

Hybrid Horizons:
Exploring Material-Led Abstractions
in Landscape Art Practice

by

Kai Liu

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@Kai Liu, 2024

Table of Contents

Land Acknowledgment	4
Introduction.....	5
Positionality	6
Purpose and Significance of the Research.....	7
Research Methodology	9
Aesthetics of Hybridity	10
Hybrid Art Method	11
<i>Collagraph Printmaking as a Hybrid Art Form.....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>The Eleven Untitled Collagraph</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Another Way of "Editioning" – Reprint the Plates</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Hybridity in Painted Print Mixed Media</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Near, So Far – The Process of Fusion.....</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Inspiration from Bay Area Figuration.....</i>	<i>24</i>
Hybrid Art Tradition.....	25
<i>Another Way of "Editioning" – The Ghost Prints</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>Abstract Concepts in Chinese Painting.....</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Artistic Influence from Zao Wou-Ki.....</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Neither Mountains nor Water</i>	<i>32</i>
Three Ways to See the World	37
Post-Defence and Thesis Exhibition Reflection	39
Conclusion	43
Bibliography.....	45

List of Images

Fig. 1 <i>Neither Mountains nor Water</i> No.1 and 2. 2024	5
Fig. 2 <i>The Eleven Untitled Collagraph Prints</i> . 2023.....	11
Fig. 3 Gathering Collagraph Plates	14
Fig. 4 Printing on Xuan paper.....	16
Fig. 5 Segers, Hercules. <i>Ruined Tomb</i> . c. 1589-c.1636. Etching printed in black, overlaid with blue oil paint, 12.8 x 19.5 cm.....	17
Fig. 6 Working detail of <i>Near, So Far</i>	18
Fig. 7 Working detail of <i>Near, So Far</i>	19
Fig. 8 Working detail of <i>Near, So Far</i>	20
Fig. 9 <i>Near, So Far</i> series in the State of Practice Exhibition.....	21
Fig. 10 <i>Near, So Far</i> No.1. 2023	22
Fig. 11 <i>Near, So Far</i> No.2. 2023	23
Fig. 12 Diebenkorn, Richard. <i>Ocean Park #60</i> . 1973.....	24
Fig. 13 Ghost print process	26
Fig. 14 Ghost print detail	26
Fig. 15 Wou-Ki, Zhao. <i>Abstraction</i> , oil on canvas.1958.....	31
Fig. 16 <i>Neither Mountains nor Water</i> , Working Process.	32
Fig. 17 <i>Neither Mountains nor Water</i> . 2024.....	35
Fig. 18 <i>A Long Long Time Alone</i> , 2024.....	39
Fig. 19 <i>The Northern Mountains</i> , 2024.....	40
Fig. 20 <i>A Long Long Time Alone</i> and <i>The Northern Mountains</i> installation view, 2024	42

Land Acknowledgment

My artistic practice unfolds on the unceded, traditional, and ancestral territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), and sə́lilwətaʔ (Tseil-Waututh) peoples. This acknowledgment reflects a profound respect for the land and its original caretakers, guiding my exploration of the landscape as both a subject and a source of inspiration.

Introduction



Fig. 1 *Neither Mountains nor Water* No.1 and 2. 2024

In this thesis project, the concept of hybridity is explored by merging distinct artistic disciplines, resulting in two series of artworks. The aim is to integrate collagraph printmaking with painting techniques, thereby creating a novel approach that challenges the boundaries between different mediums. The artistic methodology is significantly influenced by traditional Chinese painting ideology, providing a unique vision of the fusion of Eastern and Western artmaking perspectives. Through the combination of different artistic processes, a dialogue is fostered between traditional and avant-garde choices. The artworks reflect my comprehension of various ways landscape can be understood across different cultures and traditions. I am aware there are different worldviews expressed through the Chinese painting traditions, Western art, and

Indigenous relations to the land. My artworks in this study do not directly depict specific landscapes; they are primarily material-led and observation-driven abstractions. This thesis support paper presents a journey through the process of art hybridization, supported by theoretical aspects and detailed case studies of the artworks, and explores the rediscovery of printmaking and painting methods as a combination, transforming them into a versatile medium that captures fluidity and expressiveness. This project showcases the contemplation and inner thought activities that were part of the hybridization development process, forming a personal artistic language. The exploration has resulted in the emergence of a hybrid art form that challenges perceptions and broadens the understanding of art's potential at the intersection of diverse realms, transcending conventional categorizations.

Positionality

Growing up in China, a country with a rich artistic history, I embarked on my journey, creating both impressionist paintings and experiencing my first encounter with traditional Chinese painting principles¹. This exposure became the foundation for my unfolding aesthetic sensibility. Moving to Canada was a significant turning point, expanding my creative horizons and introducing me to new avenues, particularly intaglio

¹ The transitional Chinese painting principles, established during the Three Kingdoms (220-280) and Six Dynasties periods (220-589), reflected the era's political instability and the rising influence of Buddhism and Taoism. This period encouraged a shift from philosophical to metaphysical art, focusing on capturing the essence of subjects beyond their physical forms. Artists like Gu Kaizhi and Zong Bing emphasized expressing inner feelings and spiritual energy, prioritizing the expression of Dao through landscape painting. This marked a significant departure from traditional realism, leading to a legacy that values the spiritual and philosophical over the literal, influencing Chinese art for centuries (Daniela).

and relief printmaking. As an artist who navigates the technical world of printmaking and painting, as well as the dynamic visual language of Chinese painting and semi-abstract landscape art, my role is that of an integrator. My artwork reflects this harmonious integration, allowing me to inhabit a space where artistic methods, customs, and styles intersect, giving rise to fresh expressions. As I position myself as a painter, printmaker and technique-heavy art practitioner, this thesis support paper represents the research of the concept of hybridity in artistic processes and cultures through the State of Practice interim project, *Near, So Far* series and the final thesis project, *Neither Mountains nor Water* series.

