



ABOVE:
Installation view; main gallery with view into vault, 2011

COVER:
In the Garden: Born in a Way of Metaphysics No. 4 (detail), 2011

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Notes: height precedes width. All artworks have been made available courtesy of Deng Guo Yuan unless otherwise noted. All installation shots are courtesy of David Broda.

MAIN GALLERY:

In the Garden, Series I, 2010

Nos. 1, 9, 5

Chinese ink and wash on wove paper
19.5 x 17.5 inches (each panel)

In the Garden, Series I, 2010

Nos. 3, 4, 18, 6, 10, 2, 11, 7, 12, 19, 15, 20

Chinese ink and wash on wove paper
19.5 x 17.5 inches (each panel)

In the Garden, Series II, 2010

Nos. 12, 6, 4, 14

Chinese ink and wash on wove paper
39.5 x 35.5 inches (each panel)

In the Garden, Series III, 2011

Nos. 8, 6, 7, 3, 2, 4

Chinese ink and wash on wove paper
79 x 35.5 inches (each panel)

In the Garden, Series II, 2010

No. 13

Chinese ink and wash on wove paper
39.5 x 35.5 inches (each panel)

In the Garden: Born in a Way of Metaphysics No. 4, 2011

Nine birdcages, four chairs, test tubes, and plants
Dimensions variable

VAULT:

Pierre Creton

Deng Guo Yuan: In the Garden, 2010

DVD

20 min.

Courtesy of Pierre Creton

This winter, the Warehouse Gallery highlights ink brush paintings by Tianjin-based Chinese artist Deng Guo Yuan. His work reveals the tradition of Chinese landscape painting and a profound knowledge of modern and international contemporary aesthetics. The film *Deng Guo Yuan* (2010) by French filmmaker Pierre Creton, presented in the Warehouse Gallery's vault, meticulously documents the creation of one of Deng's ink paintings in his Tianjin studio. Widely exhibited in China and Europe, this is the artist's first solo museum exhibition in the United States. The show originated at the Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts Museum (Tianjin, China), and then traveled in modified form to the Samek Art Gallery at Bucknell University (Lewisburg, PA), to the Provenance Center (New London, CT), and to its last venue, the Warehouse Gallery, for which Deng created additional site-specific works.

Additional support for the lecture is provided by the Chinese Students and Scholars Association (CSSA).

THE WAREHOUSE GALLERY

Syracuse University
350 West Fayette Street
Syracuse, NY 13202

The Warehouse Gallery is an international contemporary art venue of the SUArt Galleries at Syracuse University. The gallery's mission is to present exhibitions and programs by artists whose work engages the community in a dialogue regarding the role the arts can play in illuminating critical issues of our life and times.

EDITOR

Jessica Reed

DESIGNER

Rainer M. Wehner

Ash Braunecker

GALLERY STAFF

Anja Chávez—Curator of Contemporary Art

Rainer M. Wehner—Exhibition Designer and Preparator

GALLERY ASSISTANTS

Emily Marie Barry—Gallery Assistant

Ash Braunecker—Gallery Assistant

Ellie Brown—Gallery Assistant

Emma Diane McAnaw—Gallery Assistant

Daniela Rodriguez Restrepo—Gallery Assistant

Kiri Rowan—Gallery Assistant

Sarah Trad—SU Engagement Fellow

Minjie Yoo—Intern

Website—thewarehousegallery.syr.edu

Information—whginfo@syr.edu

Voice (315) 443-6450 Fax (315) 443-6494

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DENG GUO YUAN

17 NOVEMBER 2011–18 FEBRUARY 2012

THE WAREHOUSE GALLERY
GUIDE#16





In the Garden III, 2011
From left to right: Nos. 8, 6, 7, 3, 2, 4

DENG GUO YUAN: INK PAINTING IN THE 21ST CENTURY
BY
ANJA CHÁVEZ

"Like many abstract artists, we need to find the access to nature. This is the only way to achieve infinity."
—Deng Guo Yuan (2001)¹

In 2000, Chinese-born and Tianjin-based artist Deng Guo Yuan turned towards ink painting, one of the most enduring Chinese art forms practiced for over a thousand years. Though he was initially trained as an oil painter, Deng also began creating sculptures and installations that both pay respect to traditions in Chinese art and incorporate elements of Western aesthetics. The international nature of Deng's art is thus evident early on in his career, and his early twenty-first century work with ink painting is also to be understood in this vein: as a continuation of a major tradition in Chinese art with an eye toward innovations infused with the concerns of other nations and cultures.

Deng's present work thus reveals both the tradition of Chinese landscape painting and a reception of international contemporary aesthetics. If this work incorporates a centuries old Chinese tradition that requires a close study of nature (yet in a way that this art is less a faithful copy of the visible world than a metaphor for the artist's expression of an inner self), it also incorporates the historical, political, and cultural convulsions witnessed by China in the past decades.² Indeed, by the time Deng had created his first ink paintings in 2000, China already had undergone profound changes, while Chinese contemporary art also had gained international attention through such major exhibitions as *Inside Out: New Chinese Art* (1998) organized by Gao Minglu. At

the same time, Deng had begun exhibiting in Germany, where he maintained a close friendship with the late German painter Jörg Immendorff; a friendship that also has had its impact on Deng's own artistic vision.

