

QIU ZHIJIE
Geography of Knowledge

Maps 2010–2019

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SKIRA

GALLERIA CONTINUA | 30 YEARS
SAN GIMIGNANO BEIJING LES MOULINS HABANA ROMA

Cover
Imaginary Geography, 2016, detail

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About Qiu Zhijie and I

I met Qiu Zhijie at the Shanghai Biennale in 2009; I was a little surprised that for that edition he was under the guise of curator.

Zhijie, having found out about the project I had organized in the Pollino National Park in Basilicata, Italy, where I had invited amongst others Giuseppe Penone, asked me if I could support Penone’s participation in the biennial he was organizing, where he wished to also present the works of this great Italian artist.

I liked this request straight away, because it related to one of the artists that I most admire despite not having a continuous working relationship with him. Zhijie clearly showed a taste affinity for an artist and his creations that I had not yet seen displayed in China, neither in public or private exhibitions nor in collections.

It was, however, Penone’s profound nature and deep intensity that brought Zhijie to my attention and pushed me to follow more closely what he was doing as an artist, rather than as a curator or teacher at CAFA or as a competent calligrapher.

The following year, I had the opportunity to see Zhijie’s famous conceptual maps on show at the Fondazione Querini Stampalia during the Venice Biennale. On that occasion, I understood that this was an artist who, through his works, could allow us to enter his world, and that it could be very interesting to invite him to work with us on a continuous base at Galleria Continua.

Qiu Zhijie produces landscapes that are typically Chinese, being enriched with calligraphic art—a practice that he took up after a master had selected him when he was still a child. Alongside his ability to intersect meanings and concepts between calligraphy and the most spoken Western language, English, these landscapes are the trace to follow in order to understand Zhijie’s poetics and his apparently simple way of connecting the two worlds to which he belongs: that of the Chinese tradition and that of a globalized life in which we are, by now, all immersed. Not only the East–West dialogue but also the past and present; it’s a way to get close to us and, at the same time, to let us get close to him and to the culture in which he, as an artist, has been formed—something that we all now share.

The role of tradition is therefore a thought-provoking matrix in his work, which examines and translates today’s world—from “science fiction” to the art world, from the great river of religions and beliefs that have inspired and fascinated all of humanity in different corners of the world to man’s mark left in time and in the different places of the planet. All this is brought together after a long work of research that manifests itself in Zhijie’s paintings, through lines of development that connect imaginary territories, distant worlds that today seem increasingly closer thanks to journeys and digital communication.

I was very much struck by Zhijie’s research on the Nanjing Yangtze River Bridge and how he made art with it. The bridge, which crosses the Yangtze River between Pukou and Xiaguan in Nanjing, China, is 70 meters tall and was completed in 1968. It’s the first heavy bridge designed and built by Chinese own expertise. For its characteristics, the bridge has always attracted a high number of people who want to commit suicide, with an average of over 300 attempts each year. His project was about hampering these persons, while helping them to realize that such an extreme gesture would put an end to their existence.

To bring forward this type of action and verify whether art can literally save lives was extremely important in my decision to approach him as an artist. Indeed, this concern to transmit and help others understand the deep meaning of any artistic research, this desire to get in the game, try and win back time and win over death is something I myself look for in and through art. And it’s something I have recognized in Qiu Zhijie as well.

As soon as I could, I went to visit him and I remain to this day fascinated with his world, the frenzy and the passion with which he makes his art, and how he talks about his work. This is how his first solo exhibition at our Beijing gallery happened, inspired by Italy and by his meeting with Umberto Eco in Bologna during his stay in the country.

In the exhibition, Qiu Zhijie claimed to “own” a version of the “forbidden” book in Eco’s *The Name of the Rose*, i.e. the second book of Aristotle’s *Poetics*, and showcased some chapters from it. By “presenting” this book to the audience, the techniques of comedy and laughter were opened for acquisition, therefore this forbidden knowledge could be gained freely. The “laughter” in that show was more than a simple cheerful laughter, it had a penetrating power and contained deeper implications. It aimed to awaken.

After some years, time was ripe for his big exhibition at San Gimignano. Walking on an elevated structure in the stalls area of our cinema (Galleria Continua in San Gimignano is located in an old cinema from the 1950s), you could explore islands or archaeological ruins from which mythological life forms emerged, aimed at demonstrating the tendency of any life form to colonize, invade, and even hybridize with the different life forms that surround them, right up to man in space.

Among the main Qiu Zhijie exhibitions in Europe, we must mention *Journeys Without Arrivals*, co-curated by my friend Davide Quadrio, which was staged first at the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (with Charles Esche); then at the Centre d’Art Contemporain Genève (with Andrea Bellini); and at the Lunds Konsthall (with Åsa Nacking). In the exhibition, what can be considered the center of the artist’s work, that is the theme of identity in relation to the codes of society, was very well expressed. And we should not forget the permanent *Maps of Surnames* installation at Facebook Headquarters in San Francisco and *The Universe of Naming* in Hong Kong.

On all of these occasions and in many others, homage has been paid to the work of this great contemporary artist.

I hope this book will offer a better and deeper understanding of the meaning and direction of Qiu Zhijie’s work, an artist we will hear very much about while enjoying his beautiful works that allow us to get to know and see the world in another way.

A deep thanks to my friends who have willingly contributed to this publication, following Qiu Zhijie’s journey with me and with Galleria Continua: especially Ilaria Pigliafreddo, Giulia Contri, Federica Beltrame, and Luna Peng.

Mario Cristiani

Here Be Dragons

The Origin and Other Notes on the Mapping the World Project

Qiu Zhijie

Origin

In 2010, Hans Ulrich Obrist asked me to make the *Map of the 21st Century* for the Digital Life Design conference in Munich. It wasn't the first time I made a map—at the beginning of the exhibition catalogues *Ataraxic of Zhuangzi* (Zendai Museum of Modern Art, 2008) and *Breaking the Ice* (UCCA Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, 2009), I put illustrative maps explaining interconnections between each piece of work in the show. Even before that, when I was traveling in Tibet and Xinjiang in the early 1990s as the curator of the *Long March* project, I was already fascinated with collecting and creating maps. I never got lost because there is always a map in my head.

At the end of 2011, I was shortlisted for the Hugo Boss Prize administered by the Guggenheim Foundation. I was supposed to provide photographs of my works for the catalogue. Each contender had only six pages available, but there was no way I could explain myself and my works in only six pages, not even a slightly complicated work such as *Railway from Lhasa to Kathmandu* (the origin of this work is related to the drawing of maps and the work itself contains maps). It would be an even greater challenge for a project such as the *Map of the Nanjing Yangtze River Bridge*. Therefore I had the idea of making maps—a strategy for a greedy person to put unlimited information within a limited space.

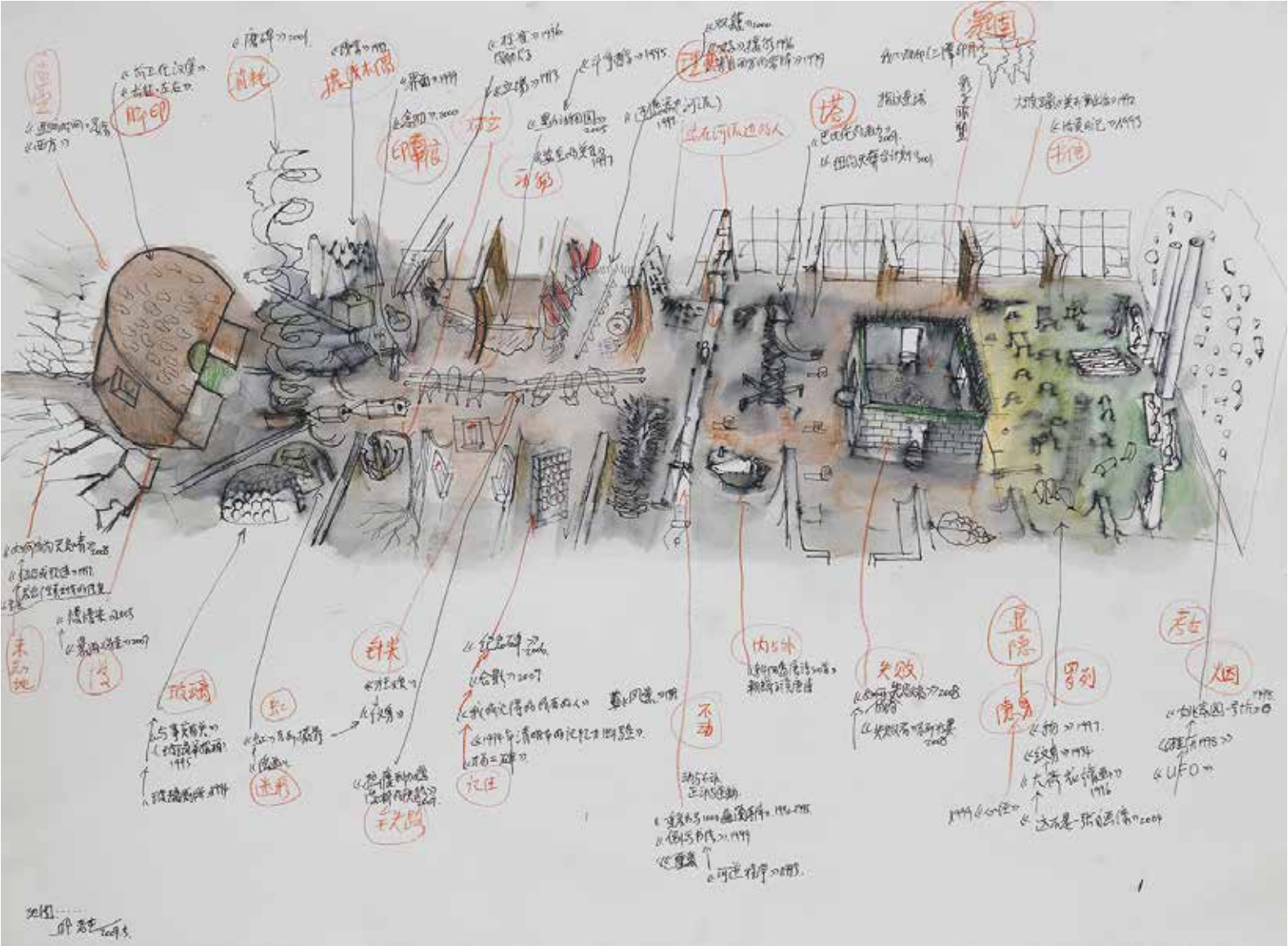
This set of maps describes all my work in total: the *Map of the 21st Century* is the result

of my research on futurology and eschatology; the *Map of Utopia* is a collection of political ideologies; the *Map of Total Art* describes the overall structure of my work in general, especially my teaching activity; the *Map of Reactivation* is a mind map of the whole curatorial work of the Shanghai Biennale; and finally, the *Map of the Nanjing Yangtze River Bridge* thoroughly explains various aspects of the large-scale art project to which I devoted most of my energy in the last few years.

In 2012, I held the post of curator of the Shanghai Biennale. In my opinion, a curator is a person who sets up relations, just like a cartographer. I graduated from the printmaking department of Zhejiang Academy of Art, and among curators I'm probably the best at drawing and sketching. I didn't want to write a long article as a curatorial statement—instead, I could make some maps complemented with comments. As a result, I made twelve maps by 2012, and more afterwards.

Mapping has provided me with a method to bring together research, writing, imagination, and action. I spent many years experimenting with artistic creation, education, writing, and curating, and as a result I was often asked questions about my identity: "Who are you after all?" I used to answer cunningly, "I'm in-between," but now I answer: "I am a Mapper."

Today the work of making maps has developed into the *Mapping the World Project*, just like each map embodies an individual world.



Sketch of the exhibition at UCCA Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, 2009

Yide GE ink and a brush, and I can finish the painting in a week. The exhibition organizers only need to pay the fee of my air ticket and get the bucket, rags, and the lift truck ready. Inviting me to draw a map in a huge space is much more environmentally friendly than the cost of making a huge installation. Because I also sometimes take on the role of curator, I especially understand the hard work of curators; I always sympathize with their tight budget and never ask them for unreasonable artist fees. These wall maps are very suitable for stopping to read and contemplate, or as the background wall for selfies—so they are very popular with the audience.

Most of these wall paintings, except for the one at Facebook Headquarters in California, which is permanent public art, will be erased at the end of the exhibition period. Because when painting directly on the wall, no matter how you predict in advance, it's difficult to completely control the water absorption of each wall's surface, so I am forced to invent some unique techniques on site. Despite the difficulty of wall painting modification and the always tight schedule, I am very excited about painting every time, which makes me feel a challenge. This excitement is rewarded by the audience's realization that the wall they are looking at will be erased in a few months, so they actually pay more intense attention to these pictures. In the end, both sides know that the shared encounter is ephemeral, so we both treasure the experience with the wall painting, often with unexpected good results. I am often praised for these wall paintings. Of course, there are unsatisfied people—the collectors and galleries. The fact that I continue to draw murals makes them go crazy.

Thirdly, the maps show some form of ink painting on paper. In fact, the whole process of these works is very dependent on computers. The process of thinking is very active, and organizing concepts is very brain burning, unlike traditional ink painters who are meditatively immersed in the techniques and pro-



cess of painting. As a result, I've been thinking about how to make the thought process and brain activity manifest, and I started to develop the automatically generated map series in cooperation with AI experts in 2018. The exploration in this area is totally beyond the original framework. This AI map project is still updating for the better day by day. At present, what the final state will be is totally unpredictable. But it excites me, makes me feel that I have found a possibility to surpass classical and contemporary art, and makes me feel that history is rolling past me. This is what I didn't expect when I started to draw maps.

Fourth, cartography has become a methodology. Making maps is not only a way of drawing, but also a way of understanding the world. Making maps can be a mode for writing and a model for curating exhibitions and, of course, a map can also be the script of a drama play. I use maps to make reading notes, and I use maps to make teaching plans. Such a mod-

Railway from Lhasa to Kathmandu, 2006
Exhibition view: a set of six Tangkas, maps, manacles, cast railroad tracks, videos and photographs of walking and exchanging activities, and the process of casting the railroad tracks. Tables and photos of lists of metal objects exchanged



el is perfectly compatible with sensibility and rationality, and at the same time it efficiently transmits visual information.

Making

When I make a map, the time spent making the ink painting of it is about a week and the time for a sketch draft is several days; but it always takes me a few months to do research for each map. In general, the mind mapping software is used to collect data in the computer, and the relevant knowledge pedigree of a core concept is developed in the most comprehensive manner. Then, I leave it for a period of time and when I return to the research of the map, some new ideas are meant to appear. I do this until each core concept is fully developed into an amazing amount of data.

This stage of work is like making reading notes. My important tool is the English version of Wikipedia, but I still need to buy a pile of books for each topic to read. Every time I

draw a new topic, there will be new books to read, so I have to read voraciously and swallow as much information as possible. Each topic is a mind map, but each topic will lead to ten more topics. Fortunately, mind map diagrams can open and fold constantly, but that's how my mind maps often have such unbelievably large sizes. Now, there are more and more mind map files in my computer. At the same time, in order to draw a map, I must also look up images. For example, in order to create a map of the world gardens, I have to set up separate folders for famous gardens in each region. During the course of research, I often stumble on some trivia I didn't even know before.

Some unexpected leaping associations have already been recorded in mind mapping software at this time. At this stage, I also need to complete the screening and translation of the concepts that will eventually appear on the map.

Transferring words and concepts into images on the map is another task in designing it: some objects are suitable for being rendered as cities; some are suitable for appearing as mountains; some systematic concept groups are suitable for being organized into rivers because they inherently contain the relationship of root directory; the concepts of time sequence are also suitable for being expressed with the upstream and downstream of rivers; important events or figures are often suitable to be represented by independent mountains or monuments; if some distant objects have strong connections, they are often linked by railways; the very interesting things, such as the Babel Tower, I tend to draw out their form with much delight.

In fact, for the whole map, it is not necessary to draw it as a half-overlooking mountain. You can use contours to draw mountains, or just a black triangle to represent a group of mountains. My pictures still look like Chinese landscape painting. That's because I still feel that I have some responsibility toward Chinese landscape painting, besides regarding maps as a conceptual art form.

The design of maps is usually done in pencil on sketch paper. Depending on how smoothly I make the sketch, some paper will almost be ruined through rubbing and modifying, and need to be replaced. Sometimes, the thinking is clear and the sketch is done in a take. Very often, in order to get the right position relationship between concepts and words, I write words and phrases on small pieces of paper and move them around until the relative relationship between the positions shows interesting results. Then I project the sketch onto large rice paper, and draw the ink map proportionally.

When working on rice paper, I alternately use two methods. One is to draw a large form of landscape and terrain first, and then write words on top of them. The other is to write the words first and then add the images. The former method gives me great satisfaction

as I can paint heartily, sometimes I even want to leave it as a landscape painting and feel reluctant to add texts. Indeed, with the first method sometimes there is not enough place for texts. In the case of writing texts first, it is often for the purpose of making prints, because the text part must be photographed for preparing the plate, otherwise it would be difficult for anyone to carve out the flipped words and ensure good calligraphy.

Making prints is necessary for my maps. Because I devote so much time on the research during the process of making each map, I couldn't bear to sell any map after making them. Every time it is taken away by the gallery, it's like selling my own children. Fortunately, I have majored in the printmaking department, so I have no psychological barrier to the plural work. There is a deep relationship between the epistemological tradition of printmaking and maps: in ancient times, making the plates for printing was very costly and required heavy workload. Therefore, only the most sacred and precious knowledge got to be printed through the tedious platemaking and printing process, and copied in large quantities for dissemination. This kind of knowledge is first of all religious classics, then knowledge illustrations—maps being one of the most demanded varieties.

Writing Chinese calligraphy is always a pleasure for me. Today, lots of Chinese painters sign the title on the painting, but few of them dare to write so many words in their works. The calligraphy training I received since I was a child is a core support for my cartography work. In contrast, it used to be very painful for me to write English letters with ink and brush. It was very difficult to imitate Roman tangent lines with a brush. I have also tried to change the quill pen purchased in Venice into a variety of pen nibs, but none of them worked on rice paper. It took me three years to explore and study all kinds of English fonts. I finally had an epiphany in October 2015, when I was painting the mural

Map of the Third World for the Moscow Biennale. I realized that no matter how hard I tried to practice the calligraphy of Latin alphabet, I could never write better than those European calligraphers who wrote imperial edicts for the courts of various countries. On the lift truck in Moscow, I simply used the strokes of “Zhangqian Stele” and “Cuanbaozi Stele” to write English. Unexpectedly, the calligraphy looked very nice and I actually invented a new handwritten font. Since then, writing English letters has become a very enjoyable thing for me too, often as pleasant and exciting as writing Chinese calligraphy. Now I have created my own English font library.

I am often asked why both Chinese and English texts appear on the map, and this always feels like an odd question to me. My map is read by people from all over the world, isn't the presence of Chinese texts on the maps more surprising?

The biological significance of cartographic ability

Many years ago, in 1994, I designed a work called *The Philosophy of Struggle*, which was to put a cat and a group of mice into a maze to see whether the cat has caught the mice or the mice have escaped from the maze. At that time, I wasn't able to produce the work into an installation or a performance, so I just made a model. When I did this, I wasn't aware of Edward Tolman's research on the navigation ability of rats, and little did I know that cartography would become one of the most important parts of my artistic career in the future.

Biologists have been studying the navigation ability of animal brain relentlessly for many years. Edward Tolman published *Cognitive Maps in Rats and Men* in 1948; by studying the rats moving in the maze, he found that they are very good at remembering the routes. He conjectured that the brain of rats must have formed a “cognitive map” to obtain the complete concept of the maze pathway, therefore becoming able to find their way out of it.

Throughout the 1960s, scientists were keen to insert electrodes into the brain of rats to study the activity of animal brain regions. In 1971, John O'Keefe found that when rats were in a particular position, the neurons in a specific area in their brain would be activated. But he saw that if the rats ran to other places, some other specific neurons in their brain were activated. As a result, these cells form a correspondence with their positions. The “place cells” successfully construct the internal map reflecting the external environment.

More interestingly, these place cells are located in the hippocampus. We used to know that the hippocampus has a relationship with learning abilities and is especially important for long-term memory storing, but studies have demonstrated that it has also directional and orientational functions. The ancient Greek square speakers had to learn the contents of their speeches by heart in order to speak eloquently. Their invention of the Memory Palace technique is to connect long-term memory with a specific space scene. Matteo Ricci once taught this set of memory techniques to Chinese scholars who needed to recite *The Four Books* and *The Five Classics*, thus winning their respect and trust successfully. Now, spatial perception ability is again connected to the organs of memory. Later tests also showed that the hippocampus of London taxi drivers who can take all kinds of shortcuts through the city maze without looking at a map is larger than that of ordinary people, and that the very first places of pathological changes in the brain of Alzheimer's patients, who often get lost, are the hippocampus and the entorhinal cortex. In 1978, O'Keefe wrote the book *The Hippocampus as a Cognitive Map*. In the book, he actually compared the hippocampus directly to an internal global positioning system (GPS). At that time, GPS was in its infant stage and only used by the military.

The next step of development is the discovery of grid cells. In 2005, Edvard and May-

Britt Moser of Kavli Institute for Neuroscience in Norway found that a group of cells in the entorhinal cortex of the hippocampus were specially responsible for constructing a hexagonal network to form a coordinate. That is to say, some of the cells in the hippocampus are responsible for drawing the fiducial line, some of them are responsible for the direction of the rat’s head, others are responsible for sensing the boundary of the room, which means that some of the cells are on-board GPS to provide the signal of the mobile terminal, and some like the satellites in the sky are responsible for the global positioning. All of these cells work together to build a complete internal GPS in the rat hippocampus. People among us who have no sense of direction actually just need to activate these two kinds of cells in their brain.

The cognitive map theory has been developing since it came into being. For Tolman, who proposed the concept of “cognitive map,” the most primitive version of it is a kind of simulated image of the scene terrain in one’s mind. However, in his later research, he tends to abstract and generalize the notion of cognitive map: that is to say, cognitive maps can also be composed of concepts. To some degree, the connotation of this concept has been expanded to a wide extent, and can even become a metaphor. This actually helps to popularize the concept. It can even be used by urban planners like Lynch to construct urban image theory.

The geographer Than (1975) believes that a cognitive map is the image in your mind when someone asks you for directions. But in fact, different people may generate different graphics in their mind. When you call for directions, someone tells you that you will see a gas station first, and then drive for another three minutes and you will see a red house. Some people will say: there is a red house 800 meters north of the gas station, and my home is at its eight o’clock direction. It can be assumed that the former kind of people use the time axis to organize experience, much like

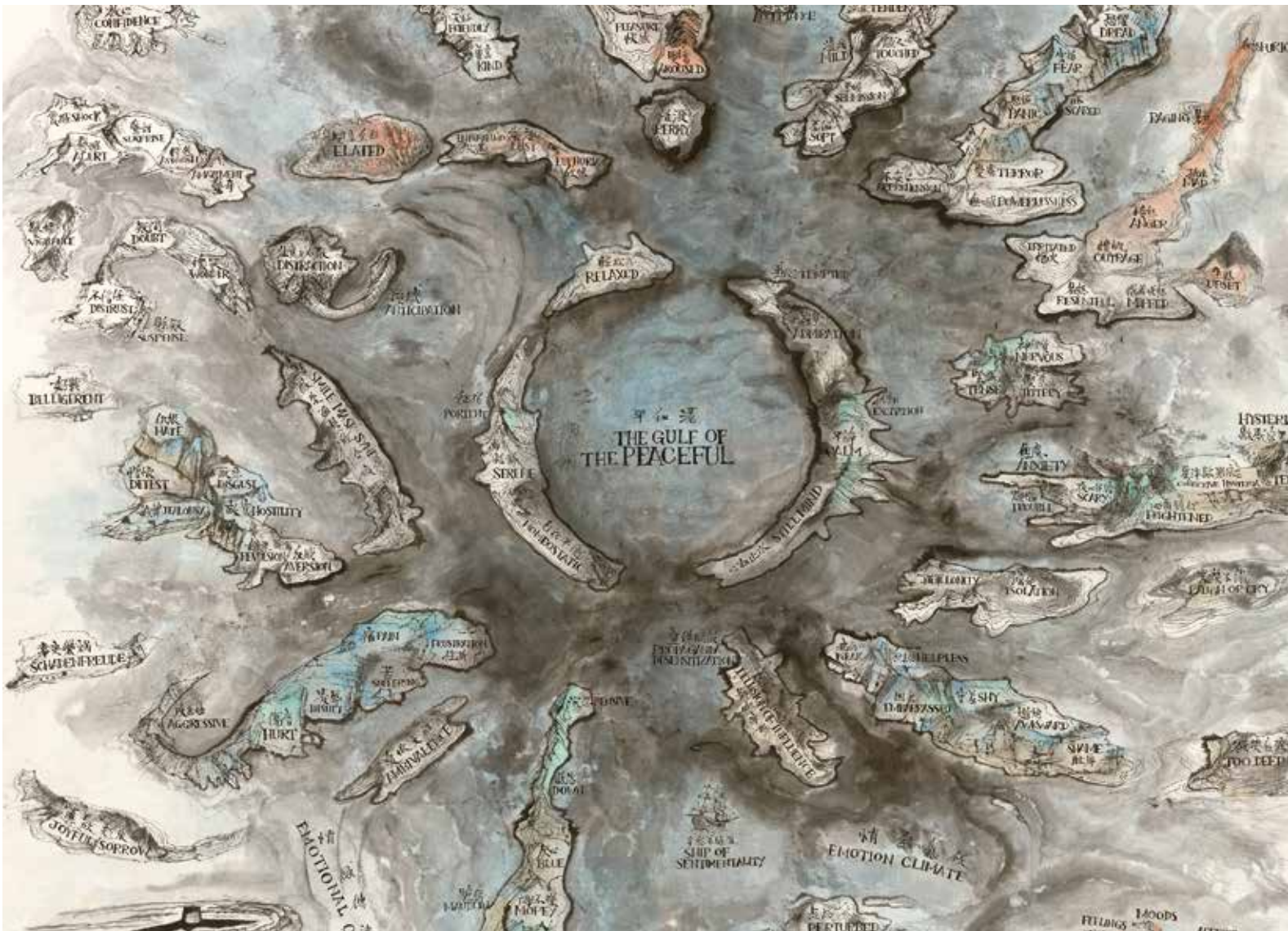
editing videos; this should be the method that all people instinctively adopt, which is basically perceptual. The risk is that if you change your entry position and you drive from west to east instead of east to west, the order in which your experiences are presented will change. You will see the red house first, then the gas station. The latter kind of person has a map in his mind and his perception is rational. He uses a coordinate system to locate any individual space or object. This way of thinking requires people to transcend their subjective feelings. It requires people to experience the perspective of multiple subjects simultaneously and adopt a public context that can be translated into multiple perspectives to understand things in the relationship.

Understanding the world by the method mimicking video editing or by making maps are two different modes of perception. I believe that everyone instinctively has the mode of video editing, whereas the mode of map making requires a little effort to cultivate and strengthen. The difference between using an overall sense of space to think and organizing thoughts based on a timeline is the difference between rationality and sensibility. Appleyard doesn’t judge one way is better than the other, he tends to think both models as cognitive maps. He points out that there are two types of cognitive maps: sequential map and spatial map.

Since the 1980s, information processing scientists have also joined the research team of cognitive mapping. They focused on the dynamic process of how such a cognitive map was constructed—in other words, how to obtain, encode, store, and decode geographic location information.

Modern technology shows that the construction of every living body is a process of mapping. Living beings have always existed in the relationship network, and there is no independent organism, the so-called independent individual. Without maps of biosphere and ecosphere, we can’t understand individual

Map of Human Emotions – Both Despair and Hope Are Extinct Volcano, 2015, detail



organisms. Cartography has become the instinct of advanced beings. However, for me, there is a risk of today’s GPS system of depriving us of this potential development. In an era when we have so many devices to help us navigate and locate ourselves, are we becoming more and more adapt at getting lost?

Today, the ability to construct maps is something that creatures in the post-biological era need to constantly regain.

Rebuild the sense of wholeness and of the world

The Japanese philosopher Hiroki Azuma, who gave lectures at the China Academy of Art in 2017, published *Otaku: Japan’s Database Animals* in 2001. He pointed out that the

otaku is a kind of “database animal” human: the two-dimensional consumption of the *otaku* is a simulacrum made up of *moe* (in Japanese, refers to feelings of strong affection mainly toward characters in anime and manga) in the database, rather than a narrative of the self-organizing model. In the twentieth century, human beings experienced the “Ideal Era,” in which the grand narrative still played a role; then the grand narrative collapsed and people began to forge the “Fictional Era” of the grand narrative; then they completely abandoned the grand narrative and turned to the consumption of the “Animal Era” database.

In my opinion, this process doesn’t just happen to Japanese youth. In fact, it happens

everywhere in the serious academic fields in the utmost imposing way. First of all, linguistic philosophy attributes problems of the world to languages; then art criticism is reduced to power ranking lists; after that, the fall of history. The goal of history used to be that of providing a grand narrative that “the narrative about the past is history”—we should not only make clear what happened in the past, but also why it happened. History should make our past coherent, understandable, and meaningful. However, in the middle of the twentieth century, history faced the challenge by quantitative history. At one time, history was full of figures and statements. The truth of history asked to be guaranteed by archival science, and the conclusion asked to be derived from statistics. Historians no longer have the right to describe vividly, nor to criticize and guide the direction of history.

Fortunately, no one is interested in reading that kind of writing of history, so narrative in history made a natural return. People always have to put themselves into a story to understand themselves. They are born to tell stories and live in them. Better yet, these stories must be simple and modeled.

We need models to put our experience into an order. Time experience needs to be organized by models, whether it’s the three-part model of past, present, and future, or the four-part model of life metaphorized by spring, summer, autumn, and winter, or the dramatic narrative model of the three-act or five-act play, all of which were once provided by history. Spatial experience also needs to be organized by models. We need to understand where we are by being aware of all directions. We need to be in a world where “on the left is the green dragon, on the right is the white tiger, at the front is the rosefinch, and at the back is the Xuanwu tortoise.” We need the order of internal and external, far and near, high and low, up and down. We need to know where the center is, where the edge is, where to go and where not to go. This information

used to be provided by maps, which are the best choice in carrying out this mission.

The famous silk painting in Mawangdui Han Tombs is a concise map of the three realms of heaven, earth, and human beings, and it is full of vivid descriptions. The global map in Medieval Europe is simply a picture with a horizontal line and a vertical line in a circle, where the upper side is Asia, the left side is Europe and the right side is Africa. The intersection of the horizontal and vertical lines is the holy Jerusalem. Such a construction, although rough and concise, points out the Holy Land very clearly. It has been enough to pull us out of the unexamined routine of our daily life into a broad vision and to build up a sense of wholeness and of the world.

Today, we don’t remember and recite any more. Our knowledge intake depends on one click on search engines such as Google and Baidu. Many of us are no longer familiar with the shape of our cities. It’s almost impossible for us to navigate without turning on GPS, let alone being familiar with the secrets of the city as the old taxi driver in London. We no longer regard the city as our home, no longer know the passage and the shortcut. Perhaps this is because our cities and lives have become too complex to bear the burden of memory. We have countless fragmentary experiences but we lack models to organize them into stories. As regards the aspect of timeline experience, we no longer remember the connection between the new moon and the rise and fall of the tide. All we have is a 9-to-5 work time and a noisy schedule splitting our time into pieces, as well as all kinds of meaningless countdowns. We have endless fragments and details, but we lack the framework of narration and the model of experience.

The world of the past was rough but complete. The world of today is ample but broken.

I even doubt whether life is really becoming more and more complicated. We certainly remember the meaning of many academic terms and symbols, and we also know a lot of

brand styles. But we forget the kinship of the gods and we can no longer tell the footprints of every animal, and which clouds predict what weather it will be tomorrow. As a matter of fact, the world of the ancients may not have been smaller and simpler than our world. The knowledge managed by experts today was also managed by ancient experts, which is no different. But the ancients never gave up the sense of the world as a whole. They believed that there is some universal knowledge that is necessary for human beings, which is the basis of what we call general education and education for all-around development today. But today, more or less intentionally, most of us give up this sense of wholeness. People today no longer need to fend for themselves, they are highly dependent on the supply of the system. What they want to use is not their own ability but one application after another. When you have a need for a particular thing, you use a specific app instead of developing a basic ability and then use it to deal with all kinds of unpredictable scenarios.

Today, it is so urgent for us to reconstruct such a sense of entirety and completeness. We have never lacked the phenomenon; the most important thing in our day is to have the ability to understand the phenomenon and construct it into a story. Without a narrative model, the massive information we produce every day cannot even be built into database.

Some of the maps in the *Mapping the World Project* are very logical. The seemingly strong connection is designed to produce some specific effect when you cut it off. The effect of disconnection is actually based on the awakening of relevance. In other contexts, to organize a relationship between seemingly unrelated things gives people a sense of wholeness. Connecting knowledge points into context is to build entirety.

Our map can always be more detailed, until it finally becomes a super photorealistic vertical-view painting. But even then, the map is still symbolic. Every figure “marks” the exis-

tence of a certain thing, which resorts to the convention of conceptual systems rather than the illusion of vision.

At the same time, the ability to stay on the intentionally rough or fine scale means to organize the degree of details of knowledge according to a specific purpose. That is to say, we should dare to ignore, dare not know, dare to “leave it blank,” which is the ability to select knowledge. More information doesn’t mean better. Only by filtering junk information can we build meaning. In the same way, it becomes possible for us to go deep into details without being confused, which is because of the discerning of the whole picture.

During the Spring Festival of 2016, in the archives of San Gimignano, Italy, the administrator brought me a book, which was the cadastral map for the year 1790—a map indicating the area and ownership of land. It was usually the basis for taxation and litigation, so even the number of fruit trees on a plot is clearly marked.

In January 2016, in a private map collection in Chicago, I saw a cadastral map hand drawn by George Washington, “the father of the United States.” Before the Revolutionary War, he was the tax collector and land surveyor of the British Empire. Not only Mr. Washington, but Franklin and Jefferson as well were land surveyors once. The United States was built by a group of mapmakers, which was inevitable in my opinion: after working on delimitations day by day, the dual identities of local tax officials and national tax officials conflicted, started to have dispute with their own boss, and fought for independence.

As regards the use of maps, the first is to explain the system of the world: the relationship between heaven, earth, people, ghosts, and gods, the power level from the center to the edge; then the road map and sea area for navigation, all kinds of practical maps that describe the elements, such as property and precipitation, from which the business and military use; finally, to define the right bound-



Map of Life, 2012,
detail

ary, the administrative division between countries, and the cadastral map between families and people.

The advanced development of cartography in Europe since modern times has a lot to do with their clear power boundary. It’s a matter of precise calculation with every inch of land fought after. The traditional map of China focused on traveling routes and the grasp of big concepts. For example, the *Chart of Zheng He’s Voyage to the West Ocean* has flattened all the stops along the coastline; although the space is out of order, it is actually very practical for the navigator. After all, all maps are projections—you can’t flatten the peel of an orange without breaking it. Maps that are practical for travelers are good maps. When I read the ancient sea navigation guide *Voyage with a Tail*

Wind, most directions in there are described in the format of clock position, i.e. sailing the boat at such and such o’clock direction for such many days you can reach the fishing island to fetch water. For lawyers, the defining of borders is very much related to taxation, just like Tao Yuanming’s Peach Blossom Spring is actually the ghost island of anti-tax groups. For travelers, time and space cannot be separated—each step counts as another surviving moment in the journey, with people passing by and stars changing in position as time goes by. Maps are for carrying out acts and deeds.

