



Huang Rui: Ways of Abstraction

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The largest solo exhibition in recent years by Huang Rui, artist and co-founder of pioneering avant-garde Stars Art Group, surveys important but often overlooked threads in the abstract painting practice from the beginning of his career to the present day.

Exhibition Period:

2021.9.25 – 2021.12.19

Location:

UCCA Central Gallery and New Gallery

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BEIJING, China — From September 25 to December 19, 2021, UCCA Center for Contemporary Art presents “Huang Rui: Ways of Abstraction.” Since the late 1970s, Huang Rui (b. 1952, Beijing, lives and works in Beijing) has been active at the forefront of Chinese contemporary art as an artist and instigator, who notably co-organized the “Stars Art Exhibition” in 1979 and pioneered contemporary art practice in China. “Huang Rui: Ways of Abstraction” is the largest solo exhibition by the artist in recent years. Featuring more than 40 paintings and sculpture installations from the beginning of the artist’s career to the present day, this exhibition explores the language of abstraction and East Asian thoughts that have informed the artist’s practice for decades. Structured by five series—“Early Abstraction,” “Space,” “Space Structure,” “Experiments with Ink,” and “Installation Works”—works on view include the latest paintings created in 2021 in the “Heaven, Earth, Man” series, and exhibited for the first time, the oil paintings in the 2020 “Inside-out Dao” series. “Huang Rui: Ways of Abstraction” is curated by UCCA Director Philip Tinari with UCCA Assistant Curator Neil Zhang.

Press material available at

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Huang Rui’s foray into abstract painting can be traced back to 1978 and the “Stars Art Exhibition” late the following year, where abstract art, including several paintings of his own, was openly exhibited for the first time in post-Revolution China. First shown during this period, *Infinite Space* (1979), included here again in the “Early Abstraction” section, is the first significant abstract painting by the artist. Throughout the late 1970s and early 80s, Huang Rui’s exploration of abstraction in the works in this section not only foreshadow the artist’s later shift towards a focus on the abstract, they also offer vivid testimony of the era’s artistic movements and social transformations.

At the beginning of the 1980s, Huang Rui started searching for an approach towards abstraction that was grounded in his personal experience, one that would be more deeply abstract and rooted in the local context. His examination of the



interaction between architectural form and spiritual space in the courtyard house of Beijing led to works in the “Space Structure” series. Following his relocation to Japan in 1984, where he would live for the next fifteen years, Huang Rui began to explore the connections between materials, content, and brush work in painting. Inspired by the design philosophy of Japanese houses, such as an old rice warehouse that he used as his studio, that integrate space, form, and use, the “Space” series sees Huang Rui using black paint to create a kind of frame within his images that opens up a freer spiritual space within the picture plane. This series is echoed in the *Space (Recovery)* paintings made in 2015, in which the artist recreated according to photographs and sketches some of the “Space” paintings destroyed in his move back to China.

During his time in Japan, Huang Rui also made a series of experiments with ink under the influence of the Gutai group and avant-garde calligraphy. He was particularly inspired by how the splashes, brushstrokes, and other techniques of avant-garde calligraphy could be harnessed to create visual abstraction. In his ink wash paintings, Huang Rui utilizes a pure form of the abstract to produce an intense visual impact. The left and right sides of each piece often function as separate compositions, opposed to each other yet seeking a kind of reconciliation and unity. In these large-scale paintings, ink soaks through the interior of rice paper, connecting between the space on the front and back sides of the paper. Huang Rui took advantage of this unique feature of the materials in his exhibitions in Japan in the mid-1980s, adopting ink wash pieces as spatial dividers hung within the exhibition halls, using physical attributes of the ink and paper to add depth to the picture plane.

Contemplation on East Asian aesthetics and East Asian philosophy have been formative to Huang Rui’s abstract painting practice, especially since 1933 when he began to study the *Tao Te Ching* and the *Book of Changes*. The turns and changes embedded within the names of each hexagram in the *Book of Changes* informs the core idea of constant change in his practice. The “Inside-out Dao” series (2020) is a result of Huang Rui’s more fluid and breezy ways of abstraction in connection to the idea of *dao* in Taoism. In these large-scale paintings with a minimalistic palette, the viscous texture of oil forms in contrast with a flowing, ink wash effect created with diluting oil paint. The language of abstraction in the “Inside-out Dao” series eludes the traditional geometric order of the universe; through the juxtaposition between the different kinetics of the brushwork on the



canvas, Huang contracts a freer, new, three-dimensional space on the canvases.

Beyond the canvas, Huang Rui's in-depth study of East Asian philosophy and bold, experimental approach to the language of abstraction are materialized in the installation works at this exhibition. The three sculpture installations expand upon his use of the materiality of ink as a direct medium of expression, his cosmic view of the relationship between Taoist cosmology and urban ecology in the context of a global pandemic, and an alternative thread in his study of space and objects in sculpture form.

Exhibition Catalogue

On the occasion of "Huang Rui: Ways of Abstraction," UCCA Center for Contemporary Art will publish a catalogue of the same title, taking a retrospective look at the artist's explorations in abstract art over the course of the past four decades. The publication features essays by curator and critic Pi Li and Columbia University Professor John Rajchman, a wide-ranging conversation between UCCA Director Philip Tinari and Huang Rui, and high quality reproductions of all the exhibited artworks, as well as rare archival photographs and sketches dating from the "Stars" era up until the present day. The catalogue is designed by He Hao and published by Zhejiang Photography Press.

Sponsorship and Support

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About the Artist

Huang Rui (b. 1952, Beijing, lives and works in Beijing) was a founding member of the groundbreaking Chinese avant-garde art group The Stars. In the 1980s, his practice centered on painting, and in the 1990s he began to explore more diverse and experimental art-making techniques, including installation, performance art, photography, and prints. His major solo exhibitions include "Animal Time: 1204-2009" (Coudenberg Museum, Brussels, 2009); "Chinese History in Animal Time" (Museo delle Mura, Rome 2009); "Huang Rui: The Stars' Times 1977-1984"



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(He Xiangning Art Museum, Shenzhen, 2007); “Chai-Na/China” (Les Rencontres d’Arles Photography Festival, 2007); and “Huang Rui Exhibition” (Osaka Contemporary Art Center, 1990). Select group exhibitions include “Art and China after 1989: Theater of the World” (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2017); “CHINA 8” (various venues, Germany, 2015); the Venice Biennale (2013); and the “Stars Art Exhibition” (east garden of the National Art Gallery, Beijing, 1979).

About UCCA

UCCA Center for Contemporary Art is China’s leading contemporary art institution. Committed to the belief that art can deepen lives and transcend boundaries, UCCA presents a wide range of exhibitions, public programs, and research initiatives to a public of more than one million visitors each year. UCCA Beijing sits at the heart of the 798 Art District, occupying 10,000 square meters of factory chambers built in 1957 and regenerated in 2019 by OMA. UCCA Dune, designed by Open Architecture, lies beneath the sand in the seaside enclave of Aranya in Beidaihe. UCCA Edge, designed by architecture firm SO – IL, opened in Shanghai in May 2021. Formally accredited as a museum by the Beijing Cultural Bureau in 2018, UCCA also operates non-profit foundations, licensed by the Beijing Bureau of Civil Affairs and the Hong Kong government. UCCA’s commercial ventures include the retail platform UCCA Store, the children’s education initiative UCCA Kids, and collaborations and projects under the rubric UCCA Lab. Opened in 2007 and revived by a committed group of Chinese and international patrons in 2017, UCCA works to bring China into global dialogue through contemporary art.

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