Deng's inclusion of nature and abstraction into his works is attributable both to the tradition of Chinese painting in the nineteenth and twentieth-century³ and to such twentieth-century European perspectives as Paul Cézanne's claim to return to nature, Max Ernst's revision of romantic landscape painting in Germany, and Anselm Kiefer's exploration of texture in his paintings.

Despite Deng's stating he is an abstract painter, his work also often verges on the figurative. Thus, the titles of many of his works allude to man-made, cultivated, or recreated landscapes. For instance, the series *In the Garden* (2006) reveals varied depths and perspectives that are entirely due to Deng's brushstroke—one of the significant aspects of traditional Chinese painting that evolved from calligraphy. *In the Garden* can also refer to the so-called mind landscape paintings (produced by scholar-artists during the Mongol Yuan dynasty) in which the garden is an extension of the artist. These works simultaneously refer to masters from previous dynasties and to the artist's own calligraphic brushwork.⁴ In similar fashion, Deng's *In the Garden* series alludes



Installation view; main gallery, 2011
From back to front: **In the Garden II**, 2010 (Nos. 12, 6, 4, 14)
In the Garden: Born in a Way of Metaphysics No. 4, 2011

to the late nineteenth- and twentieth-century turn toward abstraction in Europe and in the United States.

The Western connection of Deng's art is all the more clear in his 2001 text titled "*Die Gedanken über die Zeit*" ("Thoughts on Time"),⁵ which alludes to Western artistic achievements and to the search for a universal language by such artists as Paul Cézanne, Vasily Kandinsky, Piet Mondrian, and Arnold Schoenberg. In both Deng's small and large ink paintings, his brushstroke creates abstract patterns that evoke paths, flowerbeds, trees, branches, clouds, and the sky in ways sometimes reminiscent of Claude Monet's gardens.⁶ In the Chinese tradition, the brushstroke is of course central to evaluating an artist's qualities, feelings, and cultivation.⁷ In the case of Deng, his calligraphic brushstrokes also project states of mind that are independent of the figurative elements to which they might give rise. In seeking to both prolong and alter the Chinese tradition of ink painting, Deng's work exists within a lesser-studied tradition of Chinese painters from the nineteenth century onward who have sought to merge the aesthetic cultures of East and West.

The exhibition of Deng's work at the Warehouse Gallery at Syracuse University includes twenty paintings and one

installation that were first on view at the Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts Museum in Tianjin, China. A portion of this exhibition traveled to the Samek Art Gallery at Bucknell University in Lewisburg, PA, and to the Provenance Center in New London, CT. For The Warehouse Gallery's venue, Deng has recreated portions of the Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts Museum installations, to which he has added a set of six new large ink paintings that suggest scroll paintings and again emphasize the subject of nature that is equally central to his installation. *In the Garden: Born in a Way of Metaphysics No.4*, (2011) consists of nine bird cages hanging from the ceiling above four chairs standing on the ground, symbolizing the four cardinal directions (North, South, East, and West).

The living plants above and the enclosed dying flowers, leaves, and branches in test tubes below guide the visitors' eyes towards the artist's main concern of today's science and its impact on our planet. The content of the test tubes is meant to be replaced throughout the time period of the exhibition to demonstrate the act rather than the fact.

The Warehouse Gallery's vault features the film *Deng Guo Yuan: In the Garden* (2010) by experimental French filmmaker Pierre Creton, which documents Deng's



In the Garden II, 2010 (No. 6, detail)

creation process while contextualizing his ink paintings, sculptures, and installations within Chinese culture, its past and present, as well as philosophy and thought process. This is the artist's first solo exhibition in a United States museum.

¹ Quoted from Deng Guo Yuan, "*Die Gedanken über die Zeit*" (2001), in: *Deng Guo Yuan Distanz*, (exhibition catalogue) Haus Hartmann am Alten Schloss Grevenbroich, October 24–November 11, 2004, 71. Translation by the author.

² Throughout the Tang (618–907), Song (960–1279), Mongol Yuan (1279–1368), Ming (1368–1644), and Manchu Qing (1644–1911) dynasties, Chinese landscape painting often symbolized both the individual values and thoughts of an artist and reflections on an ideal state or alternative culture. See Maxwell K. Hearn, *Cultivated Landscapes. Chinese Paintings from the Collection of Marie-Hélène and Guy Weill*, (exhibition catalogue), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press: 2002), 3-7, 9.

³ See Wen C. Fong, *Between Two Cultures. Late Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Chinese Paintings from the Robert H. Ellsworth Collection in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, Exhibition catalogue, (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2001), 4, 12, 17, 88, 96.

⁴ See note 2, 5–6.

⁵ See note 1, 70–71.

⁶ Beate Reifenscheid, "*Guo Yuan Deng: Bilder auf dem Weg zur Weisheit*", in: *Deng Guo Yuan Distanz*, (exhibition catalogue), see note 1, 13.

⁷ See James Cahill, *The Painter's Practice. How Artists Lived and Worked in Traditional China*, Bampton Lectures in America, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 114, 126.