

# The Paintbrush of Nature 自然の絵筆

23 June - 2 September 2023

Aperture Gallery

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Aperture Gallery is delighted to present “*The Paintbrush of Nature*,” a group exhibition by Chen Yuxing, Til Han Qingshan, Xi Li, An Ting Teng, and Bing Ye.

These five artists use photography as their central media but in a non-traditional, conceptual way. Sharing a common East Asian background, they draw inspiration from ways of depicting nature in traditional Chinese or Japanese cultures, look critically at them when they have been adopted into Western perspectives, or explore memories of their own culture through natural landscapes.

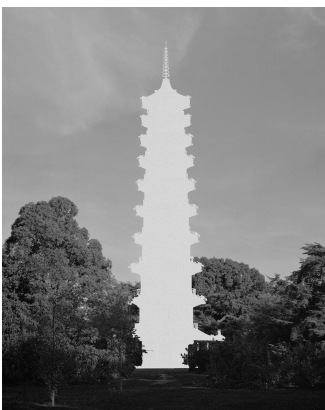
The world’s first photo book by William Henry Fox Talbot, one of the pioneers of early photography, was entitled “*The Pencil of Nature*,” highlighting the accurate depiction of the world by photography. In contrast, paintbrushes and ink are frequently used in traditional East Asian image-making. In this region, even depictions of nature traditionally focused on evoking a spiritual level rather than reproducing the visible surface. Even abstract elements such as a single line or ink stain were imbued with meaning, and the paintbrush was well suited for such expression. Taking a cue from the difference between the pencil and the paintbrush, this exhibition will show how these young artists incorporate elements of East Asian origin into their photographic expressions.

Co-curated by Bing Ye and Sonoko Nakanishi

## Artists’ Talk

6.30 - 8.30 pm, Thursday, 27 July 2023

The artists Chen Yuxing, Til Han Qingshan, An Ting Teng, and Bing Ye share their practices and interests with the audience. This event is free to attend, and there’s no need for RSVP.



Chen Yuxing’s series *The Oriental Scene* focuses on the oriental structures frequently found in English gardens. Chinoiserie, which was all the rage in Europe in the 17th to 18th century, was adopted in garden design as well as other areas of visual culture. In Europe, these structures have been admired for their exoticism and elegance, while people from the regions where these cultures originated are often puzzled by the unnaturalness of the sudden appearance of “Chinese” structures in landscapes with Western vegetation, or by the inaccuracy of their design. Chen’s work emphasises this sense of incongruity by redacting the structures in question from these images of the landscape, while also drawing attention to the historical context by displaying the documents on which these building designs were based.



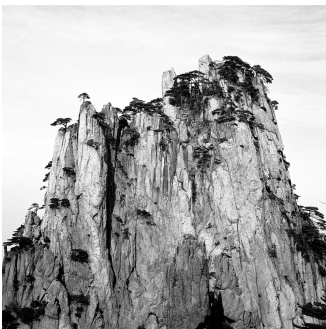
Til Han Qingshan uses painting and photography to address themes of identity. The photographs of plants that frequently appear in her series '井' (Well, or *Container* in English) are emerged from a desire to capture natural individuals in their various environments as they are. Her Polaroid works of flowers seek to embrace the existence of each flower through its own form and state, rather than through objective information such as the type of flower or its native habitat. The images, which are not bound by conventional composition or focus, are reminiscent of the portraits of friends we take personally. Han, who also practices Buddhism and *ikebana*, tries to find hints in traditional East Asian cultures for the conflicts concerning human identity in a complex society.



Xi Li shows two works from her series "Unstable Landscapes," which addresses the unreliability of images through her signature staged photography style. *Parallel Life (Plant Diptych)* is a set of "group portraits" of house plants, each of which is carrying their product image representing their ideal state as a plant but looking quite different from their appearances in real life. *Mountains That Do Not Exist* questions what the true image or information of what you see in nature can be. Landscape, for Li, is closely connected to a collective human memory or shared identity of people who experience exposure to the same landscape. Li's work emphasises that the images of nature we see are always a reflection of human ideals, memories, and emotions, and are subjective and variable.



