

● DANCING WITH THE QI
TRANSMEDIATING CHINESE CALLIGRAPHY ●



Curated by Jia-Yan Mi with Jerry Kaba

CUI FEI
ZHEN GUO
HUANG XIANG

XIN SONG
YIN MEI
SIN-YING HO

TCNJ Art Gallery

FEB. 05 - MAR. 13, 2025

- Jiayan Mi

The exhibition *Dancing with the Qi: TransMediating Chinese Calligraphy* (氣韻之舞) showcases a multimedia reimaging of Chinese calligraphy through diverse artistic mediums, including painting, ceramics, papercutting, textiles, natural objects, and dance performances. Featuring six New York-based Chinese American artists—Cui Fei, Zhen Guo, Sin-ying Ho, Huang Xiang, Xin Song, and Yin Mei—the exhibition reconfigures Chinese calligraphy as a dynamic embodiment of Qi, the cosmic vital energy that drives artistic creativity.

The recent technological revolution in Generative AI has spurred an optimistic narrative, an ostensibly liberating discourse celebrating the boundless potential of "creativity" within human intelligence. Applications like OpenAI, ChatGPT (for text generation), and DALL-E (for generated images), alongside Midjourney (for images) and virtual reality, have become emblematic of these advancements, often invoking popular euphoria within techno-utopian fantasies.

Central to this emancipatory narrative is the notion that advanced AI will surpass human intelligence. In response to the incredulous conditions of disembodiment, virtuality, automation, and vectorization inherent in Generative AI, this exhibition seeks to celebrate the authenticity and craftsmanship of human-made art in contrast to the disembodied virtuality of generative AI. The diverse artworks exude a Benjaminian aura, encompassing authenticity, originality, and the tangible presence surrounding a unique work of art, manifesting an irreplaceable sense of intimacy, humanity, and co-presence of the human body and hand. Audiences will be captivated by the affective interface with the power of dynamic strokes shaping Chinese characters.

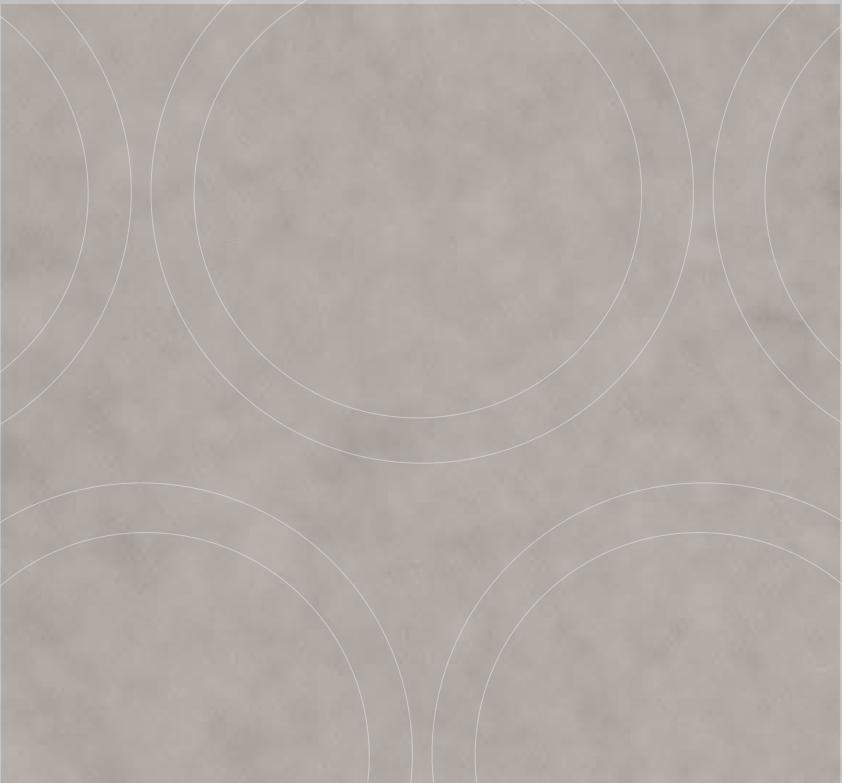
Chinese calligraphy, as an expressive and philosophical art form, embodies more than the skillful arrangement of characters; it channels the life force and inner rhythm of the artist. Central to understanding this artistic tradition is the concept of *Qi* (氣)—often translated as "breath," "energy," or "life force." In Chinese philosophy, *Qi* is the animating force of the universe, a dynamic, flowing energy that permeates in all living things and the natural world. Within the context of art, particularly calligraphy, *Qi* transcends its metaphysical origins to become a guiding principle that infuses a work with vitality, spirit, and authenticity.

