



Cursive Script, Color, and Collage

The art of WEI JIA

韦佳：抒写 色彩 拼贴



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## Director's Preface

I would not expect that my first meeting with Wei Jia began with a discussion of a poem by Song Dynasty poet Qin Guan (秦观, 1049-1100). In getting to know the artist better, I understand that his intense attraction to Chinese traditional culture dates back to early years in Beijing when he had the opportunity to study Tang and Song poetry privately with Zhang Boju (张伯驹, 1898-1982), the legendary collector and renowned scholar of literature and drama; while Zhang's wife, the blue-green landscape painter Pan Su (潘素, 1915-1992), taught him to paint in an antique manner. Forty years later in post-modern New York, Wei Jia still fills his spare time with classical poetry and practices calligraphy one and half hours every evening. He jogs about six miles almost every day in Brooklyn's Prospect Park and spends time to observe colors of changing seasons in a pavilion, which he names Fugue Pavilion. In addition, he is the only Asian to play African Djembe drum every Sunday at the Drummer's Grove.

Wei Jia's simple and reclusive lifestyle, and his deep love for classical poetry, calligraphy, music, and the nature, always reminds me of Wang Wei (王维, 699-759), the great Tang Dynasty poet, painter, calligrapher and musician. In a sense, Wei Jia has been having a spiritual dialogue with ancient masters; yet, this dialogue is carried out across time and space in the twenty-first century New York, with inspirations from contemporary surroundings and western influences. His poetic feeling is moved to a visual construct through cursive and dissembled ideograms of calligraphy, and a rigorously repeated tearing and collage, painting and coloring of hand-made *xuan* paper. Multiple layers and fascinating textures are created in this process of accidental perspectives. The beauty of line, space, rhythm, color, and movement, which he enjoys every day from calligraphy, poetry, music and nature reveals, providing a trans-cultural and trans-contextual experience for viewers. In this respect, Wei Jia's art speaks about east and west, the past and the present; yet, in another deeper sense, it is neither Eastern nor Western. Rather, it is the art of pure feeling and cosmic aspirations, which transcends cultural and artistic boundaries, and carries a distinctive mark of Wei Jia.

## Cursive Script, Color, and Collage: Wei Jia's Reinvention of Ink Painting

Robert C. Morgan

I am most grateful to the curator of this exhibition, Dr. Robert Morgan, for his brilliant curating and writing an insightful and enlightening catalogue essay, and above all, for introduction of Wei Jia. Lastly, a poem from Wang Wei's *Wangchuan Collection* (辋川集) would best describe history, memory, and our continuing search for cultural identities:

*A light boat sets off from the southern hill,  
The north is hard to reach against the vastness.  
On the other bank I look for my home,  
It cannot be recognized so far off.*

轻舟南垞去，北垞淼难即。隔浦望人家，遥遥不相识。

Edward Gui  
January 2015

To spend time looking at the works of Wei Jia, whether on canvas or xuan paper, offers an immanent and intensely rewarding experience. While his point of view as an artist remains committed to furthering the legacy of Chinese art, he is clearly aware of his exposure to Western styles as well. This exposure has further strengthened his commitment to working within his own tradition. There is little doubt that Wei Jia's intuitive, focused, and meticulous maneuvering of ink is distinctly informed by his on-going practice both as painter and calligrapher. This practice takes its inspiration taken from the great poets of the Tang Dynasty in the eighth century and from the painterly methods used by Sung Dynasty masters from the twelfth century. In this respect, the art of Wei Jia follows in a traditional line, as he captures the three-fold essence of the inimitable Chinese literati: calligraphy, poetry, and painting.

This line became evident during his early studies at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing in the early 1980s. Since coming to the United States with his wife, the artist Lin Yan, after graduating with his baccalaureate degree in 1984, his adaptation of gouache pigments in relation to ink painting emerged from techniques he acquired as a graduate student at Bloomsburg University in Pennsylvania. The combination of ink and gouache offered Wei Jia a unique point of view, another means of perception, and an ineluctable combination of feeling and thought that goes far beyond the normative status of tradition.

