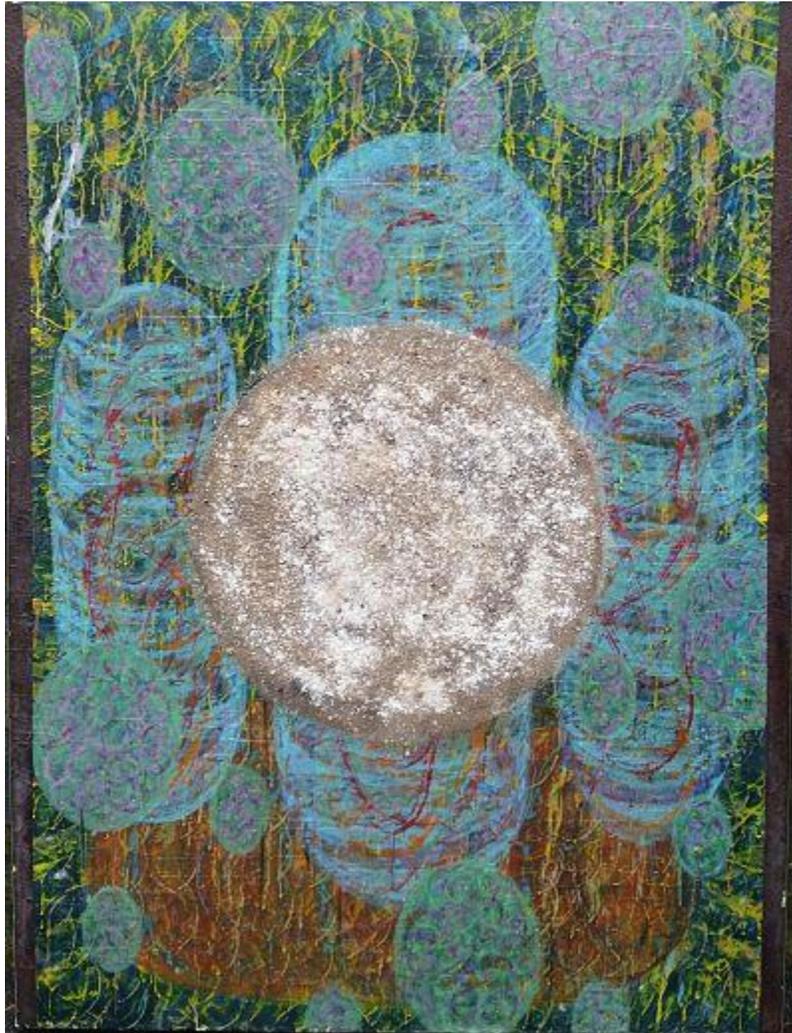


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WELLINGTON FINE ART



Rising and Advancing 1999 by Yong Jo Ji encaustic on canvas 38 x 52 inches

Rising and Advancing is perhaps the most dramatic form of the Taoist/ Ch'an spiritual practice of merging one's consciousness with the Cosmos. The artist dreams of the universe and has built his artistic life around it. The human element in these paintings is almost always small and well-integrated into the Cosmos, or there is no trace of the human at all. The white circle represents Buddha. The lack of perspective makes the viewer feel somehow inside the work's cosmology and able to wander there rather than looking at the painting from a single viewpoint outside the painting.

