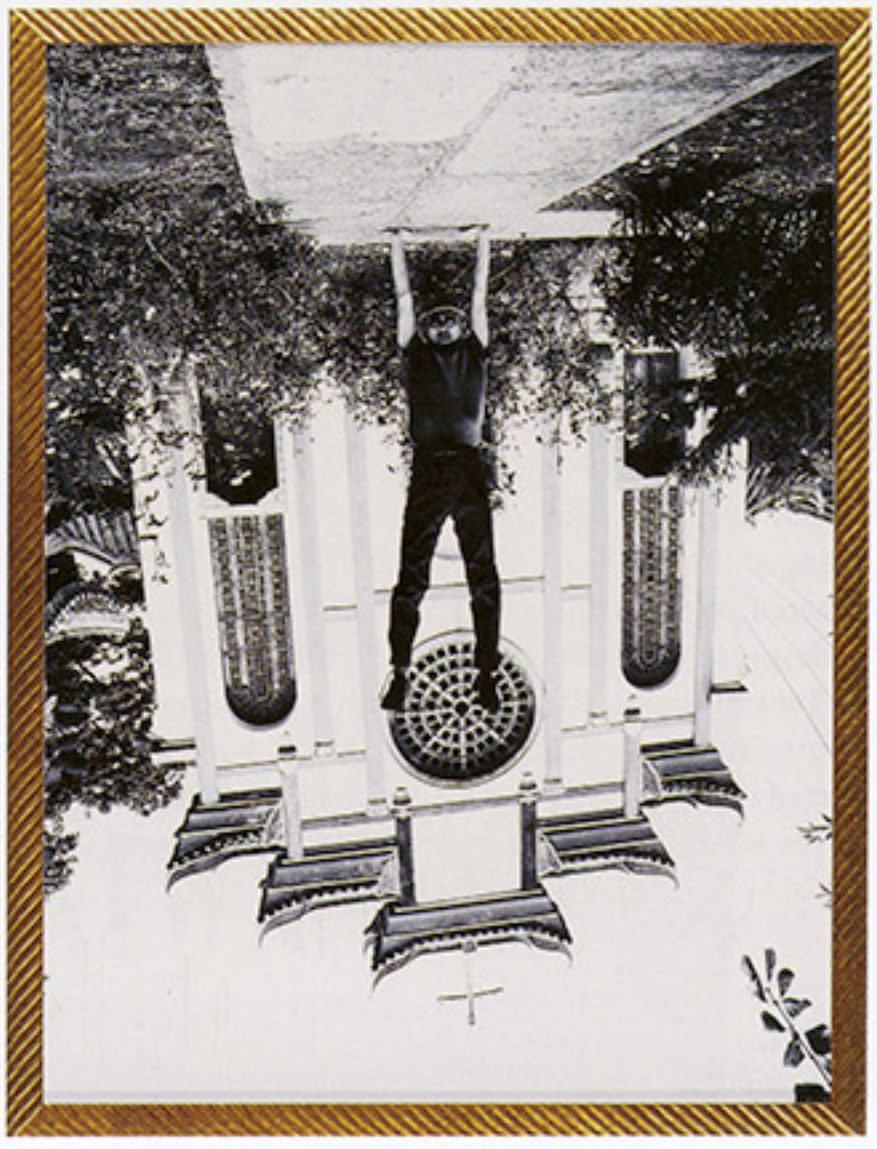
Yao photographed himself against 10 historically significant landmarks along the route of the Long March, including the legendary Luding Bridge in Sichuan province where the Red Army defeated the embattled Nationalists, in front of the famous conference building where leaders of the Politburo met, and against the monument to the 'Red Army Revolutionary Martyrs' in Zunyi in Guizhou province (figs. 6.22–6.25). In every image he is depicted doing a handstand and, when presenting this series, the artist cunningly turns these images 180 degrees so that both the landscape and the artist appear upside down. As such, the subjects in these images defy gravity and the viewer experiences an overwhelming sense of disorientation. Similar to *Territory Takeover*, each work in this series is accompanied by an extended label written by the artist that provides details about the particular sites represented in the image. Each text panel concludes with the line 'Yao Jui-Chung was here to accomplish the feat of "shifting the universe"'.

This series undermines not only the conventions of portrait photography but also questions and challenges the ways that history shapes us or, more specifically, how an historical event defines our destiny, which, in turn, constructs our sense of national identity. The artist notes that, in China, the Long March is celebrated and commemorated as an integral part of its history; whereas, in Taiwan, few people know about the Long March because, he says 'for us it's shit and for them it's victory':[61]

> History is about the winners – not the losers. The Kuomintang came to Taiwan because they lost. Memories become history but those that have power can change your memory and history.[62]

6.21 Yao Jui-chung, *TAIWANESE* (2004), handmade paper, ink with gold leaf, 115 x 153 cm (from the series, *The Cynic*). Image courtesy of the artist.





6.22 Yao Jui-chung, *Zun Yi Red Army Mountain Memorial: Gui state* (2002), performance/photograph, 140 x 105 cm (unframed) (from the series, *Long March – Shifting the Universe*). Collection of Hong-gah Museum. Image courtesy of the artist.

6.23 Yao Jui-chung, *Red Army General Political Department: Gui State* (2002), performance/photograph, 140 x 105 cm (unframed) (from the series, *Long March – Shifting the Universe*). Collection of Hong-gah Museum. Image courtesy of the artist.