The light in Wei Jia's color is pervasive in the sense that it reveals what is hidden in the art of traditional calligraphy: the manner in which the artist actually applies pigment and collage with xuan paper that he cuts and tears with his hands, laying it down over previously drawn marks and gestures both in art and gouache. One might refer to this method as a kind of multi-medium approach in which the process of painterly and calligraphic applications, coalesce with the layering of torn and cut shards of xuan paper procure a mode of contemplation. Through this highly

attenuated and deeply felt process, the retinal act of seeing color comes into the surface as the pigments move and bounce in an optical way from one section of the canvas to another. Wei Jia is clear about his perspective – that there is nothing illusory. The layering of the strokes and lamination of fragments of xuan hold infusions of colors – often, but not always earth tones – that create a complex variety of textures and cursive interruption of ideographic forms that ultimately defer the possibility of meaning in any strict literary sense. Rather the cursive ideographs are disassembled, torn apart, weakened, before they are rebuilt and revitalized into a new visual structure. Here the artist emphasizes pure feeling on the surface of the canvas or within the complex mix of ideographic fragments in black and white on large sheets of xuan. In either case, whether on canvas or paper Wei Jia inaugurates a new species of expression taken from his tradition, rather than appropriated from Westernized expressionism. This heroic, yet subtle process, moving from poetic inspiration to a visual construct given a dense tactile resonance, over time, has been pushed and pulled into place.

Given that Wei Jia practices calligraphy every evening while drinking wine, it is no surprise that his manner of writing has clearly come into his art. There is little he can avoid it. To write the ideogram persistently over time, over days, weeks, months, and years, suggests that something is being gained in the process of being lost. For the artist, this paradox is ineluctable and definitive. To gain is to lose, and to lose is to regain the necessary strength to continue one's task. To regard this action as a continuum, as an uninterrupted process allows the eye and mind to relieve the tension of a purely spatial opposition.

This seemingly contradictory approach to thinking and writing in the act or writing and painting is perfectly consistent from a Chinese point of view. What goes away comes back again, and what suddenly comes into the forefront of thought may temporarily disappear. It will ascend and then descend, moving from one place to another. In the process, the artist Wei

Jia discovers his own sense of time and his own method before returning to create another work, a new distillation, binding ink and gouache on xuan and canvas. This is the place where memory precedes history and where history is retrieved from the darkened past.

Returning to the application of color, Wei Jia is clear that color is an integral idea in his work, not simply a decorative adjunct. The question may arise as to the brilliant of some colors in relation to the more equalized sobriety of the earth tones. While often seen as separate from one another in China, especially as they pertain to the popular, more decorative approach to art in contrast to the literati landscapes of the late Sung Dynasty. Within the current atmosphere of cultural globalization, Wei Jia is less interested in maintaining this separation than in generating new ways and means on how they might appear together in the canvas within the texture of one surface. From his point of view, color is removed from the symbolic realm used by Chinese artists, both fine and decorative, in the past, and is now open to experimental license. Why not combine the two? Just as the categories of high and low art have come into close proximity, why not bring somber and bright light together within an array of color that speaks of the present?

Whereas the artist has recently remarked in his typical Ch'an manner that his work has no point, I am inclined to both agree and disagree. While the terms of the unconscious mind would be a foreign concept to a Chinese artist, the feeling of nature is not. For the Chinese artist, nature is the source from which the *qi* (energy) moves from one body to the next, whether in plants, animals, or humans. Concurrently, it exists in all the four basic elements: earth, fire, air, and water. The *qi yun* is associated with "emptiness" or *wu-nien* (without mind) as found in higher states of meditation or within the unexplained leaps of enlightenment found in these paintings. Once this is understood, Wei Jia is correct: There is no point. But, from a Western perspective, there are occasions when making a point

about no point might be useful as a way of coming to terms with the deeply profound insights the artist has revealed as in the works that comprise this extraordinary exhibition.

**Robert C. Morgan**, Ph.D. writes frequently on the work of Chinese contemporary artists. He lives in New York City and teaches in the Graduate School of Fine Arts at Pratt Institute and the School of Visual Arts. Author of many books and exhibition catalogs, he is a painter and New York Editor for *Asian Art News* and *World Sculpture News*. In 1999, he was given the first Arcaele award in Salamanca (Spain) for his work in Art Criticism. In 2011, he was inducted into the European Academy of Sciences and Arts. He has curated over 80 exhibitions of Modern and Contemporary Art in various galleries and museums worldwide.