Purpose and Significance of the Research

This investigation centres on fundamental inquiries, such as hybrid techniques and artistic traditions, both Chinese and Western, that challenge and broaden the limits of artistic conventions. Several questions come to the fore, such as: What might be revealed in the fusion of printmaking and painting techniques? What distinct qualities does abstraction bring to figurative image-making? How does the act and mindset of contemplation influence and redefine my art practice? These inquiries are crucial not only to the field of art but also to the convergence of cultural and artistic traditions within my own artistic journey. Contemporary art is experiencing a transformative phase where artists are merging languages, embracing hybrid methods, and engaging in cross-disciplinary dialogues to address the complexities of our era. This trend is fostering a

rich and innovative artistic landscape that reflects the multifaceted nature of the current period.

My research and artwork also engage with the current environmental discourse through several deliberate choices in my artmaking process and thematic focus. Firstly, by employing collagraph printmaking, I embrace sustainability by reusing materials. This method exemplifies my commitment to eco-friendly practices and serves as a metaphor for regeneration and resilience in nature. Secondly, my art celebrates and respects the beauty and sanctity of traditional Indigenous lands, drawing inspiration from the land I live in at present. This focus underscores an appreciation for environments that have sustained cultural and ecological richness for generations. Lastly, I deliberately remove artificial elements from my images to encourage attention to the natural environment against the bustle of modern life. By doing so, I aim to convey the importance of reconnecting with and preserving the natural world. I am especially alert to the concerns of being a guest on Indigenous land. These aspects of my practice reflect my introspection about contemporary environmental issues and the respectful acknowledgment of land that has long been overlooked in industrial and political narratives.

Research Methodology

The methodology employed in this thesis project combines practical artmaking with an analytical approach. It involves a hands-on exploration of mixed-media techniques with a focus on creating and analyzing two bodies of work: *Near, So Far* and *Neither Mountains nor Water*. These pieces serve as case studies examining the fusion of artistic styles and philosophies. The research also entails ideas of historical and contemporary art forms, drawing upon the Six Principles of traditional Chinese painting that I explain later in this paper. This approach allows for the understanding of the artistic process and the exploration of hybridization through landscape themes and abstraction. For me, it is important to bridge the gap between the theoretical discussions and the tangible aspect of artmaking. Throughout this exploration, the fusion of collagraph printmaking with painting and the integration of Chinese ink art with abstraction are not just conceptual ideas; they manifest collectively in each printed, painted or collaged artwork. The texture and layers from printmaking, combined with the fluidity of painting, introduce physical depth and movement. This, alongside the philosophical depth and historical resonance of Chinese ink art and the personal, evolving perspectives offered by abstract approaches, culminate in artworks that are a dialogue between tradition and contemporary. These elements coalesce to form a narrative that is both a reflection of artistic heritage and a personal expression.

Aesthetics of Hybridity

During the past few years, I learned the word hybrid, such as the hybrid car that uses gasoline and electrical power and the hybrid class that combines in-person classes and online meetings during the pandemic. Hybridizing things together is a compromise but also an innovation. Homi Kharshedji Bhabha, an Indian scholar and critical theorist, introduced "the concept of hybridity" in his book *The Location of Culture* in 1994, focusing on the interdependence of colonizer and colonized relations and the mutual construction of their subjectivities. He describes this concept as the "Third Space of enunciation," where cultural identity emerges in a contradictory and ambivalent manner (Bhabha).

The Third Space refers to a space where individuals from different cultural backgrounds can interact and negotiate for mutual understanding. According to Bhabha, cultures cannot be viewed as binary oppositions between Self and Other; Instead, the Third Space is characterized by the absence of cultural purity or originality, meaning that any meaning must be arrived at through a process of translation and negotiation to gain consensus. In my opinion, art forms today no longer have clear lines between purity and originality. Interaction and mutual understanding between forms are more common and necessary.

In philosopher Jerrold Levinson's article, "Hybrid Art Forms," he categorizes hybrid art forms as those that emerge from a combination of different artistic activities or media. He identifies three types of hybrid art forms: *juxtapositional*, which places different art forms side by side; *synthetic or fusion*, which merges them into a new form;

and *transformational*, which involves the conversion of one art form into another (Levinson). In the following sections, I will elaborate on the emergence of the concepts of hybridity within my work.

Hybrid Art Method

Collagraph Printmaking as a Hybrid Art Form



Fig. 2 *The Eleven Untitled Collagraph Prints*. 2023

The experimental printmaking project I did during my first year of MFA study is called *The Eleven Untitled Collagraph Prints* (refer to Fig. 2), and this collagraph prints on Xuan paper concept inspired my later projects. In this series, I utilized printing plates, also known as matrices, which played a fundamental role in the initial stages of my

thesis project. Collagraph printmaking involves the innovative use of various materials, according to "Collagraph Printmaking" by Donald Stoltenberg and Ralph MacKenzie. The printing plate materials can include fabric, paper, acrylic paint, paste and media, thread, wire, hardboard, metal, wood, plastic, water, coins, keys, leaves, and found objects². The use of the term "collagraph" to define this highly experimental printmaking process is fairly recent. Its acceptance as a form of printmaking in its own right has been attributed to the abundance of work produced in the 1950s by the artist Glen Alps, a printmaking professor from the University of Washington, Seattle. The word itself is descriptive of the process in that it is derived from the Greek verb kollo, meaning 'to glue,' which perhaps explains the common misspelling, "collograph" (Hartill 7).

The unique aspect of collagraph printmaking lies in the diversity of materials for the printing plates, which is distinct from the singular material used in copper etching and wood engraving printmaking techniques. The list of materials in collagraph printmaking is virtually limitless, which sets it apart from other printmaking methods. The process involves a tactile examination of the plate's surface to predict printing outcomes and textural manipulation is central to this process. Each material's roughness contributes distinct characteristics to the plates, resulting in a diverse tonal range and textures that offer a strongly haptic quality to the artwork.

² Found object in art refers to using everyday items not initially intended as art materials within artistic works. This practice, integral to Dadaism and popularized by Marcel Duchamp's "readymades" in the early 20th century, challenges traditional art definitions by recontextualizing mundane objects. It plays a significant role in questioning the nature of art and the artist's role, influencing various art movements and contemporary artistic experimentation.

The Eleven Untitled Collagraph

The project *The Eleven Untitled Collagraph Prints (Fig. 2)* was a starting point in this research. This unfinalized formal printmaking exercise focused on gathering materials to make the plates, such as cardboard, fabrics, plastic sheets, acrylic mediums, and carborundum. Enhancing the plates involved laminating paper and fabrics for varied textures, adding carborundum and acrylic medium mixtures for dark tones, and incorporating dry point etching techniques for lines. Everything on the plate was glued and sealed with acrylic medium for durability.