An Ting Teng is interested in images and patterns that remind her of expressions of nature in traditional Chinese painting, especially those abruptly found in a contemporary urban space. Teng captures these images using techniques of photography and prints them on different kinds of surfaces, often unconventional support materials for photographic images. Her choice of monochromatic colour is a reference to Chinese ink painting, in which the viewer is invited to search for meanings or feelings in different shapes, shades or even in blank spaces. Practicing dark-room printing and alternative photographic techniques such as liquid light, Teng also values the elements of experiment, labour, and the meditative process in image-making.



Primarily working with the medium of photography and printmaking, Bing Ye produces black and white images that are reminiscent of the Chinese or Japanese tradition of landscape painting on silk scrolls, of which format emphasises verticality. Here Ye shows the works together with images of very similar motifs from East Asian art history. Akin to these historical predecessors, and yet Ye's works do not directly refer to them. The artist, who has been so familiar with these iconic images in East Asian culture that they are almost embedded in the mind, is naturally and unconsciously drawn to similar motifs. Just like those skilfully done ink paintings, Ye's images invite the viewer to look at them in greater detail or even to interpret profound meanings in them.

CHEN Yuxing 陳雨星 (b. 1998 / based in London, UK)

Chen holds a Master's degree in MA Photojournalism and Documentary Photography at London College of Communication (London). Photography expands her horizon as a novel approach to narration and representation. Chen mainly focuses on themes including identity, recollection, historical public issues, and the authenticity of objects. Her recent research is in the area of archives and decolonisation. Chen has exhibited her works mainly in the UK, and is participating in PhMuseum Days 2023 Photo Festival in Bologna in this autumn.

[www.chenyuxing.org](http://www.chenyuxing.org) @dxxin\_universe

Til HAN Qingshan 韓青杉 (based in London, UK)

Han's works revolves around the ontological proposition of the unrealised being. Her practice is dedicated to taking an active investigation into the potential of unrecognised, unfinished, or unfulfilled forms of life. Using different media including painting, photography, or textile, Han tries to capture fleeting imagery that otherwise disappear without being recorded. Han's works have been exhibited mainly in the UK.

<https://h-qs.net/> @108qs

Xi LI 李希 (b. 1995, Suzhou, China / lives and works in New York, USA)

Li is an artist who focuses on how personal and collective memory affect the perception of the past. Li works with photography, video and installation to address the unreliability of images and memories, and fabricates a new reality in between the fictional and the nonfictional. Li has exhibited internationally in François Ghebaly in Los Angeles, LATITUDE Gallery and Inna Art Space in New York City, and Madeln Gallery in Shanghai. Her self-published book *Traces of Invisibilities* has been shortlisted for Photo 2020 x Perimeter International Photobook Prize. Li earned a Bachelor of Design from Pratt Institute and an MFA in Photography from Yale School of Art.

<https://xili.studio> @xili.lixi

An Ting TENG 鄧安庭 (b. 1995, Taipei, Taiwan / based in London, UK)

Teng holds a Master's degree in Photography from the Royal College of Art (London). She investigates unconventional materials for photographic prints through experimentation with chemistry and light. She collects everyday materials, both natural and man-made. Her encounters with these materials generate stories that bring together elements of memory, nature, and longing. Teng's works have been exhibited in various group exhibitions in Taiwan, UK, and the Netherlands.

[www.antingteng.com](http://www.antingteng.com) @annie\_teng

Bing YE 葉冰 (based in London, UK and Hangzhou, China)

Holding degrees in Printmaking and Photography in China and UK, Ye acquired various techniques that belong to the field between photography and traditional printmaking. With a focus on the materialities and histories, Ye's practice explores the relationship between photography and perception, or between photography and other media. Beside developing artworks, Ye's practice also involves the collaborative production of hand-made books and curation of exhibition as well as art direction.

[www.yebing.me](http://www.yebing.me) @bing.ye.xci

## Sales

Some of the works shown in the exhibition are available to purchase. Please make an inquiry at [gallery@apertureuk.com](mailto:gallery@apertureuk.com) for further details.

Aperture Gallery  
(Basement level of Aperture UK)

17 a&b Riding House Street  
London W1W 7DT  
Tel. 020 7436 9844  
<http://apertureuk.com>

### Opening Hours

Tuesday - Saturday 12-6 pm  
Mon, Sun & bank holidays closed

Press / sales contact  
Sonoko Nakanishi  
[gallery@apertureuk.com](mailto:gallery@apertureuk.com)