## Statement

*Wei Jia*

My diversified cultural background has influenced me as an artist by evoking a unique way of thinking and expressing myself. My earliest artistic development was shaped during my years in China, studying classical Chinese painting, poetry and calligraphy. After I moved to the United States in the 1980s, elements of modern and contemporary western art revealed themselves in my work. I was influenced by American culture, but feelings of cultural displacement and the co-existence of separate cultural identities taught me to reckon with these influences in my work.

My process involves a rigorously repeated cycle of tearing, mounting and painting, which contributes serendipitous combinations that cannot be replicated. The foundation of my artwork is a variety of hand-made paper widely used in traditional Chinese painting and calligraphy. I am fascinated by the long history of hand-made paper in China, by the cultural and historical elements of the paper and by its relationship to nature and craft.

A collage of layers of hand-made paper requires a close look. In my artwork, the viewer is encouraged to free the mind and make a journey of immersion in the rich variations expressed by this exceptional medium. My personal journey involves bringing my daily life into the artwork: the color of changing seasons, the layers of wood, the shape of flowers and plants, the art I enjoy in museums and galleries, the rhythm of Djembe (the African drum) and the aesthetic of ancient poems. For me, this process embodies nature and poetry, sound and silence, richness in density and wealth in space, the past and the present, change and immutability.

Artists create their own problems in order to solve them. I want my work to stand as a successful reconciliation of the challenge to unite western and eastern influences. This was always my artistic ambition for my personal journey from China to the United States. As an artist, I try to rediscover and reexamine the culture of China while living in New York. In this way, I am able to reinvent and recreate the tradition of Chinese art under the influence of modern and contemporary western art.



Plates







1.  
No. 13144, 2013  
Gouache, ink, pastel, charcoal and Xuan paper collage  
on canvas backed with wood board  
Two panels, 68x48 in. each

*previous spread*

2.  
No. 12138, 2012  
Gouache, ink, pastel and Xuan paper collage  
on canvas backed with wood board  
48x64 in.



VERA 2012

3.

No. 12139, 2012

Gouache, ink, pastel, charcoal and Xuan paper collage  
on canvas backed with wood board  
48x68 in.

*previous spread*

4.