Today, when we think of maps, what we use most are the maps of city streets, but the Mercator world map is what comes to mind the most. The Mercator projection, or equidis-

tant projection at the same latitude, has made Greenland bigger than Africa. Even more noticeable is that we see Britain, France, Germany, Spain, Russia, Canada, the United States, China, Japan, South Korea, etc. on the map. For me, this is called an “International Map,” not a “World Map.” “International” is composed of nation-states, while “World” is composed of heaven, earth, human beings, ghosts, God, past, present, and future. The world is especially about people who live, get old, become sick, and eventually die. It’s about success and failure, progress and retreat, honor and disgrace, love and hate. It’s about the events that have happened, are happening, and may happen. The world will be a deathly stillness without human events. The real map of the world must be a map of places and opportunities. We must regain the “World” through maps, which is the responsibility of a world map cartographer.

The meaning of time to human beings is events, and the meaning of space to human beings is place. Place is the stage of events—without events, we can’t perceive the place. The process of making a map is the process of understanding a place; the act of mapping is the process of naming a space as a place. The moment a place is named in the map is when the place is endowed with meaning.

Traditional landscape painting is never a description of a specific scene, but an illustration of the overall vision. Every painting is a description of the relationship between the whole universe and the whole world. Chinese landscape paintings once provided an overall understanding of the relationship between heaven, earth, and human beings. I regard my map as a landscape painting in the era of GPS and Google Map.

Landscape painting in the age of Google Maps

My new perception on landscape painting stems from looking out from an airplane. It has always been an awesome experience sitting by

the window of the plane and looking down at the scenery. When you are flying over a mountain region, or a desert, or a snowfield, you take pictures until you are tired of it—at a certain point, you feel like there is nothing more to take pictures of, because that scenery seems to cover the whole world endlessly. So you turn away from the view and take a nap. And suddenly you look again and the whole world has totally changed.

The biggest feeling gained from overlooking at the landscape from the airplane is that no matter how ingenious the abstract artist is, the earth has already prepared everything in advance.

I believe that the landscape painters of the Song Dynasty must have observed the mountains and rivers very carefully in the Neo-Confucian spirit of “studying things to acquire knowledge.” They watched the sharp mountains and stones in the North and invented the “axe splitting” brushstroke technique; they watched the hills in the South and invented the “hemp rope” brushstroke. All kinds of techniques derive from the shape and texture of nature, which are condensed into impression and eventually transformed into the creation of ink strokes. Indeed, their paintings were very realistic. Even Ma Yuan and Xia Gui were only making a realistic description of Hangzhou’s misty and foggy scenery. I have seen the pine trees made by Li Cheng: the great many details in his painting could only come from sketching from life. His works should be included in the sketch collection of world masters, reflecting and conversing with those of Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo.

But most of the landscape painters today do not pay that much attention to observing the mountains and rivers. They copy ancient masterpieces and learn highly stylized routines. The routines of various techniques are translated into rhyming formulas and the automatic movement of muscles, which are proficient to the extreme. They were even given the name of “freehand brushwork”—in fact, it’s

just caricature. The objects they copied were originally the results of observation, so the landscapes they painted still retain some impression of real landscapes. But after all, they did not come from the artists’ own careful observations, so the many subconscious habitual gestures in their works are noticeable. Sometimes they even become collages of traditional Chinese painting techniques. For example, Qi Baishi carefully observed the shrimp, so the shrimp he drew was almost photorealistic. However, he didn’t observe the landscape carefully, so the landscape and the house he drew were basically caricatures. The tree branches drawn by the landscape painters who use painting routines are stout and chubby, very similar to women’s bound feet drawn by the New Literati painters in Nanjing. There are also some ink dots decorating the side of the branch as leaves: pictures made like this are actually caricatures. Surely, certain ambitious landscape painters are still searching and observing great mountains to make sketches, and are still on the journey of tens of thousands of miles to draw from life. They really have my respect. Mr. Jian Jiang, Mr. Huang Binhong, and Lu Yanshao are all my great mentors. My idol though is for sure Wang Ximeng, a young man who died prematurely and painted *A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains*.

If texts were added in *A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains*, it would almost look like a map. Fortunately, I set out to make maps so I have to look at the mountains and the rivers from above, from a new point of view that allows me to grasp the relationship between mountains and rivers and the relationship between mountains, rivers, and the land. The ridgeline is sometimes sharp as a blade, sometimes smooth as a lump. Sometimes it’s flat. The tangent line between the foot of the mountain and the field sometimes rises abruptly, at other times they merge together gently and softly, modified into terraced fields. Contour lines are naturally generated in your

mind, sometimes they are pleasing to the senses and sometimes they are intense and pressurizing. You are naturally moved within during the process.

Most of the traditional landscape painters observe mountains on flat ground. But mountains block and reflect each other, so aerial perspective is used to separate the layers. In this way, the deep part of the mountain is where the clouds gather, the living place for immortals and hermits. Even if the point of view is raised and we see the mountains and waters far away, the deep insides of mountains are still secret and unpredictable territory.

However, the profound mystery evaporates when looking down from the plane. On earth, mountains and mountains intersect each other, I sometimes can even recognize traces of crustal movement—the movement of a mountain uplift pressing in one direction is blocked by another existing mountain, and both sides are deformed. Water flows down the hill and forms a river between the crevice of the mountains. Water continues to be poured into this model, the water level rises slowly, and the water surface expands gradually until it finally becomes a lake. Then, continuing to pour water, the originally connected mountains are gradually separated by the water surface and become isolated islands. The water doesn’t stop pouring in and the islands slowly shrink, their shapes change. Where there is a great drop in height, the water runs down to form a waterfall and reaches the flat ground. The slight change of the terrain height on both banks shapes the direction of the river. In a fairly flat place, the water body loses its grip and the river begins to scatter into many strands of broken rope. Canyons between mountains, wide or narrow, always fill the fields. Looking down from the plane, the first feeling I get is this kind of squeezing and pressurizing force.

The entire land is a mosaic made from the assembling of lakes, mountains, rivers, fields, and cities; nowhere it’s left blank. So I

saw a lot of contour lines and invented a kind of “contour line brushstroke” with split brush head.

As can be seen from the sky, there is no place for hermits to hide, and the island where the immortals live is no longer a fairy mountain. On the contrary, because it is located on the border of the empire, it is often a disputed territory. For those who look down from the sky, there is no real difference between them, those who live in villages around the fields, and those who build big cities by stacking concrete blocks on both sides of the river. At this time, the mountains and rivers are no longer fairyland on earth.

But the landscape perceived from a bird’s eye view has its own charm. Because the perspective is high enough and the vision is large enough, the interpretation of mountains and rivers will be led to other directions. It’s easy to compare the different life styles in the mountain areas and plains. It’s easy to realize that the cultures at both ends of the watershed are very different. One side is grassland and the other is farming land. The Lattimore line is right under your eyes. The road in your sight is not a winding road to the distance or a few lines that gradually reduce in perspective and finally meet at the vanishing point. These roads are the channels of trade and communication of ideas. As the landform under the wings of the plane is unfolding, a mountain area changes into a lake region, and you can really feel the transforming of dialects and accents. The gradually unfolding earth turns into a vast volume of text filled with hundreds of emotions. These texts infiltrate and converse with each other, they stack up one after another and, through a single gentle sweep, another layer of meaning is revealed.

In the sparsely populated area over Siberia, I seem to have seen Qiu Chuji leading a dozen disciples searching for Genghis Khan’s army in the endless wilderness. How did they find it without GPS navigation? When the old

man appeared in front of Genghis Khan, he must have seemed majestic as an old fairy. How was he able to make the big tyrant stop killing just with a few words?

Over the rugged mountains of Central Asia, looking at the ancient place names like Samarkand on the small screen in front of me, I can’t stop wondering where is Talas. Ancient battlefields are everywhere, kingdoms and borders once were everywhere.

No, no, no. We always have an illusion, when on the ground and in the city, that the entire earth land has been completely occupied by human beings. In fact, you will come to know when viewing from the sky that the distribution of human beings on earth is far sparser than we think. You often fly for a long time over the vast snowfields and only then you see a straight line, which is the trace of human activities. If there is a straight line, there will be people. If there are people, there will be civilization. From the plane, although you can’t find the immortal’s cave, you are the scavenger of civilization traces.

Civilization haggles with terrain and climate. And civilizations fight among themselves for power and territory. As a result, their boundaries are interwoven and interpenetrated. Civilization is like a pool of water, gathering in difficult places and hastily establishing approval to avoid evaporation. It winds in the rugged places, seizes the road, roars in the ups and downs, and becomes shallow in the flat places.

Then I realized that I am still a landscape painter, just no longer depicting the relationship between human beings and immortals, but depicting the crisscross terrain between civilizations. Like in Chinese landscape paintings, such mountains are never just mountains and such water is never just water. Such a landscape is always a text waiting to be read. It has its own annotations, there are words everywhere, in every wrinkle and every texture. I just developed the hidden text. And it became a map.

Here Be Dragons. The human nature and the poetics of maps

Medieval maps, even those of the Age of Discovery, often contain phrases such as “here be dragons,” “here be sea monsters,” or “unknown land of the South.” In those times, the earth had not been thoroughly explored and measured by human beings (in fact, have we really explored it today?). Back then, there were more void spaces in our world that needed for us to fill in with imagination.

I believe that the first painting of human beings must have been a map: a primitive man set out to go hunting and his fellow primitive men drew a map for him. There was a rabbit's nest under the tree by the river; there was a stone that you could hide behind; but be careful, this was the trap I dug... Today we feel that describing things is a thing in itself. In fact, at the beginning, we created the need to describe things in order to complete a task. However, the description of things can never be the things described, and "description" itself is also a kind of thing indeed called "description."

It is commonly believed that theoretical life suppresses perceptual ability. This is actually the influence of the image of Bohemian artists since Romanticism. In fact, the more reason exhausts what's knowable and what can be said, the more unknowable and unspeakable will come to us. As in the Circle of Knowledge drawn by Socrates, the more knowledge, the longer the circumference, the more unknowable things outside the circle; and people have to call on sensibility to comprehend them.

You walk around in the familiar neighborhood around your home, turn left or right subconsciously to go to work every day. You claim that your walking is guided by feeling and instinct—in fact, it's the result of habits without having to call for your sensibility. Slowly, you reach a less familiar neighborhood, you take out a map to analyze and judge the ways, you may even use GPS. Then you rely on



*The Circulation
of Revolution, 2015,
detail*

reason to move around. When you finally arrive in a desolate place, there is no relevant knowledge on the map and rationality is not enough; at this point, you finally start to use your sensibility. You get a keen sense of which direction the wind blows from looking at which side the branches and leaves of the trees are more dense. You make judgments of where the road is and where the quicksand is. Every step you take is carefully set forward, not knowing whether there is a solid land or a deadly swamp below. Every pore of yours is opened and you are really using your feeling, unlike when you walk around your house day after day. Maps are for us to get to the place where we can utilize our senses as soon as possible, rather than wasting our sensibility in the place we already have maps of. When you come to no man's land where the existing maps are vague, you start to call for sensibility, and your sensible ability contains your imagination. It's only when your senses come to life that you feel the feeling of adventure.

Wittgenstein may not agree with me on this. In his imagination of the city, the city center is always in chaos. All kinds of roads are modified time after time, illegal buildings are built and demolished again and again, and the old city is like a maze of hidden filth. The further moving to the edge of the city, the newer the development zone, which has just been planned out and has a short history—the roads are horizontal and vertical, spacious and clean. There are no sloping and crooked roads. Wittgenstein uses such a city as a metaphor of our daily language. The so-called old city is like words such as “love,” “hate,” “loneliness,” “friendship,” “enemy,” “friend,” “sentiment,” “God,” “ghost,” etc., which we have used for countless years. These words have accumulated rich meanings in history, just like the roads in the old city, each of which is filled with hidden filth, caves, and secret passages. Every word is connected one way or another with other words like the fibers of broken lotus roots. The straightly aligned new urban areas

around the city are like the newly invented scientific terms, with no ambiguous meaning, such as “powdered styrene” and “aspirin.” There is no doubt that we will not misunderstand them, but it’s also difficult for us to compose poems with them.

Borges should love this old city of Wittgenstein. Every aging city is full of gardens with forked paths, and every garden is a knot of the net of the world. The overpass over the old city needs to be like the multifarious knots made by sailors, dazzling on the outside, rational on the inside. Borges is bound to see sacred VR libraries laying one by one in Suzhou gardens, where endless perceptual pleasures prevent literati from escaping the world completely, but also provide secret paths should they wish for doing it.

Maps are really about how to use our space imaginatively. Old maps provide us with aged user scenarios, which are already the creation of poetics. The poet Su Dongpo once dug six wells in Hangzhou, secretly linking the West Lake and Qiantang River. Some people regard Paris as a shopping corridor, others insist on wandering around. Some women who have no sense of direction will never get lost when finding their favorite shoes and hats in the mall. In Suzhou, Hangzhou, or Buenos Aires there are always people who follow the rules and regulations and regard the aging city as a development zone, wasting the shade and doorway of those shadows.

Maps are about roads. The more roads there are in your heart, the more choices you have. You know many things: all roads lead to Rome; you can reach the same goal by different roads; some roads have been passed countless times; there is an ancient green-slab road ten meters below Nanshan Road today; some roads are broad while some are winding trails, perhaps with more interesting scenery; and some of the roads lead to no man's land. Most importantly, you know that there are many roads in the world, so you don't go all the way into darkness on one way.

What I mean is as below:

- The existing maps inherently contain the gaps of symbols (which is always a proactive construction) or a scheme about organizing routes. Of course, most frequently this scheme was adopted in the past. It is a product of history and it has always been a product of poetics.
- There is always space for creative use in existing maps. A map does not stipulate the only road. On the contrary, a map shows the existing roads and calls for new ones.
- The purpose of mastering a map is not to control the route you take. You can use the map to ignore the areas where existing experiences intensively gather and reach the unmanned area as soon as possible. You can also turn the city center into a virgin land and explore on the spot.
- Therefore, everyone has his or her own map, or everyone should create his or her own map. There will always be dragons, monsters, and unknown land of the South on your map.

I’m grateful for my work

I must be grateful for my work. It is my work that constantly extends my vision with incessantly expanding new knowledge and experience. For me, it’s not that I created my work, it’s my work that created a more wholesome me.

If you look at archaeological data and see how human beings have spent millions of years on developing stone tools, you will not become a short-sighted nationalist or a narrow-minded person discriminating against a certain race or religion. You’re constantly being brainstormed by knowledge and your own creations. The state of my mind being greatly enlightened and my understanding being thorough and complete are the greatest happiness that art brings to me. You think that the accumulation of predecessors, all your education so far, the people around you who help you a lot, as well as yourself, are just tools for you to reach this moment. In the process of working, I become more and more knowledgeable, or more aware of my

ignorance. At the same time, I become more capable to appreciate and comprehend things, more inclusive, more open, and more ready to accept incredible things. Therefore, I become calmer in moments of distress, more patient to others, and I live a more joyful and abundant life. I also become a freer and more humorous person. With the unfolding of the *Mapping the World Project*, I become a more and more interesting person—which is good.

When making the *Map of Tools*, I was moved to find out about the strange obsidian tools made by the Mayas. And I was deeply moved to find that the grindstone of Goth Island in the Neolithic age was not used to grind the traces of stone tools, but was possibly related to specific astronomical phenomena.

Artists are always moved by something and, afterwards, they have the ability to move others. What moves you may come from reading, other people’s works, natural phenomena, or your own imagination. What comes from imagination is also externally driven to me. I don’t want to see this revelation as the innate source of my heart.

My map-making works with relationships between concepts. Cartography as a conceptual operation

Professor Sarat Maharaj once told me a detail of Duchamp’s life: Duchamp didn’t use notebooks; instead, all his notes were written down on some small pieces of paper and then were put in the box. After a while, the box was filled with all kinds of small pieces of notes. In this way, when Duchamp wanted to revisit these notes, he took out ideas he didn’t even remember when he wrote down—at least, he had to search for what he was looking for among many notes. This became a mechanism to ensure that his logic of thinking was constantly cut off. In fact, this is the method of making Dada poetry.

Duchamp was so brave that he dared to murder his own inertia of thinking. This, of

course, was self-cultivation, dwelling in the realm of Total Art. In other words, he must have realized how highly logical he was, and needed to keep shuffling the cards to make the game interesting.

In the spring of 2013, I created a series of 26 ink paintings entitled *The Bird’s-eye View*. The pictures were closely connected, forming a global landscape, like Google Maps. While I was making the paintings, many thoughts came to mind—just like when I was on international flights overlooking from the window at the mountains and the seas below—and words often floated in. So these sentences were written on the pictures, thus transforming a landscape painting into a map.

When it came to make a catalogue of these paintings, the sentences needed to be translated, so we extracted them from the pictures and gave them to the translator. Every painting has a certain structural idea, so these sentences are not irrelevant but always revolve around a certain feeling. They coexist synchronically on the images. However, in the digital text file, they were unavoidably listed in a sequence. In this way, I made some Dada poetry inadvertently, which is an unexpected harvest. Maps inherently contain words and, by navigating through the map, you have the chance to construct sentences using the given words and create your own verse of poems.

Making conceptual maps is more or less like children playing building blocks. First you spread things in front of you and move them around, then some of the relationships between things gradually emerge. Some relationships are strictly coupled, some are casual, some seem to be very subtle. A number of these relationships are very logical and have causes and consequences, as the direction of mountains determines the direction of rivers. So, causal logic is represented by going from upstream to downstream of a river. A river places time within space—therefore, every river is a museum, and every mountain is the negative form of an archaeological pit. There are

other things without causal relationship, with only a status that you have to accept.

Cartography is between logical and illogical. “What’s mysterious is not what the world is like, but how it is.” Map is not for producing understanding, but for producing knowing, or arrival. There is a wonderful word in Chinese, *tongda* (to know thoroughly). “To know” means to understand what is around, where the road is and how to go about it. A map doesn’t define a place merely pointing out what place is next to it. A map is also a blueprint for construction; to design it, you can rely on intuition, but good intuition should stand up to reasoning.

To make a conceptual map is to create something directly instead of using a map to recreate an established terrain. Therefore, during the painting process I’m oppressed by the sense of responsibility, drawn by the passion of poetry and blocked by fear. Sometimes, indecision leads to failure to move forward, which is the main obstacle for this work. Making art like this is like taking an adventure in the wilderness, without road signs.

Making a map on an obvious level can be understood as organizing reading notes. For example, to draw out all the relevant figures and post stations along the Silk Road—that is just a “realistic and useful” map. Though the scale of work can be very large, the result can be awesome, but it’s just a spectacular accumulation of reading volumes and workload, without any accidental surprise. We should mix sand in the mechanism of logic and the series of relationships between different sets of knowledge, and include exception in the series of conventional things. For example, among the travelers, after the names of Xuanzang and Marco Polo there suddenly appear “boomerangs” and “pollen.” When painting the phenomenon of witchcraft ritual, the texts slipped from “mask” to “commodity fetishism.” Isn’t commodity fetishism witchcraft? Isn’t hysteria the collective hysterical event of shopaholics organized by the Double 11 sales promotion?

The beauty of drawing a map is to organize unexpected relationships, where more often than not abrupt connections play a role of integration. Things that I originally thought having no connections suddenly linked together, and the pleasure derived from that experience is the unique accidental sense of art. The listing of knowledge and deduction of logic are all for these last few steps. That is, we must finish the known (knowledge) and knowable (logic) parts as soon as possible to see the incredible connection. Though the connections are innately there, they are oblivious to our eyes. And when they show up in front of us, the feeling is incredible.

Isn't this map rich enough? My weakness in making pictures has always been over-exertion. If I put in slightly less effort, the image will be just fine. The *Map of Travelers* actually can be divided into several maps. The *Map of Religion* can be directly divided into many maps, one for each religion. Maps are works on the concept of scale, which means that any word in them can be developed into another map. However, if the map is too fine and detailed, it will become reading notes, devoid of a sense of metaphysics. In terms of content of the map, two of the best happenings are the relationship of chance encounter and the exceptions in the list.

The relationship of chance encounter is like this: I drew “Homo erectus migrated out of Africa” on the left side of the *Map of Travelers*, and on the right side of the *Map of Religion*, which connects to it compositionally, I put “Religious diaspora in Africa.” As if there were providence in the destiny.

The exceptions in the list are items such as Xuanzang, Zheng He, Marco Polo, Ibn Battuta and drifting bottles in the list of travelers. On the right side of the travelers is “virtual navigation.” In fact, most of the virtual navigations are forms of utopia. So on the right is the *Map of Utopia*. In the end, it’s actually a large-scale painting.

It's the same thing with painting: you should constantly reach beyond imagination. This is a good way of making art, of making people progress, raise people instead of consuming energy within.

The messy interconnections across fuzzy boundaries

It is very important to realize that the boundary between things is obscure. We have been trained to categorize things since childhood. In fact, all classifications are temporary and compromising. When I was studying tools, an example I saw was that the kitchenware stove is actually very similar to the kiln for manufacturing bricks and ceramics. It's also very similar to the blast furnace for steelmaking. The dividing line between when it is classified as a "tool" and when it is a building device is very much blurred. The water pipe is a tool, and then it becomes a ditch, a canal. There is also a fuzzy line between tools and clothes. Diving suits and motorcycle helmets can be regarded as tools, but they are also pieces of clothing. Hats are clothes, of course, but what about helmets, which are a kind of weapon? So is clothing a kind of weapon? Of course, shoes are also a kind of clothing, but shoes with wheels are obviously used as vehicles or toys by some people. Even the boundary between tools and animals is not clear. For example, for a fisherman who uses cormorants and otters to catch fish, his osprey is actually equivalent to fishing net and hook of another family as the tool for working. Another example is, in the map of professions, the food sampler who specialized in tasting food for poison before the ancient monarch takes a bite. These people should appear in the map of tools too, shouldn't they?

In this way, the boundaries between different concepts and different things are blurred, just as maps are always connected with each other. All the borders are artificially demarcated. Every day, I just kept jumping between the boundaries of things, and gradu-

*Map of Professions –
He Who Uses His Brain
Will Govern, 2016,
detail*



ally trained my intuition into a state where I don't see anything in isolation and I'm instinctively aware of all the strands and ties between them. Everything stays in muddled ambiguity. You can't exhaust one field without exhausting the whole world.

You shouldn't conceptualize your world: if you don't see food samplers, cormorants, and hammers as merely tools, you also cannot use the word "red" to generalize a rose, a drop of blood, and a parrot. And the post-1990s generation shouldn't be described in general as "stupid and brain damaged," and a region or a person of a certain faith as terrorists.

Of course, any classification is only temporary. Classification is just a tool, a map that enables us to enter a field. Maps are used for walking and marking. But on our planet earth everything is connected into a whole, where even rivers often change their course.

Knowledge about relationships is called wisdom. Otherwise, knowledge that is divided into disciplines but not related is called science: the science of dividing disciplines.

Through making maps, going deep into the tortuous and unspeakable details of things, you slowly become as silent as them. That is the right course, as painting surely should be a technique that teaches people to be silent.

The all-encompassing and scanning thinking mode

According to the classification, I treat them as homework and when I finish I break them

down one by one. I see it as a kind of self-training, in the same way as athletes train. The purpose is to enable us to fully encounter all the possibilities of a field, as well as providing unexpected opportunities for ourselves.

Usually, if we clearly know which drawer contains the object we are looking for, we will open that very drawer directly to fetch it. But if we can bear to turn over every drawer, we can always find a lot of things we have forgotten. Some of the things we've been searching for a long time are inadvertently found—things we never imagined would come out and we have a chance to reexamine. Every time I turn over all the drawers, a number of new ideas about the future emerge.

So this classification mode is a method that can be used. Why not give it a try? Why not let it happen once in a while?

Cartography is such an all-encompassing and scanning mode of working. In such a way, we reach the blank space through care and concern.

Place

How vastly the map covers is always a question. The real world is endless, so it's always necessary to push the frame out again. Therefore, the relationship between the things in the picture and the things outside the cut frame is worth noting. Usually, there will be "turn to page XX" marked on the edge of the pages of traffic maps, so every map links one place to another. Here we consciously realize that there

are places here and there assembled together with pressing force just like mosaic pieces without the wall support.

A place inherently contains a sense of wholeness, very much like what a scale model provides from a bird's-eye view. God's perspective is actually available to everyone, the only difference is in position and height. Everyone can gather a sight that miniaturizes all mountains; what people need to be trained in is to have a compass in mind when walking in the crisscross footpaths of streets and alleys, and for the heart not to take the horizon as the boundary of the world and always look beyond the present scenario and situation with a sense of access and connection.

If you have a map in your heart, you can perceive here and there at the same time, as well as multiple layers and multiple movements in various directions. This kind of consciousness of "synchronicity" is the sense of scene. The sense of scene also includes the ability to get out of a situation, which means making yourself a spectator to observe and reflect. Everyone on the journey uses a subjective perspective, which aligns with our self-centered instinct. At the same time, it is a method devoid of the past and only setting out from the present moment. So I can't adapt to the GPS navigation with subjective perspective, and I can't accept someone else's voice to navigate for me. A map provides you with a bigger picture, the whole picture, but also what you have experienced. With the over-

looking view, the future looks less like a pre-destination, as the other roads were not pushed aside. It's not enough to have the big picture, we also need to constantly rotate the map and change the coordinates.

Overlooking is not to get a global perspective and thus become more rational and open-minded than others: in this way, you appear to have an unfair advantage over the other walking travelers. The purpose of overlooking from above is perhaps to obtain a perspective of self-observation. People walk on the ground, and their hearts are in the sky observing themselves with detachment—how they meet and separate from others, and converse and fight with others. There's always a way to get out of a play. If we act and perceive, then action has the chance to become aesthetics and appear generous.

Walking in Suzhou, I think of Borges's Buenos Aires. It is the reflection and superposition of place and time. Every night traveler is concerned about each present time and place, from ancient to modern times.

Every corner is a world of its own, and these worlds contain each other. Places map and mirror each other. Only a heart of sensibility can draw a complete image. A map as large as the actual size of the empire is not able to achieve this.

2019



The Most Important Work Is Yet to Start

Conversation with
Hans Ulrich Obrist
on Maps

HUO: The traditional art form of Chinese calligraphy, using a brush dipped in liquid black ink, is something you often use in your work, as a resource and subject as well as a technical material. You have practiced Chinese calligraphy since childhood, is this correct? How did you begin to be interested in it? Could you talk about the importance this has had in your life?

OZ: Calligraphy is probably one of the forms of Chinese art or Chinese ancient culture with the most connotations. It is surely a form of art but it's more than that, because it is both the law of writing and Tao of writing. A person who can write is like a person who can use chopsticks—he or she therefore owns an essential skill of everyday life. At the same time, calligraphy is connected to a person's thoughts, or beliefs, or even to moral requirements: for example, since ancient times there has been this belief that as long as your heart is righteous, your ink brush will be straight up. So, on some level, calligraphy is higher than art. When I was young, people with outstanding calligraphy skills could be seen everywhere. Even during the Cultural Revolution, traditional calligraphers still often held the long-established literati's *yaji* (elegant scholars' gatherings), where they would write with their unique personal artistic styles—but what these masters were writing was Mao Zedong's poems. Through participating in various social services, such as writing the Big-Character Posters and shop stone signs, they managed to survive that period skillfully. This ancient tradition was still kept alive by the end of the

Cultural Revolution. I first encountered this group of old calligraphers in the training class in the cultural centers operated by the Socialist cultural system; from there, I was allowed to learn directly under their mentorship very quickly. Through master/student relationships, I was able to come into contact with the last generation of Confucian intellectuals in China, and was given the most classical traditional calligraphy training. I learnt ancient skills such as stele rubbing, seal cutting, and so on. More importantly, during the process of learning, I got to know a very subtle way of building relationships with traditional Chinese intellectuals. This knowledge and these feelings affected my entire life, they even affected my approach to contemporary art today.

I believe that all of my work, be it photography, video, installation, or even theater, is deeply rooted in calligraphy. To me, it is not just a choice of artistic medium: indeed, it has the basic significance of methodology.

HUO: How do you deal with the challenges of incorporating traditional Chinese culture into contemporary thought and practice?

OZ: I'm wary of this tendency of simplifying Chinese traditional thought into stereotypes, and then mixing them with contemporary phenomena. This is the most common practice for contemporary artists today who do not have good understanding of the traditional Chinese culture. It is basically a kind of consumerist exploitation of traditional images. We noticed that a lot of overseas exhibitions about Chi-

Map of Chinese
Contemporary Art
for the exhibition Art
and China after 1989:
Theater of the World,
Guggenheim Museum,
New York, 2017, detail

because any detail you pick up, you can expand it into a map.”

QZ: I had a deep love for geography since I was a child. Among the students of art major who take college entrance examinations, I was the rare one who scored above 90 out of 100 in geography. In the many years of my artistic career after that, I became a semi-professional traveler. There is a profound similarity between travel and art—they both come down to opening the field of vision and eliminating prejudice. Only when we gain enough difference of experience we can make people realize the limitations of the world in which they live. So I’ve been collecting all kinds of maps for a long time. But the official beginning of my maps has something to do with you. In 2010, you invited me to make *Map of the 21st Century*, which actually became the starting point of the *Mapping the World Project*. Of course, maps may be a particularly effective method to me: I integrate the various identities that have been considered mutually split before into a whole—I’m a painter, a writer, a calligrapher, and a curator at the same time. More importantly, in the cartographic process we are able to develop an appropriate structure in order to understand the world, a structure that both contains the overall picture and goes into details. To own a map means to have an active understanding of things and to have the power beyond what controls us.

HUO: You have also said that maps are a way to “organize chaos.” Could you explain what you mean by this, and how this is received by the audience?

QZ: In ancient China, the character *tu* (picture/map) was sacred. Although the plane structure of the Chinese character *tu* is basically similar to the plan of traditional Chinese architecture, such as the Forbidden City, to own a map is to own the fundamental force to face and conquer all the confusion and fear. When we walk into the mountains, all the demons and ghosts marked on the map enable

us to be fearless toward them—to name something is to tame something. So maps are also a kind of protective talisman for human beings. Through maps we are able to gain understanding of relationships, and more importantly, to imagine the possibility of relationships, instead of being controlled by the existing ones. Therefore, maps are rational and signify a positive way of life. The more we use maps to exhaust all the known and existing relationships, the more truly we stand in front of the unexplored virgin land. Only then is it possible for us to really own a future. So a map is both an illustration of existing knowledge and the possible space for survival.

The audience can follow my spiritual adventures through reading my maps, and at the same time they are encouraged to develop their own cartographic activities.

HUO: One of your recent works, a six-panel map commissioned by the Guggenheim in New York for its *Art and China after 1989: Theater of the World* exhibition, charts the historical and political events and movements that have shaped contemporary Chinese art. Do your works often feature this level of in-depth investigation of history?

QZ: The map made for the Guggenheim Museum has itself significance in art history. Indeed, the logic of division of periods I used in that map and the many details I have included are different from the approach of a curator to an exhibition. Here I reconstructed Chinese contemporary political history and the world’s political and cultural context (from the second half of the twentieth century up to today), which especially provided the basic coordinates for people to understand contemporary art. It is a process of writing art history, which also gave the cartographer the rights of a historical writer. Therefore, I was very cautious when I was creating this map.

Retrieving history is one of the most effective ways of understanding things. I have developed a habit of thinking that the discov-

ery of anything begins with tracing back to history. The internal logic of things is developed in historical research. But historical writing is not the purpose: the aim here is to create a poetic quality by organizing the knowledge of history. This sense of poetry may be a feeling of desolation, of the vast void, like a swan’s footprints found on snow or mud, and as transient as a fleeting cloud. It may be the laughs and cries when watching the actors putting makeup and going on the stage of the human comedy. It may also be the reminiscence of old friends who helped one another during difficult times, some of whom have passed away in the past decades of the development of contemporary Chinese art. What is more important to me is not the right of writing history, but the real laughs and tears that have existed between us.

HUO: Just as *Copying the Orchid Pavilion Preface* 1,000 Times was perhaps less about the exact words of the text and more about the process and the actions, so the maps seem less about geography and more about relationships.

QZ: Yes, for sure. Today the GPS is better at describing real geographical locations than all the cartographers in our history. But the great revelation brought to us by the cartographers from the past and the present is that they set up a connection between the known world of life and the unknown world, describing these two worlds as a whole. There are always some places on the ancient maps where you can see annotations such as Here Be Dragon, Here Be Monster, Here Be Lion, and Here Be Savages. I think this is a valuable way to think about the world—to admit that there is an ignorant territory in our world, and that we live with blank space and ignorance, which will make us a little humbled.

HUO: What are the research processes you use to create these maps, which are so rich in information, far beyond the physical geography of a place?

QZ: When I decide to make a map on a certain theme, I usually construct a mind map of that subject on the computer, then I start the long process of working and researching on the internet about all the elements related to this subject: its history, its classification, various cultural phenomena pertaining to it, and people and events that are related to it. At this point this mind map is very close to reading notes, a kind of research. From there, I break through the normal logic and reorganize the classification of this topic based on my own creative practice, namely, the poetic principles mentioned above. For example, I do not organize the relationship between animals according to the zoological approach of kingdom, phylum, class, order, family, genus, and species. I classify the animals into black and white, iridescent, animals that take on the appearance of being dead, working animals. I even designed a small zoo for talking animals who can produce sounds resembling those of human language. Again, for example, after listing the names of some of the famous travelers in history, I might include in the series drifting bottles, or pollen. Of course, drifting bottles and pollen are also travelers in the poetic sense. Then I will write all the concepts or sentences on small pieces of paper and move them around repeatedly to try to figure out the relationship between them, until this relationship becomes not only logical, but also revealing, or permeated by a subtle sense of humor. The third step is to produce the sketch drawing based on the repeated process of deliberation and design, in order to define what should be taken out, what is suitable as a mountain range in the painting, and what should be the roads. And finally, when I magnify the sketch to the large-scale ink painting, my attention switches to the calligraphy and landscape painting. After all, I regard my maps as Chinese landscape paintings in the age of Google Maps. In addition to making good conceptual art, my greatest ambition is to demonstrate a new possibility for Chinese

landscape painting, and through the opportunity to write a lot of texts on the map, to show off the essential training of my calligraphy and my contempt toward the Chinese painters today who dare to make landscape paintings without knowing how to write calligraphy.

HUO: Could you talk about some of the different maps you have worked on and what inspired them?

QZ: I once created the *Map of Gods* and the *Map of Mythical Animals*. The first was a logical classification of the gods of different civilizations. For example, with the God of Creation there will be the God of Sky, the God of the Sun, and the God of Stars. With the God of the Sun there will be the God of the Day, the God of the Night, and therefore, the God of the Four Seasons. Then the God of Wind will bring rain and therefore there will be a God of Rain; and when the rain falls, there appears the God of the River and the God of the Sea. With the activities of hunting and fishing there is the God of Agriculture and, with agriculture and a surplus of good, the God of Wine is also created. There is a great similarity between the harvest of agriculture and the fertility of women, therefore we have the Goddess of Fertility and the Goddess of Love. But women and food supplies are incentives for robbery and aggression, therefore we need Patron Saints and the God of War. We may get hurt in the war, so we need the God of Medicine, and when we can't be cured, we will report to the God of Death, and in the end, the God of the Underworld controls our destiny. Such a way of organizing the cross-cultural divinity is actually close to the study of mythology.

But on other maps I may tell whole stories, even contemporary stories. For example, I once made a map about the missing Malaysia Airlines flight, where statements by American military pilots, a shaman, and people with various political positions, together with the description of the relevant context, make such a map more like a script. The work *Map of the*



Third World has a similar function. Such cartographic work will move from one point to another naturally, until you realize that any detail in the map can be taken out to make a new map. So this kind of work is self-generating and self-nurturing, and does not need external inspiration. I always feel that there is not enough time for me to work, I never experience lack of inspiration.

HUO: In your role as professor at the China Central Academy of Fine Arts you teach a class

*Map of Gods – God
Never Rests, 2016,
detail*

on Chinese social thought. You have mentioned that there are “dangerous subjects,” what do you mean by this? What are the challenges you face?