The choice of printing paper was also crucial. I chose Xuan paper, a type of traditional Chinese paper made of rice straw, which I have been familiar with since my early days of learning Chinese painting. Its soft and slightly stretchy nature, along with its self-flattening ability once moisturized, made it ideal for this project. The universal subject in these prints that I started out in mind was the elements of mountains and nature as I observed creases, faults, deposits, corrosion, and other natural phenomena and mountain formations. Drawing from my experience in printmaking, I have discovered that the technique of folding and stacking collagraph plate materials can generate textures that are reminiscent of these natural phenomena. These elements are represented through various arrangements and combinations of matrices, drawing upon a composition study to create a series of semi-abstract prints. Through this experimental project, I delved into the world of collagraph techniques and materials, laying the groundwork for my subsequent work for the State of Practice interim exhibition as part of my MFA program. The technical proficiency I gained in collagraph

printmaking at that time was sufficient, prompting me to pursue the next step, a hybrid approach that combined collagraph with painting.

Another Way of "Editioning" – Reprint the Plates



Fig. 3 Gathering Collagraph Plates

In the printmaking tradition, the concept of the edition—crafting multiple originals³—has been a cornerstone, yet *The Eleven Untitled Collagraph Prints* remained

³ In printmaking, "multiple originals" refer to the series of prints produced from a single matrix (such as a plate, block, or screen) where each print is considered an authentic artwork by the artist. Despite being part of an edition, where multiple copies exist, each print is seen as an original due to the hands-on process involved in its creation and the artist's direct involvement in the production and approval of each piece. This concept underscores each print's uniqueness and artistic value within the edition, emphasizing that each is not a mere reproduction but an original work of art (Grover).

an unfinished series; they are proofs awaiting continuation. I am a practitioner of the arts who values the preservation of tradition. The printmaking plate holds great significance for me. While I am open to innovative printing methods, I remain committed to creating print plates. In response to an inquiry regarding monotype prints within my artwork, I clarified that these were, in fact, printmaking elements produced with authentic collagraph plates. I refrain from creating monotype prints, a unique type of printmaking where a single impression of an image is made without a fixed plate that has been inked or painted, resulting in a one-of-a-kind artwork, as I believe that the print plate serves as the soul of the print. I was Intrigued by the prospect of revisiting these printing plates. I considered the potential of their rich textures that evoke natural forms like rocks, mountains, and landscapes (Fig. 3). This reflection sparked the decision to extend the life of these plates through reprinting, not merely to complete the repetitive editioning process but to redefine the notion of multiple originals.

Collagraph plates can be printed using the intaglio technique, a printmaking method that involves incising the image into a surface. The sunken area or incised line of the design retains the ink, which is then transferred onto printing paper to produce a print that reflects the design of the printing plate. This method is particularly effective in creating detailed designs on the printing plate. The correct moisture level in Xuan paper is paramount and can be achieved by spraying a small amount of water and rolling the paper together to keep it damp. The printing press transfers the image from the matrix to the paper, and the pressure must be set correctly to balance ink adherence and avoid smudging or excess (Fig. 4). Each step unfolds as a mindful contemplation, embedding

the artwork with a depth of intention that bridges artistic skill with the reflective engagement.



Fig. 4 Printing on Xuan paper

Hybridity in Painted Print Mixed Media

I discovered an unexpected and profound connection with the seventeenth-century Dutch artist Hercules Segers, which only happened after I developed my own process. A fellow artist who is studying print history at the University of British Columbia introduced Segers to me, and I found many similarities between Segers' process and mine, such as innovative hybrid techniques, a visionary approach to landscape art, and a fusion of traditional and unconventional practices. Discovering Segers' process became a pivotal moment in my artistic development, a serendipitous encounter that was more like an encouragement rather than inspiration.

Seger's unique approach to painted prints demonstrates an example of Levinson's "Hybrid Art Forms": "In synthesis or fusion, the objects or products of two (or more) arts are brought together in such a way that the individual components to some extent lose their original identities and are present in the hybrid in a form significantly different from that assumed in the pure state" (Levinson 8). The individuality of certain art forms should not be dismissed, as they have a fundamental role to play in certain stages of development. In fact, hybridization is not an act of rebellion; rather, it is a detachment and sublimation from the binary. Whether it is a print or a painting, the form of art is irrelevant. The fusion of techniques and styles is not only acceptable but can also lead to innovative and unique creations.



Fig. 5 Segers, Hercules. *Ruined Tomb*. c. 1589-c.1636. Etching printed in black, overlaid with blue oil paint, 12.8 x 19.5 cm.

Professor Christopher P. Heuer, historian of early modern art, mentions the Dutch art theorist Samuel van Hoogstraten, who writes that Segers invented a new form of artistic creation called *printed painting*. The artwork *Ruined Tomb* (Fig. 5) is one of Segers' examples of this process, which is an etching print in black ink and overlaid with blue oil paint (Heuer 945). Similar to Segers' method, I used painting over prints in the

Near, So Far series. However, rather than painting over the prints directly, I collaged prints onto wood panels before painting over them. These collaged prints created physical layers on the panel that became a method helping to finalize the compositions. Using hybridization and innovative strategies, during the time when Segers was creating his art, the distinction between printmaking and painting was not as significant as it became later. However, Segers' artistic style was not in line with the dominant artistic trends of the Dutch Golden Age. While the paintings of this era were characterized by delicate and luxurious details and followed certain fixed formats, Segers' works stood out for their simplicity in colour, slightly flat composition, and influence of Eastern art styles. This raises questions about how Segers managed to push the boundaries of traditional art and thrive despite being different from his contemporaries.