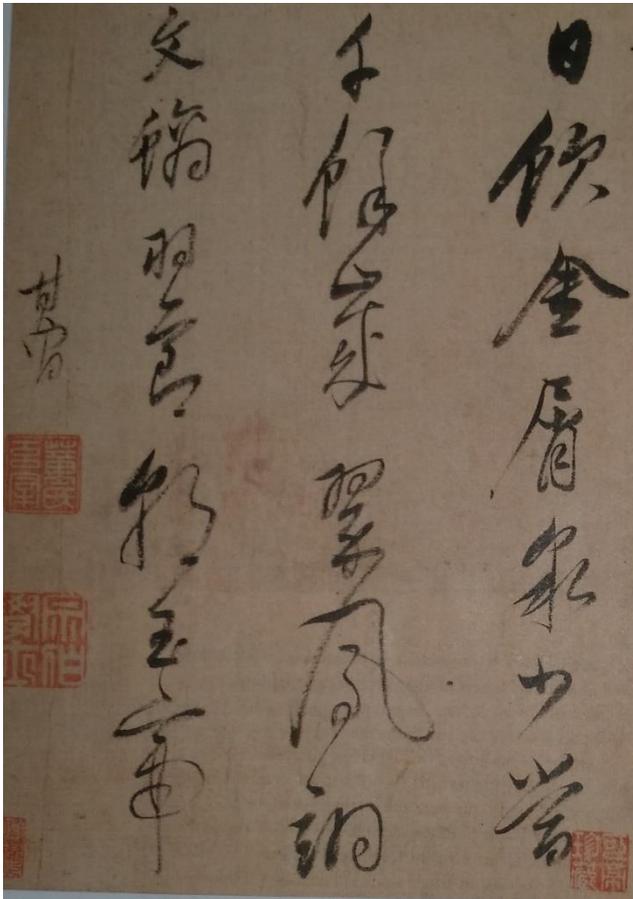


Tao's Pathway 2011 by Yong Jo Ji encaustic on canvas 4' x 5'

Great painters often copied esteemed works by their predecessors as a way of fully inhabiting the minds of those earlier artists, a way of mastering their insights- and when original paintings are lost, surviving copies by later masters are frequently revered as if they were the originals. Understanding these images requires some knowledge of the conceptual framework within which they operate. Otherwise it's like looking at Renaissance painting with no knowledge of Christianity. The cosmology of Lao Tzu's *Tao Ti Ching* (sixth century seminal Chinese work of spiritual philosophy) and the term more related into the English language than any other, *Tao*, the central concept in Taoism, means most literally *Way* as in a road or pathway. But Lao Tzu uses it to describe the empirical Cosmos as a single living tissue that is inexplicably generative- and so female in its very nature. As such, Tao is an ongoing cosmological process, an ontological path*Way* by which things come into existence, evolve through their lives, and then go out of existence, only to be transformed and reemerge in a new form.

At its deepest level, the tissue of Tao is described by that cosmology in terms of two fundamental elements: Absence and Presence. Presence is simply the empirical universe, the ten thousand things in constant transformation, and Absence is the generative void from which this ever-changing realm of Presence perpetually emerges. And so Tao is the process through which all things arise and pass away as Absence burgeons forth into the great transformation of Presence. This is simply an ontological description of natural process, perhaps most immediately manifest in the seasonal cycle: the pregnant emptiness of Absence in the winter and so on. This makes philosophical sense because the concepts of Absence and Presence are simply an approach to the fundamental nature of things. In the end, they are the same thing: Presence grows out of and returns to Absence and is therefore always a manifestation of it. Or to state it more precisely, Absence and Presence are simply different ways of seeing Tao rendering a mindscape of stark serenity: the empty mind of an old sage-master that somehow includes all the sorrow of life.

Proper viewing of this art was determined by Taoist/ Ch'an meditation practice, which was common among ancient China's artist-intellectuals and is often referenced as the stream of thought falls silent and practitioners inhabit empty-mind. In this empty-mind, the opening of consciousness is a mirror allowing no distinction between inside and outside. Hence mind and Cosmos are woven together in the most profound way. This mirrored perception is central to the art of Yong Jo Ji. These ancient artist-intellectuals gazed into these pictures for long periods of time as a kind of spiritual practice, and to mirror that image is to fill one's mind with that Cosmos, a particular form of emptiness.



Cursive script calligraphy like this was intended to liberate the serious Ch'an practitioner/ calligrapher from self-identity into the cosmological process. The brushstrokes are selfless and spontaneous, enacting the elemental forces of the Cosmos, which perennially tumble through its myriad transformations- sometimes headlong and sometimes lazy, sometimes thick and sometimes thin- writhing with the abandon of a dragon in flight (as the ancients may have said).

Two pages from Dong Qichang's 17th Century calligraphic panels



Yong Jo Ji Sag Harbor, New York 2010



Tao's Path 2012 encaustic on canvas by Yong Jo Ji at collector's home East Hampton, New York. In painting, as in calligraphic practice, the brushstroke is an act of perpetual spontaneity by the artist.

The ancients followed the dynamic lines from the top right down, as if the focus of awareness were the tip of the brush in motion. In tracing the movement of that brushstroke, with mirror-deep clarity of Ch'an empty-mind, they shared the painter's experience inhabiting that originary moment of the cosmological cycle of Tao. They could participate in an unbridled mind soaring free of the complications that mired their lives in day-to-day concerns, a mind full of creative energy and elemental joy, wherein thought, identity and language are purified into the sheer energy of the Cosmos.

The word for "mind" in classical Chinese is also the word for "heart" (which is an image of the heart muscle, with its chambers at the locus of veins and arteries). There is no distinction between the two. The empty-mind is also an experience of the heart. And so *Tao's Path* means to cultivate the inexhaustible complexity of an empty mind and a full heart.

Manhattan, New York October 18, 2018