QZ: I also use my maps when I'm teaching at the China Central Academy of Fine Arts. Each map is in itself a very effective teaching tool, since the contents of my maps cover all kinds of fields. So in my teaching I naturally offer interpretations of various political trends in China and in the world. Some of the organizational relationships of knowledge in the maps may lead to misunderstandings, as they are greatly different from popular stereotypes. The biggest danger to me is that people always subconsciously rely on stereotypes to build their own knowledge system instead of taking the initiative to make maps of their own. So the challenge I face also lies in that both other artists and the students tend to rely too much on the existing model of working, and the real creative method of making art is often doubted by them. Compared to the temptation of the most popular experiences of becoming famous in the contemporary art world—such as coping invented or existing symbols in large scale, or exploiting people's stereotyped impression of Chinese culture and Chinese politics and contending for attention in the international political context, or symbolically describing a generation of people using crude and simple futuristic discourse—the independent way of working I proposed on the basis of profound research and reflection on the world seems to be too risky, and the arrival of success too distant. What I proposed is so unattractive to the students who lack aspirations. It is obviously easier for ways that can bring them quick success to catch their minds. That is to say that the shortsighted and utilitarian way to success of the previous generation of Chinese artists has seriously damaged the minds of a whole generation of young people.

HUO: You have experienced the rapid changes in Chinese society over the last decades as

it has opened itself up to economic and cultural globalization. Could you talk about your experience of the changing landscape of China? What are your visions for the future?

QZ: The social change in China is usually described as a process of abandoning communism and leaping into the capitalist world. But I don't think this way. I believe that on both of the opposing poles of the political balance there should be positive and rational experimenters, and that all the failures we experienced were due to people's deviation from the path of reason and experiment. Over the past forty years, Chinese people had neither blind faith in absolute market fundamentalism, nor government control. Their statements such as "practice is the sole criterion for testing truth" or "to cross the river by feeling the stones" are full of experimental attitude. Chinese people establish special economic zones, launch experiments, observe feedbacks, adjust according to the situation, study the scope of application of different modes of working, and generalize it cautiously. Such an attitude is the combination of the spirit of trial and error and the error-correction mechanism. This is the spirit of the experiment, this is the spirit of reason. And this is the spirit of science.

So I believe that the success of the Chinese society over the past forty years is not the success of any kind of ideology, but of rational spirit, of experimentalism, and of scientific attitude. In a way, it is a continuation of the scientific methodology pioneered in Europe since the Renaissance. So the great changes in Chinese society in the past thirty to forty years have made my generation experience a condensed world history in a very short time: basically, China rapidly developed from a medieval country to a post-industrial society. This has brought extremely rich topics and objects of perception for my creation, and, more importantly, it made experiment the most fundamental quality of my art. That's why my work has never been repeated on the basis of symboliza-

tion and stylization, but is constantly experimenting with all kinds of media and topics. I am grateful for the world and the times I live in, for they give me great energy and a relatively peaceful working environment. Sometimes I think of the last few generations of artists, who were also talented and hardworking, but with extremely bad luck; they endured so much hardships in their lives and always had to struggle for basic survival.

Though I love to study history, I do not love to predict the future. I believe that a description of a vision is not a description of the fact. To some extent, to describe a vision is more like to use the desire itself to guide the future toward the direction of our own desire. So what I want to do is to get rid of the overdependence of today’s art on the art system and to reconstruct the possibility of creating art based on the relationship between people and the world, people and their own lives, and the direct relationship between people, and not just creating art for galleries, museums, and biennales. I see many changes happening in the world today, whether it’s the internet, Artificial Intelligence, or gene editing: but none of these is separable from the proper relationship between a person’s physical and spiritual life. Because we humans, in addition to being a species that has so far been quite successful, are an unfinished project, which needs continuous trial and error, proofing, falsification, and renewal.

HUO: You have spoken of the concept of your work as “total art,” and you said that art has the ability to engender change and transformation. Could you talk a little about what you mean by “total art”?

QZ: You are right, the basic meaning of the “total art” theory is that it is impossible for us to solve the problem of art within the artistic territory. We should solve social problems in the society outside the realm of art. To solve the problem of art we need the solution of social and life problems, but we cannot under-

stand the meaning of society and life without the exploration and inquiry of art. So the meaning of “total art” is that art is not a field of human activity that is independent of society and life; one should do social work in art, and one should live life through art. Therefore, art precisely happens in things that do not look directly related to it.

HUO: As an art writer, you have published several books including *The Image and Post Modernism* (2002), *Give Me a Mask* (2003), *The Limit of Freedom* (2003), *The Photography after Photography* (2004), *On Total Art* (2012). And among the catalogues of your work, *Breaking Through the Ice* (2009), *The Shape of Time* (2007), *Archaeology of Memory* (2006), to name just a few. How does your theoretical writing and research fit with your artistic practice?

QZ: There are three reasons why I started theoretical writing. The first is to prove that the real, valuable theoretical thinking can only be done by an artist; the second is to avoid being misled by theorists who talk nonsense, and strive to keep the mind closer to the facts; the third is that I feel theoretical thinking itself is a fascinating spiritual activity, no less charming than artistic creation. Today, with the advancement of my work practice, I am even more aware that these two aspects are inextricably involved with each other. For example, when I’m making a map, it is both artistic creation and theoretical writing and research. It seems that the action of making maps ultimately integrates my myriad interests.

HUO: Your recent exhibition at the Van Abbemuseum, *Qiu Zhijie: Journeys Without Arrivals*, proposes that your work could be seen as a “series of unending journeys.” Do you feel that this is a fitting way to describe your work?

QZ: The title *Journeys Without Arrivals* seems to sound rather romantic, but in fact, it is in the spirit of launching a debate. Because I have

a huge amount of projects and very long working cycles, and my working model is very different from that of the artists of specific styles and symbols, I deliberately used such a romantic and proud way to declare war on institutionalized artistic creation. I hope that through such an exhibition title, people can go over the form of the work itself and trace a person’s way of thinking, therefore developing their own path of thinking. This is just a solo show in the middle of my career, but I hope that in a retrospective exhibition after my death, what people will see is the start of something, not the end. There will be many small paths departing from an exhibition to all directions.

HUO: You also create work in collaboration with other artists, including workshops that invite participation and interaction with the artworks. Do you have any collaborations in progress?

QZ: Yes. I don’t think that artistic creation should be an individual thing. Indeed, since my childhood experience of learning calligraphy, basically I have always believed that any artist is just one node in the inexhaustible network of collaboration and succession of

teachings. Each artist’s work, even if he or she thinks that their creation is totally unprecedented and independent, in fact contains elements of collaboration of which they are not aware of. So I sometimes intentionally expose the truth of this collaboration—for example, in the Chinese Pavilion at the 57th Venice Biennale I curated in 2017, and in the many experimental theater projects I carried out in recent years, all of which are in fact organization of collaborations. Works of this kind are still in progress. But what I am more interested in now is not the collaboration with artists, but the possibility of collaboration with scientists, technicians, and ordinary people outside the art circle.

HUO: Do you have any unrealized projects?
QZ: Too many of them! The *Mapping the World Project* is far from complete; *A Suicidology of the Nanjing Yangtze River Bridge*, which was carried out ten years ago, is still unfinished; the *Qiu’s Notes on the Colorful Lantern Scroll Project*, which has been running for eight years, will come to its periodical conclusion this spring. The most important work is yet to start.

Mapping Art History, Relational and Ongoing

Birgit Hopfener

Creating maps has been central to Qiu Zhijie's artistic practice since 2011.¹ Indeed, he has repeatedly introduced himself as a mapper when talking about his artistic self.² In the following essay I will be focusing on his art-historiographic maps. Maps that I consider art-historiographic are for example the *Map of Total Art* (2012), a visualization of how Qiu Zhijie constructs his concept of "total art" (*zongti yishu*) historiographically; the *Teacher-Student-Lineage Map* (2017), which uncovers the entangled teacher lineages of all the artists who participated in the exhibition *Continuum – Generation By Generation*, which Qiu Zhijie curated for the Chinese Pavilion at the 57th Venice Biennale in 2017; and the *Map of Contemporary Chinese Art* (2017), which was commissioned by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York for the show *Art and China after 1989: Theater of the World* in 2017–18.

Taking the *Map of Total Art* as a case study, I will be arguing that Qiu Zhijie's interest in adopting maps as a medium for art history writing plays a crucial role with regards to his conceptualization of art as relational and ongoing.

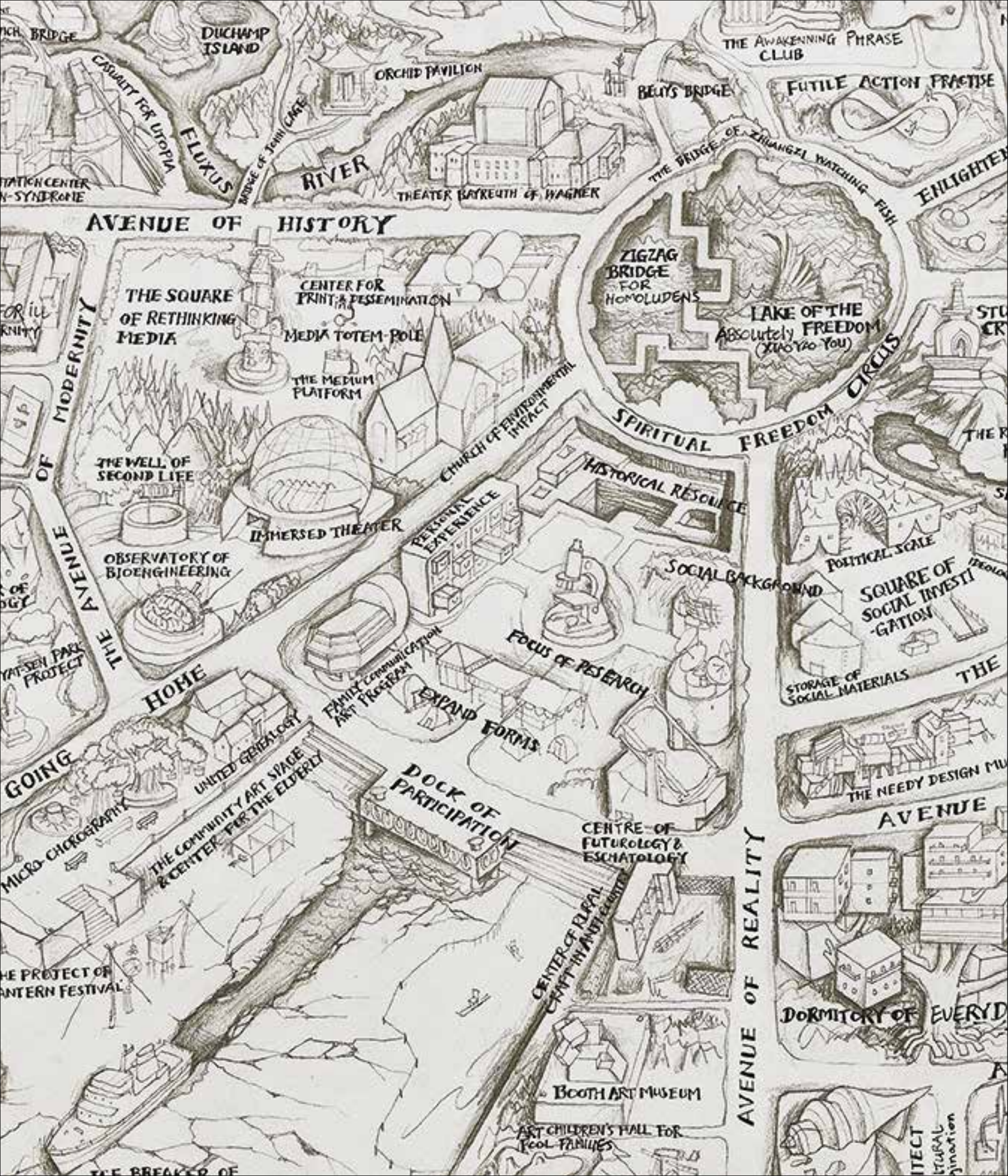
A close reading will show that the *Map of Total Art* sheds light on how he situates himself and his concept of "total art" in interrelation with multiple concepts of "total art."

In my reading, I consider the *Map of Total Art* as the subjective proposition of a transculturally entangled historiography of contemporary "total art" by a China based and globally connected and exhibiting artist.³

Qiu Zhijie's transcultural perspective is contributing to a critique of a modern Western binary of art versus life and to a global discourse of "total art" from a specific locale.

As he has mentioned, "From the rethinking of modernity that extended globally in the twentieth century, from Rudolph Steiner to Rabindranath Tagore, from the Black Mountain College to Joseph Beuys, we can see the strength of the efforts to construct art as life."⁴ And elsewhere he said: "We knew quite clearly that we did not wish to and could not import the Euro-American concept of 'Total Art.' Out of necessity, we stand on the foundations laid by Chinese and Western culture, looking to find our own way and to build our own methodology. Creating a framework to accompany the Mandarin-language notion of *zongti yishu*, 'total art' is not merely a way of stimulating art education in the domestic Chinese context, but a contribution to the entire global discourse of 'total art.'"⁵

The *Map of Total Art* critiques a conventional Eurocentric, modern Western narrative of contemporary art, at the content as well as at the structural level, by constructing a non-linear, non-binary, transculturally entangled contemporary art historiography with multidimensional spatial and temporal dimensions. Through art historical contextualization, the article explores how the *Map of Total Art* can be understood as critical engagement with Euro-American and Chinese histories and epistemologies of art-historiographic mapping. By so doing, I intend



Map of Total Art, 2012, detail

to contribute to a bottom-up and multi-sited discourse of global contemporary art. Such a critical global art history approach argues that it is crucial to take into account multiple and transculturally entangled histories and epistemologies that constitute contemporary art in today’s spatially as well as temporally disjunctive global world from a specific geo-historical perspective.⁶

The power of maps

Maps are powerful visual media. All maps—topographical, thematic, or historiographic maps—are instruments of communication, persuasion, and power, presenting themselves as orientation and navigation aids. Even though post-seventeenth-century Western cartography tried to make us believe this for a long time, maps are actually not veracious and transparent objective representations of reality, mirrors of the world, but subjectively constructed visual representations of geographies, themes, ideas, or historical narratives.

Based on selective processes of inclusion and exclusion, maps embody and project the perspectives and interests of their creators. By constructing specific relations, maps constitute meaning and connect viewers to a reality that exists through these maps; in so doing they position and constitute viewers as subjects in specific spatial and temporal structures of knowledge and experience. Shedding light on conditions, structures, and agencies according to which certain realities are created, maps produce awareness in viewers that reality, and one’s relationship to it, is not set in stone, but due to its constructedness, it can always be imaged and formed otherwise.

Mapping is a powerful practice of making, (re-)shaping, and changing the world, its subjects and its collectives. It is in this regard that maps not only function as visual representations, but also enact operational agency. As James Corner writes in his essay on the agency of maps, “the function of maps is not to depict but to enable, to precipitate a set of effects in

time. Thus, mappings do not represent geographies or ideas; rather they effect their actualization. Mapping is neither secondary nor representational but doubly operative: digging, finding and exposing on the one hand, and relating, connecting and structuring on the other. Through visual disclosure, mapping both sets up and puts into effect complex sets of relationships that remain to be more fully actualized . . . Mapping is . . . a process of exploration, discovery and enablement. This is less a case of mapping to assert authority, stability and control, and more one of searching, disclosing and engendering new sets of possibility. Like a nomadic grazer, the exploratory mapper detours around the obvious so as to engage what remains hidden.”⁷

It is because maps are, as Denis Cosgrove has put it, “both the spatial embodiment of knowledge and a stimulus to further cognitive engagement,”⁸ that even though they have a governing effect on subjects, they also have the potential to encourage emancipation and agency by asking viewers to uncover their respective structures of world perception and subject construction, and in so doing they function as instruments of critical—and in consequence social—intervention and change.

It seems to be this operational agency that is at the center of Qiu Zhijie’s interest in map making. As he explained in an interview with the online magazine *Blouinartinfo* in 2013, “I find it is difficult to make sense of this world. Creating maps is my way of resisting the madness of the world. We live in a world that makes us lost. Everyone has a map, or maps, that they carry within themselves and we should continuously create and recreate those maps. It is a proactive way of creating meaning, instead of passively accepting the meaning created by other people. The best result from my installation is for everyone to go and draw their own maps, perhaps of their interpersonal relationships, or just for the books and movies that they’ve read and seen. Draw a map and create a meaningful world for yourself.”⁹

The *Map of Total Art* gives insights into the framework used by Qiu Zhijie to construct his own concept of art as a life practice. Viewers are invited to research the concepts presented and to make sense of the artist’s suggestions for how different cultural and historical concepts of integrated art practices relate to each other and how they could be put into practice. Viewers enact agency by drawing on their subjective knowledge and experiences and by reflecting on their personal framework of constituting meaning and themselves in relation to Qiu’s ideas.

A close reading of the *Map of Total Art*
So, how is the meaning of “total art” created in Qiu Zhijie’s *Map of Total Art*?

Instead of accepting an Euro-American art historical framework of “total art,” the map expands and restructures existent narratives spatially as well as temporally.

Resembling an urban infrastructure with streets, buildings, ponds, rivers, and parks the *Map of Total Art* is laid out in a radial pattern. The Lake of Freedom, which is overlooked in the north by the Bridge of Zhuangzi Watching Fish and framed by the lakeside road Spiritual Freedom Circus at its southern shore, and which can be traversed by a Zigzag Bridge for Homo Ludens, forms the center of the map. From the Lake of Freedom five major streets lead away clockwise starting in the north with the Enlightenment Avenue, followed by the Path of Life-long Project, the Avenue of Reality, the Avenue of Going Home, and the Avenue of History. The Enlightenment Avenue and the Path of Life-long Project are connected by the Nature Study Avenue. From the roundabout at the intersection between the Enlightenment Avenue and the Path of Life-long Project, in the middle of which the Fountain of Possibility is placed, the Nature Study Avenue continues until it meets the Avenue of Creation, which is also connected to the Avenue of Reality. Below the Avenue of Creation, two more avenues lead away from the Avenue

of Reality: the Avenue of Everyday Life and the Avenue of Details.

The street system structures the content of the map, namely “total art,” in different yet interrelated parts. In the north-western area, above the Avenue of History, viewers learn about the multiple art historical and historical references that constitute Qiu Zhijie’s concept of “total art.” The upper left part of the map assembles artistic and political initiatives as well as reform pedagogical institutions from the beginning of the twentieth century that Qiu Zhijie identifies as conceptualizing art and culture as socially inclusive life practices: among others, the Santiniketan University of Rabindranath Tagore in India, the Chinese Rural Reconstruction Movement, accompanied by the names of its founders Yan Yangchu alias Y. C. James Yen (1893–1990) and Liang Shumin (1893–1988). Yan Yangchu also co-established the National Association of Mass Education Movement (MEM) that sought to bring education, particularly literacy, to the masses. Worth mentioning in the context of Qiu Zhijie’s *Map of Total Art* is the so-called Dingxian Experiment, also organized by MEM, where schools in Ding Xian county helped the rural population to implement innovations. Like Yan Yangchu, Liang Shumin and the also mentioned Yan Xishan (1883–1960) were reformers of the Republican period. While Yan leaned more toward Christian ideology, Liang Shumin and Yan Xishan both believed in the possibility to modernize China through Neo-Confucianism instead of solely relying on modern Western concepts of science, individuality, and progress. In the immediate neighborhood of Santiniketan University and the Chinese Rural Reconstruction Movement, Qiu Zhijie placed the Dartington Estate of Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst in England, the Populism of Lev Tolstoi in Russia, and a little bit further south the Japanese Arts and Crafts Movement by Yanagi Sōetsu and the Bauhaus. Separated by the River of Surrealism in the north and the Fluxus River

social harmony under his/her rule, the *Map of Total Art* is “ruled” by a de-centralized, multi-perspectival, and relational governing principle embodied by the Lake of Freedom. Like walking on the Zig-zag Bridge, which connects the shores of the Lake of Freedom and prompts travelers to continuously change perspectives by following the alternating right and left turns of the bridge, the overall map is an invitation to adopt different viewpoints by learning new things and how they can be related to each other and one’s own self. The map does not construct “total art” according to a stable linear chronology, but rather as a temporally and spatially entangled web of interrelations, in which the Orchid Pavilion (353 AD) is put into close proximity to the Black Mountain College (founded in 1933) and the Duchamp Island (Marcel Duchamp, 1887–1968).

Some of the interrelations of the historical references of “total art” are based on historical evidence, others are constructed by the artist. For example, Leonard Elmhirst, the co-founder of the Dartington Estate, met Rabindranath Tagore and was inspired by his Santiniketan University. The transcultural grouping of the Orchid Pavillion, the Black Mountain College, and the Theater Bayreuth of Wagner, on the other hand, indicates relations that the artist constructed. By grouping and neighboring certain aspects and references of “total art” and by using architectural and landscaping elements such as bridges, islands, or parks, Qiu Zhijie connotes relations in a certain way, and by so doing constitutes new meaning.

Qiu Zhijie’s historiographic artwork critiques the universalized modern Western mode of linear history writing and the related concept of art as a temporally stable entity neatly placed in chronologically ordered and contained periods. By constructing a spatially and temporally entangled narrative of “total art,” Qiu Zhijie argues for art’s temporal instability, and in so doing emphasizes that art’s status and meaning are in fact not set in stone but are constructed—and therefore changeable.

Asking to change perspectives, the *Map of Total Art* seeks to inspire viewers to reflect on how ways of making sense of the world are always situated within certain structures of knowledge, and encourages them to keep on drawing new connections. The Bridge of Zhuangzi Watching Fish, a historical reference to the famous story *The Happiness of Fish* (*Yu zhi le*) by the Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi, emphasizes this programmatic claim of the map. If viewers invest time to research, interpret, and relate the story to themselves, it may serve as a trigger to fostering a critical attitude. *The Happiness of Fish* narrates the dispute between Zhuangzi, who claims to know that the fish are happy, and Huizi, who argues that Zhuangzi cannot know their frame of mind, since he is not a fish himself. The story about whether or not one is able to know if fish are happy recognizes that there is no single true way of knowing, and instead emphasizes the situatedness of knowledge. As Steven Shankman writes: “For Huizi, *zhi*¹¹ means certain knowledge from an intentionalist perspective. For Zhuangzi, *zhi*¹² means the awareness, however proximate and imprecise, of his participation in the unity of the *dao*.”¹³ Zhuangzi is clarifying the difference between the knowledge of the intentionalist thinker and the “wisdom” of the Daoist sage. How (*an*)¹⁴ does Zhuangzi know that the fish are happy? Zhuangzi chooses to understand *an*¹⁵ as meaning “from what perspective” (literally, “where”). He knows that fish are happy, he concludes, from his perspective on the bridge overlooking the Hao River. A purely intentionalist thinker forgets that acts of intentionality occur within a comprehensive whole. There is no place to stand outside the process of reality. Zhuangzi is attempting to recover that insight, and his playful and ambiguous use of language reflects this fact. Huizi’s question to Zhuangzi, “how do you know what the fish enjoy,” according to Zhuangzi presupposes this participationist understanding of knowledge. “You already knew (*zhi*)¹⁶ I knew (*zhi*)¹⁷

it when asked the question,” Zhuangzi replies. So, whether we can know if the fish are happy or not depends on what is meant by knowing.¹⁸

This parable relates to Qiu Zhijie’s understanding of freedom and explains the meaning of the Lake of Freedom at the center of the map even deeper. For him, freedom is not a given but has to be acquired as a means of personal emancipation¹⁹ through continuous reflection upon one’s situatedness—that is, by critically intervening into given structures of knowledge and regimes of truth,²⁰ and naturalized ways of seeing and perceiving the world. In the north-eastern part of the map, above the Enlightenment Avenue, the reference to the ambiguous image (*Kippbild*) of a duck-rabbit, famously used by the language philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) when discussing the nature of perception and meaning making, underlines these concerns of the artist. The experience of identifying a rabbit or a duck in the image depends on the perspective, experience, and attitude with which one looks at and makes sense of it, and therefore epitomizes the insight that how we see the world and constitute meaning is never objective, but always dependent on context and concept.²¹

Contemporary art and mapping

In contemporary art, the potential of maps to challenge naturalized understandings of various aspects of reality has been the main reason why artists have been adopting mapping practices.²² Questioning dominant art historical narratives to expose their subjective constructedness and to remap modern and contemporary art’s histories has been an important topic in this context.²³

For example, in 1946 the abstract painter Ad Reinhardt created an art historical family tree, *How to Look at Modern Art*, as part of his series called *How to Look at Art*.²⁴ The work is a mapped visualization of the history of modernism that starts with the following names in the soil: Manet, Poussin, Ingres, Primitive, Negro Sculpture, Greek Art, Persian Minia-

ture, Polynesian, Children’s Work, Monet, Japanese Prints, and Daumier, followed by the post-impressionist artists Cézanne, Seurat, Gauguin, van Gogh in the roots, Braque, Matisse, Picasso in the trunk, whereas the left part of the tree is dedicated to abstract and the right part to figurative painters. The main topic of the image is the controversy between figurative representation versus abstraction, which for Reinhardt is also a political debate between figurative art supported by the conservative and abstract painting, of which he was a representative himself, as associated with the liberal left.

In the 1960s, re-mapping art history was also an issue for the Fluxus artists George Maciunas and Nam June Paik. Since Qiu Zhijie explicitly refers to Fluxus in his *Map of Total Art*, their maps serve for an interesting comparison. Fluxus artists challenged conventional boundaries of art and art history, and this was the agenda for both Maciunas and Paik. George Maciunas created many different art historiographical maps.²⁵ The *Expanded Arts Diagram* (1966) has the shape of a horizontal flow chart; it does not stick to a linear chronology but offers a more fluid vision of what constitutes Expanded Arts. At the top it starts with Byzantine Iconoclasm in the Past and Socialist Realism and Didactic Art in 1859; then it continues with the 1960s Chinese Red Guards, Anti-art, Political Culture, Anti-bourgeois Political Didactic Art, Industrial Design, Joke, Fluxus Art, all sorts of theaters, Expanded Cinema, and a number of cultural-historical and socio-political contextualizations.

Nam June Paik’s *Fluxus Island in Décollage Ocean* (1963) was published in the magazine *Dé-coll/age: Bulletin Aktueller Ideen*, which was dedicated to publishing theoretical writings by artists involved in Fluxus, Nouveau réalisme, and Pop Art. *Fluxus Island in Décollage Ocean* is a map of transgressing boundaries of art and critiquing conventional conditions and binary structures of meaning

making processes. A compass rose with completely changed cardinal points sets the tone that formerly naturalized meanings don't count anymore—everything is turned upside down. The map shows the Fluxus “territories” consisting of a central island supplemented by a few smaller islands offshore and surrounded by the imagined Black Ocean, Yellow Sea, and White Sea. The aspects that signify the Fluxus land often do not make sense according to conventional frameworks, and their arrangement in space and time does not follow a unified temporal and spatial through-line. Humorous and hybrid in nature, the aspects written in the map and how they are related to each other provoke viewers to rethink their conventional assumptions of how to make sense of the world, its histories, and art. The map contains diverse written entries: historical aspects of World War I and II and the Holocaust are mentioned, including for example the entries Airplanes in World War I, the Mountain of Russian Tanks in 1945, Stalin-grad, and Auschwitz. Art historical references are also mentioned, introducing the Boulevard St. Maciunas and the Boulevard St. Vostell, as well as historical references to other art and cultural forms, such as the Statue of Marilyn Monroe and the Pyramid Higher than Egyptian Pyramid Made from Automobile Wracks. The map also includes personal details such as The Third Husband of My Second Wife, and aspects of infrastructure like the Chinese Restaurant, the Airport for Flying Saucer, and the Harbor of Freedom. Central topics of the map, which are mentioned a couple of times and also commented on in greater detail, are race, religion, and sex/gender. The Ministerium of Mixing the Enemy Race, the Temple of United Religion, and the School of Indetermined LOVE (Five Female Contra Five Male Marriage System) all undermine conventionalized binary and essentialist concepts of these categories.²⁶ The use of English, German, and Paik's innovation of a hybrid German-English language further emphasizes this concern, as

well as the map's agenda of questioning established meaning in favor of creative mixing. Qiu Zhijie's *Map of Total Art* can certainly be contextualized within this art historical context of crossing established boundaries of meaning and meaning making, of writing counter narrative as a way of situating and emancipating yourself from conventional art historical frameworks. The *Map of Total Art* contributes to a (postcolonial) critique of Western modernity. The artist not only includes additional historical and cultural references that so far have been left out from dominant Eurocentric discourses and histories of socially engaged art. By adopting a cartographic approach to construct a spatially and temporally entangled history, he also critiques the linear and binary framework of modern Western history writing and its immanent effect of exclusion and "othering."

But in contrast to Reinhardt, Maciunas and Paik, and contemporary maps of this type, for example by Lia Perjovschi and Walid Raad, whose art historiographical maps are visualizations of historiographies that have a beginning and an end, Qiu Zhijie's mappings, including the *Map of Total Art*, are conceptualized as ongoing historiographies in the process of being written and lived, which is articulated by the maps' cropped edges, the ongoing series of mapping art history, his adoption of a continuing temporal structure (*buxi*, continuum) as the governing principle of art, and map making as a historiographic practice.²⁷

I believe that Qiu Zhijie's emphasis on the ongoing and the relational as key aspects of art and historiography can be explained by adopting two different yet interrelated lenses. On the one hand, it relates to the artist's lived experiences in a transculturally entangled world, that is, ongoing and relational, which I already mentioned above. On the other hand, it can also be understood in the context of his critical engagement with the Chinese literary concept of art as self-cultivation, which is, I argue, related to an epistemology of relational and open-ended historiographic art.

**Art as self-cultivation:
an epistemology of relational and
open-ended historiographic art**

History writing was a constitutive element in the production as well as the reception of art in China, particularly in the context of the Confucian understanding of art as self-cultivation.²⁸ Calligraphers and painters referenced certain artistic, intellectual, and moral traditions through productive acts of copying and in so doing constructed specific narratives of art. Based on a processual, open, and relational concept of the artwork, recipients of calligraphy and painting added inscriptions

and seals, thus contributing to collaborative history writing.²⁹ Through these historiographic practices, both artists and recipients inscribed themselves in certain histories and constituted themselves as historical subjects. In hierarchical Confucian society, the writing of history through art had a political function since it was through this very practice that the continuity of certain narratives, their inherent power structures as well as aesthetic and moral values were maintained. Artists and recipients were shaped by histories but at the same time were also active agents engaged in writing history.

Map of Total Art
2012, detail



In the Confucian understanding, art and art images respectively were conceived as actors in an assumed interrelational historically and socially constructed reality.

The painting *Early Spring (Zao chun)* by the Northern Song court painter Guo Xi (c. 1020 – c. 1090) serves as an example in this regard. As Stanley Murashige has explained, the work shows evidence of Confucian influence. The landscape painting is conceived as thematizing how man and the world interrelate in a stable and hierarchical political order governed by a ruler whose governance was legitimized cosmologically. The central peak represents the emperor and the pine trees stand for the literati scholars serving the court.³⁰ On a more abstract level, Guo Xi’s painting embodies the Confucian persuasion that the world is constituted through relationships, that human beings are constituted socially through their respective social roles, and historically by inscribing themselves into particular histories, here evident through certain painting styles that were copied by the artist and in which recipients would also inscribe themselves by re-enacting the brushstrokes.

According to the Confucian worldview, art images are conceived as articulations and media of moral self-cultivation and, in this regard, they serve historiographic and social functions. Self-cultivation in the Confucian sense means to learn, to relate, and to inscribe oneself in specific historical narratives and their related ethical/moral premises in order to cultivate, that is to generate oneself, as a moral human being and at the same time, by so doing, to contribute to the continuation of a certain history and its related moral values and assumptions.

In concrete practical terms, this means that in Confucian image culture and practice, for example, to copy, write, or paint according to the style of a specific master was never only an aesthetic, but always also a political choice, since style was conceived as an embodiment of specific moral and ethical premises.

Not only artists, but also recipients of artworks in this Confucian context were engaged as constitutive “participants” in history. By adding commentaries, so called colophones, and their personal seals to existent artworks, they inscribed themselves in history and by so doing practiced historiography.

It is in this regard that the identity of an artwork, a calligraphy, or a painting wasn’t based on its physical materiality but rather on the continuity of traditions, as attested by seals and colophones of multiple viewers and collectors. Wang Xizhi’s (303–361) *Letters on the Presentation of Oranges (Fengju tie)* is a good example here. What’s conceived as the artwork isn’t just Wang Xizhi’s calligraphy but also the numerous and diverse comments, signatures, and seals that generations of recipients and collectors added until the end of the imperial period in 1912, when the work was transferred into a museum collection and became an enclosed art object. In other words, an artwork wasn’t conceived as an expression of one individual artist but as an ongoing collaborative historiographic project of generational exchanges. The common denominator and premise of this collaboration was a shared interest in and appreciation of Wang Xizhi’s calligraphic script, which embodied certain aesthetic as well as ideological values. Since the reception of Chinese calligraphy and ink painting not only meant reading the semantic content but also bodily enacting the brushstrokes—which were conceived as traces of certain socially and historiographically constituted subjects—the later participants in the historiographic collaboration were still able to engage in quasi-physical relations with all contributors of the artwork, even if they had lived in another time and space. Since literati artists would often write commentaries and add their seal in company of fellow artists during literati gatherings, these practices of self-cultivation also had a community building function that served the construction of the social, moral, intellectual, and aesthetic identity of literati officials.

Conclusion

Qiu Zhijie’s interest in mapping, I argue, can be conceived as a critical examination and re-invention of the Confucian tradition of self-cultivation as a relational and open-ended historiographical practice of art making. The *Map of Total Art* engages the viewer as constitutive participant in the process of constructing social and historical reality. In a similar way like Guo Xi’s landscape, the map asks viewers to temporalize their gaze and to intellectually and bodily engage in certain spatial and temporal structures, which in turn constitute the subject in specific ways. While traditional Chinese painting, according to the Confucian concept of self-cultivation, asked the viewers to relate themselves and their social role to certain power structures in order to ensure the continuity of a specific social and historical order, Qiu Zhijie re-invents self-cultivation as a critical, that is, transformational and emancipatory self-technique that enables recipients to penetrate one’s own and reality’s social and historical constructedness.

It is in this respect that mapping as a critical practice of self-cultivation means to continuously construct and reconstruct reality, write and rewrite art history relationally and as an ongoing process by examining existent power structures and by constructing new reality constituting interrelations in order to “transcend and free ourselves from the prejudice and set values that control our mind, to refresh our knowledge and sensibility.”³¹

¹ Qiu Zhijie’s recent solo exhibition *Qiu Zhijie: Mappa Mundi* at the UCCA Center for Contemporary Art in Beijing (2019) provided insights into the large body of maps the artist created since 2011. For more information about the show, please visit <https://ucca.org.cn/en/exhibition/qiu-zhijie-mappa-mundi/> (last accessed December 10, 2019).

² Conversation with Qiu Zhijie, New York, October 2017.

³ Interrelating different histories and concepts of art as life resonates with the context of production and the intended reception of the work. Firstly, together with a couple of other maps, the *Map of Total Art* was Qiu Zhijie’s artistic answer to the museum’s invitation to participate with his solo show in the exhibition series *Prompts & Triggers* (April 26, 2012 – January 6, 2013), for which various artists were asked to critically engage with cultural differences beyond discursive frameworks of cultural essentialism, in order to analyze and consequently prevent social anxieties in a globalized world (Witte de With, Rotterdam, 2012). Secondly, the maps were also part of the conceptualizing process for the 9th Shanghai Biennale in 2012 entitled *Re-activation*, which Qiu Zhijie co-curated together with an international team.

⁴ Qiu Zhijie, “On Total Art,” undated, no page numbers, <http://www.qiuzhijie.com/e-critiquelunwen/016.htm> (last accessed December 10, 2019), translated by Jennifer Dorothy Lee with Rebecca E. Karl.