***Near, So Far* – The Process of Fusion**

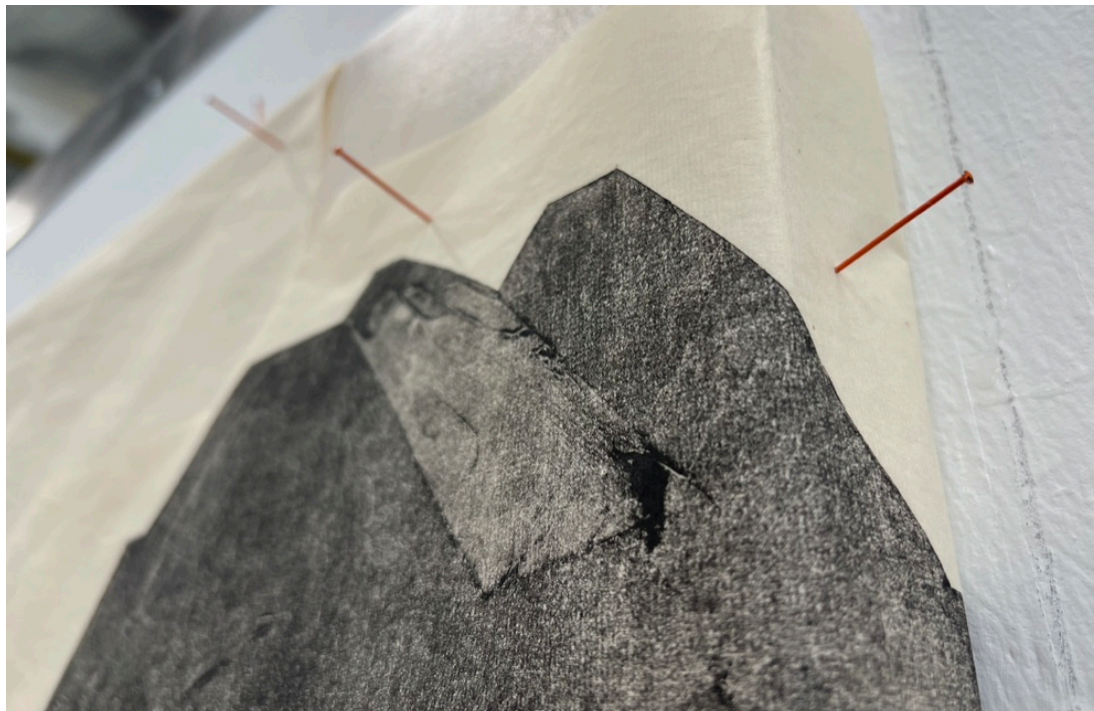


Fig. 6 Working detail of *Near, So Far*



Fig. 7 Working detail of *Near, So Far*

Once I had gathered all the necessary printed elements, the composition and planning came into play. I trimmed the prints meticulously and pinned them on the panel temporarily (Fig.6). Then, I played with the arrangement of the printed fragments to achieve balance and harmony, and this harmony is what I learned from Chinese paintings, it is a beautiful experience that transforms from visual composition to spiritual perception. (Fig.7). The process was dynamic, as each element's placement contributed to the composition's overall effect. The printed texture and tonality gave the work an illusion of depth. The collage offered a platform to experiment with juxtaposition and abstraction, allowing me to bring life to the printed visual elements, giving them a fresh context, the conversion from collagraph fragments to the portraits of nature. I then introduced water-based black pigment to the artwork to blur the boundary between print and painting and create a hybrid complexity. In this step, I applied water-based acrylic

ink across the collaged prints and blank spaces, harmonizing the composition with gestural brushwork. In addition, the water-bleeding feature of Xuan paper gives the artwork a sense of wetness, and these wet gestural brushstrokes contrast with the dry etching ink, capturing the uniqueness of the hybridity of merging printed and painted visual elements (Fig.8).



Fig. 8 Working detail of *Near, So Far*

Reflecting on my resonance with Hercules Segers' printed paintings, I found a transition point to delve into the philosophical underpinnings of my art, leading to the awareness of the aesthetics of hybridity. This philosophy extends beyond mere material blending, combining contrasting elements: traditional and contemporary, East and West, tangible and abstract. It is a process that guides the combination of distinct existences to make them work as oneness. This oneness does not mean letting either party lose its identity or individual difference but collaborating their strengths. This series of mixed-

media works was a visual exploration of the order and disorder found in nature, as interpreted through the lens of mixed-media. In creating this piece, I aimed to delve into the relationship between closeness and the expanse that defines both the physical landscapes and the introspective spaces of the mind. The artwork combined the precise detail of collagraph printmaking with the expressive potential of painting, revealing the contrast between the two techniques. This contrast speaks to diversity, and the fusion of different process can collide into new forms, which became unique.



Fig. 9 *Near, So Far* series in the State of Practice Exhibition

Near, So Far No. 1 (Fig. 10) presents a series of mountain-like forms, fragmented to suggest how landscapes can feel both intimately known and yet distant, almost unreachable. The strong contrast between the dark shapes and the lighter background contributes to a sense of depth, drawing on the Chinese painting concept of 'Xie Yi,' or '*capturing the spirit*', rather than a direct representation. The intent is not to replicate the landscape but to convey an impression, an emotional resonance that echoes the

vastness and mystery of nature. The semi-abstract style balances the identifiable elements of mountains and the mystery, where form becomes a vehicle for contemplation. This style is informed by the Chinese artistic principle of seeking harmony in art, where every brushstroke and line aims to align with natural laws⁴.



Fig. 10 *Near, So Far No.1*. 2023

⁴ In Chinese art, the term ‘natural laws’ refers to the fundamental order and patterns that govern the natural world and the universe. This concept is deeply rooted in Chinese philosophy, particularly in Daoism and Confucianism, which emphasize living in harmony with the Way (Dao) and the natural, ethical, and cosmic order it represents. In art, ‘natural laws’ are expressed through principles that aim to capture the essence, energy (Qi), and rhythm of nature rather than simply its outward appearance.



Fig. 11 *Near, So Far No.2*. 2023

In *Near, So Far No.2* (Fig.11), the focus shifts to the sea's fluidity, the islands' solidity, and the ethereal nature of the sky and clouds. The contrasts are more pronounced, with the piece's lower section evoking the sea's dark and undulating rhythms of the land. Above, the lighter areas suggest the sky's openness, the clouds' transience, and the air's elusive quality. It is a visual representation of the various states of water, its forms, and its interactions with other natural elements. Using collagraph printmaking techniques adds depth and texture to the artwork, inviting a tactile

perception and interplaying the relationship between what is shown and what will appear in the imagination.