The practice of calligraphy is often described as a dialogue between the artist's inner *Qi* and the external *Qi* of nature. Each stroke of the brush, whether bold or delicate, embodies the rhythm and vitality of life itself. A calligrapher must cultivate their *Qi* through deep concentration and regulated breathing, allowing the brush to become an extension of their being. The movement of the brush echoes the flow of *Qi*, creating a seamless interplay between intention and spontaneity, control, and freedom. The concept of *Qi* also informs the structural aesthetics of Chinese calligraphy. The balance of Yin and Yang, light and dark, heavy and light, is crucial in composing each character. Empty spaces (虛, Xu) within the work are as vital as the inked strokes, for they represent the unseen flow of *Qi*, lending a sense of movement and vitality to the static form. This dynamic balance transforms written characters into a living, breathing expression of the universe's energy.

Equally vital to *Qi* is the aesthetic concept of *Qiyun* (氣韻), which is often translated as "spiritual resonance" or "rhythmic vitality." Coined during the Six Dynasties period (220–589 CE) by the art theorist Xie He in his "Six Principles of Chinese Painting," *Qiyun* defines the essence of artistic excellence, where technical mastery harmonizes with the artist's inner spirit.

It refers to the ineffable quality that breathes life into a work, imbuing it with dynamism and a connection to the cosmos. In calligraphy, *Qiyun* represents the synergy between the artist's spirit and their technique, creating a dynamic interplay of form, rhythm, and meaning, connecting the viewer to the cosmos through the vibrancy of the brushstrokes.

Calligraphy is a meditative practice, uniting body, mind, and brush with spontaneity as the artist channels their *Qi* into the flowing lines and voids of their composition. The dynamic curves of cursive script (草書), the poised discipline of regular script (楷書), and the balanced voids of space (白) reveal the interplay of movement and stillness. These elements, deeply rooted in Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist traditions, invite viewers to experience the calligraphy as a living art form—a dance of *Qi* that transcends its medium, embodying the very essence of vitality and spirit.





Tracing the Origin VI_II, 2008

Archival pigment print

76 x 35 in

- Cui Fei

Cui Fei's installations embody the concept of *Qi* as a vital force that animates both nature and culture, dissolving the boundaries between the two spheres. By transforming natural materials such as thorns, tendrils, and vines into calligraphic forms, Cui reveals the latent energy and expressive potential inherent in the natural world. Her works suggest that *Qi* flows seamlessly through organic and human-made forms, connecting them in a cosmic continuum of creativity. Treating these natural elements as ideograms, she invites viewers to experience nature as a living script, infusing traditional Chinese calligraphy with a contemporary, ecological resonance. In doing so, Cui challenges conventional notions of representation, presenting nature as art and art as an extension of nature, rooted in the vitality of *Qi*.



Love, Kindness, Passion, Desire, 2020
Fabric silk yarn and mixed media
Four panels, 250 cm x 600cm x 26cm

- Zhen Guo

Zhen Guo's fabric installations of feminist punch bags and hard breasts embody the resilience and transformative power of *Qi* as both a creative and disruptive force in the tradition of Chinese calligraphy. Her bold use of textiles challenges the patriarchal norms often associated with calligraphy's history, reframing it as a medium for feminist expression and resistance. These works pulsate with the dynamic energy of *Qi*, symbolizing a defiant vitality that transcends societal constraints and embraces intersectional dialogues. By integrating the fluidity of calligraphic strokes with the tactile strength of fabric, Zhen's installations invite viewers to confront the tension between tradition and subversion, beauty and defiance. Positioned within the broader theme of *Dancing with the Qi*, her art underscores the enduring relevance of calligraphy as a vessel for contemporary feminist activism and creative innovation, inviting audiences to critically rethink the intersections of tradition, identity, and contemporary art.



Lan Ting Xu, 2025

Stoneware, Celadon glaze, High fire reduction firing

Size: H10.5' x 7'

- Sin-ying Ho

Sin-ying Ho recreates and deconstructs the most iconic masterpiece calligraphy *The Lanting Xu* (Preface of the Orchid Pavilion) 《蘭亭序》by master calligrapher Wang Xizhi (王羲之) with ceramic art, creating a three-dimensional, tactile and visually stunning representation of the Qi-infused strokes. The ceramic medium adds a unique dimension of vitality and shock to the traditional art form, inviting audiences to engage with calligraphy in a tangible way. Her multi-media work, *Ink & Clay: A Dance of time*, captures the dynamic flow of Qi in every ceramic brushstroke, now rendered in clay sculpture, emphasizing the vitality and energy inherent in the art form. By deconstructing and reshaping this masterpiece, Ho bridges traditional calligraphic elegance with the shock and presence of ceramics, making Qi physically manifest and emotionally resonant. The textural quality of the ceramic medium invites viewers to experience calligraphy not just as a visual art but as a visceral and spatial encounter. Ho's work exemplifies how ancient practices can pulse with new life, embodying the cosmic vitality of Qi in modern artistic contexts.