⁵ Qiu Zhijie, “Total Art Based on Social Investigation,” in *Yishu Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*, vol. 5, no. 3, September 2006, pp. 77–85:78.

⁶ My research on contemporary art is based on this multi-sited, bottom-up perspective on the global. Other scholars who are adopting such an approach are, for example: Reiko Tomii, *Radicalism in the Wilderness. International Contemporaneity and 1960s Art in Japan* (Cambridge Mass. and London: MIT Press, 2016) and Dominic Sachsenmaier, *Global Perspectives on Global History: Theories and Approaches in a Connected World* (Cambridge Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁷ James Corner, “The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique, Invention,” in *Mappings*, edited by Denis Cosgrove (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), pp. 213–52.

⁸ Denis Cosgrove, “Introduction,” *ibid.*, pp. 1–23.

⁹ <http://hk.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/903290/qiu-zhijie-making-maps-against-the-madness-of-the-world> (last accessed December 10, 2019).

¹⁰ When asking Qiu Zhijie why he wrote the word Transculture located in a cemetery, next to Study of Mortuary System, he explained that transculture is achieved after death. Most obviously, he meant that after death all cultural differences are irrelevant. Moreover, in the context of his interest in an ongoing open temporal structure and its effects on constituting reality, meaning, and subjects respectively, I would argue that it could also mean that only if we acknowledge that everything is transient, and therefore continuously changing, transculture is possible. For more detailed insights into this issue see my forthcoming book *Contemporaneity’s Transcultural Entanglements. Historiographic Interventions by Qiu Zhijie, Li Ran and Liu Ding*.

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¹⁸ Steven Shankman, “These Three Come Forth Together, But are Differently Named: Laozi, Zhuangzi, Plato,” in *Early China / Ancient Greece: Thinking Through Comparisons*, edited by Steven Shankman and Stephen W. Durrant

(Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), pp. 75–92:80–81.

¹⁹ Johnson Chang, “An Archaeological Position on the Future,” in *Suicidology of the Nanjing Bridge*, edited by the Tyler Institute, Singapore (Singapore: Tyler Institute, 2008), pp. 22–29:23.

²⁰ Birgit Hopfener, “Qiu Zhijie’s Self-conception as an Artist: Doing Art in a Critical Historical and Transcultural Perspective,” in *Journal of Historiography, Modern and Contemporary Chinese Art: Historiographic Reflections*, no. 10, 2014, <http://arthistoriography.wordpress.com/> (last accessed January 3, 2020).

²¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein called this issue “perception of aspect.” See https://arete.unimarconi.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/ARETE-Volume-2-2017-13-Wittgenstein_s_philosophy_of_seeing_as.pdf (last accessed December 10, 2019).

²² Ruth Watson, “Mapping and Contemporary Art,” in *The Cartography Journal*, vol. 46, no. 4, 2009, pp. 293–307.

²³ Natasa Petresin-Bachelez, “Innovative Forms of Archives, part one: Exhibitions, Events, Books, Museums and Lia Perjovski’s Contemporary Art Archive,” <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/13/61328/innovative-forms-of-archives-part-one-exhibitions-events-books-museums-and-lia-perjovskis-contemporary-art-archive/> (last accessed December 10, 2019).

²⁴ Robert Storr, *How to Look. Ad Reinhardt. Art Comics* (Ostfildern and New York: Hatje Cantz and David Zwirner, 2014).

²⁵ Astrit Schmidt-Burckhardt, *Stammbäume der Kunst. Zur Genealogie der Avantgarde* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2005); Astrit Schmidt-Burckhardt, *Maciunas’ Learning Machines: From Art History to a Chronology of Fluxus*, second revised and enlarged edition (Vienna: Springer Vienna Architecture, 2011).

²⁶ I would like to thank Franziska Koch for sharing her archival findings on Nam June Paik’s map with me.

²⁷ Qiu Zhijie has developed this concept of “continuum” (*buxi*) in the context of the exhibition *Continuum – Generation By Generation*, which he curated for the Chinese Pavilion at the 57th Venice Biennale in 2017. For more detailed insights into this issue see my *Contemporaneity’s Transcultural Entanglements* (forthcoming).

²⁸ Jean François Billeter, *The Chinese Art of Writing* (New York: Skira/Rizzoli, 1990).

²⁹ Lothar Ledderose, “Chinese Calligraphy: Its Aesthetic Dimension and Social Function,” in *Orientations*, vol. 17, no. 10, 1986, pp. 35–50.

³⁰ Stanley Murashige, “Rhythm, Order, Change, and Nature in Guo Xi’s Early Spring,” in *Monumenta Serica*, vol. 43, no. 1, 1995, pp. 337–64.

³¹ Qiu, Zhijie, “The Phase of Total Art (*Zongti yishu jieduan*),” 2006–present, pdf file edited and provided by the artist.



Mapping the Mapper A Reading of the *Journeys Without Arrivals* Exhibition

Davide Quadrio

They musicked a resistance,
defying any kind of definition.¹

In the spring of 2017, Qiu Zhijie's artistic work from 1985 to 2017 was presented and examined in an extensive solo exhibition that showed the wealth of Qiu's artistic vision by mapping the journey of this exceptional artist throughout his flamboyant career.

The exhibition *Journeys Without Arrivals* has been an extensive endeavor that ultimately presented the complexity of this artist through a colossal number of works: calligraphy and drawings, videos, installations, and photographs. Taken together, these form a unique and exciting universe. Staged initially at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, the show then toured in various configurations within Geneva and Lund,² especially expanding the possibilities of this archival exhibition, mutating and morphing in the three museums that hosted it.

The exhibition included a series of Qiu's calligraphic works from 1990 to 2016: the large installation *Jingling Chronicle Theater Project*; *A Suicidology of the Nanjing Yangtze River Bridge*; and *Railway from Lhasa to Kathmandu*, with Tibetan visual art and traditions; a series of his photographic and video productions from 2000 to the present, mainly self-portraits; and a new series of his wonderful maps, which will be the focal point of this essay.

All the works that punctuated his area of interest and artistic development were organized around the main work in the exhibition, which is his own portrait. This is done through

a variegated, unexpected, and powerful collection of memorabilia of his life and work that show, in an articulated and startling way, the history of China in the last five decades. This display of objects beautifully revealed the relationship between Qiu's own biography, the history of China, and China's relationship with the world since Qiu's birth in 1969. This 2016 work, titled *My Hundred Objects*, is indeed the map of the mapper.

Maps as translations

In this show, Qiu's curatorial voice shone, once again intertwining Qiu as the artist and his own curator, and addressing very powerfully the issue of the excessively simplistic view of China, or the tension between what is read as the two blocks "East" and "West," namely between communism and capitalism. The exhibition contributed to the development of a deeper and enhanced understanding of Chinese history through art and its actors, artists, curators, educators, and organizations. Along with these, it clearly portrayed Qiu Zhijie as a complex figure, who from very early on questioned how art may be an engine or gateway for change.

The narration of this adventure (both personal and collective) came to life piece by piece as visitors walked through the galleries and the various spaces. In this sense, they were able to visually enter China through Qiu's art and they were invited to reflect upon how the artworks communicate with each other, marveling upon their exuberant number and the relationship between them. This

Journeys Without Arrivals,
Centre d'Art Contemporain
Genève, Geneva, 2017,
exhibition view
Photo © Annik Wetter



experience hence became a journey, which required a continued effort on the part of the visitors: indeed, they had to maintain a pronounced and constant attention while fostering patience and sophisticated contemplative thoughts upon entering such a diverse and complex world.

“As an artist, I am trying to use all possible methods, all possible media, to try to . . . I think my ideal media is the relationship of all objects,” said Qiu Zhijie. In this exhibition, the artist was pictured as a body that had been ripped apart and transformed into a detailed map of his own creativity, making this not only a form of expression, but a manifestation of the artist as a whole, in his total-

ity. Seemingly, one of the most important aspects of *Journeys Without Arrivals* is showing through Qiu’s work China and by extension the world—both as a dismembered body.³ In doing so, the visitor could access, through this dispersing knowledge, ways to confront and overpass the fear that is ever growing in the world today.

To further clarify the standpoint of Qiu’s work and the curatorial approach, this exhibition was constructed not with a (post)imperialist idea of “moving” content or creating “exposure” to the Other (the Other being China), as is so often observed in a number of artistic efforts in these days. On the contrary, the very potency of this show consisted in going beyond

My Hundred Objects, 2016
installation of objects on shelves,
dimensions variable

Installation of teachers lineage
in the Chinese Pavilion at
the 57th Venice Biennale, 2017

this “transporting” exoticism by empowering “translators” (Qiu) and “cross-cultural activators” (the curatorial team) as connectors in the uncertain territory of the “in-between.”⁴

In this sense, the fluidity with which Qiu Zhijie and the curatorial team built bridges between cultures—Qiu being an excellent case for this feat—stands as a new paradigm for the creation of a zone freed from fear, limits, and overall simplifications. This free zone, which allows us to really observe the world (in Chinese *sbi*,⁵ meaning the multitude of sentient beings), reshapes it at the same time. Indeed, artists, institutions, and operators are able to claim the “emotional” as a tool to generate unstable truths that, although stemming from intuitions, are nonetheless real. Intuitions themselves have always proven to be germinal in the establishment of a myriad of vectorial

truths (even scientific truths) soliciting complex revelations.

In this interstice of unstable cultural existence, Qiu Zhijie is the key custodian of the interspaces between cultural worlds for which he has responsibilities with ethical repercussions. It is for this reason that Qiu’s work acts more than ever within the cracks in between systems, not only in cultural realms but also in their structural embodiments: institutions, economy, and politics.

It is in this context that Qiu represents an ideal example of the sophistication of an artist as intermediary, with his visions and the vagueness of his ideas (as an artist, merchant, teacher, and political activist) blending to become strong, resolute, profound, and clear gestures and images. Without the proper mediation and interpretation offered by the



in-between language, these images would have remained silent in a context extraneous to the Greater China. So, the objective of the exhibition was to uncover new ways of reading the artworks, the philosophy and the history of Qiu’s works, life, and actions. His maps are of course the best example of his way of accomplishing this.

The maps

On the occasion of the 2012 Shanghai Biennale, Qiu created a series of maps, understood as mind-maps, which conceptualized the curatorial strategy for the Biennale: the *Map of Total Art*. Everything started with this series, for which he made a map of his global ideas in contemporary life shown as a utopia. Religion, lifestyles, philosophy, myths, characteristics, and developments in social as well as technological fields are all covered.

In most cases, Qiu refers to real concepts, ideas, and the social and cultural desires for a better world. These different scripts cast doubt upon Qiu’s position: is he an observer of the world or more of an artisan of a crafted reality? It seems that the artist is more inside the world he has drawn than outside it. Indeed, this world is a very realistic representation of his solid imagination, knowledge, and interests.

Since then, the universe of his maps increased and expanded, very often to the point of becoming site-specific exercises and monumental pieces, such as the wall he created for the São Paulo Biennale in 2014.⁶ This wall was more than thirty meters long and six meters high and was created in front of my eyes in a little less than a week, without any assistants but a calligrapher who helped him write over two thousand words that compiled the blueprint of the São Paulo Biennale in this incredible and immense graphic representation of the curatorial statement.

The maps created for the *Journeys Without Arrivals* exhibitions were made on ink paper and framed with wooden structures. On this occasion, the maps surrounded a 2013



work entitled *A History of Plants Colonization*, which is a mixed media installation with bamboo woven baskets and actual fruits and vegetables originating from all around the world. It physically presented the idea of nomadic transience of commercial activities, with endemic plants and fruits indeed colonizing the whole world. Another layer of the work is the baskets, which were traditionally produced in rural China; Qiu is keeping this tradition alive by commissioning to the villagers artworks developed using techniques that are millennia old.⁷

The walls surrounding *A History of Plants Colonization* were filled with very appropriate *Maps of Technological Ethics* (2016, ink on paper). Among the others,⁸ the masterful 2017 monumental piece *Imaginary Geography* stood

A History of Plants Colonization, 2013
bamboo woven baskets, fruits and vegetables, dimensions variable
Photo © Peter Cox

out, depicting a world of imagination, a geographical fantasy connecting the world of East Asia with the global knowledge through a river of data, information, associations, and precise references to the extensive knowledge of Qiu Zhijie.

Technically, Qiu’s work is based on the Chinese ink painting tradition, but subsequently it evolves it into a new paradigm of optical manipulation where the long-established landscape structure is tilted in such a way that the strict rules of composition of ink painting are completely distorted. Thus, the resulting vision is more similar to Google Maps than to Chinese traditional landscapes. In doing so, Qiu pushes forward a tradition of millennia and becomes himself a master among a lineage of masters.

Berlin, January 10, 2019

¹ Excerpt from the video in Christine Meisner’s installation, *The Freedom of*, 2015–16.

² *Journey Without Arrivals*, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, April 1 – September 24, 2017, curated by Davide Quadrio, Annie Flechter, and Charles Esche; then traveled to the Centre d’Art Contemporain Genève, Geneva, November 17, 2017 – January 14, 2018, curated by Davide Quadrio, Charles Esche, and Andrea Bellini; lastly to the Lunds Konsthall, Lund, February 17 – May 20, 2018, curated by Davide Quadrio, Charles Esche, and Annie Flechter.

³ Achille Mbembe wrote: “Inequalities will keep growing worldwide. But far from fueling a renewed cycle of class struggles, social conflicts will increasingly take the form of racism, ultra nationalism, sexism, ethnic and religious rivalries, xenophobia, homophobia and other deadly passions. The denigration of virtues such as care, compassion and kindness will go hand in hand with the belief, especially among the poor, that winning is all that matters and who wins—by whatever means necessary—is ultimately right. With the triumph of this neo-Darwinian approach to history-making, apartheid under various guises will be restored as the new old norm. Its restoration will pave the way to new separatist impulses, the erection of more walls, the militarisation of more borders, deadly forms of policing, more asymmetrical wars, splitting alliances and countless internal divisions including in established democracies. None of the above is accidental. If anything, it is a symptom of structural shifts, which will become ever more apparent as the new century unfolds. The world as we knew it since the end of World War II, the long years of decolonisation, the Cold War and the defeat of communism has ended. Another long and deadlier game has started. The main clash of the first half of the twenty-first century will not oppose religions or civilisations. It will

oppose liberal democracy and neoliberal capitalism, the rule of finance and the rule of the people, humanism and nihilism.” See Achille Mbembe, “The age of humanism is ending,” in *Mail&Guardian Africa’s Best Read*, December 22, 2016, <http://mg.co.za/article/2016-12-22-00-the-age-of-humanism-is-ending>.

⁴ When I talk about “translators,” I refer to a particular category of cultural mediators (individuals, groups, and institutions) that, clustering together or with independent actions, place themselves in a position of fragility. Being a translator entails the adoption of a standpoint where mistakes are inevitable and should somehow be embraced. Translators are creating knowledge through making, are powerhouses who, by living physically and intellectually in between cultures and languages, define and keep negotiating meanings (semantic) and references (visual, cultural, historical). This means that the act of interpreting creates bridging forces between cultural clusters, where translations are journeys more than start/finishing points. With this process, translators shape what we can define as “hybridity,” the underline motif that allows the creation of a cross-cultural language. Translating bears the responsibility of drafting the ABC of a common alphabet that simultaneously considers several sources, meanings, and references that are not per se coming from a specific privileged system or hegemonic cultural references.

⁵ 世
⁶ São Paulo Biennale, 2014, *How to (...) Things that Don’t Exist*.

⁷ Anji County, Huzhou, Zhejiang.
⁸ *All Living Things – Man with Destiny*, *Out of Border*, 2017; *All Living Things – Man with Destiny*, *The Supreme Seductress*, 2017; *All Living Things – Man with Destiny*, *The Maid Servant*, 2017; *The World Before*. All ink on paper.

“So That We May Sooner Arrive at the Uncharted Areas”: Qiu Zhijie’s Maps

Qilan Shen

Let's talk about the secrets of this world.

No. They are not self-explanatory information, nor well-known historical facts.

They are the delicate spiritual connections between things and objects, connections that transcend time and space, sort of quantum entanglements that go beyond the sensible but generate impacts nonetheless.

Such secrets are at the core of Qiu Zhijie's maps: some have been revealed, others concealed in some unexpected places. It's always been a labor-and-intellect-intensive endeavor to either discover or store secrets, which always require their own special vessels—vessels like seashells that harbor all the roaring waves and heartbreaking sighs of the entire ocean. Qiu Zhijie creates maps to store such secrets.

Discovering certain secrets and weaving some others concurrently, Qiu's maps are like the spell books of an alchemist that trigger quite ambivalent feelings among their viewers—they are overwhelming with all the sweeping big data, but also promise ecstatic experiences for those lucky enough to find those treasures buried within them. Here, in Qiu's maps, everything is related to the secrets of the world.

Qiu Zhijie has walked among these secrets.

Long before creating *Mappa Mundi*, Qiu once used his own body as a brush to paint on the earth, which was his paper. This refers to his 2006 project, *Railway from Lhasa to Kathmandu*, which recorded the artist's early efforts

to discover the hidden body buried within maps. The work is a homage to the earliest mapper of Tibet. According to Qiu Zhijie's research, Nain Singh, a 33-year-old Indian man, accepted a task to measure Tibet in 1863. He had to journey all the way from the Indian side of the Himalayas across the entirety of Tibet to Lhasa. And all he could depend on as his measuring tools was nothing but his own body. Before the journey began, Singh underwent a two-year training program to ensure that every stride he took was exactly 33 inches. By counting the number of strides he had taken, Nain thus calculated the length of his journey. Every stride was translated into data, which were later used to accurately map the Tibetan Plateau. Besides the complex historical and political motives that were undoubtedly part of this mapping project, what truly fascinated Qiu Zhijie is the corporeality that is embedded within it—each and every information went through Nain Singh's body. Qiu Zhijie decided to walk the route in the opposite direction, from Lhasa to Kathmandu, using exactly the same calculating and positioning techniques as Singh, so that data generated by his body would form the core of his work. Qiu even wore an iron rail on his feet in order to guarantee that every stride he took would cover exactly 33 inches, so equaling those of Singh.

The journey was anything but easy. Qiu finished 800 km in 2006 and the rest 300 km in 2007. During the journey he struggled against the pain caused by the iron rail, which almost mutilated his ankles. But still he perse-

Map of the Art World
for the exhibition *Mappa*
Mundi, UCCA Center
for Contemporary Art,
Beijing, 2019, detail



Railway from Lhasa to Kathmandu, 2006, detail

vered. He considers physical pain a part of the work—his body needed to experience the pain that produces memories—so that he could truly empathize with Nain Singh. This journey was like a religious ritual, which involved human sacrifice and agony in order to invoke the iron will of the Indian mapper 150 years ago as well as all the hardships he had experienced. In this way, Qiu Zhijie integrated data with human flesh and thus uncovered an emotional dimension, which he would always retain in his future map making—a job most considered to be a process of pure abstraction and distillation. Maps made by Qiu Zhijie never fail to combine abstraction and emotion.

Everything in the whole universe is connected, in a sense, to everything else. Howev-

er, to catch the reverberation sent from the distant past or a faraway place, one has to build the channel of resonance of their own specific individual experiences. It is these echoes and reverberations in time and space—the results of mutual selections between fate and chance—that ultimately form the secrets of Qiu Zhijie’s maps and endow them with unique values.

People are easily intimidated by the gigantic amount of information and the unexpected combinations thereof in Qiu’s maps. However, this only stands for one of the many perspectives to understand these maps, an initial entry, which is by itself complicated enough to inundate first-time viewers the same way like a stormy ocean made of knowledge and information.

Yet it has never been Qiu’s intention to impress people with his erudition. The astronomical amount of data he creates has more to do with his methodology, the logical procedure of exhaustion: a map shall, to fulfill his ambitions, include every possible information and clue under a given category. Qiu Zhijie is obsessed with the human pursuit of the unknown. And he keeps asking the following questions: What do we know? What can we know? What is left to be known?

Qiu once commented on his own maps: “Maps are not for the production of understanding, but for that of knowing. I want to know my surroundings, direction, and means of traveling. I create maps to find my way out.” He prefers to call his method of information collection “exhaustive,” which is to put everything known down in front of the eyes; more precisely, to include everything identifiable in his maps. According to Qiu Zhijie’s genealogy of knowledge, what he is creating is nothing less than idiosyncratic two-dimensional edifices of worldviews, with all the objective information and subjective cognition serving as bricks, and the maps themselves as skeletal structures. Within this genealogy, Qiu cares less about power structures than the connections and transitions between identifiable objects, which he has connected with one another through the circulation of mountains, rivers, lakes, oceans, and railways.

Qiu Zhijie’s maps are his alchemy of the world and worldviews. Once inside, a viewer will easily get disoriented by surprising findings, or taste the absurdity of life amid marvelous intellectual ecstasies. As an “alchemist” who makes maps, Qiu has his own unique formula created through the distillation of his life and cognition in combination with his “handicraft,” which integrates all the learnings, skills, and accomplishments of his artistic career till then: he uses ink and brush, which serve as the tonal ground of his childhood as well as the beginning of all his artistic thinking; his mastery of Chinese landscape painting,

which allows him to play with mountains and rivers in the maps; calligraphy, which flows in his veins enabling him to develop the style of characters and letters that suits the maps best. A voracious glutton of human knowledge as a whole, Qiu has projected his own eclectic system of knowledge onto the maps. As an important witness and participant of Chinese contemporary art in the last three decades, he has always been at the center of clashes between waves of thinking. In this respect, he is keen on eliminating blind spots and expanding his own territory of knowledge so that it could connect the East and the West, the past and the present. His attitude toward knowledge is clear—to exhaust all possibilities in the known world, so that voyages into the unknown might be finally launched.

In our flat capitalist world and all too digital era, it seems a bit bizarre to shed sincere tears over abstract ideas, such as the loneliness of human existence. As a thinker-artist, Qiu Zhijie carefully seals all these in his maps—the naughty and the desolate, the heart of a child and the soul of an intellectual, the kid and the cynic—identifying with the world and taming the accidental. The maps body forth worldviews that are soaked with the artist’s love and sorrow. Qiu is an obsessed and voracious man: he is obsessed with learning everything that has been created both in the West and the East and his ambition is to include the entire human history with all its details in his maps, to record all that is known, and to find those blanks that might hoard possibilities.

He is such an indefatigable information collector. After filling hundreds of drafts that pile up in his studio like little mounds, these data will be translated into mountains and rivers on his maps with a set of mind mapping techniques. With his superb skills, Qiu is able to inject into his maps a myriad of information, which, combined with his soaring imagination, give birth to fluidity and contingency. Cartography, traditionally a process of knowledge transformation into visual images according to

a certain set of rules, usually leads simultaneously to the distillation of information and the petrification of knowledge. Yet Qiu Zhijie wants his maps to teem with life and unpredictability; he wants the distilled information to still be able to pulse, breathe, flow, evolve; he wants to infuse them with life so that they can grow with indefinite potentials.

Qiu Zhijie's maps are the perfect carrier of his "total art." He even suggested that a more ideal term would be "Guan Tong Art" or "art of thorough knowledge," which involves "the simultaneous fulfillment of one's inner freedom and external social responsibilities," "the mutual enhancement of rational studies and emotional activities," "the cross-fertilization of different types of works that one does," and "the integration of subversive artistic experiences with mundane daily life."

Qiu Zhijie's view of art serves also as his worldview, which is that art-making should solve genuine problems in life and society. Art is not equal to artwork-making, but a reflection of the entire world that the artist has involved in it. Qiu's maps are not the result of cartographic measurement but the totality of his actions, physical labors and perceptions, plus an enormous amount of brainwork and intellectual processing, and the fruit of his "art of thorough knowledge." They are his artworks as well as actions, an encrypted book that he creates for this world. For those who can decipher his maps, they are bequeathed with the treasures hidden in several worlds awaiting to be discovered.

Traveling in the jungle of history, Qiu, good at words and logic, chooses maps as his artistic vehicle with the hope that every viewer might form her or his own map. According to him, the world has never been level. While reading articles with linear logic or seeing artworks with built-in messages, the audience only receive manipulated information. With an emphasis on openness, Qiu Zhijie's maps allow the audience to form their own distinc-

tive maps based on their own knowledge structures and understanding.

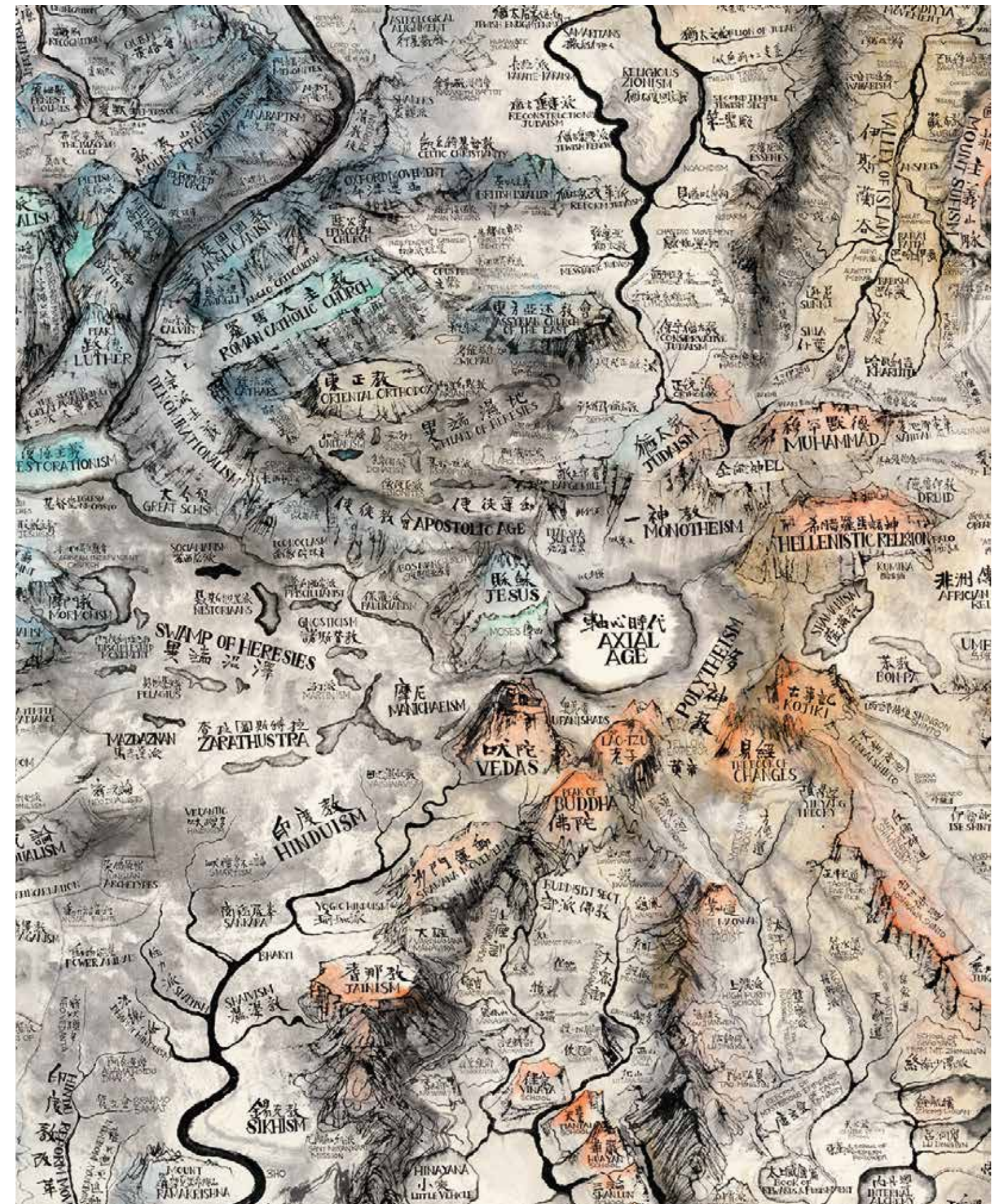
The charms of Qiu's maps lie not only in their alchemical qualities but also their capability to suggest the "unknown" by marking everything that is "known."

Qiu once explained his fervor for knowledge: “[I’m] looking for a sense of security. The moment you put things down on a map, you can depend on the map to explore unknown territories, to touch the unknown with what we already know. Or else they would be absolutely mysterious, even imperceptible. After mapping all existing knowledge, we will have a much better chance to touch those areas that do exist but are usually out of human perception.”

An enthusiastic reader of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Qiu Zhijie will never forget the difference between “signifier” and “signified,” nor ignore the existence of “what cannot be said.” Wittgenstein insists that we shall state clearly about what we can speak of: whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must remain silent. With his maps, Qiu Zhijie is providing, however, a quite different response to this issue: his maps not only state clearly about what we can identify, but also include all that cannot be spoken of, the secrets, so that they might one day be discovered. Things not yet identified and paths not yet discovered are precisely his “way out.” He creates maps so as to arrive at the world beyond them.

“What is knowledge? For me, maps function like highways that help travelers cut down the time spent on journeys before arriving at the wilderness. The most exciting part begins when we step into the wild. Yet without knowledge, you might spend days wandering about non-virgin territories. Therefore it’s necessary to find ways to skip those blocks that have already been named, explored, and surveyed by others. We should transform this knowledge created by others efficiently into our own experiences so as to arrive quickly at the unknown, which we need to summon all

Map of Religion – Some People Always Tend to Believe, 2015, detail



our emotional resources to deal with. I am obsessed with knowledge collection. Because I want to save time.”

“The function of maps is to help people sooner arrive at the uncharted areas. They are not for those who tread one place repetitively—you don’t need maps to find a familiar spot,” he stated firmly.

Still, Qiu Zhijie might have underestimated the true value of his maps, which amount to nothing less than a countercurrent in the epoch of big data—a quixotic charge indeed. During the years Qiu created these maps, he was also engaged in another important art project related to AI: Qiu hopes that he can train a same-minded AI to tackle most of his replicable works, such as teaching and lecturing, so that he can have more free time to create art. By teaching another intelligent entity everything he knows, Qiu Zhijie forces himself to face the possibility of being replaced, to create unprecedented art, and to arrive at uncharted areas.

And yet, different as they are, maps and artistic AIs actually share the same logic: a voracious artist, while exploring, devouring, and digesting all the nourishment the world has to offer, constantly crystallizes his unique individual experiences into pieces of artwork, which, once being finished, will be discharged out of the artist’s body without any hesitation or reluctance. With his exhaustive method of map making, Qiu Zhijie seems to be squeezing all the knowledge within his brain out into the known world with the sole aim of asking one question: What then? In terms of their density and intensity, Qiu Zhijie’s maps are indeed an alchemy of the world and worldviews. Moreover, these maps keep touching the boundaries of the existing world so as to form “synapses” within brand new worlds; they rename the order of things, and in a poetic manner blur the boundary between the fictional and the non-fictional.

Sometimes secrets will also seek secret-seekers.



When the Art Institute of Chicago contacted Qiu Zhijie, he was surprised by the fact that it was one of the venues for the Parliament of World’s Religions in 1893, the year when different religions around the world, most of which had been developing more or less independently for thousands of years, had the very first face-to-face meeting. The Japanese monk Soyen Shaku made a presentation on Zen, which was translated live into English by D. T. Suzuki, himself a very influential figure in the subsequent history of Zen. Swami Vivekananda, the Hindu delegate from India, charmed a large number of American audience with his presentation style and thus launched the

Working process of *Parliament of World’s Religions*, a work collected by the Art Institute of Chicago

Carved cement printing slabs of *Parliament of World’s Religions* sealed in a block

spread of Hinduism in the US. The Parliament, originally planned as a self-promotion of Catholicism and Christianity, ended up becoming a milestone for cultural integration and spiritual clash. Qiu Zhijie created a work to commemorate this event that included four blocks made of layers of concrete stacked together, each layer bearing the prints of important events and elements of every religion from their respective origins till the year 1893: one block was for Buddhism, Shinto and Zen, one for Hinduism, one for Islam, and one for Judaism and Christianity. The evolvement of religions is like the growth of a tree, each new layer carrying with it all the previous history of the tree. This is a very important piece by Qiu Zhijie, representing his exploration of world religions and theology, which was later projected onto his maps. In his *Map of Religion*, Qiu put down the Parliament of World’s Religions of 1893 as a lake. A significant encounter between different religions in the global context, the Parliament marked a critical point in time when various religious thinking started to swarm into heterogeneous cultures, like ocean currents. By including the title of this Parliament in his map, Qiu Zhijie was trying to invoke it with a work created right in the same venue where the Parliament took place—a moment when different times in history resonated with each other like the mutual illumination of lights.

While curating the exhibition *Archaeology of the Future* in 2005, Qiu Zhijie was already developing thoughts on Chinese people’s conceptualization of time. Instead of following any linear time, his maps always contain secret paths for the mysterious journeys that history has taken, as well as hidden flashbacks that string together fragments scattered in time.

So, what indeed is the use of maps in this wide, wide world? Qiu Zhijie’s maps exist to reveal the secrets of the world. With them, the artist aims to travel through different souls and piece together the views he has seen along the journey.

What Qiu Zhijie truly has a mind to describe is the logic and causality of everything, as well as the pains human beings have taken to create civilizations. We might not be able to truly appreciate the value and significance of his maps until we discover these secrets that are buried there. And maybe there are secrets hidden within these maps that even Qiu himself is unaware of, which is exactly his gift for all human beings—the unknown.

During my interview with Qiu Zhijie, he talked about “the invisible connections” and “taxonomic failures” that he has experienced in the process of map making.

“When the whole taxonomic system falls apart, it’s kind of romantic,” he said with a smile.

“Romantic in what sense?”

“During my research on tools and food, I suddenly realized that we have been using a small building to toast bread. Isn’t it kind of romantic?” And he winked naughtily.