Inspiration from Bay Area Figuration



Fig. 12 Diebenkorn, Richard. *Ocean Park #60*. 1973

The Bay Area Figurative Movement represents a pivotal moment in 20th-century art, marking a departure from abstract expressionism towards a unique blend of abstraction and figuration. Central to this movement was Richard Diebenkorn, whose innovative methods exemplified the hybrid nature of this art form. Diebenkorn's work navigates between the abstract and the representational, employing a method that emphasizes the fluidity of these boundaries. His art, particularly evident in his *Ocean Park* series (Fig.12), showcases a mastery of colour, form, and space, demonstrating a deep engagement with the landscape while abstracting its elements to capture its essence rather than its literal image. This approach underscores the movement's broader exploration of the emotional and perceptual possibilities of paint, challenging and expanding the viewer's engagement with art (Richard). Diebenkorn's methods,

rooted in the Bay Area Figurative Movement, thus become a cornerstone for understanding the potential of semi-abstract art to convey complex, hybridized visions of reality. The Bay Area Figurative Movement rebelled against the idea of purely abstract art by incorporating the human figure and landscapes with elements of abstract expressionism. Diebenkorn's early and late abstract works hybridized styles and genres (Richard), and his work has inspired my exploration of merging traditional Chinese painting techniques with modern aesthetics, conveying emotional depth through colour and form.

Hybrid Art Tradition

The *Near, So Far* series, a vibrant integration of collagraph printmaking and painting, brought me to the next project, the *Neither Mountains nor Water* series. My journey through *Near, So Far* has been one of artistic discovery and evolution, where the fusion of mediums and the play between representational and abstraction of nature's forms have tried to find the best balance to stay with each other seamlessly. Carrying forward this momentum, *Neither Mountains nor Water* was an adventurous continuation of this narrative, and the exploration of natural landscapes and internal reflections with semi-abstract techniques settled in this new body of work simultaneously. The process of this series was a dynamic movement of my artistic practice and research, enrolling previous explorations into the next stage of a more intricate pattern.

Another Way of "Editioning" – The Ghost Prints



Fig. 13 Ghost print process



Fig. 14 Ghost print detail

I was curious about how much ink left on the plate after pulled an impression of the print, so I tested the plate's residual ink with a fresh piece of Xuan paper. The image appeared shallow but delicate, reminding me of ghost printing, a low-profile method with no comparable temperament. The ghost print method in printmaking introduces an element of unpredictability and serendipity. After a primary print is made, a ghost print emerges from the residual ink left on the plate. It carries a lighter, often more ethereal quality with a unique character of its own. Working with ghost prints is an exercise in subtlety and learning to embrace the unexpected. As these prints are pressed onto Xuan paper, renowned for its ability to absorb and mellow the ink, they take on a hazy,

muted appearance that softly echoes the original design (Fig.13 & 14). This effect is particularly pronounced on Xuan paper compared to the usual results on cotton or linen etching paper. While the faint remnants of ink typically lead to a more subdued visual effect, Xuan paper's softness allows it to capture a surprising amount of detail from the plate, even in these lighter ghost prints.

I liken this approach to the "Schrodinger's Cat"⁵ of editioning, where the outcome remains a mystery until revealed—each ghost print existing in a state of potential, only defined once it has been pulled from the press. This concept shifts the perspective on editioning, traditionally associated with creating identical prints, to one that values each print's individuality and nuanced differences. The ghost print, therefore, is not just a by-product but a deliberate exploration of the beauty found in the remnants and echoes of the initial artistic gesture.

Abstract Concepts in Chinese Painting

As I began working on the *Neither Mountains nor Water* series, I was thinking about the abstract concepts in Chinese painting at the start of the MFA. It was really with my last project that its principles directly informed my experiments. Observing the ghost prints, the aesthetic parallels with Chinese landscape painting became apparent. This similarity brought me back to my early years of learning Chinese painting, a time when the seeds of these profound aesthetic ideas were planted. It was in the fall of the

⁵ Schrodinger's Cat is a thought experiment that illustrates a cat in a sealed box being simultaneously alive and dead, according to quantum mechanics, until observed. It highlights the concept of superposition and the impact of observation on quantum systems.

second year of the MFA that I began to weave the principles of this ancient art form into my creations. The article "论唐前中国古代艺术理论中抽象绘画的理论起源 Theoretical Sources for Abstract Painting in the Ancient Chinese Art Theory before the Tang Dynasty" by 唐艺梦 Daniela Zhang-Cziráková explores the origins of abstract painting in ancient Chinese art theories predating the Tang dynasty. This piece, published in the Journal of Sino-Western Communications, provides a comprehensive review of how ancient Chinese art theories intersect with modern interpretations of abstraction-

Zhang-Czirakova carefully analyzes Xie He's "Six Principles of Chinese Painting," highlighting their importance in the creation and development of abstract painting in China. These principles not only guide the technical aspects of painting but also emphasize the expression of inner spirit and emotional resonance.

The Six Principles:

- Spirit Resonance (氣韻生動 Qi Yun Sheng Dong): The vitality or energy that animates the painting, reflecting the artist's spirit.
- Bone Method - (古法用筆 Gu Fa Yong Bi): Refers to the use of the brush, suggesting structural strength in the brushwork.
- Fidelity to the Object (應物象形 Ying Wu Xiang Xing): Accurate portrayal of forms, ensuring a lifelike representation.
- Conformity to Kind in Applying Colours (隨類賦彩 Sui Lei Fu Cai): Using colours according to the nature of the subject matter.
- Proper Arrangement (經營位置 Jing Ying Wei Zhi): The composition and layout within the painting, placing elements in harmony.
- Imitating (傳移模寫 Chuan Yi Mo Xie): Learning from past masters and transferring their essence into new artworks.

Zhang-Czirakova suggests that these principles, particularly "Qi Yun Sheng Dong," which means "spirit resonance, life-motion," were not simply regulations but embodied deeper aesthetic and philosophical foundations of Chinese art. She also draws a connection between the traditional concept of capturing the spirit "传神" and the abstract movement's inclination towards evoking emotions rather than just representation (Daniela). The article provides a comprehensive analysis by integrating several ancient and current sources. These sources include classical Chinese paintings, poetry, and calligraphy, as well as modern-day critiques and art analysis. The analysis emphasizes how some abstract elements can still be applicable in modern-day practice. According to the article, one can forget about the shape and capture an idea, which can also be successfully applied to contemporary abstract paintings (Daniela 186). I adopted this concept in my practice, becoming a method in my abstraction discovery.