6.24 Yao Jui-chung, *Luding Bridge at the Dadu River in Luding County: Sichuan* (2002), performance/photograph, 140 x 105 cm (unframed) (from the series, *Long March – Shifting the Universe*). Collection of Hong-gah Museum. Image courtesy of the artist.

6.25 Yao Jui-chung, *Chongqing City Residue Jail: Sichuan* (2002), performance/photograph, 140 x 105 cm (unframed) (from the series, *Long March – Shifting the Universe*). Collection of Hong-gah Museum. Image courtesy of the artist.

THE WORLD IS FOR ALL – CHINA BEYOND CHINA

In *The World is for All – China Beyond China* (fig. 6.26) (hereafter, *The World is For All*) Yao shifts his attention from geopolitical issues surrounding Taiwan's identity and its relationship with China to focus on the impact of globalisation and transmigration, explored from the perspective of the Chinese diaspora. In these photographs, defined as his third 'action' series, the artist revisits some of the themes explored in *Territory Takeover* and *Recover Mainland China* relating to notions of the land, territorialisation and displacement. This time, however, he self-reflexively examines these issues from a broader Chinese and international standpoint, and from the position of a tourist–outsider.

While travelling around Europe, America, Canada, Japan and Australia, the artist visits the various Chinatowns that have sprung up like satellite cities around the world; and which are tangible markers of identity and transmigration. Chinese from across the world have sought economic and/or political refuge in these settlements, including members of Yao's own family. As such these are marginal spaces demarcated for Chinese in exile, and for immigrant–minority labourers in search of opportunity and a new future. According to Yao they are also perceived by some Westerners as sites 'for Chinese … who just want to make lots of money'.[63] Paradoxically, these places, once viewed as dilapidated and dangerous ethnic Chinese enclaves, are today embraced as thriving international commercial and tourist hubs, and reflect the vision of a progressive and cosmopolitan city.

6.26 Yao Jui-chung, *The World is for All – China Beyond China* (1997–2000), black-and-white photographs, 105 x 140 cm (each) (10 images) (at Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts). Collection of Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts. Image courtesy of the artist and Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts.

In these 10 black-and-white sepia-stained photographs, Yao explores the historical and cultural significance of Chinatown. In particular he focuses his lens on the gate that customarily demarcates the point of entry and exit in Chinatowns. The Chinese gate can be viewed as another type of monument or landmark, which is a recurring motif in Yao's work. In his discussion on the construction of space and the significance of landmarks in a mainland Chinese context, the US-based Chinese art critic and curator Wu Hung notes that the Chinese gate is one of the principal features of a capital in Imperial China. Physically, it separates the inside from the outside and protects and conceals the power hidden within, themes that Yao explores in this series.[64] Yao says, 'Chinese like to build landmarks … they build traditional Chinese things because they feel homesick. Like dogs have an area'.[65] Instead of urinating on these monuments and reclaiming the site, as he did in *Territory Takeover*, in this series Yao stands under the gate with his feet firmly on the ground, and his arms raised straight into the air. A photograph was taken to commemorate each action.

This series, collectively titled, 'The World is for All' (*Tian Xia Wei Gong*天下為公), derives its name from a phrase that was popular during the Republican era (1912–49), and conveyed a sense patriotism

6.27 Yao Jui-chung, *The World is for All – China Beyond China* (1997–2000) (detail), black-and-white photographs, 105 x 140 cm (each) (10 images) (at Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts). Collection of Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts. Image courtesy of the artist and Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts.

and the view that we are 'all [equal] under heaven' (*tian xia*). These words, which are often inscribed on the top horizontal frame of each gate in Chinatown, refer to the idea of universal peace and brotherhood, and reinforce the idea that China belongs to all Chinese.[66] In this series Yao effectively undermines and parodies this concept by representing himself, dressed in black, appearing like a criminal with his hands in the air, as if surrendering himself to the police. The semicircular photographic installation included a toy pistol and the viewer is invited to pick up the pistol and point it at the artist represented in the photographs (fig. 6.27). A sign beside the pistol bears the words: 'You have the right to remain silent and are innocent until proven guilty'. In this series, the artist says he wanted to question and challenge racial stereotypes and, more specifically, what it means to be Chinese living overseas.

While Chinatowns may provide a safe haven for some and, for many Chinese migrants, a sense of 'home away from home', the artist reminds us that they are nevertheless built on foreign or alien soil. Yao says, 'They live in Chinatown just like China but it is on foreign land. They hardly go outside this town. Even though many live there a long time they are still [considered] foreign'.[67] In each city, Yao typically invites passers-by to take the photograph of him under the gate; in so doing they unwittingly become active participants in this 'othering' pro-

cess.[68] Each of these photographs is set in a European-style gold frame that, in this context, alludes to the insider–outsider binary and questions the notion of cultural authenticity. The gold leaf, which the artist has also applied to the photographs, serves to compress and create an illusory sense of space that accentuates the feeling of dislocation or disorientation.

This series defines Chinatown as a signifier of a unified and cohesive *Chinese* community. Notably, identity is viewed here in the context of race or kinship, as *Chinese*, rather than in geopolitical or 'ethnic' Taiwanese–Chinese separatist terms. As this series testifies, however, Chinatown is, in fact, an invented or illusory imagined community. These photographs critically engage with issues of national identity, belonging and territorialisation. Yao represents himself as an imposter on foreign soil. But whose territory is this, or to whom does it belong? Is it Chinese or Western? The artist leaves that for the viewer to decide.