WORKS

Pre-History

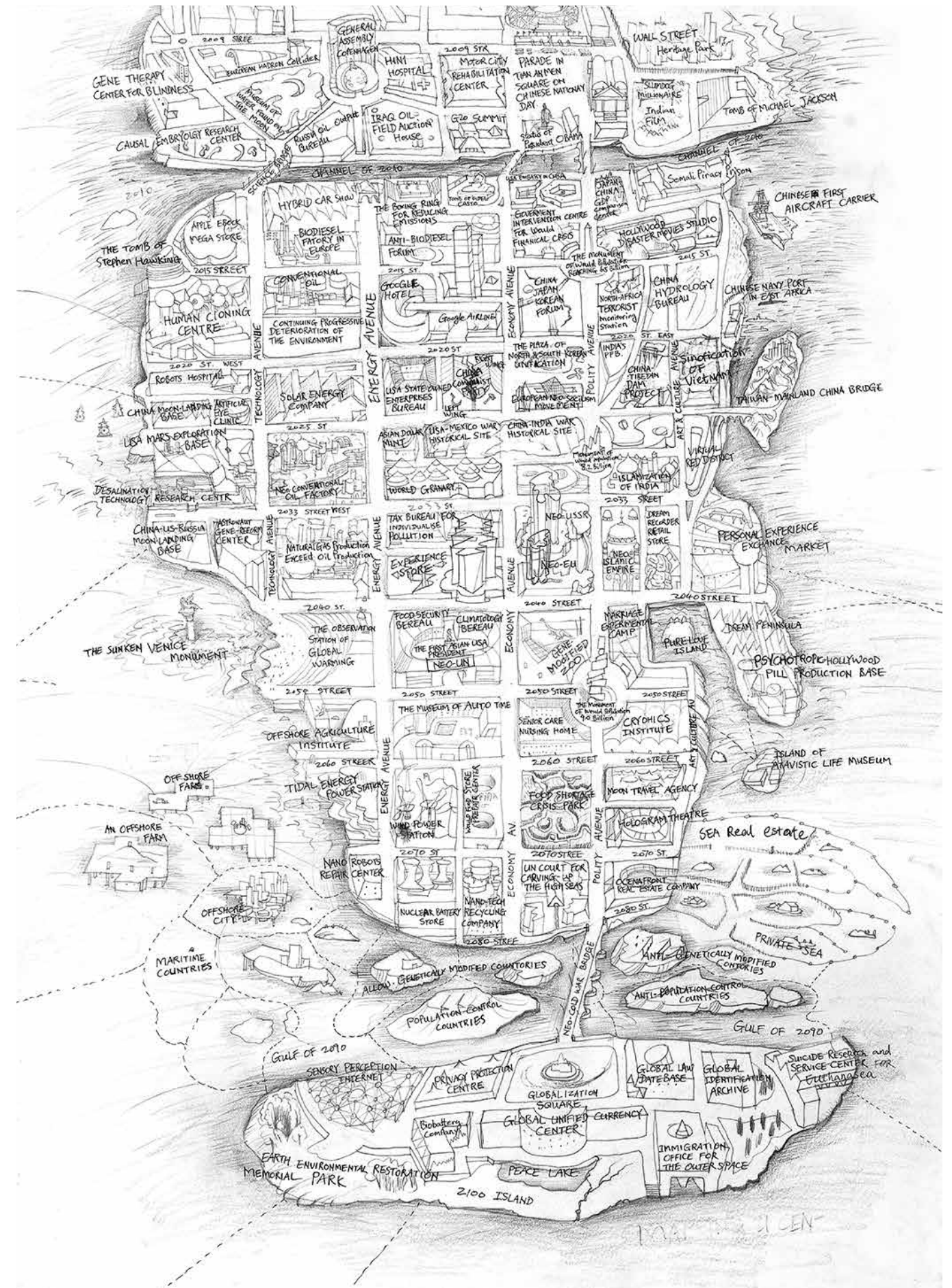
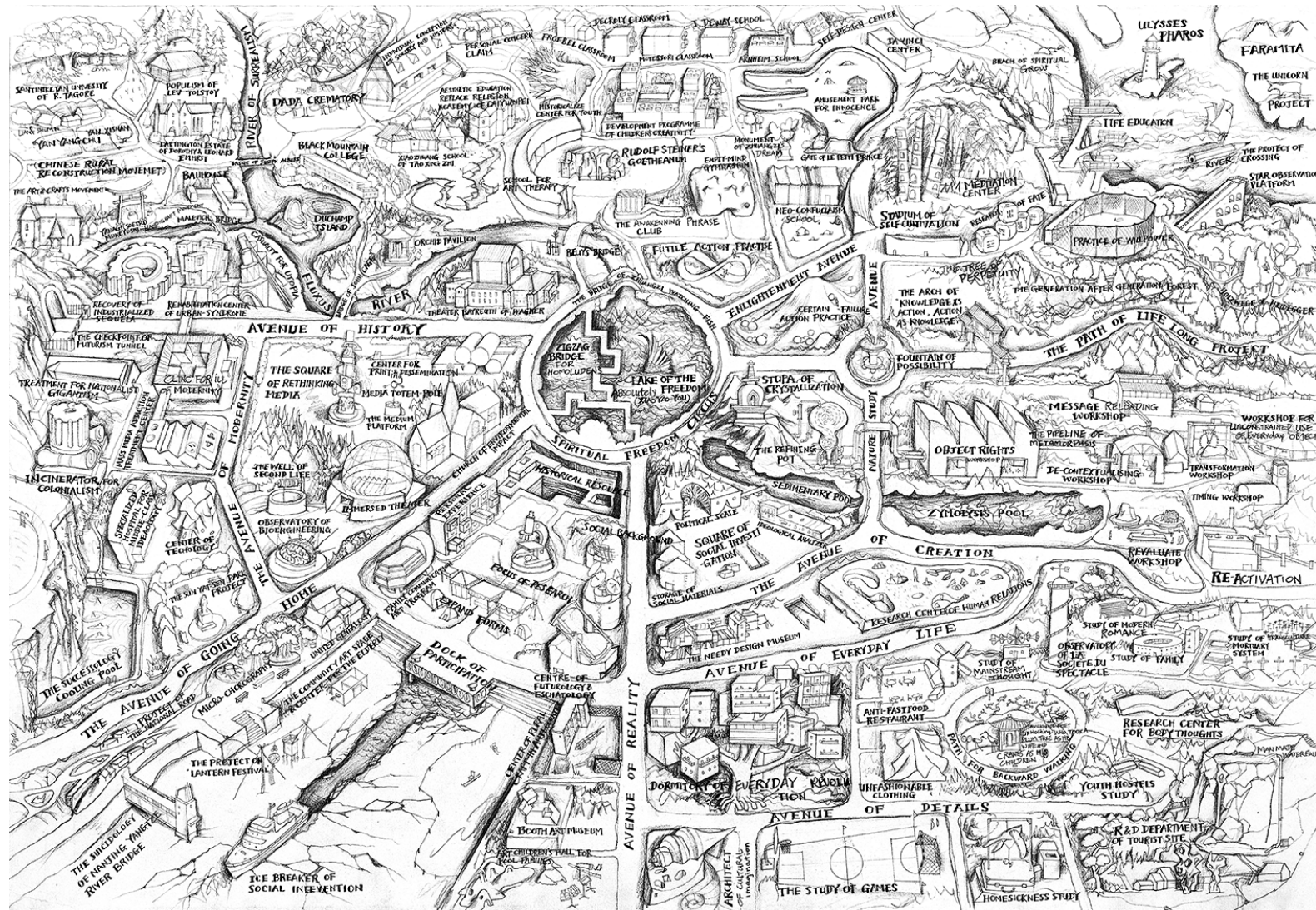
A. Series of maps in pencil or pencil and marker on paper, 2012

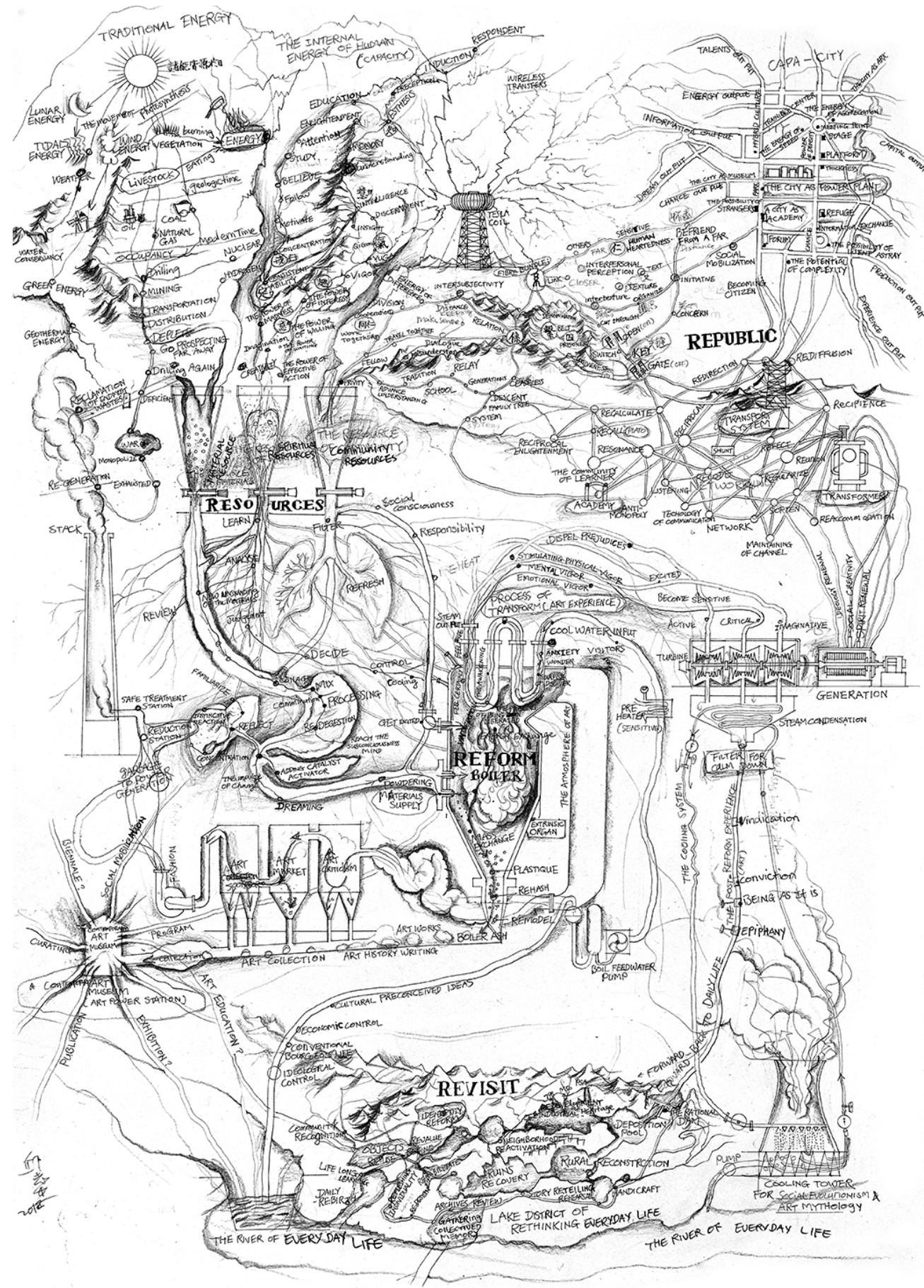
Map of Utopia
79 × 54 cm



Map of Total Art
54 × 79 cm

Map of the 21st Century
79 x 54 cm



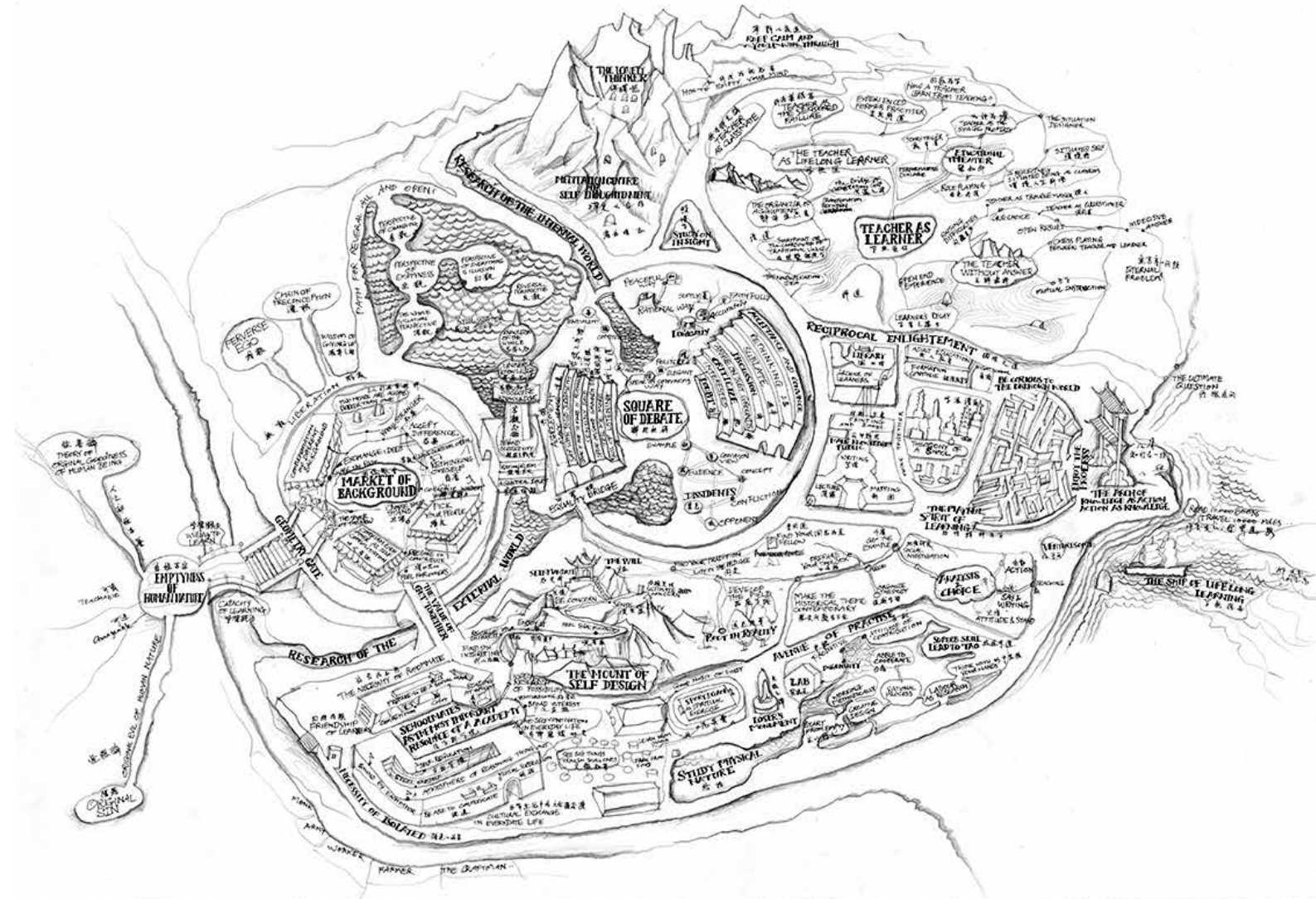


Map of Reactivation
79 x 54 cm

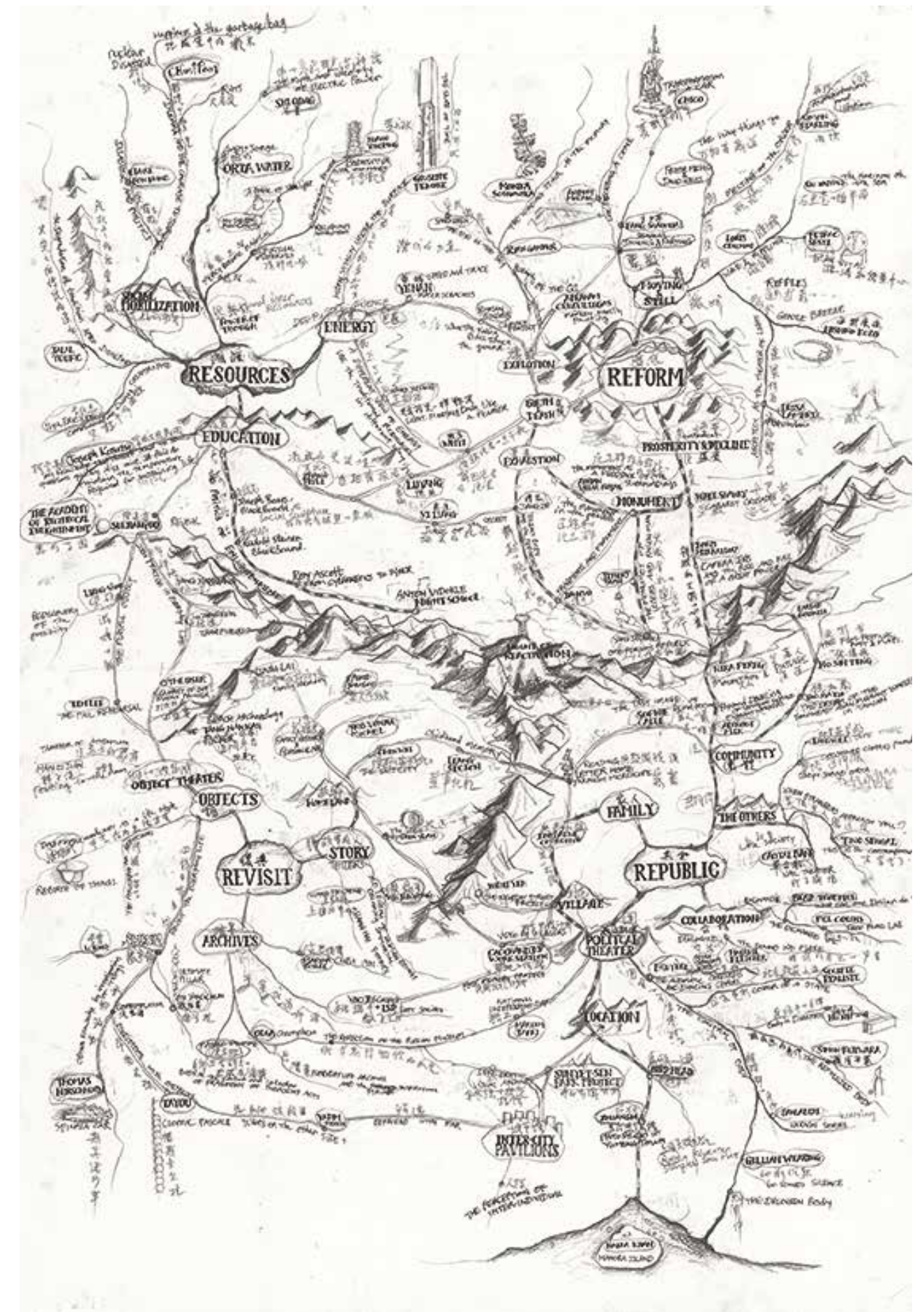
Map of A Suicidology
of the Nanjing Yangtze
River Bridge Project
79 x 54 cm



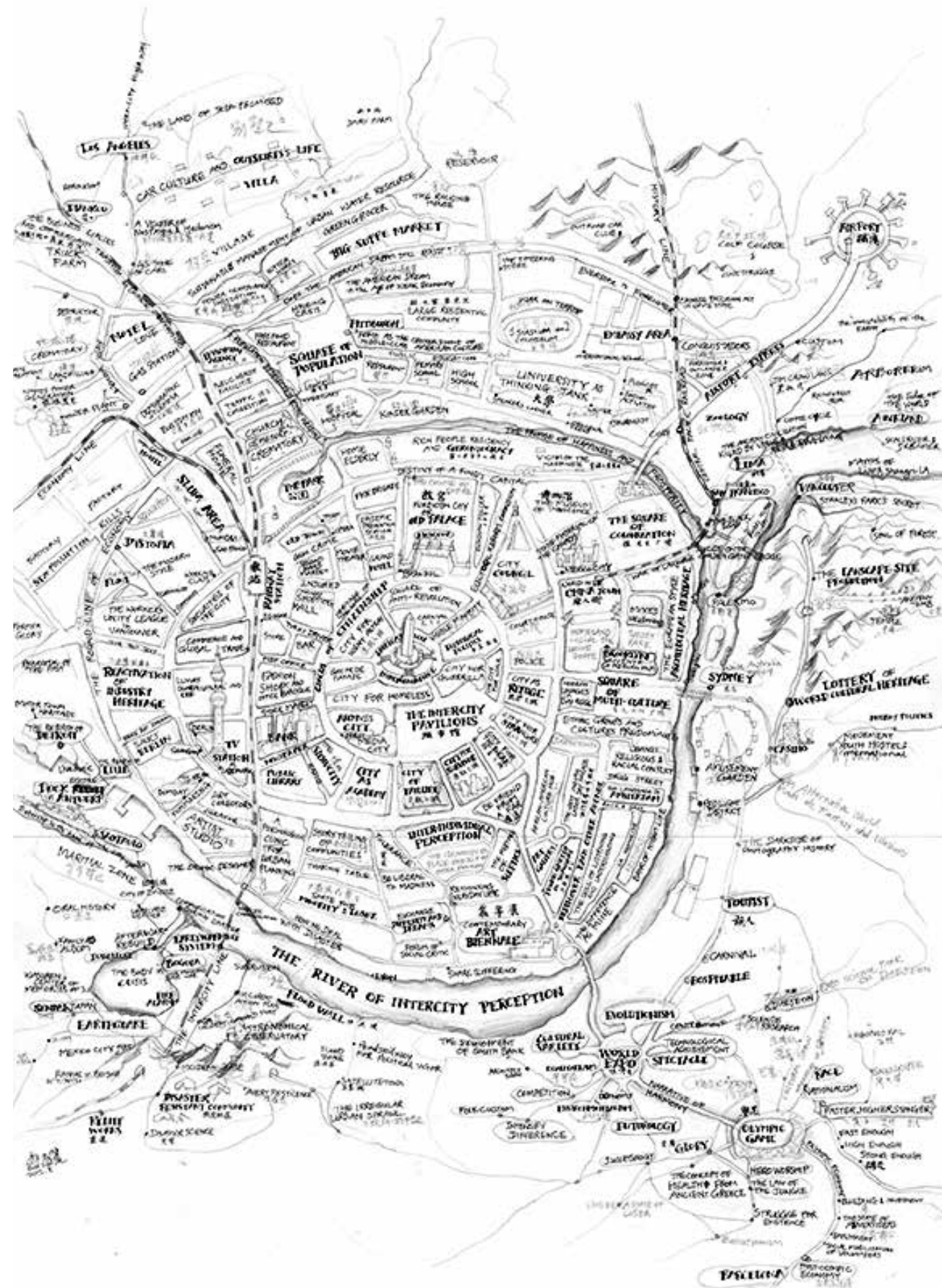
*Map of the Academy
of Reciprocal
Enlightenment*
54 × 79 cm



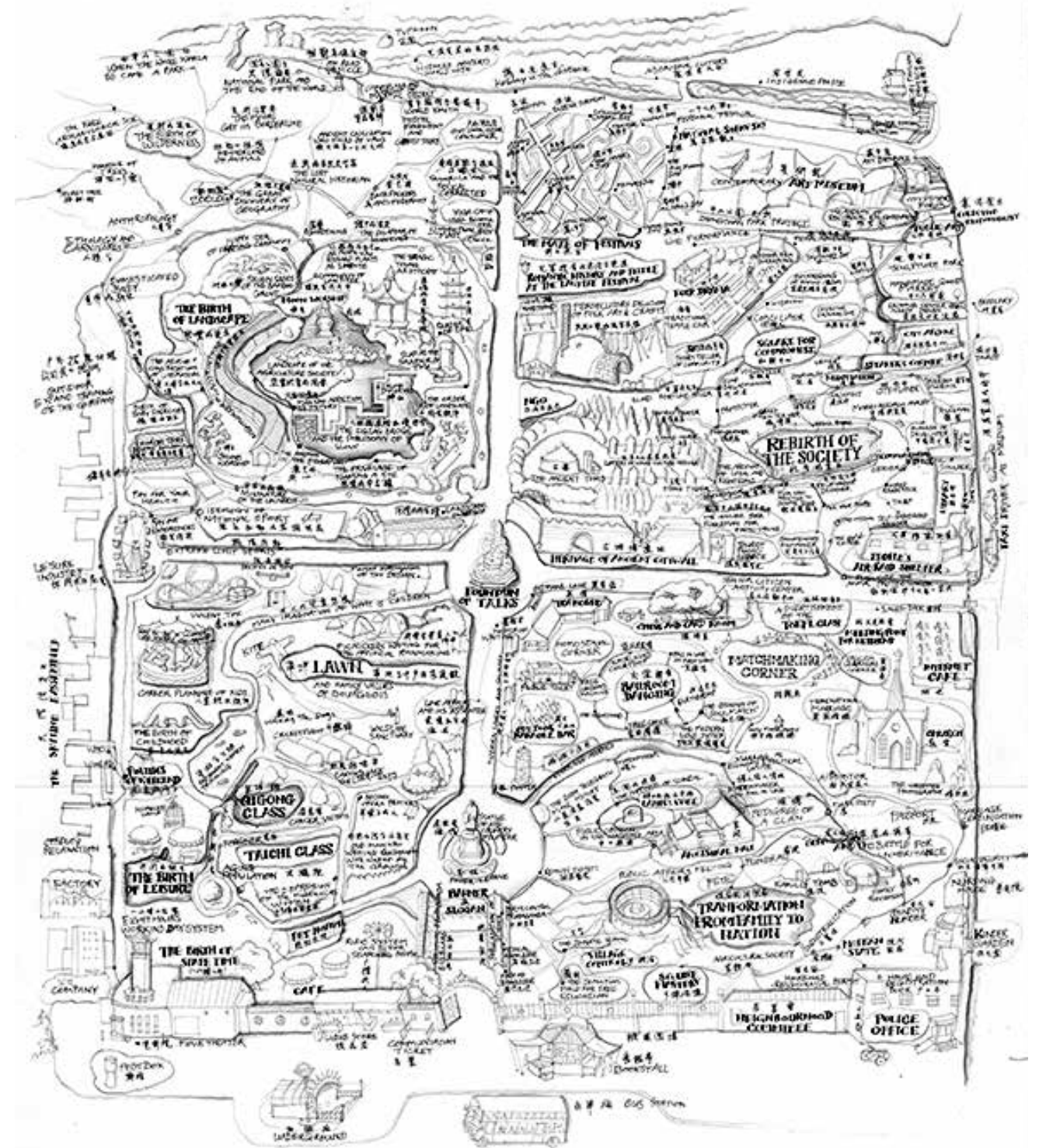
*Map of Character
Relationship of
Shanghai Biennale*
79 × 54 cm



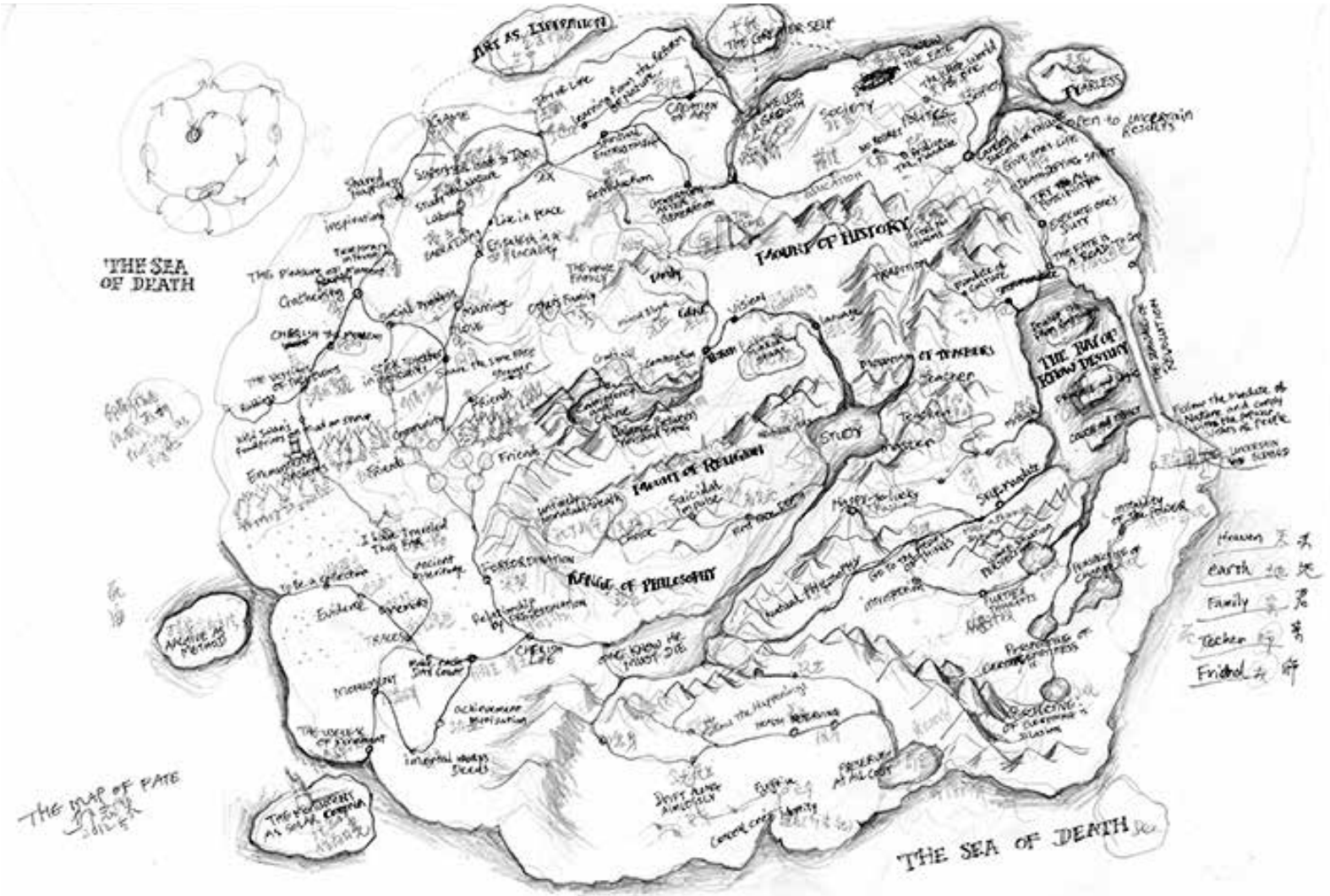
Map of the Inter-City
79 x 54 cm



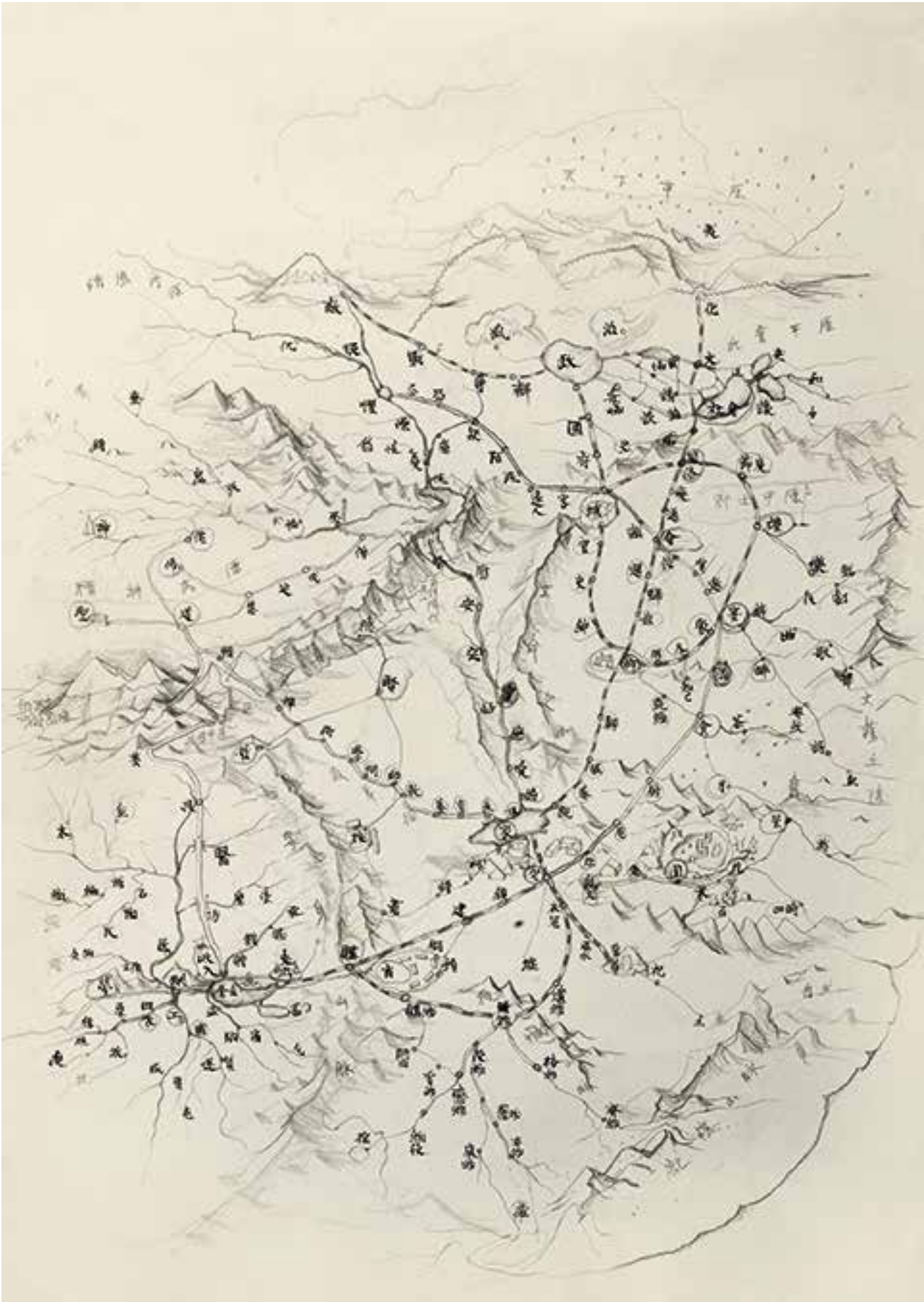
Map of the
Zhongshan Park
79 x 54 cm

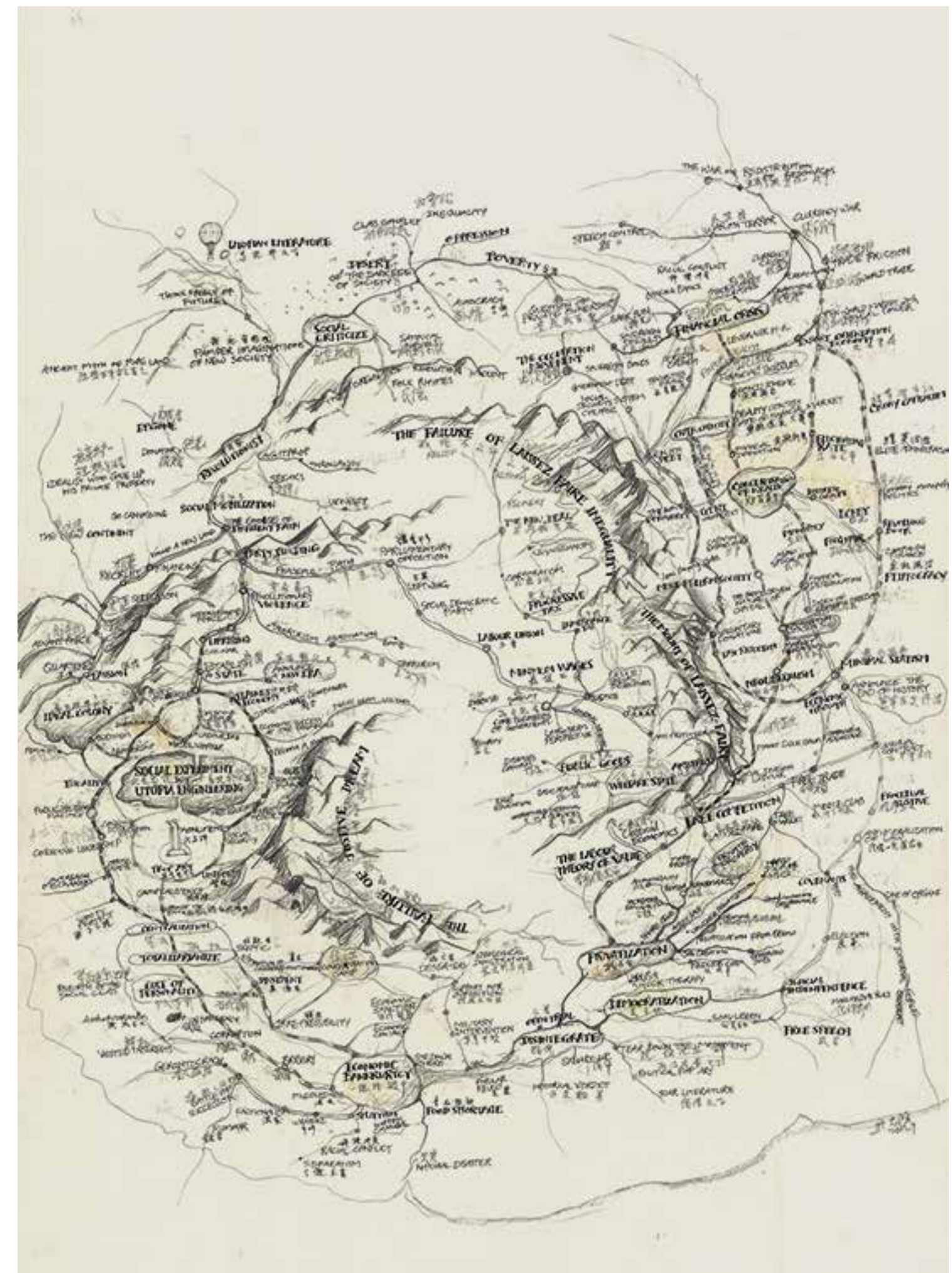


Map of Fate
54 × 79 cm



Map of Life
79 × 54 cm



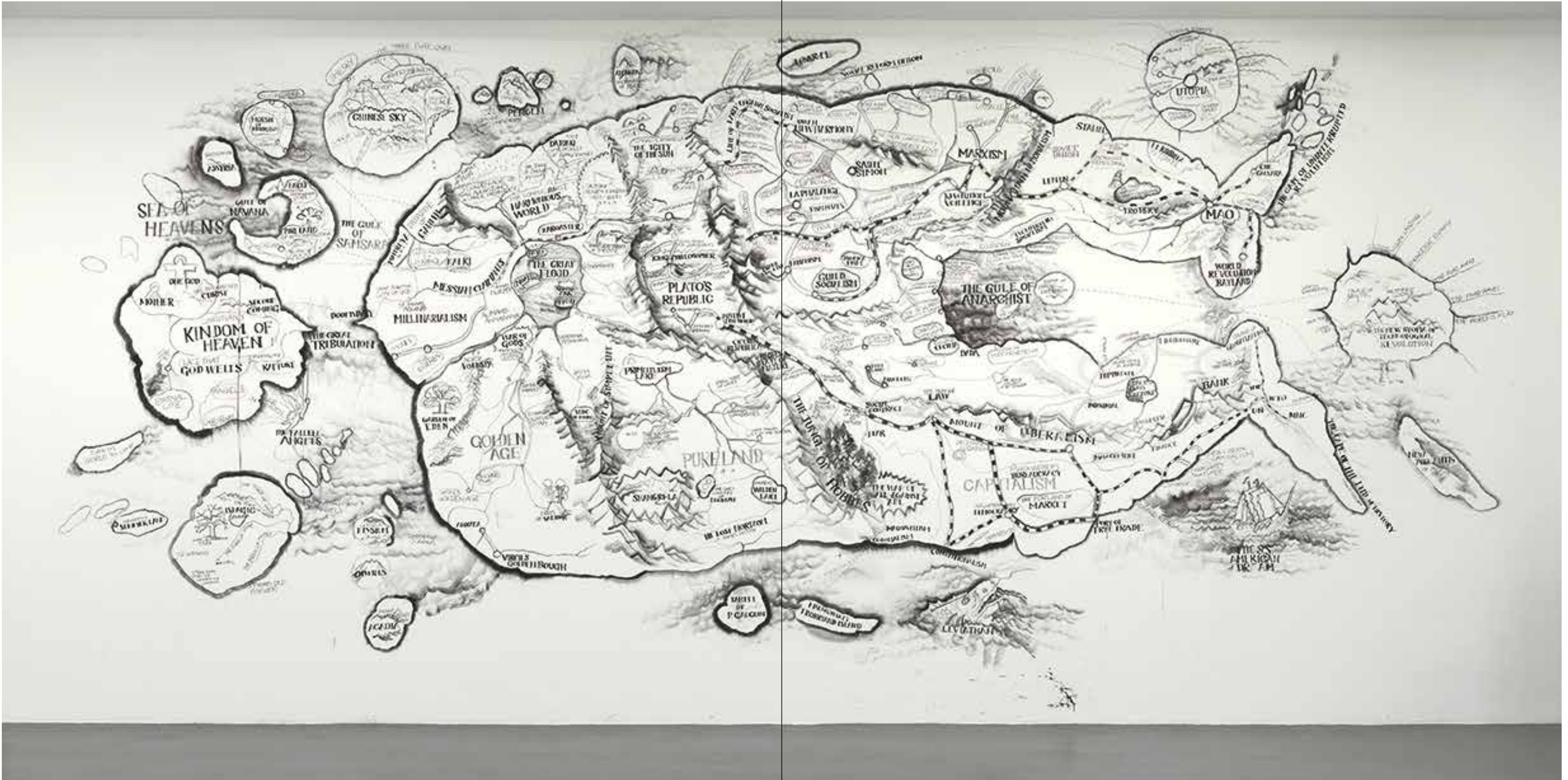


A detailed hand-drawn site plan for a community center. The plan is divided into several sections:

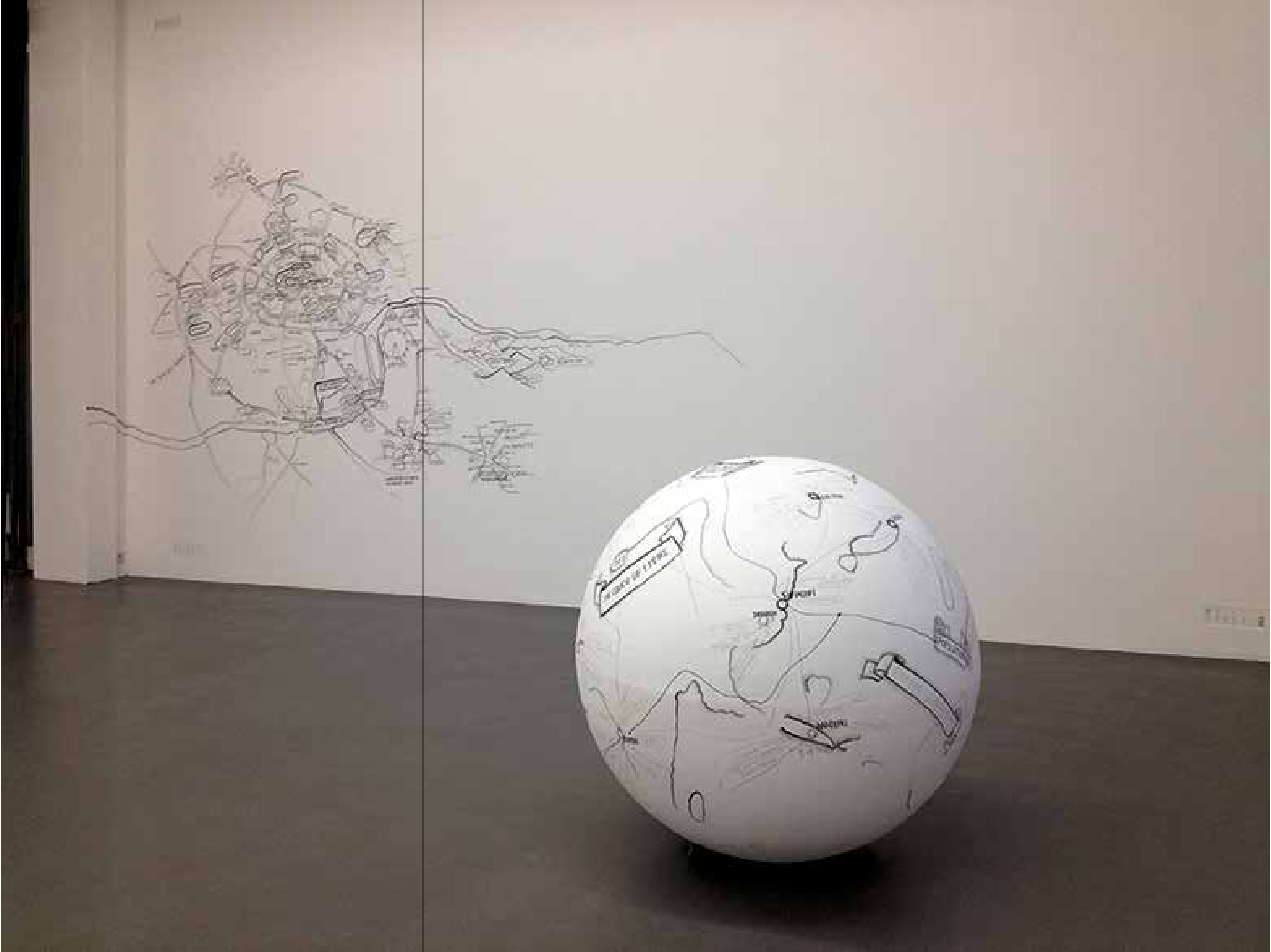
- Central Area:** A large 'LAWN' area with a 'GARDEN' and 'PARKING' area to the left.
- Top Section:** 'THE HOUSE OF LANDSCAPE' with various rooms and a 'GARDEN' area.
- Bottom Section:** 'REBIRTH OF THE SOCIETY' with a 'CONCERT HALL', 'LIBRARY', and 'ART ROOM'.
- Left Section:** 'THE TRANSITION FROM TOWN TO COUNTRY' with a 'KITCHEN', 'DINING ROOM', and 'OFFICE'.
- Right Section:** 'TEA HOUSE' and 'GARDEN'.

The drawing is a black and white line sketch with many small details and handwritten notes. It includes a scale bar at the bottom right and a north arrow at the top right.

Map of Utopia
ink mural,
350 × 900 cm

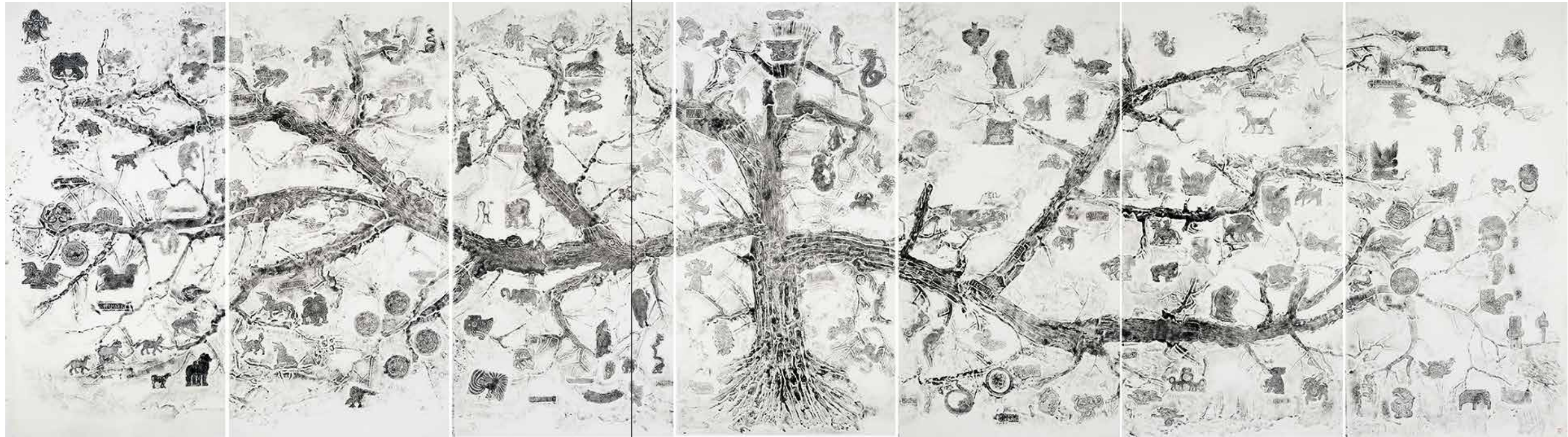


City Sphere
installation,
diameter 100 cm

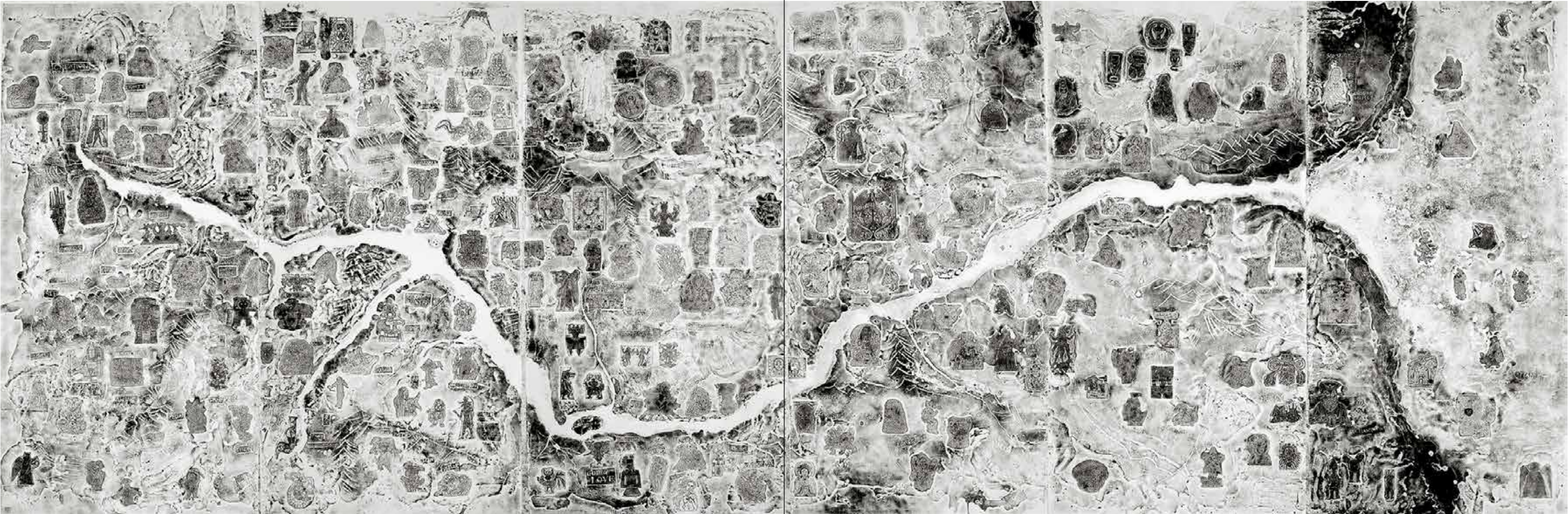


Map of Mythological
Animals
240 x 120 cm
(7 parts)

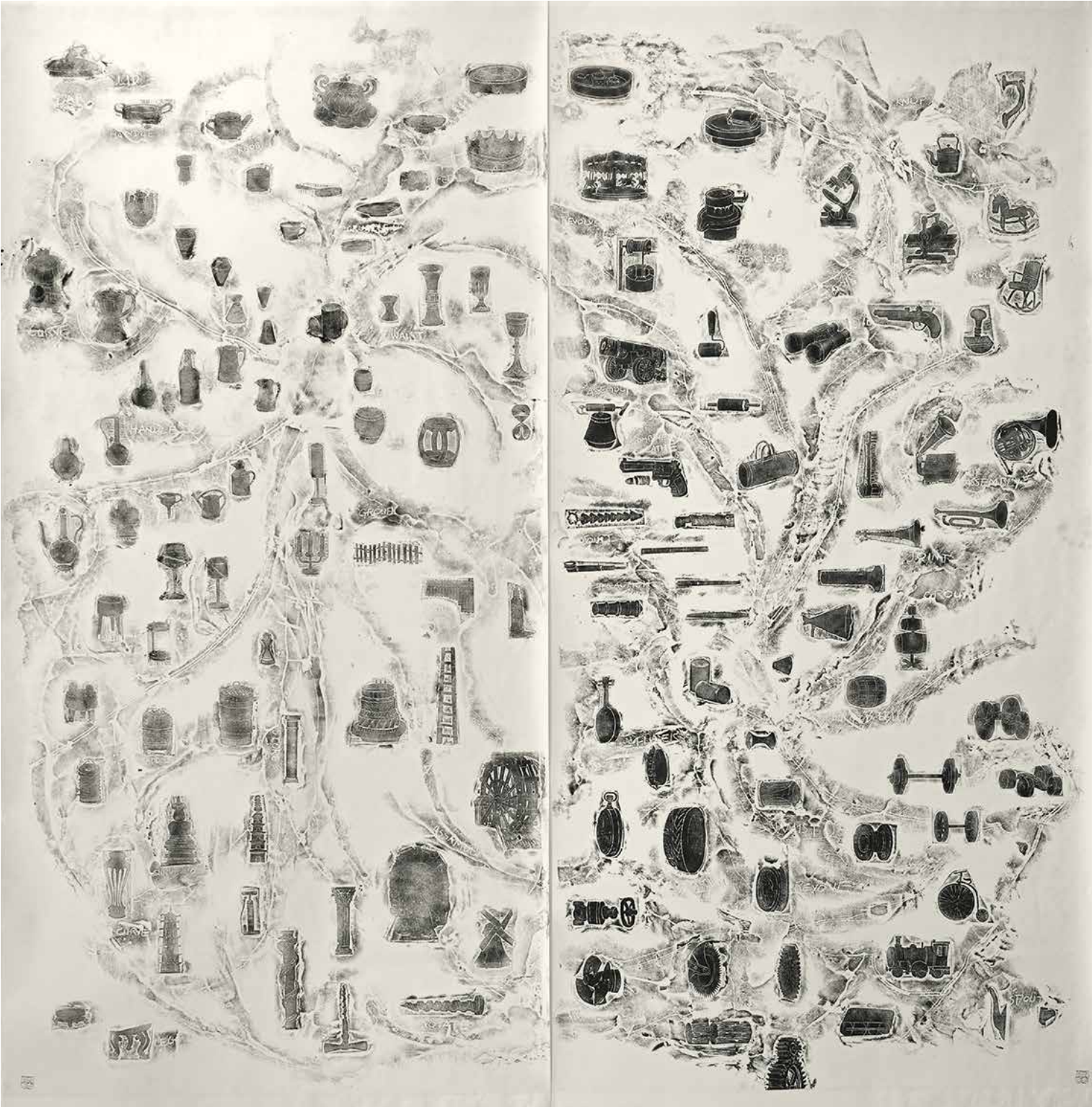
C. *The Unicorn and the Dragon*
ink rubbing on paper
Fondazione Querini
Stampalia, Venice, 2013



The Busy Gods
240 x 120 cm
(6 parts)



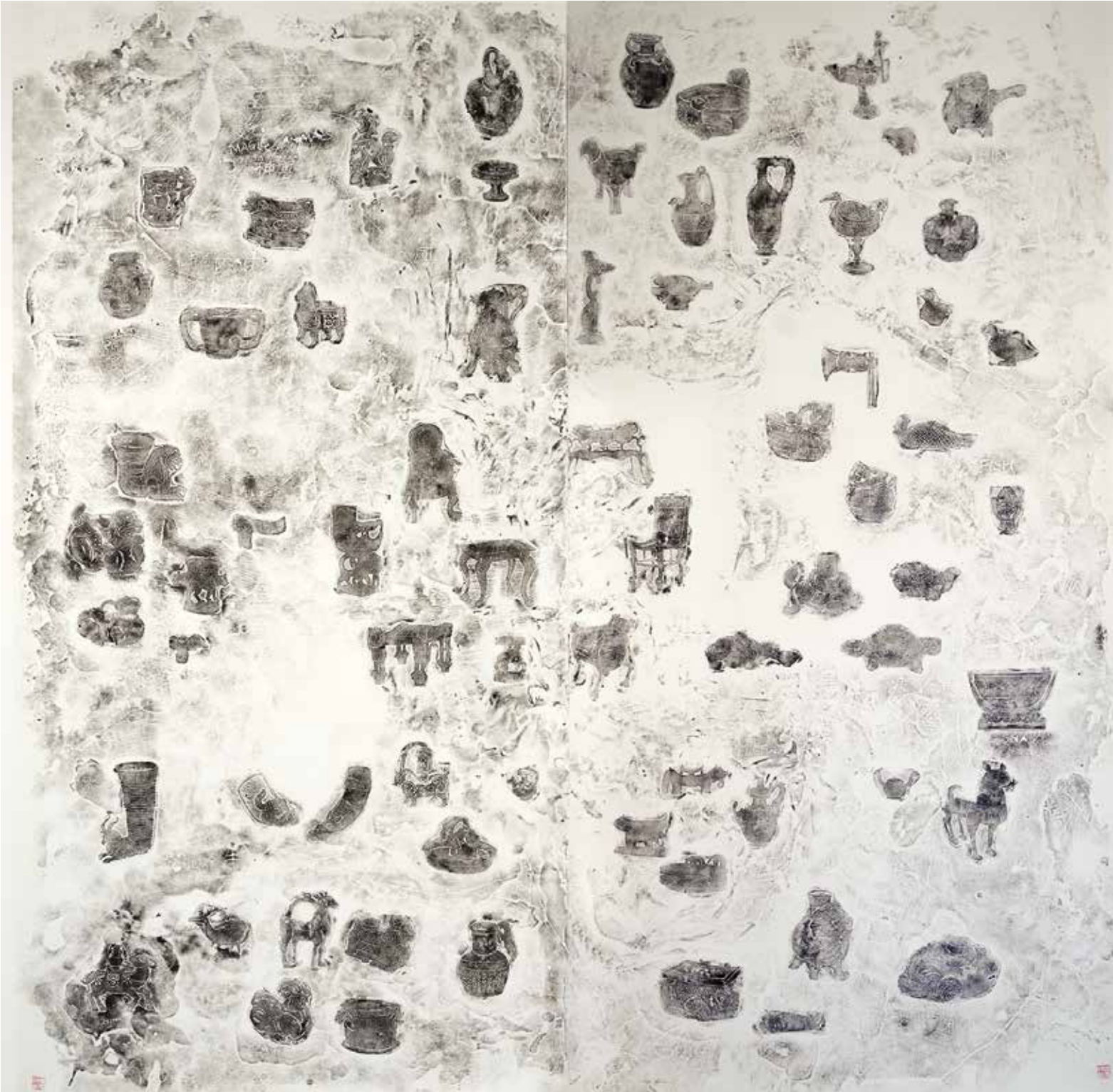
Tao and Objects
240 x 120 cm
(2 parts)



Map of a Hundred
Crafts Among People
ink mural, 250 x 250 cm



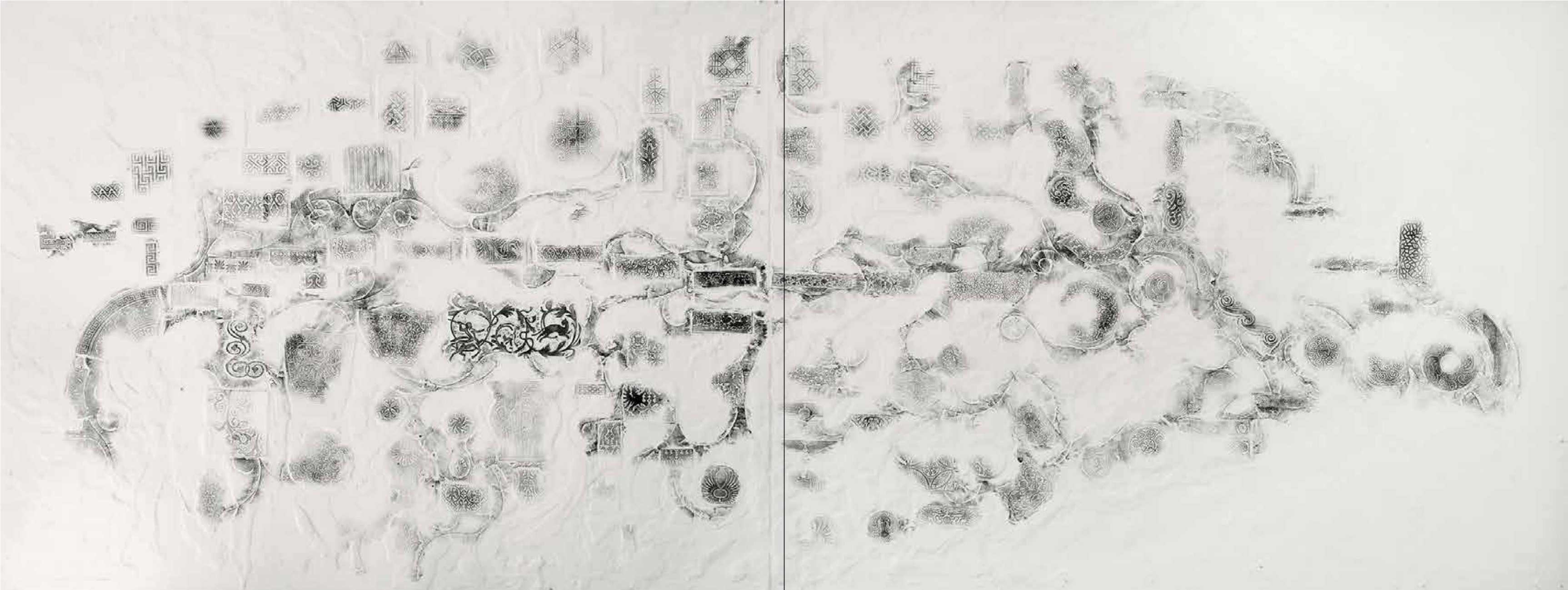
The Domestic
Zoomorphology
240 x 120 cm
(2 parts)



The Story of Boats
240 x 120 cm
(2 parts)







All of the Objects

Ink on paper

Mapping the World Project
246 × 126 cm (24 maps)

Map of Games – Used to Being a Loser, 2015



Map of Art and Everyday
Life – The Poets Even
Been Driven Out of the
Republic
by Plato, 2015



Map of Human Emotions
– Both Despair and Hope
Are Extinct Volcano, 2015



Map of Mythical
Animals – Every Living
Thing Had Its Own
Special Meaning, 2016





*Map of Gods – God
Never Rests, 2016*



Map of Religion –
Some People Always
Tend to Believe, 2015



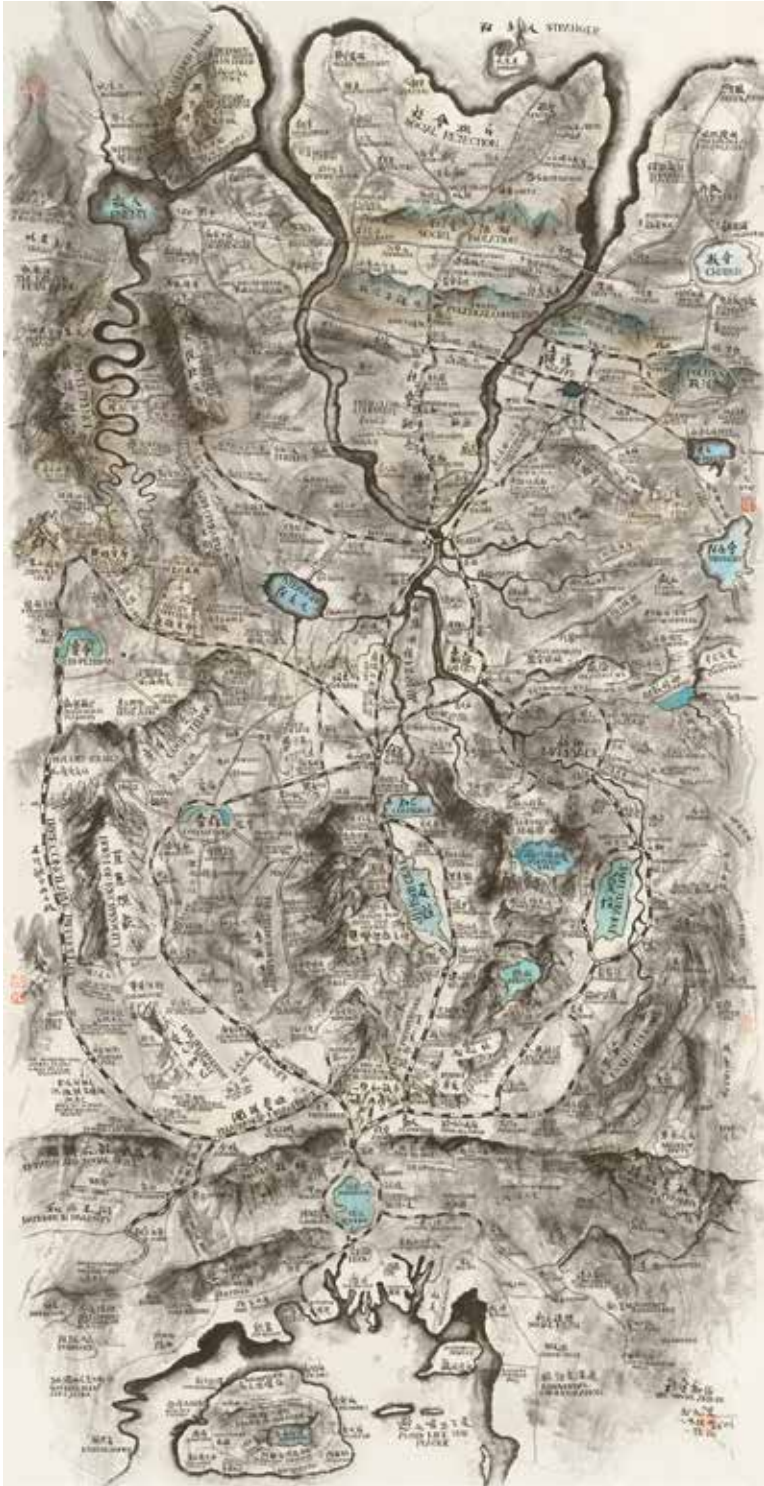
Map of Professions –
He Who Uses His Brain
Will Govern, 2016



Map of Garments – The
Clothed World, 2017



Map of Social
Relationships –
The Social Animal,
2015



Map of Tools –
Labor-Saving
Utensils Generating
More Labor, 2016



Map of Fate – Heaven's Movement Is Ever Vigorous, 2016



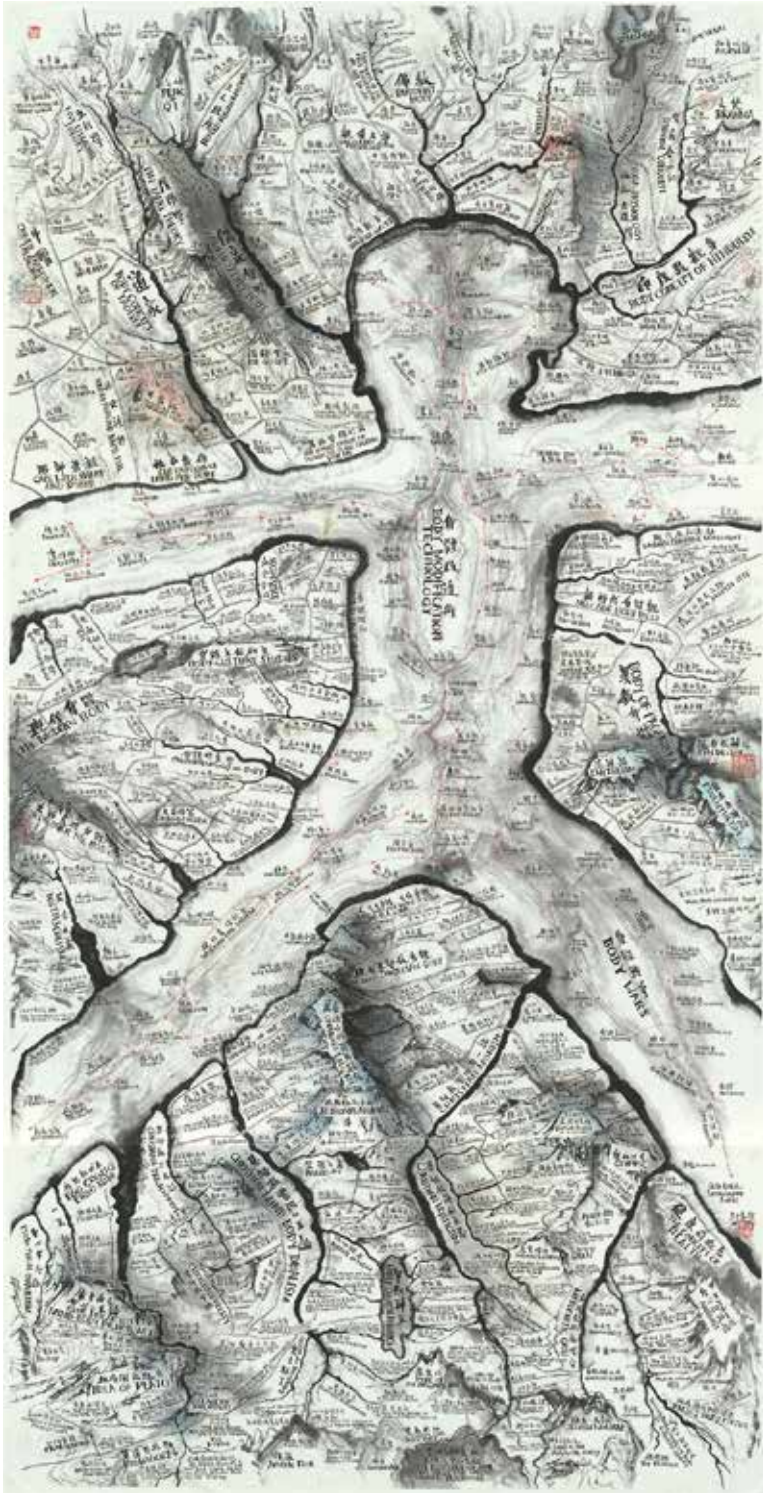
Map of Architecture – A Great Mansion of Ten Thousand Rooms to Shelter the Needy, 2017