In my journey of blending traditional Chinese painting with abstract art, I am drawn to the philosophical underpinnings of such traditional concepts as 山水以形媚道 (shān shuǐ yǐ xíng mèi dào). This phrase emphasizes how the form of the landscape serves as an evocative medium. It encapsulates the essence of how nature and its representations can be a bridge to understanding spiritual truths. This resonates with my semi-abstract approach, where the landscape is not just a depiction of the physical world but also an exploration of philosophical and spiritual dimensions.

Artistic Influence from Zao Wou-Ki

Zao Wou-Ki is one of the artists who has been influential in my art practice. His dynamic approach to abstraction complements these traditional principles, emphasizing a seamless fusion of ancient artistry with modern innovation. Zao Wou-Ki, a Beijing-born artist who gained fame in Paris in the mid-20th century, is acclaimed for fusing Chinese artistic traditions with Western modernism. Coming from a family that valued traditional Chinese art, Zao's early paintings and prints were influenced by his heritage, particularly his family's Han dynasty and Shang dynasty rubbings (Masters 134). Moving to Paris in 1948, he encountered the modernist movements of the time, drawing inspiration from European artists like Picasso and Matisse. This move led him to a path where he sought to blend the philosophies of his Asian roots with Western art practices (Goodman 30). In the 1950s, during what is known as his Oracle Bone period, Zao paid homage to traditional Chinese calligraphy and painting, even as he ventured into abstract painting. His paintings from this time reflect ancient China's intricate scripts and symbolism, imbued with a calligraphic quality that grew more pronounced as he delved deeper into his cultural identity (Masters 134).

Throughout his career, Zao navigated the delicate balance between his Chinese origins and the French influences that shaped his artistic evolution. His paintings are a testament to this balancing act, showcasing the fluid beauty of Chinese ink paintings alongside the bold strokes of Western abstract expressionism. The resulting works defy simple categorization, inviting viewers to find meaning in their complex interplay of form and colour (Goodman 30).



Fig. 15 Wou-Ki, Zhao. *Abstraction*, oil on canvas.1958

Abstraction 1958 (Fig.15) is an energetic artwork from Zao Wou-Ki's Oracle bone period, blending Eastern and Western styles. Bold brushstrokes and a play of light and shadow create enigmatic forms that recall the oracle bone script. The two red elements in the painting resemble peonies that you might find in freehand Chinese artwork. However, after the artist's abstract expressionist treatment, they are no longer immediately recognizable. The short black gestural strokes used in the painting are similar to those used in calligraphy. Overall, it represents a dialogue between Zao's ancestral heritage and his explorations in abstract art. As I continue to explore cross-cultural artistic methods, I feel a connection with Zao Wou-Ki, whose art inspires and informs my artistic journey rooted in cultural traditions. I am interested in how to merge traditional Chinese ink art with abstraction. As I am experiencing this, I incorporate Chinese painting, calligraphy, splash-ink techniques, and the six principles of Chinese painting as an homage to my heritage.

Neither Mountains nor Water

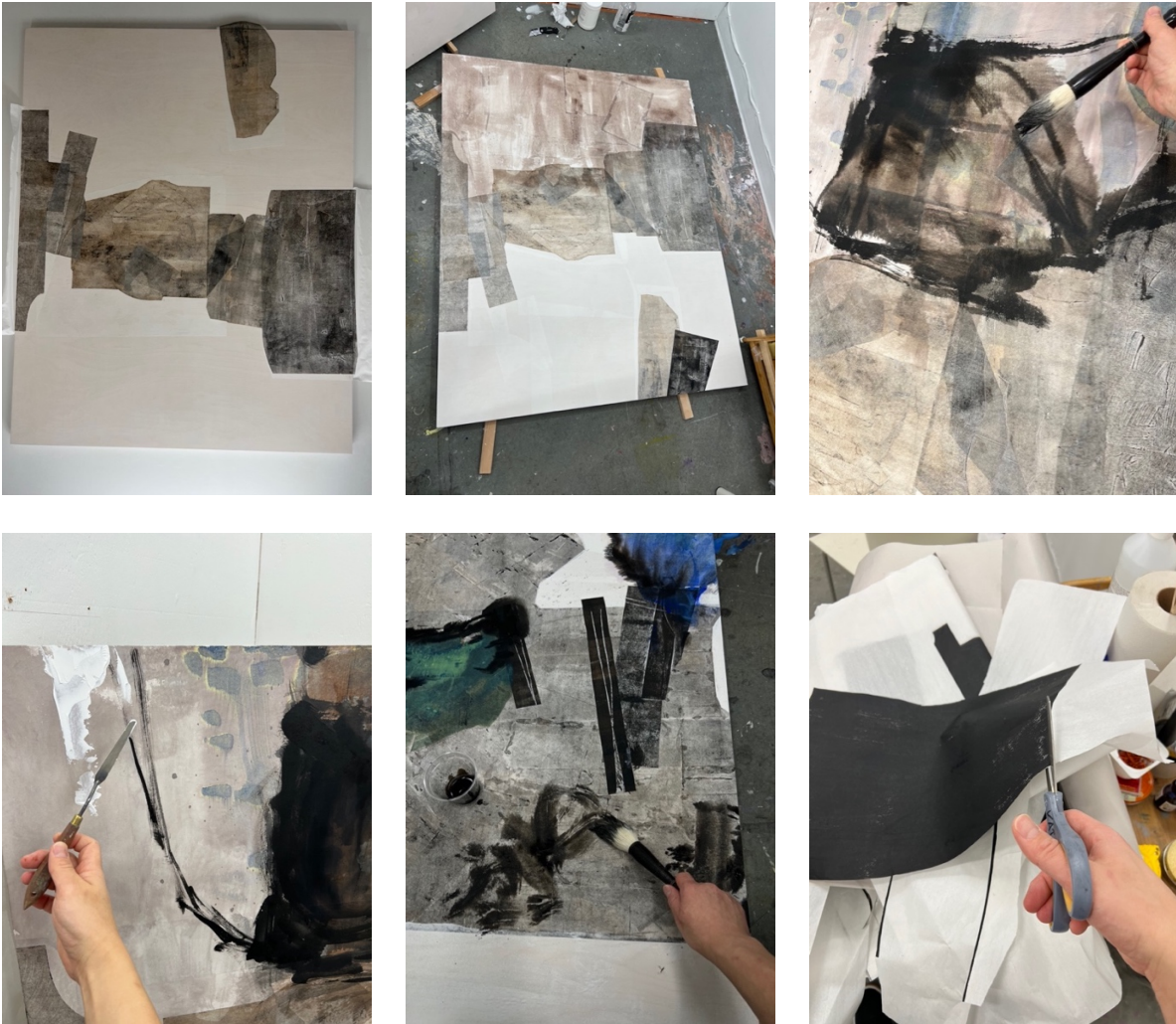


Fig. 16 *Neither Mountains nor Water*, Working Process.