Symbolically, in the final photograph of this series, taken in Taipei, Yao invites several of his friends and colleagues, from Western countries and Taiwan, to stand together under the gate of the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial. Standing alongside one another, the image of these figures of mixed race and creed visually embodies the concept of 'universal peace and brotherhood'. The fact each individual has their arms raised in the air suggests, however, that they are still targeted as offenders or imposters. In relation to this work, Yao said he wanted to inject a sense of 'hope' as he endeavoured to give expression to the complex and culturally hybrid nature of Taiwan's identity. In reference to ongoing ethno-cultural political debates regarding the meaning of being 'Taiwanese', in my interview with him in 1998, Yao was more circumspect, remarking:

> In Taiwan there are different local people like *kejiaren*, *waishengren*, Aboriginals … and *minnanren* … and they argue who are real Taiwanese. I think we should look at history again and see it is a mixed nation so nobody can say they are really Taiwanese.[69]

REDEFINING LAND AND PLACE: THE LEGACIES OF CHINESE TRADITION AND MODERNISATION IN TAIWAN

Based on this remark, and his concluding work in the *The World is for All* series, it would seem that Yao had reached an important turning point. Although he continued to produce works that explored the politics of Taiwan's national history and identity, as exemplified by his video performances, *Liberating Taiwan* (2007), *Phantom of History* (2007), towards the end of this decade he began focusing his attention on two key issues that broadly relate to the relationship between land and place, which he explores in relation to Chinese tradition and modernisation in Taiwan.

From 2007, Yao began a series of landscape drawings which are inspired by, and seek to subvert, the Chinese *shanshui* (literally 'mountain and water') painting tradition. These landscapes are often monumental in scale, and are imbued with personal and contemporary significance. According to the artist, a residency that he undertook at Glenfiddich in Scotland in 2007 prompted him to deeply contemplate a range of issues relating to his Chinese heritage and the role and history of landscape art. Living for months in Scotland's remote highlands, Yao says he began to re-think the concept of the land as a subject of pictorial representation in Chinese art, and as a site of desire and belonging. He states:

> Only in Scotland did I come to understand the ancient saying; 'watch the mountains and one's goals become clear, watch water and feel serenity, only then can one be as free as a floating cloud or wild crane though living in a busy world' … the fresh air also helped clear my head so I had a lot of time to just relax and listen to my own inner voice.[70]

Removed from Taipei's dense urban metropolis, Scotland's soaring mountains veiled in mist reminded the artist of traditional Chinese landscape painting, to which he had been introduced by his father, who occasionally practiced ink painting. As

an art student, Yao had strongly rejected the ink tradition, viewing it as antiquated and as part of China's cultural history, as distinct from Taiwan's local culture and everyday life. During this residency, however, he began to view this tradition differently, aesthetically and conceptually, and acknowledged that it was both an integral part of his identity and of Taiwan's cultural heritage. The artist began researching Chinese *shanshui* painting, particularly from the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, and he copied works by Chinese masters, including Dong Qichang (董其昌) and Shitao (石濤), whose expansive vistas, expressive brushwork, and distorted forms the artist had come to admire.

The practice of copying or imitating a venerated master's work is central to the Chinese painting tradition. In this series Yao explores this idea in a postmodernist and contemporary context, as he sets out to question, subvert and parody notions of authenticity and authorship. In these 'pseudo-landscapes', as the artist describes them, Yao randomly selects and copies from the internet a range of Chinese classical masterpieces, and he inserts into them autobiographical elements and motifs relating to his everyday life and experiences in Taiwan. Importantly, Yao consciously rejects traditional materials and methods associated with traditional Chinese landscape painting, including the brush, rice paper, seals and inscriptions. Instead, he uses a fine point oil pen on Indian handmade paper that he embellishes with gold leaf and, occasionally, glitter, to add to the 'fake' or *faux* effect that is central to his work.

As his series *Wonderful* (2007), *Romance* (2009), *Dreamy* (2008–11) and *Honeymoon* (2010–12) demonstrate, many of these works are unselfconsciously personal and intimate. In several of these images two figures, the artist and his girlfriend (and now wife) are shown embracing, having intercourse or swimming in the lofty mountainscapes, where gold leaf waterfalls and rivers gush forth. As an artist who has an enduring interest in the relationship between reality and illusion, and in the dark or concealed aspects of life, one cannot help but wonder if this is indeed the paradise it seems. In these and other works, including *Making Love in We-go Motel* (2007), *Yaoyiyao on the Internet in Scotland* (2007) (fig. 6.28) and *Love Spa* (2009) (fig. 6.29), the artist portrays himself as Mara (in Chinese *mo*魔), a demon-like Buddhist deity who, according to Buddhist mythology, used the power of temptation in an effort to distract and prevent Buddha from attaining Nirvana. Represented as half human and half demon, in these works the artist dons Buddhist robes and performs a range of tasks associated with the sensory and earthly worlds, including receiving a massage, working on a laptop and playing mahjong. In one of his most recent works, entitled *Yao's Journey to Australia* (2015) (fig. 6.30), which he produced for an exhibition I curated, *Ink Remix: Contemporary art from mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong*, the artist envisions himself as a Buddhist disciple, sitting cross-legged in the middle of a map of Australia, meditating upon on his forthcoming journey there.[71]