Map of Narratives – Why We Tell Stories, 2017

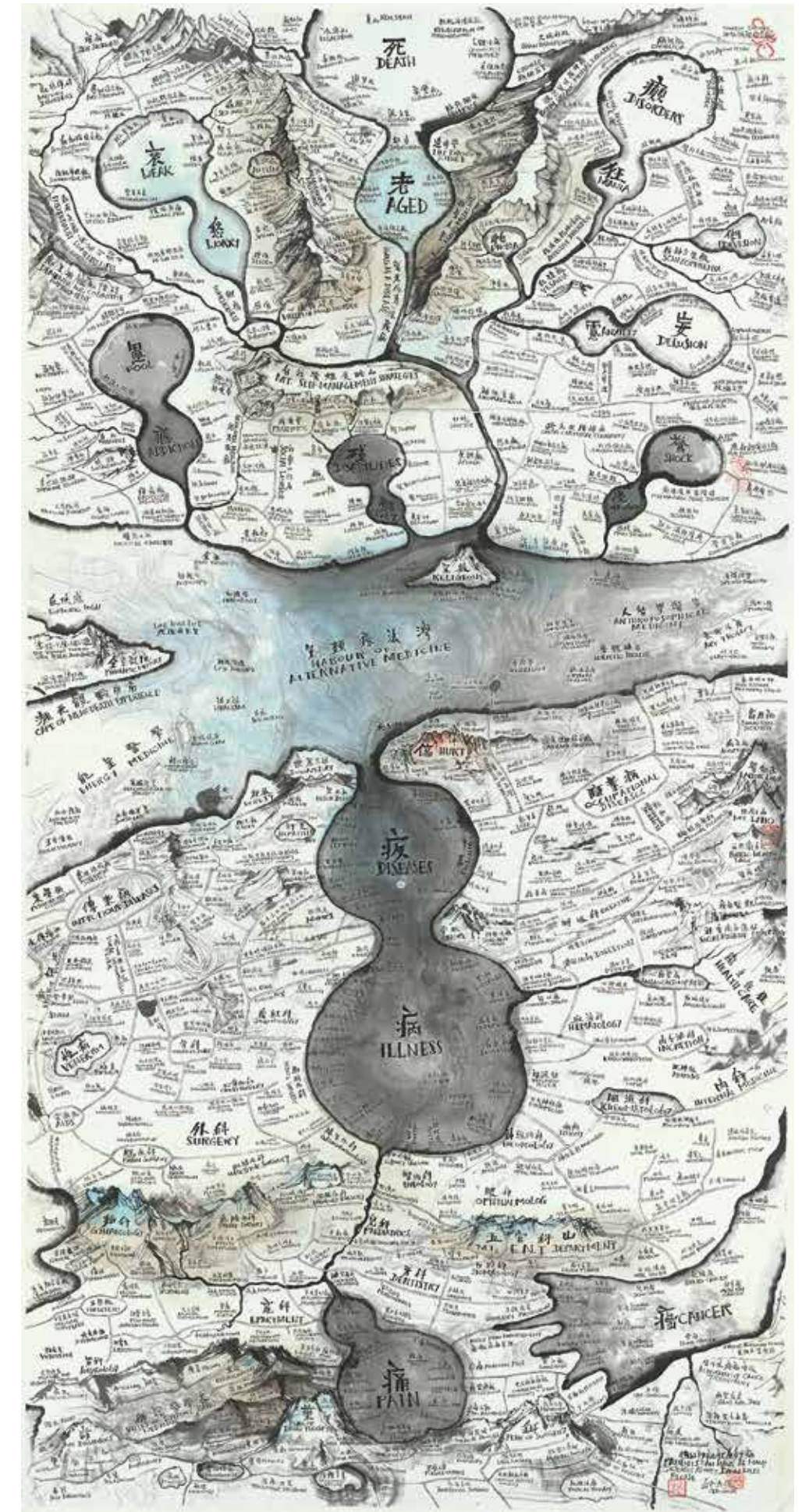


Map of Body – Vitruvian Man, 2017





*Map of Food – Food
Is Heaven, 2017*

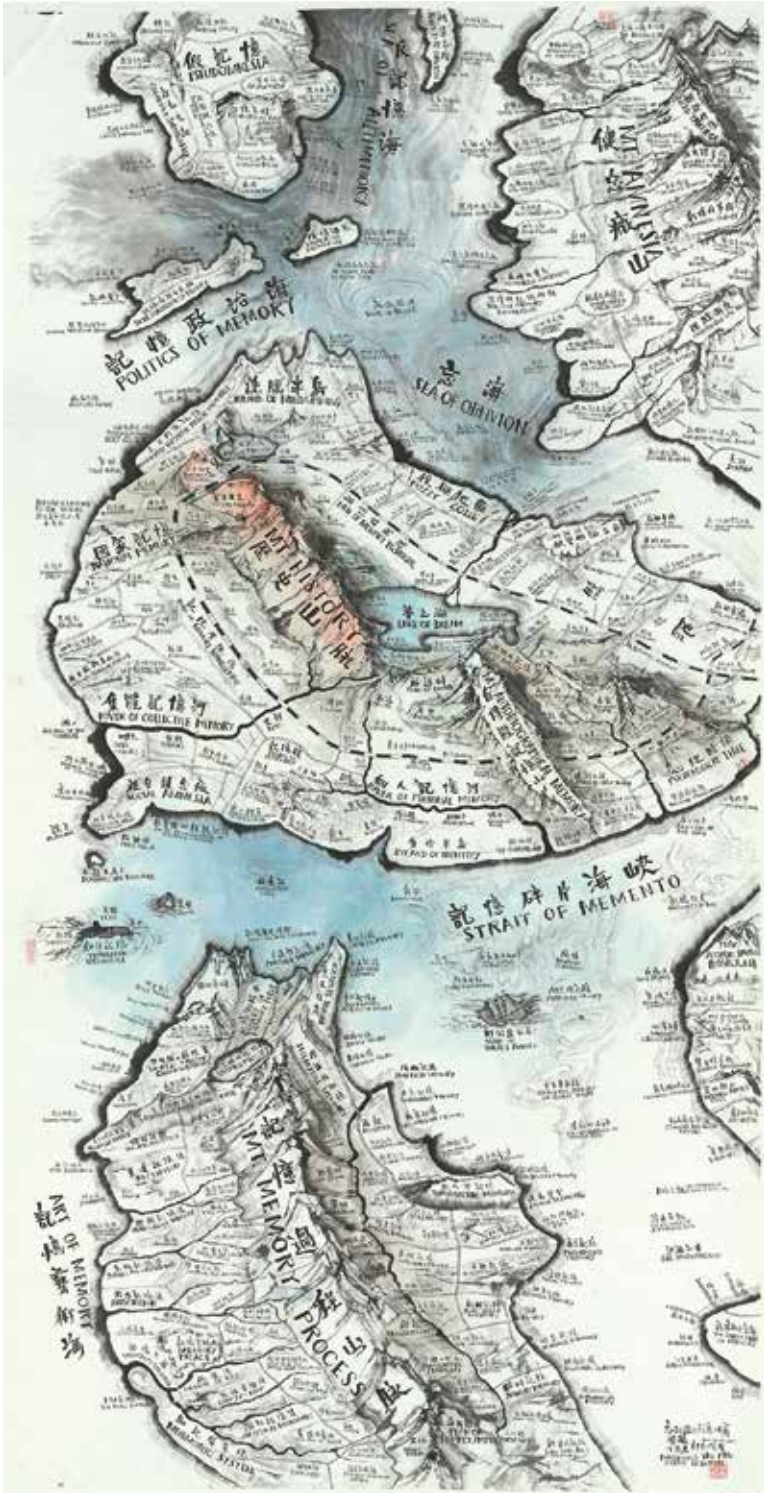


*Map of Diseases and
Medicine – Patients Can
Have as Many Diseases
as They Damn Well
Please, 2017*

Map of Flora, 2017



Map of Memories –
Forgetting the Past
Means Betrayal, 2017



Map of Animals
– All Animals Are
Heterotrophs, 2017

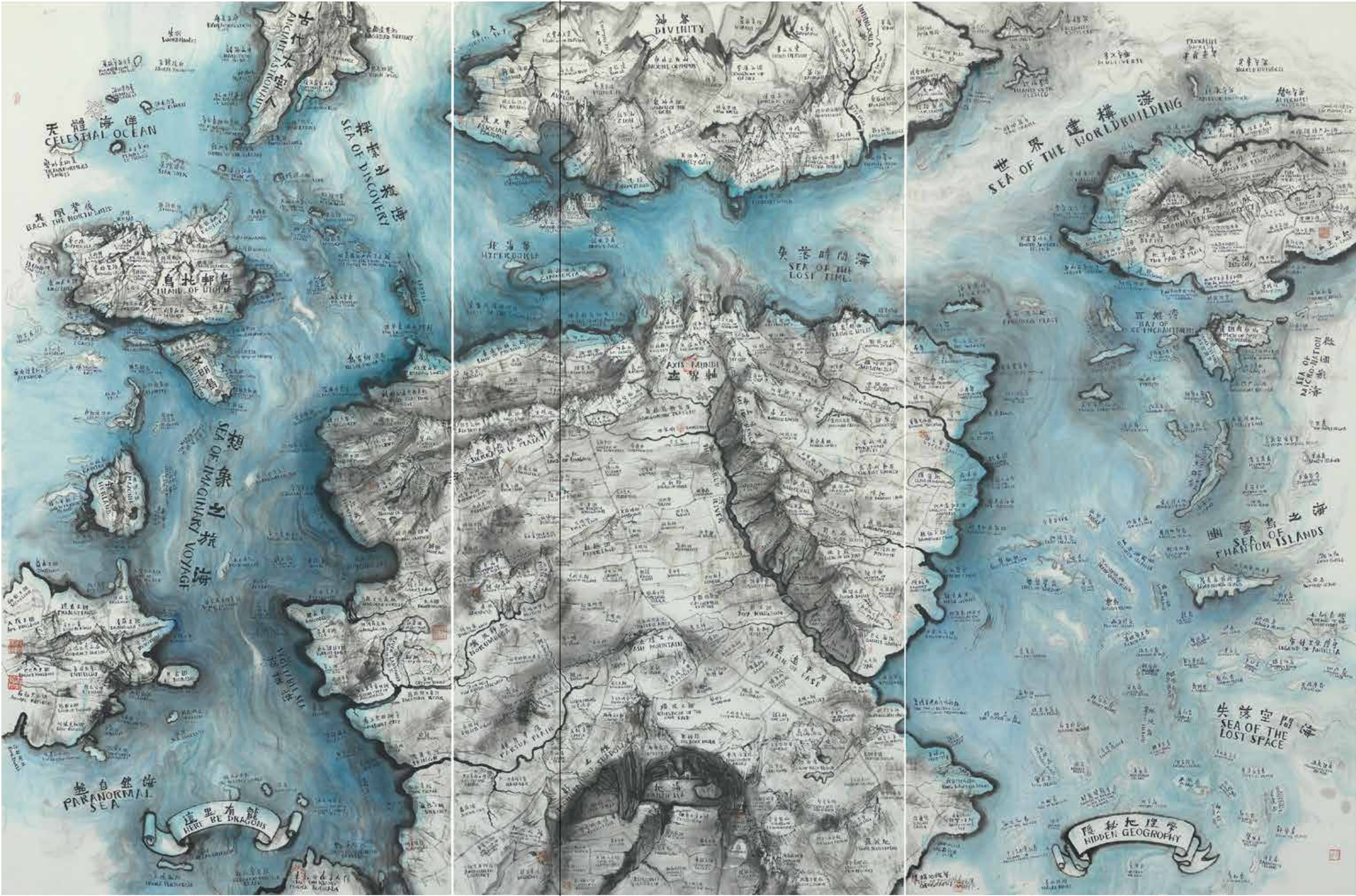


Map of Maps
Singapore Biennale, 2017–18
367 × 146 cm (16 parts)





Imaginary Geography,
2016
240 × 120 cm
(3 parts)





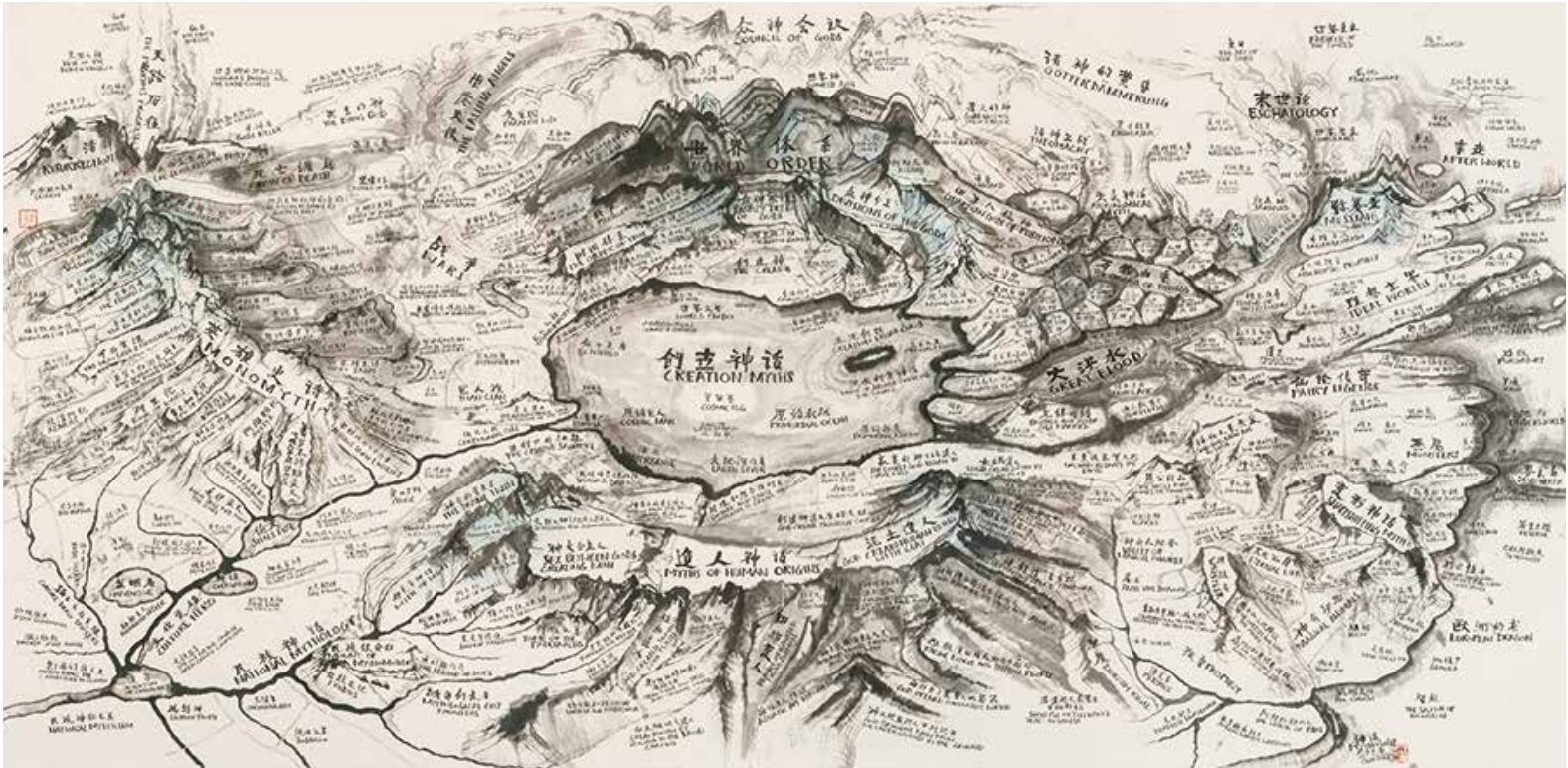
Map of Technological
Ethics, 2016
240 × 120 cm
(5 parts)



Map of Science
Fiction, 2018
125 x 245 cm



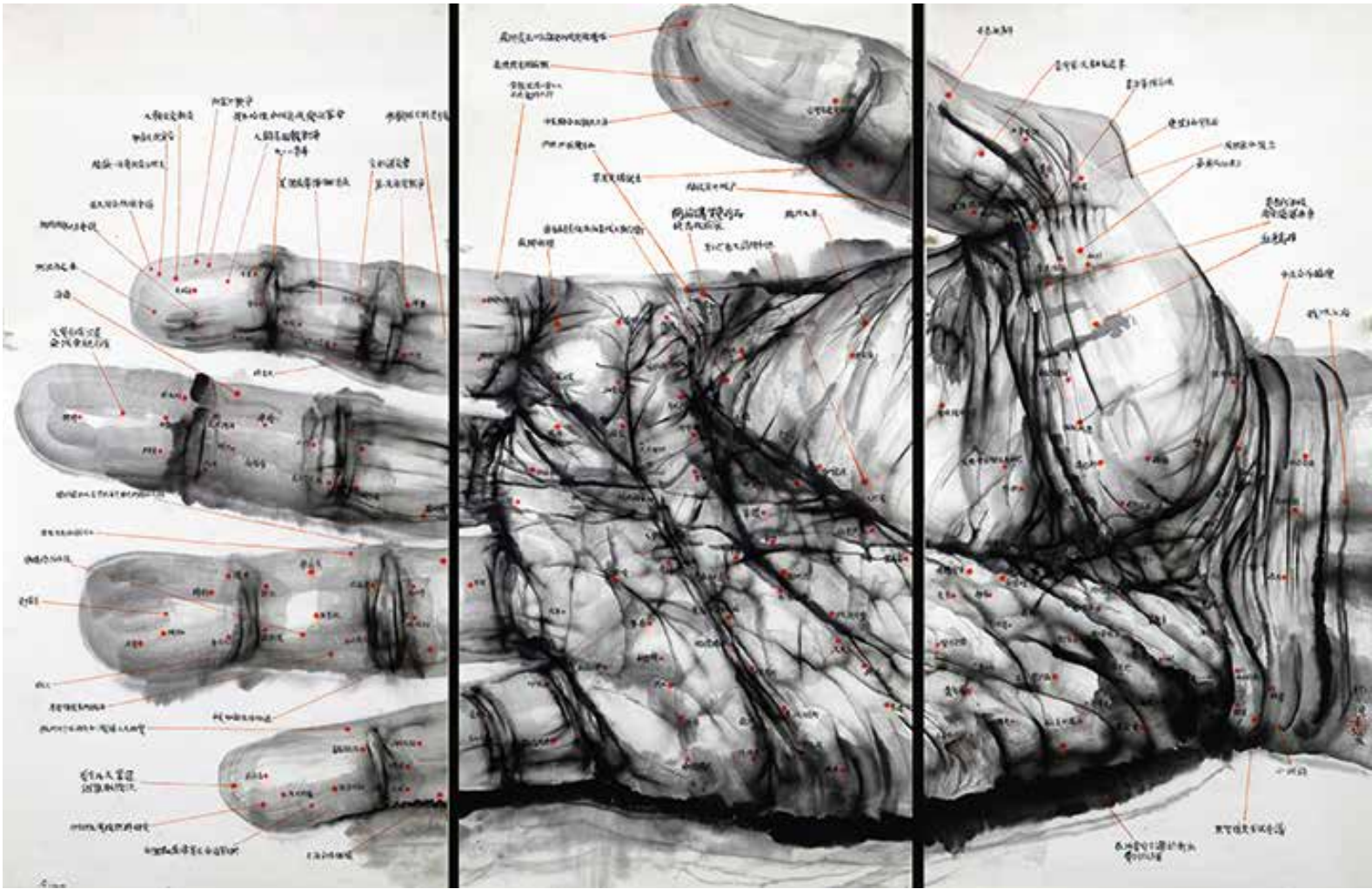
Map of Mythology, 2019
125 x 245 cm



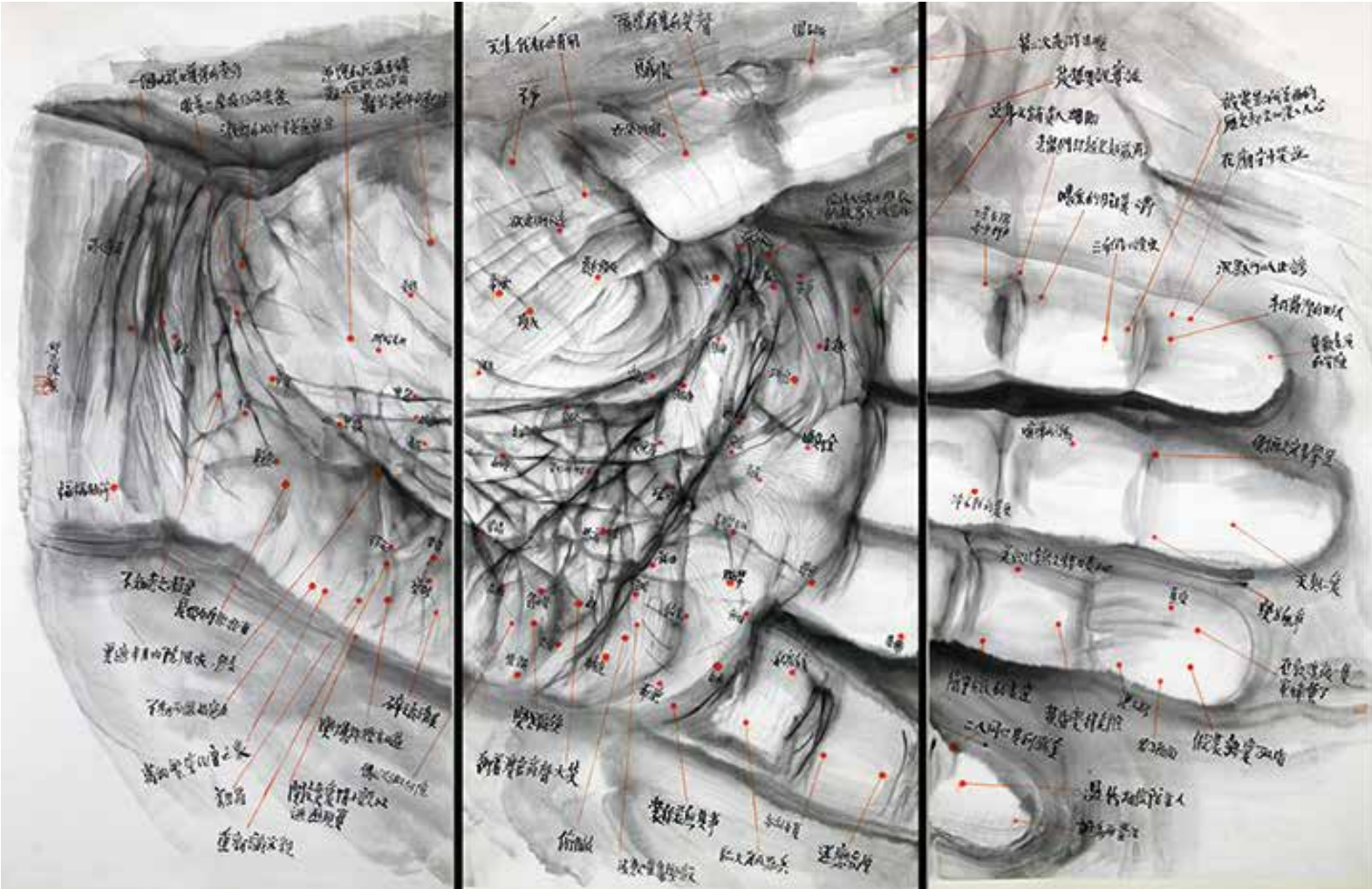
All Living Things Palm Print Series

Ink on paper

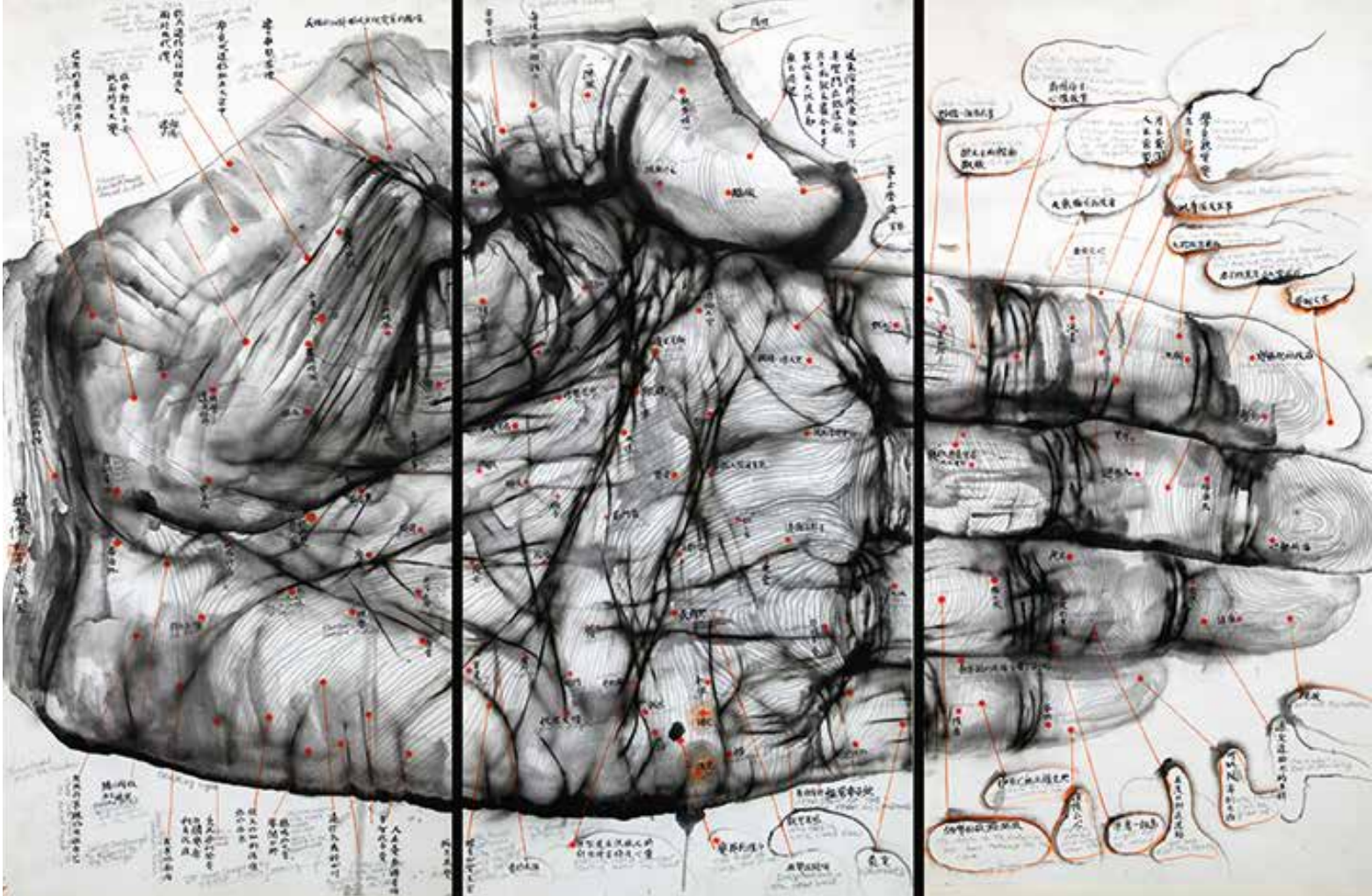
A Satisfied Art
Collector, 2013
146 x 215 cm



A Blessed
Child, 2013
146 x 215 cm

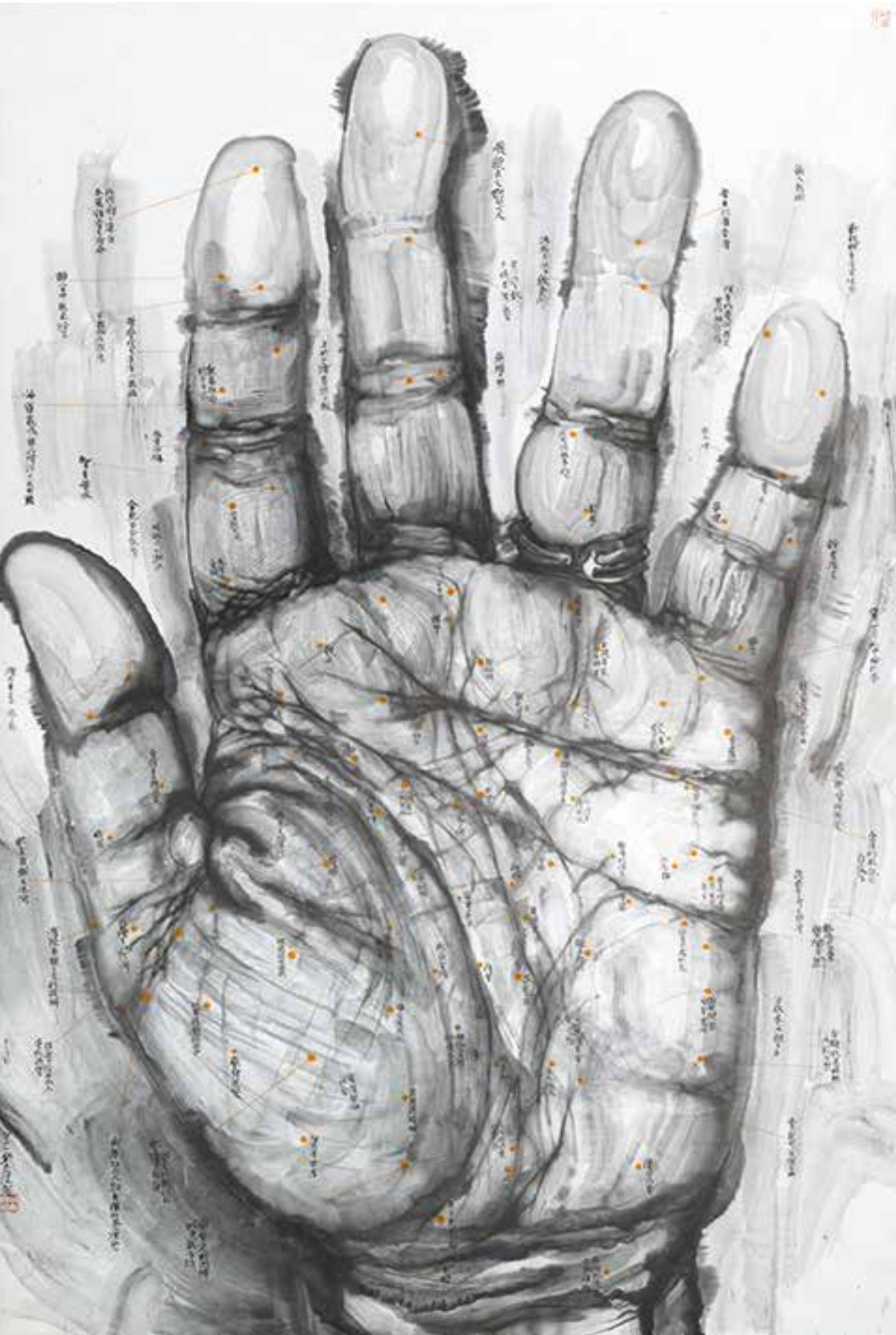
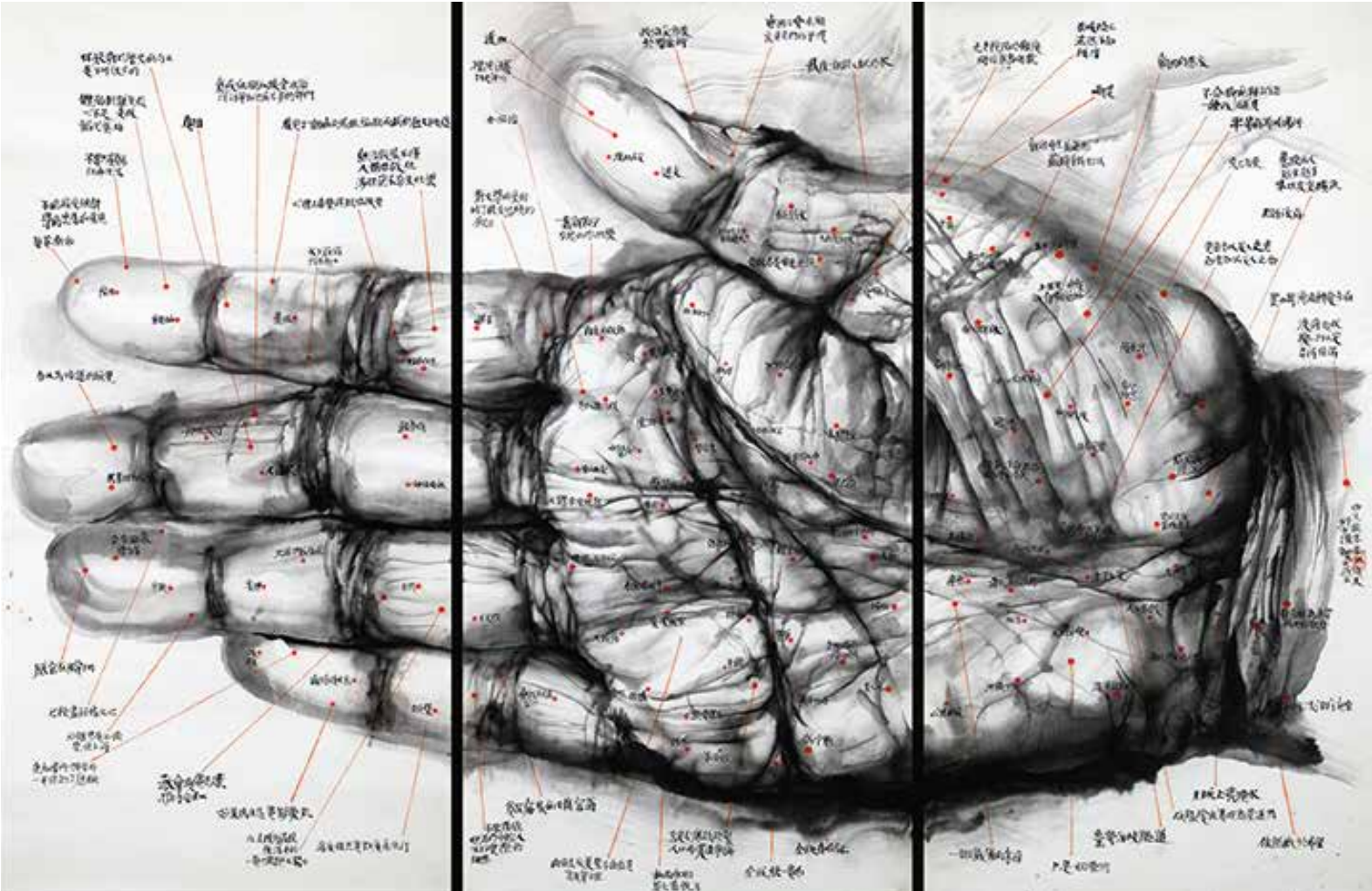


A Nostalgic
Person, 2013
146 x 215 cm



A Fortune
Teller, 2013
146 × 215 cm

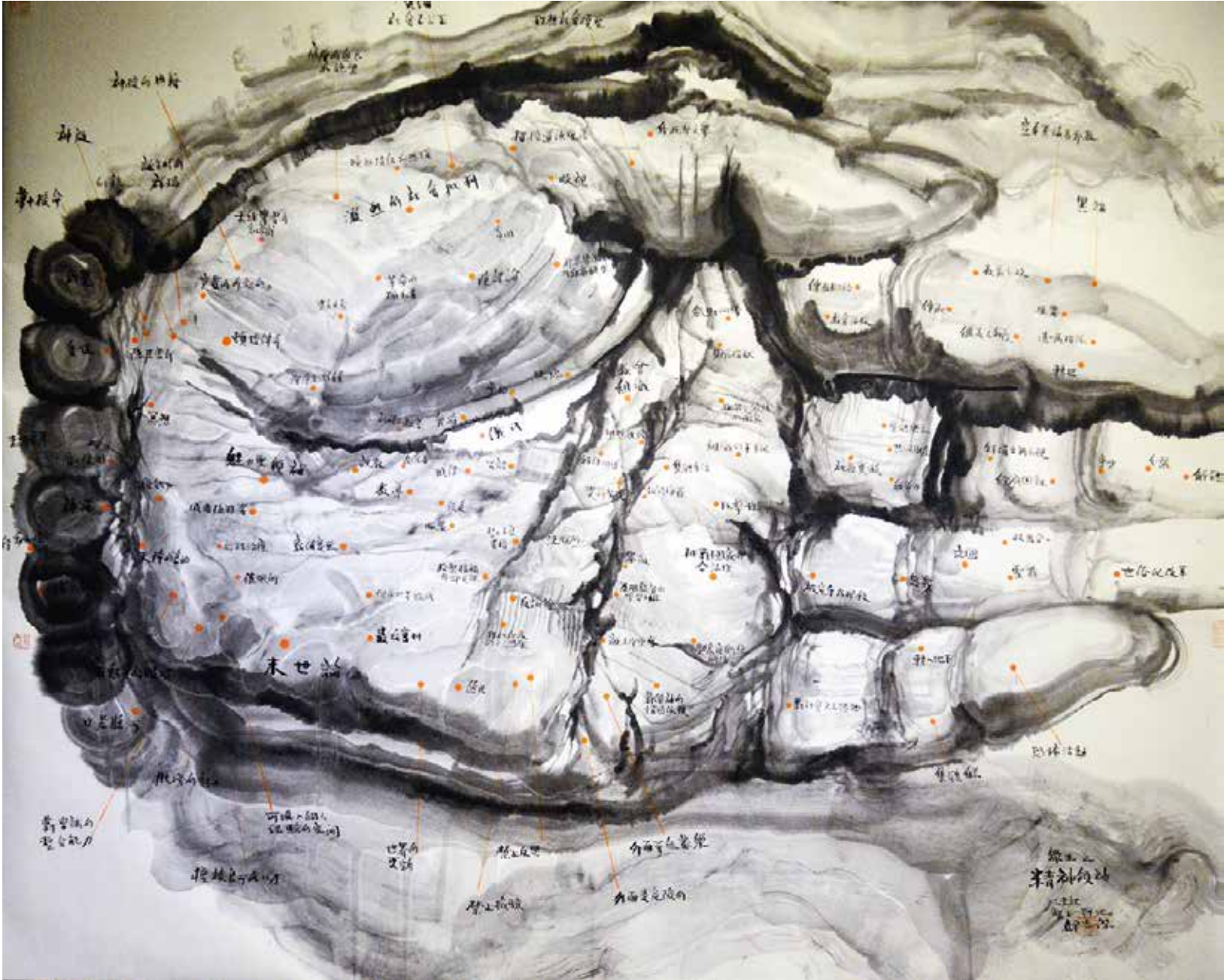
A Confucian
Businessman, 2013
215 × 146 cm