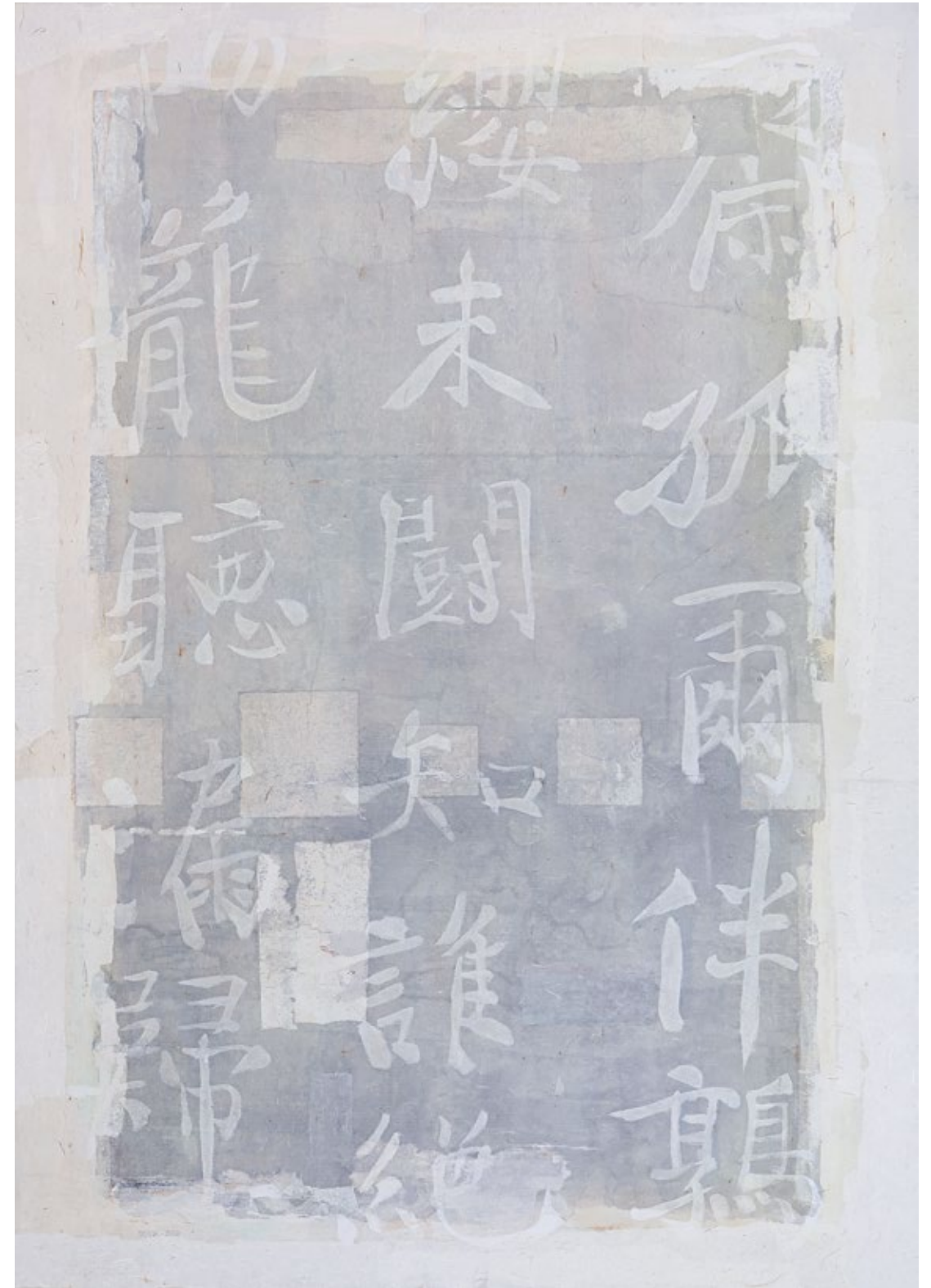
No. 11119, 2011

Gouache, ink, pastel and Xuan paper collage  
on canvas backed with wood board  
72x48 in.



5.  
No. 11118, 2011  
Gouache, ink, pastel and Xuan paper collage  