The *Neither Mountains nor Water* series consists of four pieces that reflect an immersion into contemplative abstraction. Through these mixed-media works, I aim to capture not only the physical forms of the landscape but also the perception and the fluidity of time. This series combines two distinct methods to create their colour scheme.

I used the printmaking technique called “à La Poupée⁶” to apply sepia and black etching ink onto the plates. This creates a multi-colour effect on the prints. To collage these printed elements, the back of them is thoroughly coated with an acrylic adhesive, which dries rapidly, necessitating a swift attachment to the panel. Carefully lifting two corners, one must be mindful of their fragility, as humidity could cause them to disintegrate at any moment. The paper, influenced by physical inertia, gravity, and air resistance, is gently guided close to the panel. The alignment is crucial; first, a part of the paper is attached to the panel, followed by a gentle, sweeping motion from the center outward with the hand, ensuring the paper adheres smoothly while avoiding air bubbles. This process requires a balance of speed and caution, steadiness and adaptability to unexpected suddenness. The focus is paramount - breath held, body in harmony, and then release, immersed fully in the present moment.

After collaging the prints onto the panels, I used acrylic paints with an earthy palette. This included tones of yellow, brown, and greenish hues. I also incorporated calligraphic elements, which are a key feature of this project. These were crafted using fluid black pigment. There was also a unique technique where some of the finer black strokes were painted using a twig, allowing for an uncontrolled expression that lets the material speak. This method of painting, although unconventional, provides an opportunity for me to imbue the work with a sense of spontaneity and creativity. This

⁶à La Poupée, which means 'with the doll' in French, is a printmaking technique where different colors are applied to a single plate with small fabric or leather balls, allowing multi-colored prints from one pass. This method requires precise ink application and cleaning between colors to avoid mixing, making it suitable for creating vibrant etchings and aquatints with depth.

multi-faceted approach in the series reflects a harmonious blend of printmaking and painting, each element contributing to a rich, tactile experience.

In my exploration of abstract art through the *Neither Mountains nor Water* series, I was particularly inspired by the theoretical underpinnings of ancient Chinese art, which emphasize capturing inner similarities and the essence of subjects beyond their physical forms. As noted in Daniela Zhang-Cziráková's research,

"Many Chinese art theorists who followed the theory of inner spiritual similarities capture the state of mind, feelings, the artist's emotions, and their retention in the painting... In these theories mentioned here, there is a hidden possibility that it can completely abandon the outer shape in the painting. Thus, creates an excellent base for contemporary painters who are trying to forget the shape and capture an idea" (Daniela 186).

This perspective aligns with my approach in this series, where I focus not on the literal replication of landscapes but on conveying the emotional resonance of these scenes in harmony with ancient Chinese artistic principles.



Fig. 17 *Neither Mountains nor Water*. 2024

In the *Neither Mountains nor Water* series (Fig. 17), my creative process embodies hybridity—melding the ancient ethos of Spirit Resonance with my creative approach. I juxtapose the tranquillity and tumult of forms through hybrid techniques, using balanced asymmetry and spatial dynamics reflective of Proper Arrangement, as listed in the Six Principles of Chinese Painting. The artwork fuses traditional Chinese green-blue tones and an earthy palette with bold abstract shapes, creating a visual symphony of ethereal landscapes. Embracing the Bone Method, my varied and confident brushwork infuses structure with spirited movement, marrying the gestural calligraphy with a modern, self-reflective rhythm. This series is not just a representation but a reimagining, where each stroke bridges the past and the present, echoing the muscle memory of calligraphy while charting a path of innovative expression.

Layering serves as a metaphor for the accumulation of thoughts and consciousness. It is not about physically peeling each layer away but comprehending their origins and the process. Each layer might represent a dissatisfaction with the previous one or a necessary compromise for the overall effect, often seen when blank Xuan paper or acrylic paint completely covers an existing collaged print. The act of layering and covering can be interpreted both as one form of 'letting go' in my process and as the emergence of a new form of attachment. Mistakes, when they occur, are embraced as part of the journey and another type of 'letting go.' The realization is that once a print adheres to the panel, its position is extremely difficult to relocate anymore. It is a form of acceptance and release integral to my practice. It is a duality that speaks

to the complex nature of creation and perception, highlighting the cycle of satisfaction, dissatisfaction, and the continuous evolution of the artwork.

This blending of collagraph printmaking and painting, evidenced in the *Neither Mountains nor Water* series, vividly embodies my exploration into how these techniques can converge to create novel perceptual experiences for me, directly addressing my research question on the innovative fusion of artistic methods.

Three Ways to See the World

My painting teacher, Weishi Wang, from my hometown, has emphasized that the practice and growth of art involve different stages. It reminds me of the ancient Chinese mediative philosophy of 三看山水, which translates to *Three Ways to See Mountains and Rivers*. This concept is rooted in the 禪宗 / Chan / Zen Buddhist enlightenment framework and offers a perspective for viewing and interpreting the natural world. Three stages characterize this philosophy. The initial stage, 見山是山, 見水是水, entails seeing mountains and rivers as they are. The second stage, 見山不是山, 見水不是水, involves seeing mountains and rivers not as they are. The third and final stage, 見山祇是山, 見水祇是水, entails seeing mountains and rivers again as they are. This philosophy, steeped in artistic and spiritual traditions, offers a unique perspective on the natural world.