Multi-Colored Darkness-The "Image" of the Imageless World-No. 13, 2017
Digital print and original calligraphy on paper
20"X 30", New York

- Huang Xiang

Huang Xiang explores the multidimensional aspect of calligraphy through 3D arts, creating a visual and tactile experience. His poetic approach intertwines traditional calligraphy with contemporary technology, bridging the gap between ancient wisdom and modern innovation.

Prominent poet Huang Xiang transports the *Qi* vividly through his multidimensional calligraphy, where poetry, gigantic brushstrokes, and cosmic painting converge into a sensory dialogue between tradition and innovation. By transforming Chinese calligraphy into three-dimensional art, Huang Xiang renders the unseen energy of *Qi* tangible, inviting viewers to experience its flow in both physical and metaphysical dimensions. His works bridge the ancient and the avant-garde, infusing classical wisdom with contemporary dynamism through the interplay of texture, space, and motion. This cosmic reimagining not only celebrates the authenticity of human creativity but also situates *Qi* as the pulsating heart of artistic vitality amid a digitally dominated era. In Huang Xiang's magical hands, calligraphy transcends its two-dimensional origins, becoming a living embodiment of *Qi* that animates the timeless rhythm of Chinese cultural expression.



Divine Comedy, 2024

Papercut with ink and watercolor on rice paper

26"x 48" each

New York

- Xin Song

In Xin Song's Chinese paper cut in Calligraphy, the concept of *Qi* is vividly brought to life through intricate layers of cut paper, merging the ancient art of calligraphy with contemporary forms of visual storytelling. *Qi*, the vital force that animates all things, flows dynamically in her work, transforming static characters into pulsating networks of energy and motion. Her art reimagines the essence of Chinese calligraphy by emphasizing its rhythmic and organic interplay with space and light, bridging tradition and innovation. Each cut and contour manifests the artist's inner vitality, offering viewers a tangible experience of *Qi*'s transformative power. Within the dancing flow of the *Qi*, Xin Song's creations exemplify the spiritual and creative resonance of calligraphy, reinforcing its timeless relevance in the modern artistic dialogue.



Yin Mei Dance at Beacan KUBE Ethan Vohen Gallery 3-16-2024

- Yin Mei

Through Yin Mei's dancing body with her large-scale scrolls of calligraphy, the concept of *Qi*/ 氣 is brought to life as she channels the cosmic flow of energy through her graceful dance movements, which simultaneously mimic and enhance the gestures of calligraphy. The body becomes a vessel for *Qi*, with each sweeping motion reflecting the fluidity and rhythm inherent in the strokes of traditional Chinese characters. Yin Mei's performance transcends the boundaries of calligraphy, transforming it from a static art form into a dynamic, living expression. The integration of dance allows for an embodied experience of *Qi*, making visible the invisible force that animates both the artist and the artwork. This performance serves as a powerful metaphor for the ongoing vitality and fluidity of Chinese calligraphy, reminding viewers of the deep connection between the body, mind, and cosmic energy that shapes all creative acts.

Her movements highlight how the act of writing is a dynamic, embodied experience that extends beyond the brush and paper, resonating through her body as an extension of the calligraphic stroke. By doing so, Yin Mei underscores the profound relationship between the artist's inner energy and the outward expression, inviting the audience to perceive the rhythm of *Qi* not just in the ink on paper but in the movement of the body itself.



In curating this exhibition, we invite viewers to experience the rhythmic vitality and profound balance within each work. These works not only capture the form of language but also the spirit of the artist. The flow of Qi transcends their materiality, serving as conduits for the viewers to engage with the timeless energy of the cosmos. This is the power of Chinese calligraphy—where philosophy and art merge, creating a profound space for contemplation on the inseparability of art, philosophy, and life in the ever-evolving landscape of artistic expression.

Guest Curator

Jiayan Mí, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Chinese and English

Department of English, World Languages & Cultures



The TCNJ Art Gallery thanks all those who contributed to this exhibition:

Curated by Jiayan Mí, Ph.D. with Jerry Kaba

President of The College of New Jersey

Dr. Michael A. Bernstein

Interim Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

Dr. Suzanne McCotter

Dean of the School of the Arts and Communication

Dr. Pamela E Barnett

Professor of Graphic Design and Chair, Department of Art and Art Education

Chung Sum Chak

Director, Art Gallery

Margaret Pezalla-Granlund

Gallery Assistant

Ren Maclean '22

Design

Shaily Maldonado '25

TCNJ Art Gallery
The College of New Jersey
2000 Pennington Road
Ewing, NJ 08628