Other works, including *Long Live Landscape I* (2012) (fig. 6.31), are more overtly critical, interrogating notions of power and authority. Yao refers to the 'hegemony of Chinese culture' in Taiwan, which was most evident during the early period of KMT rule, and which, some may argue, has resurfaced in recent years with the warming of relations between Taiwan and China.[72] On the left, upper-section of this work, the map of China looms large in the form of a grey cloud hovering between the lofty mountains. On the right, a small island, resembling the map of Taiwan, is symbolically cast adrift in a rivulet of gold that forms a pool at the foot of a mountain (fig. 6.32). Within each of these 'maps', a diminutive figure, which one can assume is the artist, stands dressed as a solider with his right arm raised into the air, a posture that Yao has adopted in previous works, such as *Liberating Taiwan*. On this occasion, however, his feet are firmly planted on the ground.

6.28 Yao Jui-chung, *Yaoyiyao on the Internet in Scotland* (2007), handmade paper, ink with gold leaf, 70 x 100 cm (from the series, *Wonderful*). Private collection. Image courtesy of the artist.

6.30 Yao Jui-chung, *Yao's Journey to Australia* (2015), handmade paper, ink with gold leaf, 539 x 198 cm (in *Ink Remix: Contemporary art from mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong*, UNSW Galleries, Sydney, 2016). Image courtesy of UNSW Galleries.

Given the global rise and burgeoning interest in Chinese art, and particularly in contemporary ink art, a cynic may argue that Yao's return to the Chinese landscape tradition, which he had previously rejected, was motivated by the art market and exhibition opportunities locally and internationally. As I have written elsewhere, since the early 2000s, increasing numbers of contemporary artists in Taiwan, as well as in Hong Kong and mainland China, are drawing inspiration from the ink tradition and incorporating these elements into their work.[73] During an interview with the artist in 2008, a year after Yao began this landscape series, he reflected on his artistic trajectory and, in relation to his change of direction, he candidly remarked:

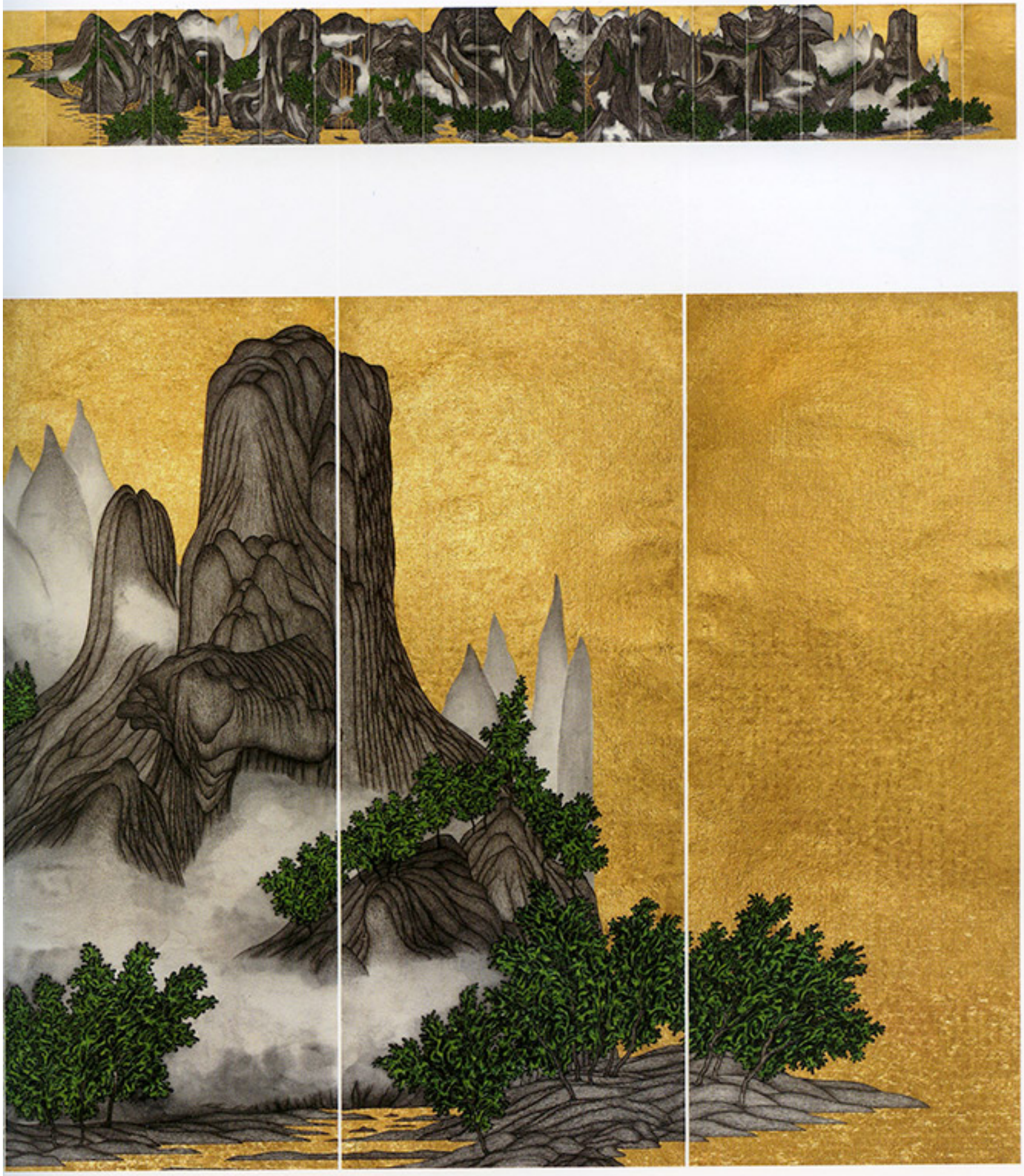
> I've finished looking at Taiwan's terrible history … I've done so many exhibitions and writing … it is hard to survive … I want to change things but it takes a lot of time [and] there's no payback so I think I should do something else. I am so tired.[74]