on canvas backed with wood board  
72x48 in.





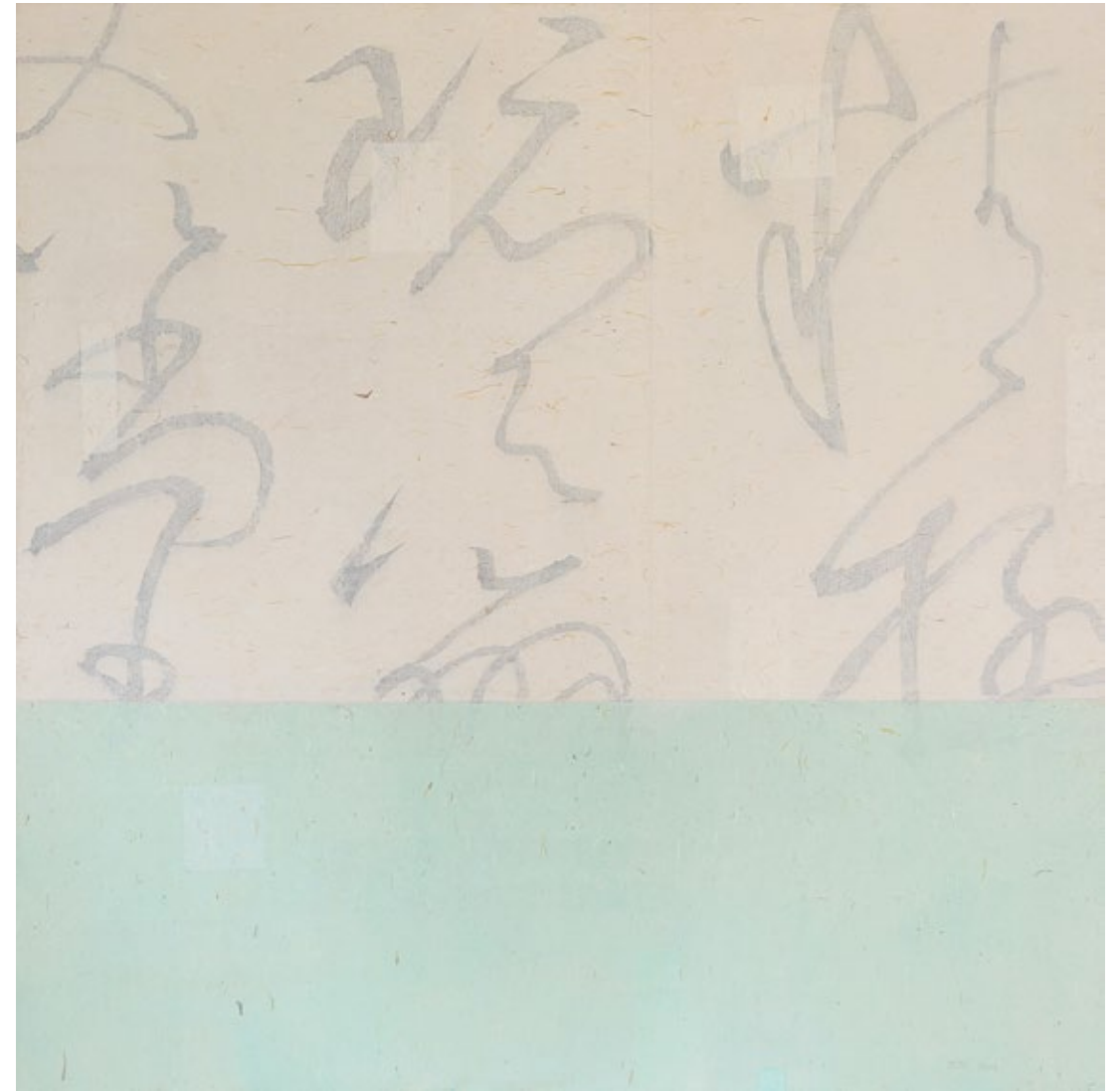
6.  
No. 0889, 2008  
Gouache, ink, pastel and Xuan paper collage  
on canvas backed with wood board  
67x47 in.