The *Near, So Far* series reflects the initial perception of the world as the first stage, viewing mountains and water as they are named. This approach to depicting the landscape is literal, focusing on capturing the visual elements as they were observed.

The *Neither Mountains nor Water* series explores beyond the literal representation of landscapes as the second stage. In this phase, mountains and rivers are no longer limited to their physical forms but are expressed as symbols, metaphors, and abstract concepts. It is about breaking free from conventional perceptions and delving deeper into a landscape's hidden meanings, a time of questioning and re-evaluation, where the familiar becomes unfamiliar, and new perspectives are sought. Moving from representation to abstraction in art involves deconstructing and reimagining methods. This can be seen in altered shapes, exaggerated forms, or using colour and texture to convey emotions and ideas rather than replicating the landscape's physical appearance. I am currently working on the third stage, which signifies a return to the ordinary after a journey of abstraction. It represents an introspection of seeing, interpreting, and settling on the subject, as well as creative vision and artistic methods. While writing this paper, I began to step into the Third Stage, which will be a long-term practice. Unfortunately, the first piece of artwork will not be included in this paper. However, it will be showcased in the thesis exhibition and can be addressed in a final reflective statement in this paper after the exhibition and defence. This project marks the beginning of a continuous exploration, settlement and compromise.

Post-Defence and Thesis Exhibition Reflection



Fig. 18 *A Long Long Time Alone*, 2024

In the thesis exhibition, I have installed six pieces of artwork: the *Neither Mountains nor Water* series, which are four mixed media works on panels; *A Long Long Time Alone* (Fig. 18), a large-scale mixed media work on canvas, measuring 1.9 m by 3.5 m; and *The Northern Mountains*, an editioned collagraph print. They spread throughout the Michael O'Brien Exhibitions Commons at Emily Carr University Art + Design. My thesis support document has discussed the *Neither Mountains nor Water* series in detail. The new focal point in my installation landed on my latest artwork, *A Long Long Time Alone* and *The Northern Mountains*, in which I aim to encapsulate the immersive experience and thematic complexity that mark these pieces.



Fig. 19 *The Northern Mountains*, 2024

The genesis of *A Long Long Time Alone* was my cache of leftover collagraph prints. While there were suggestions to display these prints as standalone pieces, I saw this as an opportunity to breathe new life into them through integration into a mixed-media format. This decision was influenced by large-scale works by artists Denyse Thomasos and Anselm Kiefer. I began to blend large dimensions, reassembled canvas stretcher components, and a layered approach in my work. This artwork was created by adapting the studio's corner and allowing the canvas to wrap around it—a method I refer to as a compromise of the limitation of the small studio space.

The thematic essence of this work was inspired by the landscape on this traditional Tsleil-Waututh land intertwined with the formal and aesthetic preferences

from my art and cultural background. The grandeur of the North Shore Mountains and clouds, viewed daily, echo the spirit and rhythm of Chinese landscape painting and are vividly captured in this work. This setting serves as a backdrop and a conduit for a meditative art-making process, where the conceptual mountains and rivers are perceived anew, echoing the third stage of *Three Ways to See Mountains and Rivers*. Coming back to the theme of hybridity, my approach aligns with philosopher Jerrold Levinson's concept of transformational hybrid art forms. I transcended traditional printmaking by using printed elements as pigments. This enhances the formal and pictorial aesthetics of the artwork, like assembling a puzzle with newfound creative freedom.

Overall, *A Long Long Time Alone* represents an ambitious exploration into new creative territories, challenging me to step into unfamiliar physical and artistic zones. The installation aims to showcase artwork and create an all-encompassing visual experience that invites viewers into a contemplative space, blurring the lines between the tangible and the imagined and underscoring the undecidable nature of art and perception.

In addition, my decision to juxtapose a small print, *The Northern Mountains*, with the large-scale painting was driven by a desire to showcase the breadth of my skills as a printmaker while exploring different modes of viewer engagement (Fig. 20). By presenting these two artworks with a huge contrast in size, I emphasize my foundational identity as a printmaker committed to the craft of editioned prints. The large painting serves as a portal into an immersive experience. I invite viewers to 'walk into' and be

enveloped by the artwork. This scale and formality impose a certain visual and emotional pressure on the viewer. The small print draws viewers into a more intimate space, prompting them to come closer and engage with the fine details. Although smaller, this print also acts as a portal, but one that suggests a distant, perhaps more reflective space. Viewers are encouraged to construct an imaginative landscape in their minds. These contrasting scales and experiences enrich the interactive nature of my work, highlighting the dynamic range and conceptual depth of printmaking as a medium.



Fig. 20 *A Long Long Time Alone and The Northern Mountains* installation view, 2024

Conclusion

This thesis support paper encapsulates the exploration of hybridity in my thesis project: the fusion of collagraph printmaking with painting and the integration of Chinese ink art with abstract painting. Through exploring mixed-media, particularly in the *Near, So Far* and *Neither Mountains nor Water* series, blending collagraph printmaking with painting revolutionized my understanding of mixed-media art. These two bodies of work also illustrate how the traditional aesthetics of Chinese ink art can be reinterpreted through the lens of abstract landscape painting.

This thesis project represents an opportunity for me to unfold both material and psychological aspects at the conclusion of my two-year MFA studies. During these years, my artistic practice underwent a significant revolution, which was highly influenced by technical research and the exploration of the concept of hybridity. Writing this paper has allowed me to reflect on the trajectory I have been on and revisit the questions I have been trying to answer. At the beginning of this paper, I asked myself several questions, such as what might be revealed in the fusion of printmaking and painting techniques. Based on my experience, I have learned that the fusion of different mediums became a natural artistic process. My printmaking teacher, Aurora Landin from Langara College, has encouraged me during the pandemic, saying that one should perceive printmaking as a strategy rather than a process. Yes, I believe creative techniques should be learned professionally but utilized as strategies to achieve ideal results. Another question I asked myself was what distinct qualities abstraction brings to figurative image-making. From the exploration of my body of work, I see abstraction as

existing based on something concrete, leading to a binary debate. If there is no concrete idea, what should be abstract? Lastly, I pondered how the act and mindset of contemplation influenced and redefined my art practice. Although I do not have a perfect answer to this question, exploring it fully is an exciting journey that extends beyond just two years of MFA studies and into a lifelong commitment to growth and discovery in my practice.

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