6.29 Yao Jui-chung, *Love Spa* (2009), handmade paper, ink with gold leaf, 100 x 140 cm (from the series, *Romance*). Private Collection. Image courtesy of the artist.

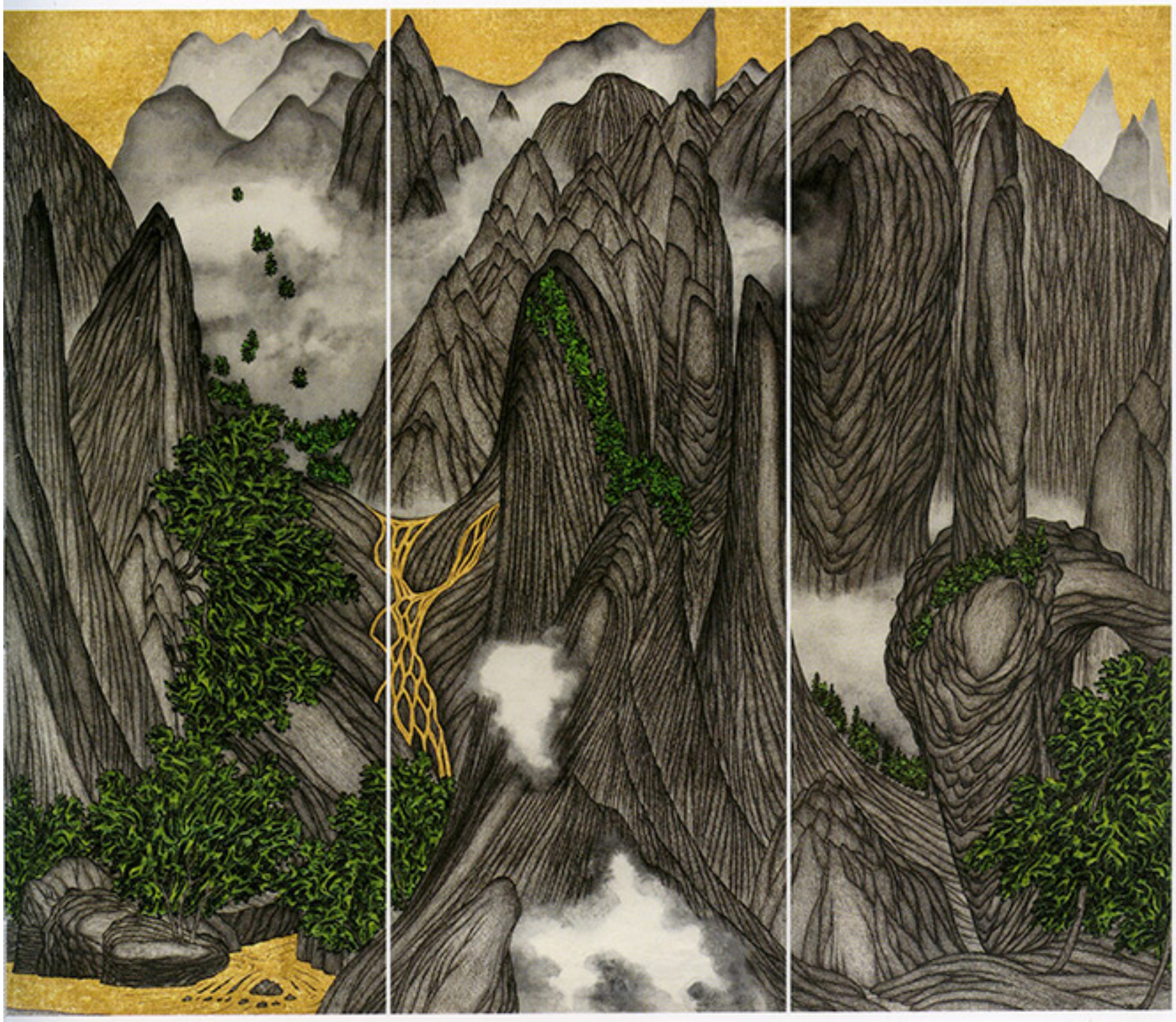
Yao acknowledges that this landscape series has been commercially successful and the sales from these works have enabled him to work fulltime as an artist and financially support his new family. They have also helped subsidise his new photographic series, which he embarked on several years later, entitled *Mirage – Disused Public Property in Taiwan* (2010–16) (figs. 6.33–6.35). Operating under the pseudonym, 'LSD – Lost Society Documentation' Yao, in collaboration with more than a 100 of his students from the Taipei National University of the Arts and the National Taiwan Normal University, have researched and photographed over 500 public buildings and facilities across the island, including art and cultural centres, elementary schools and undercover car parks. Many of these public buildings were built to fulfil election campaign promises, but they were not completed, and are described colloquially as 'mosquito halls', since it is believed mosquitos are the only living beings dwelling within them. This participatory project comprises a photographic archive and five volumes of books (the last one of which was published in 2016), and it has attracted significant media attention in Taiwan because it exposes the negligence of political leaders and their misuse of public taxes. In response, the KMT government has declared in the