7.  
No. 0655, 2006  
Gouache, ink, charcoal and Xuan paper collage on canvas  
52x52 in.



8.  
No. 0779, 2007  
Gouache, ink, charcoal and Xuan paper collage on canvas  
52x52 in.



9.  
No. 0660, 2006  
Gouache, graphite pencil and Xuan paper collage on canvas  
52x52 in.



史庶故儉東尊顏  
 乾子一簿孔子  
 至自不刊石年  
 三五嵩三攻頭石亦壽  
 頁嵩三利以表仗上  
 一少年元億銘皇極  
 顏骨仁載聖代之  
 堅石思德風方禮

傳優載與麻禧永  
 氏顏辛粵上極  
 以尊孔子亦仗皇代之禮  
 河東簿刊石表銘風燿  
 門儉二不頭以優軟德八皇  
 百故一三改利元仁思孔乃  
 魯與子自三嵩三骨后不  
 相史敦至穎嵩三骨后不  
 伯淡從不玄穎川云類暨二  
 大項伯不尊君八傳車威  
 元圖書倍於畔廟朝開君  
 崇享仁獨見不水咏吳  
 孝羊穆君獨見不水咏吳  
 喜伐天意君獨見不水咏吳  
 三興葷器用存古元承天畫統曰傳

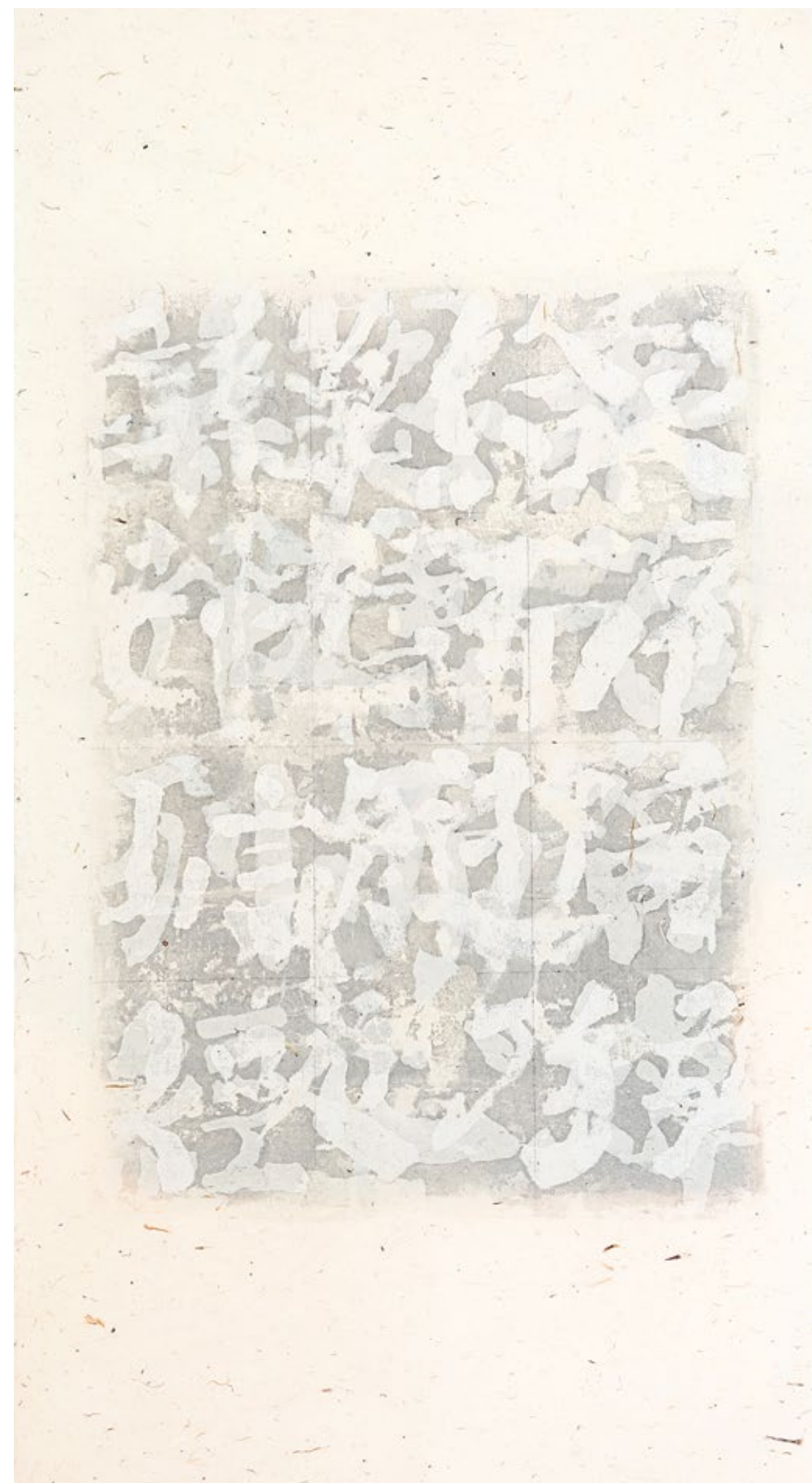
10.  
 No. 14151, 2014  
 Ink and Xuan paper collage on Xuan paper  
 30x57 in.

above: detail

11.  
No. 14155, 2014  
Ink, gouache and Xuan paper collage on Xuan paper  
57x30 in.



12.  
No. 14166, 2014  
Ink, gouache, gesso and Xuan paper collage on Xuan paper  
57x30 in.



13.  
No. 14158, 2014  
Gouache, ink and Xuan paper collage on Xuan paper  
57x30 in.



14.  
No. 14168, 2014  
Ink, gouache and Xuan paper collage on Xuan paper  
57x30 in.





Wei Jia 韦佳

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## Biography

Wei Jia

Born in Beijing, China. Lives and works in New York and Beijing

### EDUCATION

1985-1987 M.A. in studio art, Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania, USA

1980-1984 B.F.A. in Oil Painting, Central Academy of Fine Arts Beijing

### SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2015 *Cursive Script, Color, and Collage: The Art of Wei Jia*, NanHai Art, Millbrae, CA
- 2012 *Wei Jia: New Work*, Schmidt/Dean Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
- 2008 *Wei Jia*, Cheryl McGinnis Gallery, NYC
- 2007 *Wei Jia: Made in China*, Schmidt/Dean Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
- 2007 *Wei Jia, Nancy Lasar: Fields of Vision*, Amy Simon Fine Art, CT
- 2006 *Wei Jia: Made in Beijing forward slash New York*, China 2000 Contemporary Art, New York
- 2004 *Wei Jia: 2004*, China 2000 Fine Art, New York
- 2004 *Wei Jia: Recent Works*, Schmidt/Dean Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
- 2002 *Wei Jia: Recent Works*, Schmidt/Dean Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
- 1999 *Wei Jia: Recent Works*, Schmidt/Dean Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
- 1997 *Wei Jia: Recent Works*, Schmidt/Dean Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
- 1995 *Wei Jia: Recent Works*, Schmidt/Dean Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
- 1992 *Wei Jia: Recent Works*, Schmidt/Dean Gallery, Philadelphia, PA
- 1988 *Wei Jia*, Haas Gallery, Bloomsburg University, Bloomsburg, PA
- 1987 *Wei Jia*, Haas Gallery, Bloomsburg University, Bloomsburg, PA

### SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2014 *Oil & Water Reinterpreting Ink*, MOCA NYC
- 2014 *Tales of Two Cities*, Bruce Museum CT
- 2014 *Start from Tradition*, Cheryl McGinnis Gallery NYC

- 2014 *Transforming Boundaries*, Amy Simon Fine Art CT
- 2014 *Experience China Chinese Contemporary Oil Painting*, Dadu Museum Beijing
- 2013 *China Style*, Dadu Museum Beijing
- 2013 *New York Beijing Here There*, Yuan Art Museum Beijing
- 2012 *Vaulting Limits*, Tenri Cultural Institution NYC
- 2012 *Reductive*, Jeffrey Leder Gallery LIC, NY
- 2012 *Colorblind*, Amy Simon Fine Art CT
- 2011 *Asian Variegations*, Chelsea Art Museum NYC
- 2011 *Giving and Receiving*, CU Museum University of Colorado
- 2010 *Spring Equinox*, Yuan Art Museum Beijing
- 2010 *Intertwining Layers*, Cheryl McGinnis Gallery NYC
- 2008 *Apartment Art In China 1970s-1990s*, Shuimu Art Space Beijing
- 2008 *Class 80 of The Studio III Oil Painting Department Central Academy of Fine Arts*, Beijing
- 2008 *Then and Now Chinese Art From 1710 to 2007*, Lamont Gallery Phillips Exeter Academy NH
- 2008 *Cross - Reference Shuimu*, Art Space Beijing
- 2007 *Calligraphy in Paintings*, Museum of Binghamton University, NY
- 2007 *Corresponding - Chinese and American artists*, National Museum of Art, Beijing,
- 2006 *Curator's Choice: China*, Art Complex Museum, MA
- 2006 *Summer Rotation II*, Amy Simon Fine Art, CT
- 2006 *East Transplanted West*, Kean University, NJ
- 2006 *Brooklyn*, Westport Arts Center, CT
- 2006 *New Chinese Occidentalism—Chinese Contemporary Art in New York*, Ethan Cohen Fine Arts, NYC
- 2005 *Lin Yan + Wei Jia*, WFA Art, NYC
- 2005 *Summer Rotation 1*, Amy Simon Fine Art, CT
- 2003 *Paper Chase - Creation in Paper by Contemporary Chinese Artists in New York*, China 2000 Fine Art NYC
- 2002 *Contemporary Brush strokes - New York artists From China*, China 2000 Fine Art NY

- 2000 *Art Span - Three generation, nine artists in one family*, Shanghai Biennial, China
- 1999 *Spring Group Show* M.Y. Art Prospects NYC
- 1995 *Recent Paintings by Chinese - American Artists*, The Cork Gallery, Avery Fisher Hall, Lincoln Center, NYC
- 1992 *Second Spring: Contemporary Chinese Painting & Sculpture*, Founders Gallery, University of San Diego, CA
- 1992 *Duo show*, Z gallery, Soho, NYC
- 1990 Twin Cranes Gallery, Seattle, WA
- 1990 *Works by Pang's Family*, Lung Men Art Gallery, Taipei, Taiwan
- 1987 *Contemporary Chinese Art Exhibition*, The Chinese Culture Institute, Boston, MA
- 1985 *National Youth Art Exhibition*, National Museum of Art, Beijing, China
- 1977 *Beijing City Art Exhibition*, National Museum of Art, Beijing, China
- 1976 *In Memory of Zhou en lai*, National Museum of Chinese History, Beijing, China

#### COLLECTIONS

Brooklyn Museum, New York, Utah Museum, National Museum of Chinese History, Beijing, The Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania, Dadu museum, Beijing



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