6.31 Yao Jui-chung, *Long Live Landscape I* (2012), handmade paper, ink with gold leaf, 195 x 1425 cm. Private collection. Image courtesy of the artist.

Detail of fig. 6.31

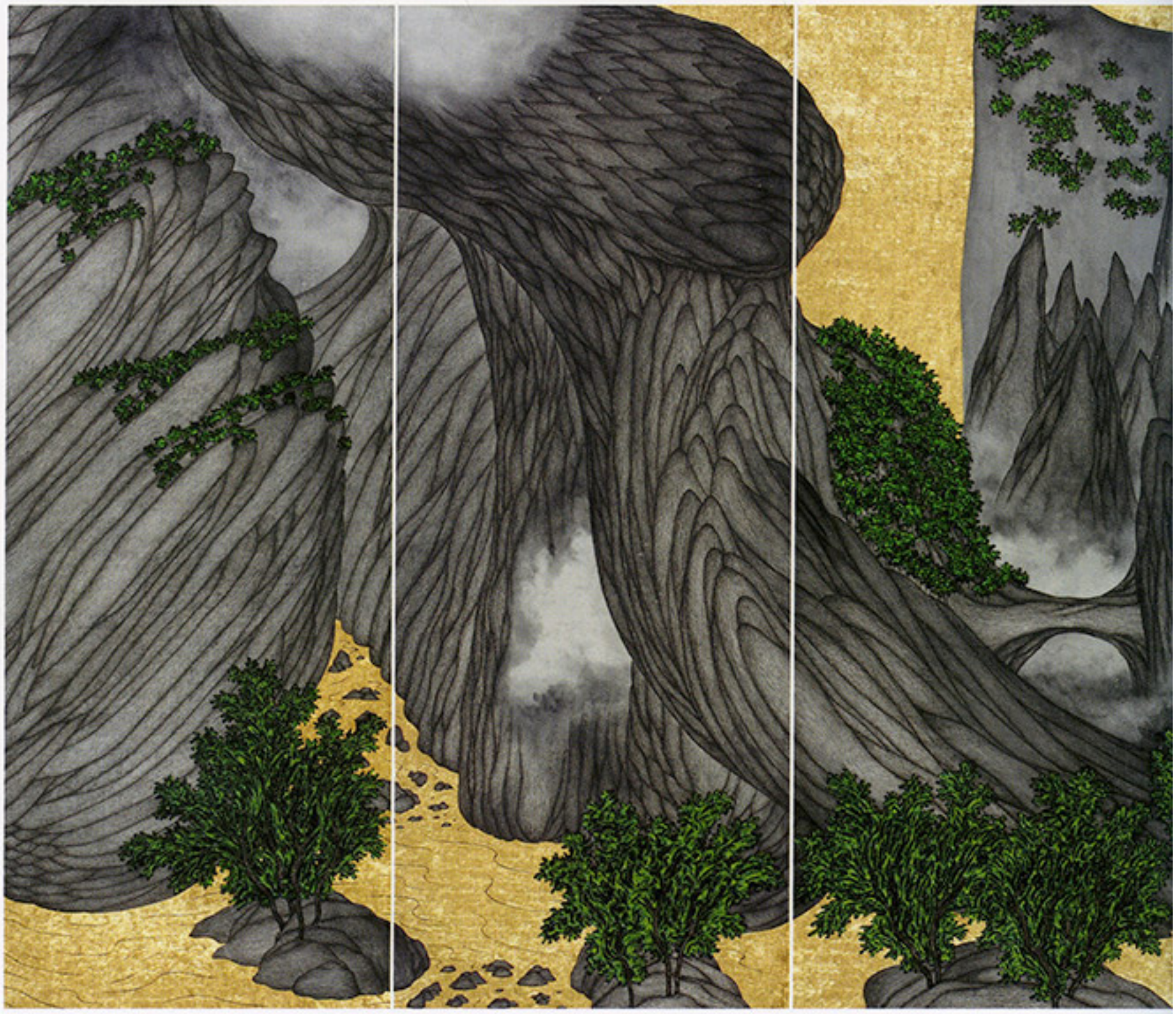


Detail of fig. 6.31

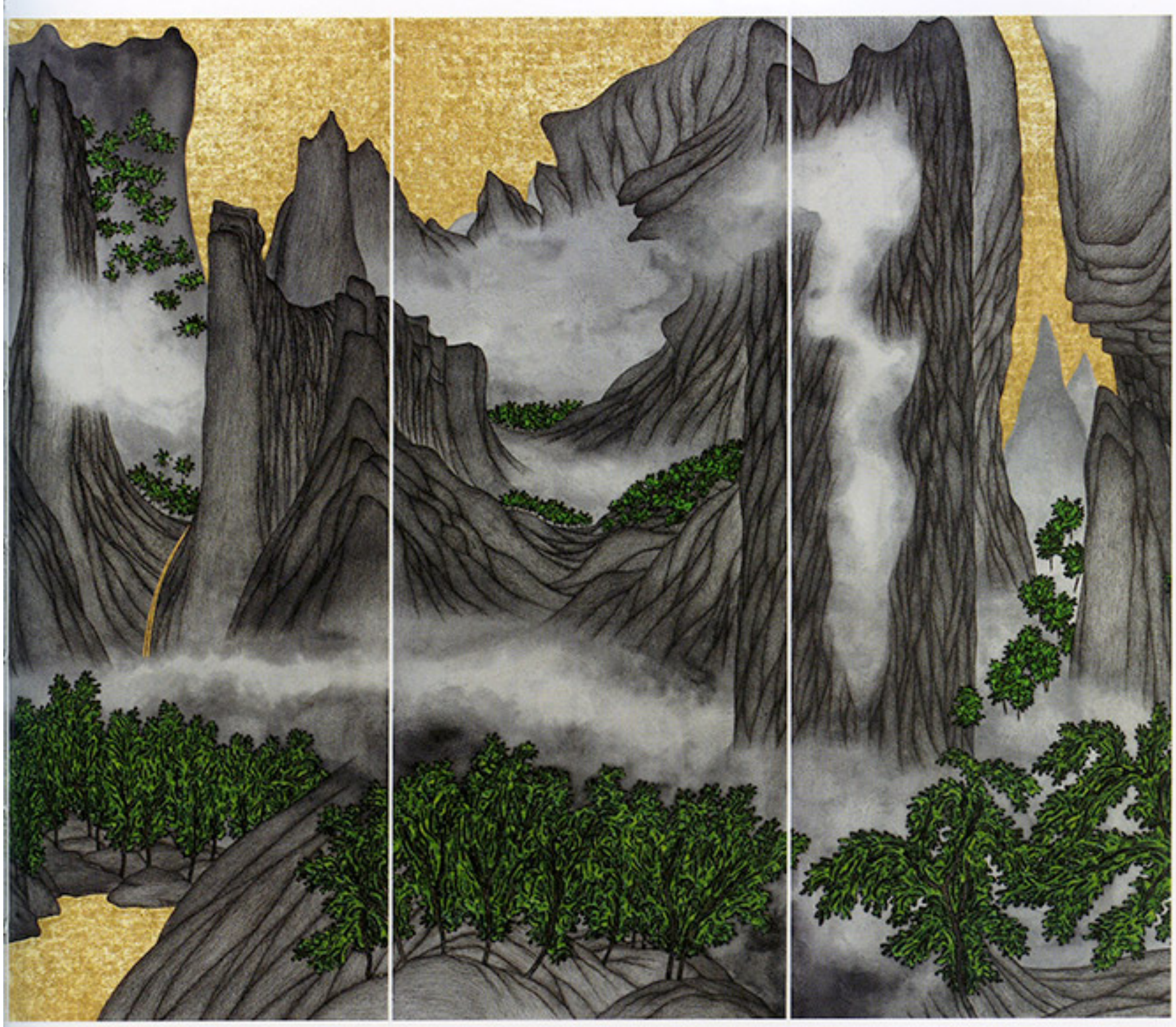


Detail of fig. 6.31

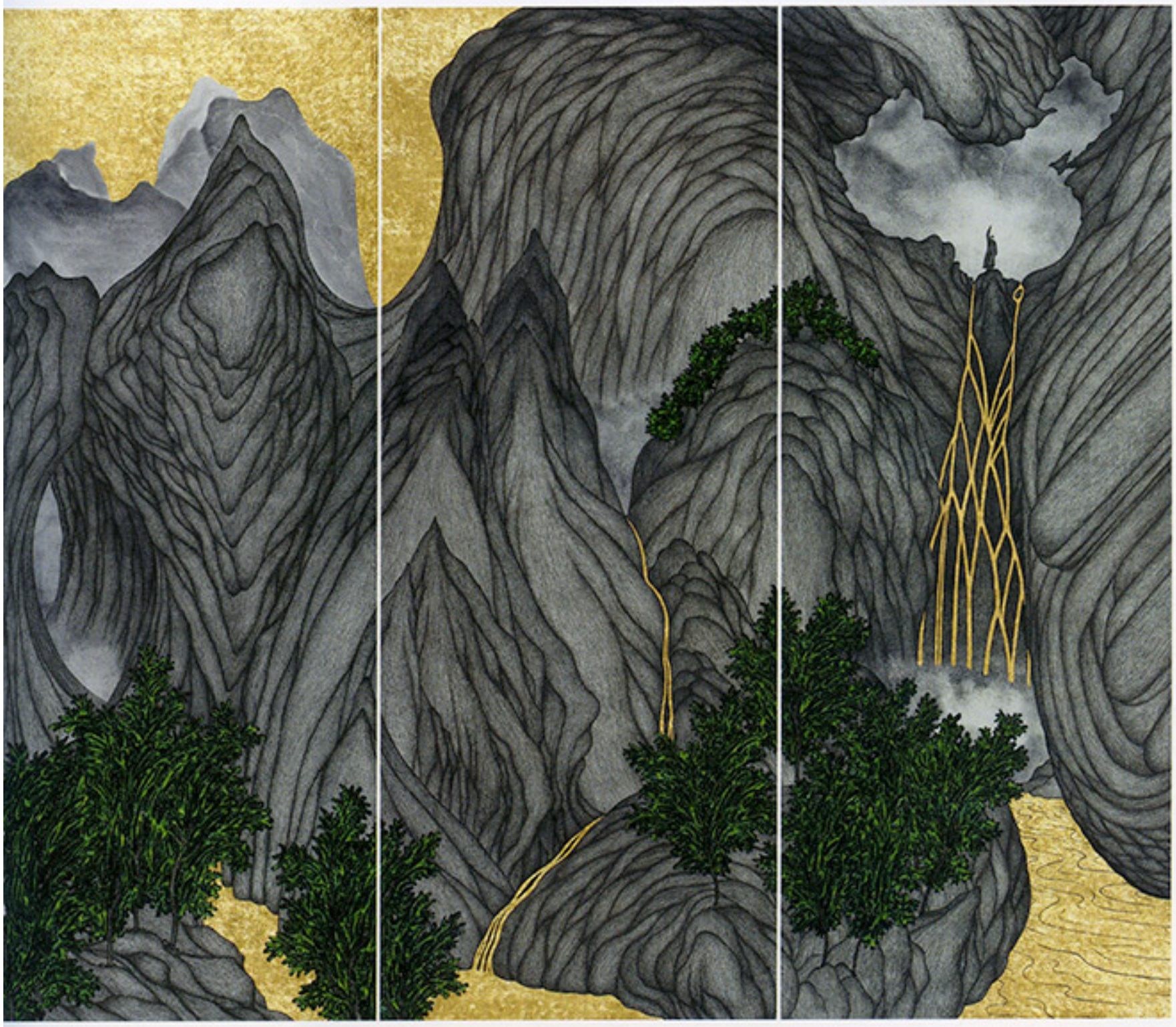
Detail of fig. 6.31



Detail of fig. 6.31



Detail of fig. 6.31



Detail of fig. 6.31

6.32 Yao Jui-chung, *Long Live Landscape I* (2012) (details). Private collection. Image courtesy of the artist.

6.33 Lin Hsin-mei & Wei Ze (with Yao Jui-chung), *The Visitor Center of Kun-Xi-Wan Cultural Park, Tainan City – Completed in 1993. About NTS 230,000,000)*, photograph, 70 x 70 cm (from the series, *Mirage – Disused Public Property in Taiwan*). Image courtesy of Yao Jui-chung and LSD.

台南市虎頭埤文化園區遊客中心(興建與啓駕設)

The Visitor Center of Kun-Xi-Wan Cultural Park, Tainan City
Completed in 1993
About NTS 230,000,000

2010 林欣梅Lin, Hsin-mei & 魏澤Wei, Ze

6.34 Huang Tzu-Jui (with Yao Jui-chung), *Hualien Aboriginal Cultural Industry Promotion Center – Completed 2004)* (2010), photograph, 70 x 70 cm (from the series, *Mirage – Disused Public Property in Taiwan*). Image courtesy of Yao Jui-chung and LSD.

花蓮縣原住民族文化產業推廣中心

Hualien Aboriginal Cultural Industry Promotion Center
Completed in 2004
Cost unknown

2010 黃子瑞Huang, Tzu-Jui

6.35 Yao Jui-chung, *Mirage – Disused Public Property in Taiwan* (2010–16) (Singapore Art Museum, 2014). Image courtesy of the artist and LSD.

media that it would investigate the issue and inspect the facilities, and it has imposed a moratorium on the construction of further buildings. Although Yao does not describe himself as a political or social activist, this series has certainly raised public consciousness about the politics of urban development and its mismanagement and, in the arts field, it has attracted critical attention since it developed at a time when participatory and socially engaged art became more popular in Taiwan.

While Taiwan's identity issues remain an important topic for Yao, by the end of this decade he, like many other artists, had become increasingly sceptical and disenchanted with political discourses concerning Taiwan's national identity, which was mired in political factionalism and rhetoric. Yao was no longer the young, rebellious spirit seeking to break away from the past and forge a new path as part of the 'New Human Species'. Reflecting on changes over the last decade, and on the emergence of a new, younger generation of artists Yao says, 'identity issues are like a ghost now … Taiwan is more international and they [the younger generation] don't care whether we are a country or not'.[75] Seeking to keep abreast of the times and forge new pathways, by the mid-2000s Yao had turned to his attention to the micro politics of identity, exploring the role and meaning of Chinese cultural tradition in Taiwan contemporary society, and also the politics of Taiwan's urban planning processes.

As this chapter demonstrates, although Yao was not a political activist and did not share the sense of collective idealism of many of his older peers, he nevertheless maintained a strong and enduring intellectual interest in national identity issues. This is evident in his significant artistic output, and his works offer a critical counterpoint to the official, celebratory narratives and historiographies of the nation promoted by successive governments. They also depart from the more confrontational and impassioned critiques of national identity issues produced by his artistic antecedents. Yao's individualism, irreverence, and open-minded outlook exemplify not only generational change, but also a wider paradigm shift in the art field. The impact of globalisation, the internet and increased mobility, along with the global ascent of China, gave rise to conceptions of identity that are no longer limited by the nation.