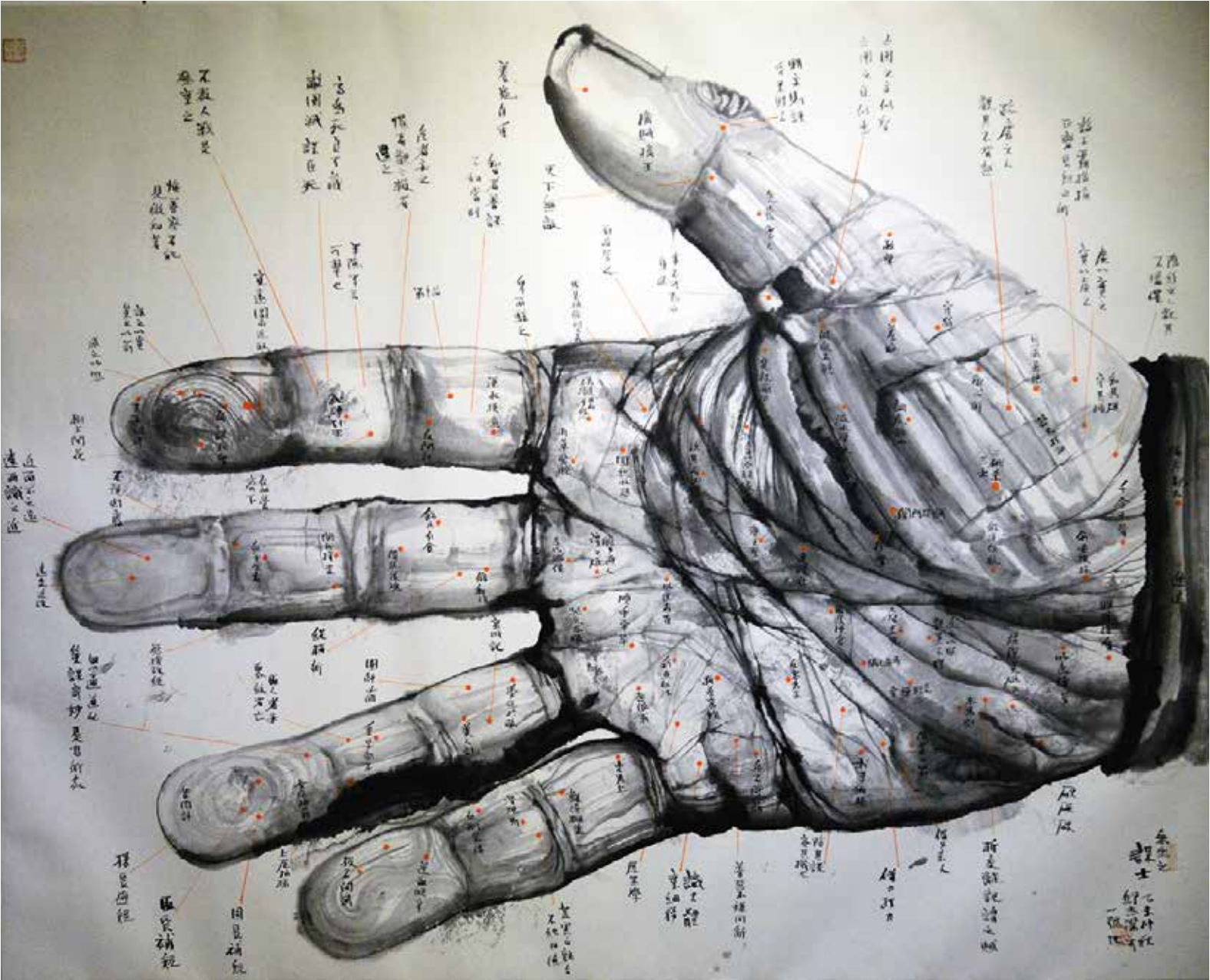
All Living Things – A Man
of Contemplation, 2015
146 × 183 cm



All Living Things –
Spiritual Leader, 2015
146 × 183 cm



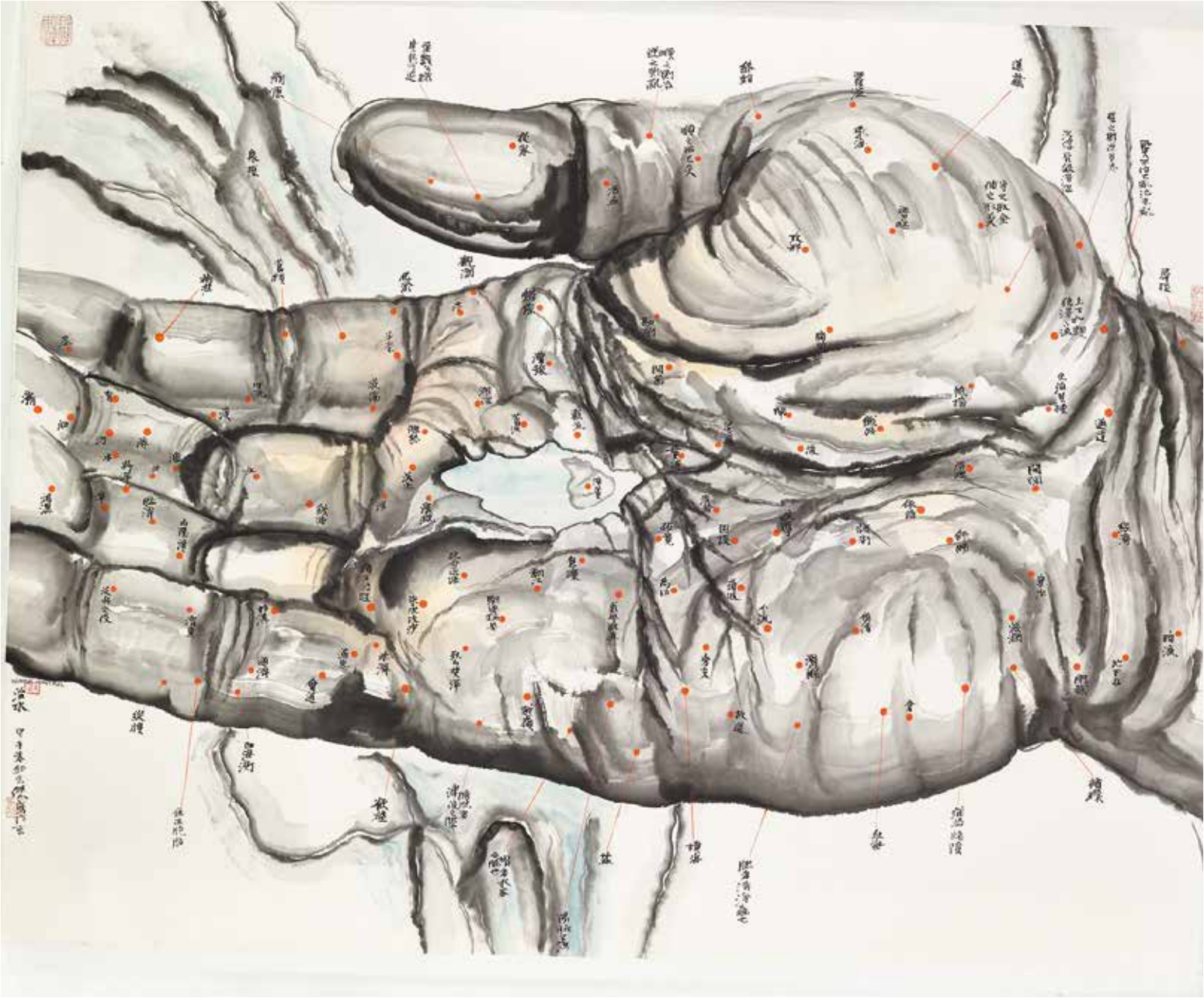
All Living Things –
The Strategic
Adviser, 2015
146 x 183 cm



All Living Things –
Hermit, 2013
146 x 183 cm



All Living Things –
Water Control, 2013
146 × 183 cm



All Living Things –
The Supreme
Seductress, 2017
146 × 183 cm



All Living Things –
The Maid Servant, 2017
146 x 183 cm



All Living Things –
Out of Border, 2017
146 x 183 cm



Give Hostages
to Fortune, 2013
128 x 90 cm



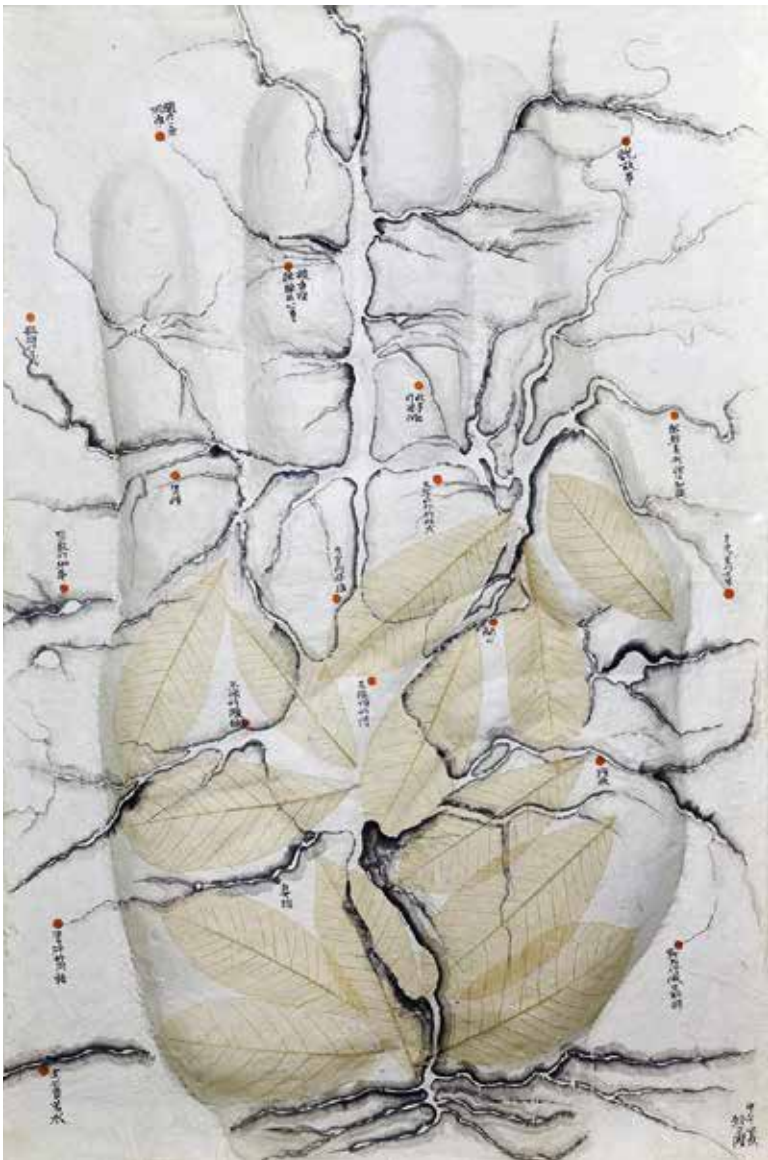
Life Is But a
Span, 2013
128 x 90 cm



Return to Dragon
Mountain, 2013
128 x 90 cm



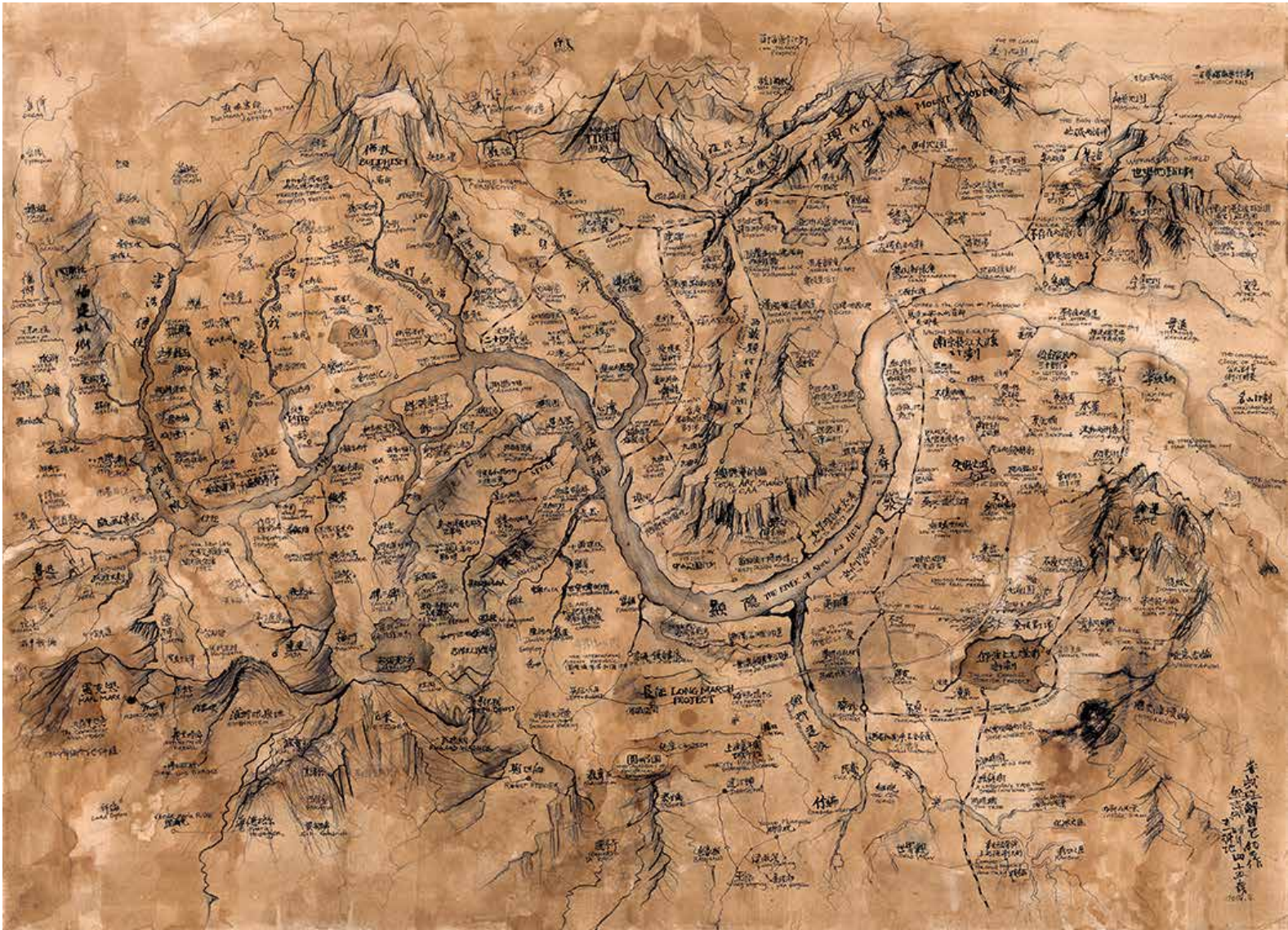
As Good as
Water, 2013
128 x 90 cm

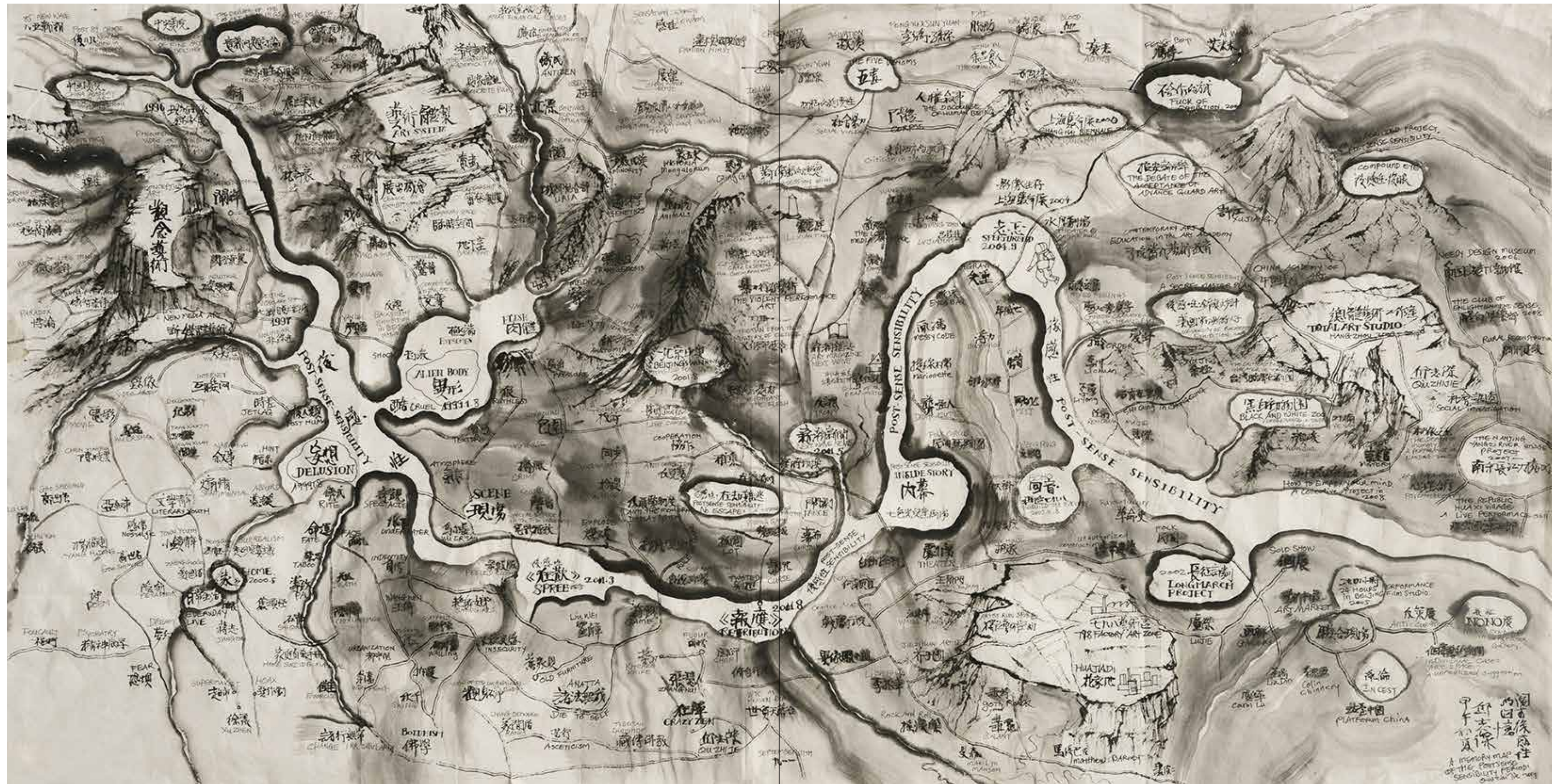


Recollection

Ink on paper

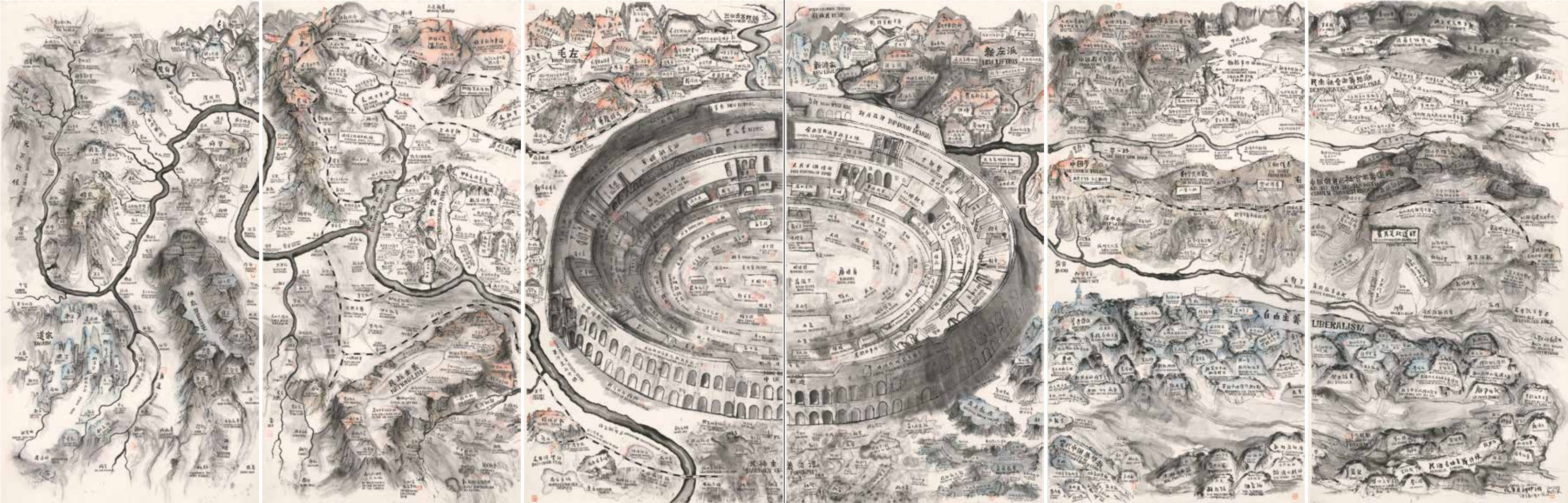
Try to Understand
My Own Work, 2014
77 × 107 cm



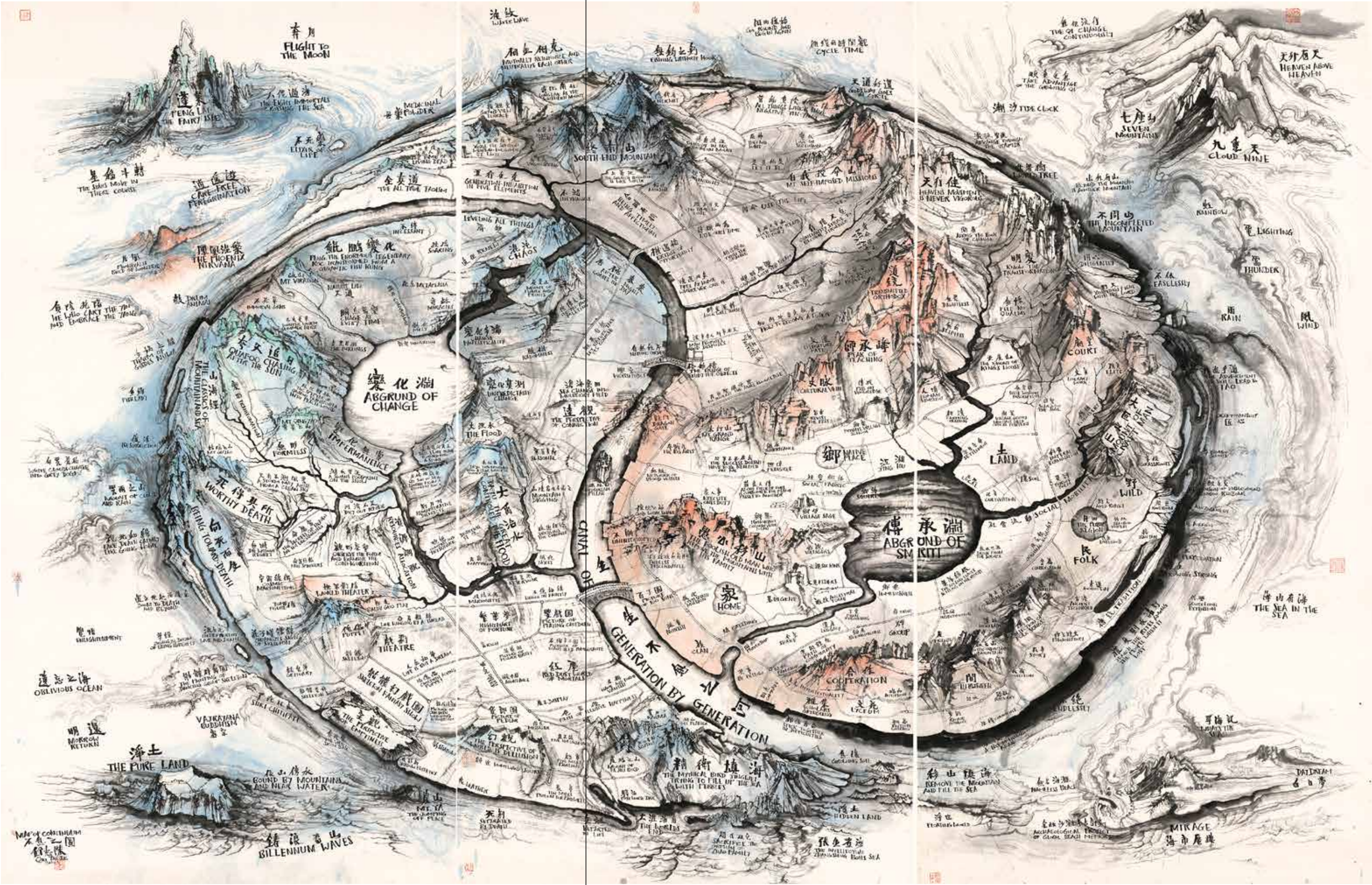


*A Memory Map of the
Post-Sense Sensibility
Period, 2014*
69 x 138 cm

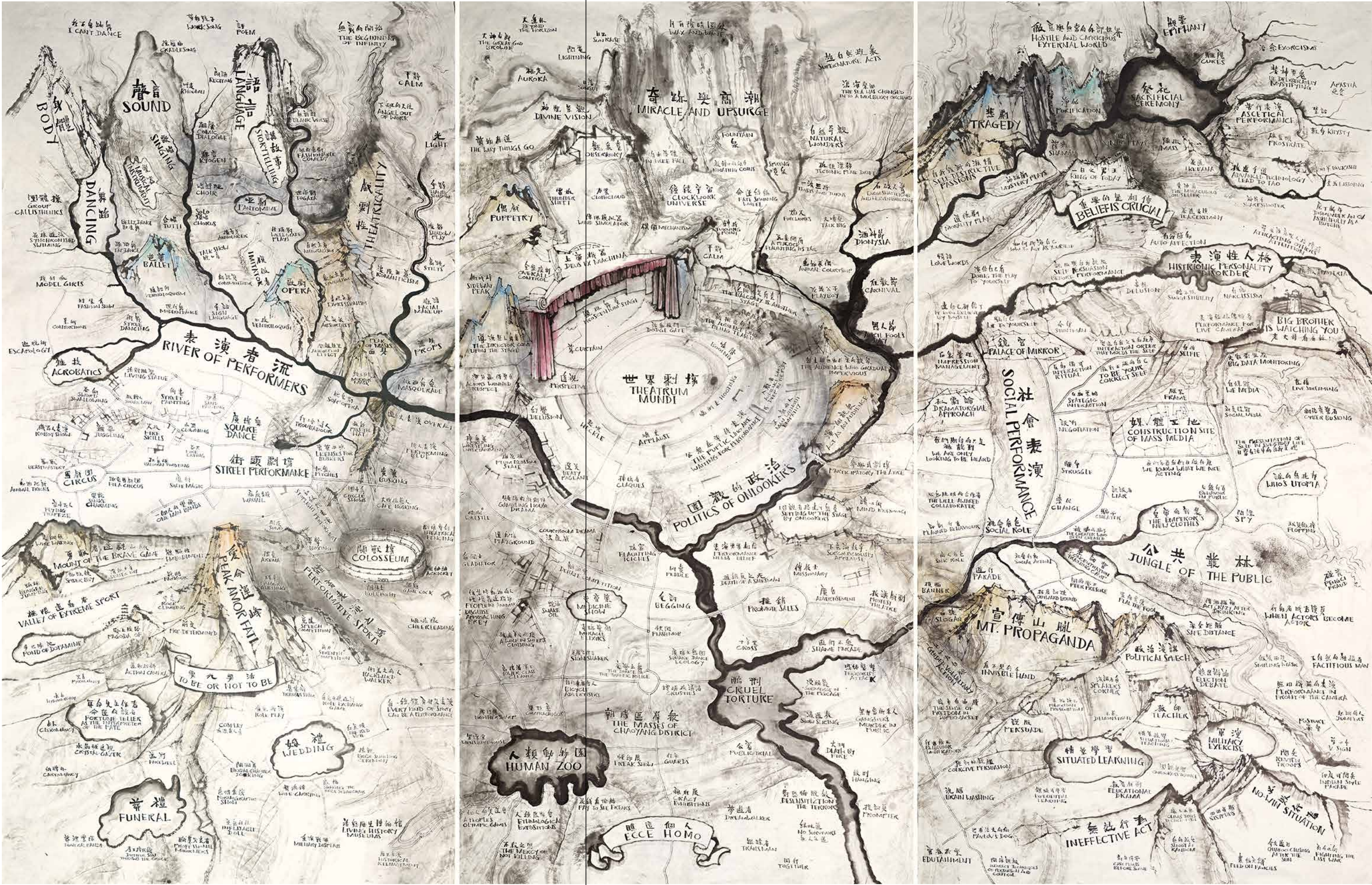
From the Central Kingdom to China, 2015
240 × 120 cm
(6 parts)



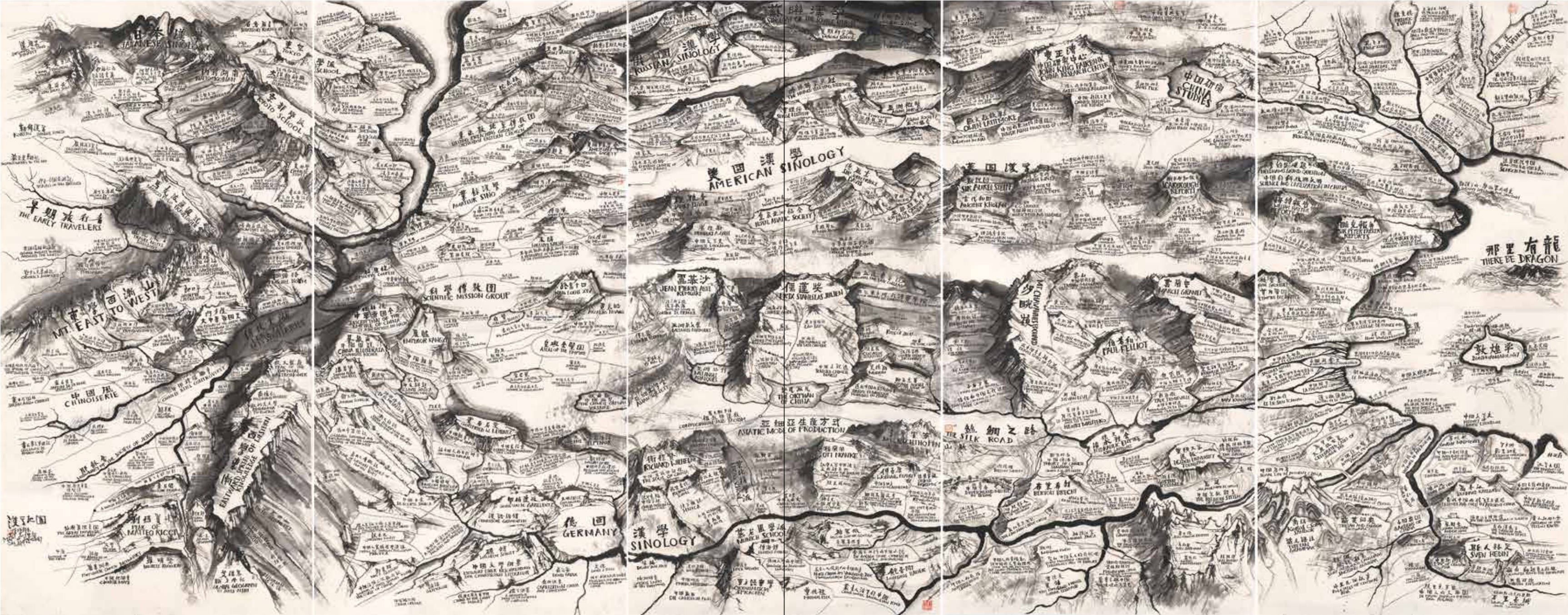
Map of Continuum, 2017
240 × 120 cm
(3 parts)



Why the Performance,
2016
240 × 120 cm
(3 parts)



Map of Sinology, 2019
240 × 120 cm
(5 parts)





Map of China-Arab Relationship – True Knowledge Should Be Learned Intently, Even if It Could Only Be Found in a Country as Far as China, 2019
240 × 120 cm
(6 parts)

The Encounter of Two Worlds Series

Ink on paper

Columbus Is Here, 2013
130 x 97 cm



I Do Not Escape from
This World, 2013
130 x 97 cm



*The Conquerors
Later Became
Archaeologists, 2013*
130 x 97 cm



*I'm Not a Pet,
and Do Not Engage
in Work, 2014*
130 x 97 cm



*The Doomsday
of Wildness, 2013*
130 x 97 cm



*Father from
the Sky, Mother
from the Earth, 2013*
130 x 97 cm



*Map of the Buddha's
Teachings that Came
from the East, 2013*
ink and rubbing on paper,
130 × 97 cm



*The Useless
Passion, 2013*
ink and rubbing on
paper, 130 × 97 cm



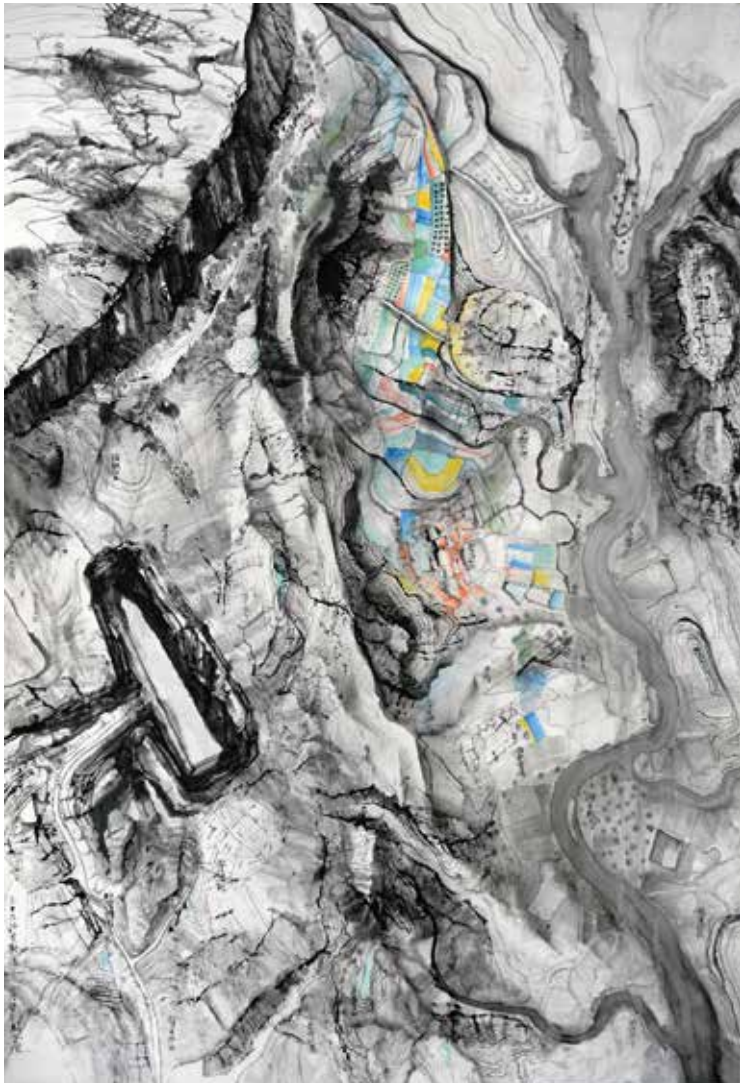
*Dusk Made in
China, 2013*
ink and rubbing on
paper, 130 × 97 cm



The World Before, 2016
130 x 97 cm



*The Ancient Battlefield
of the Thirty-Six
Stratagems*, 2013
145.5 x 105 cm



*The Seawater
May Become
Transparent*, 2014
146 x 183 cm

*The Travel of
Baudolino*, 2013
69.5 x 135 cm

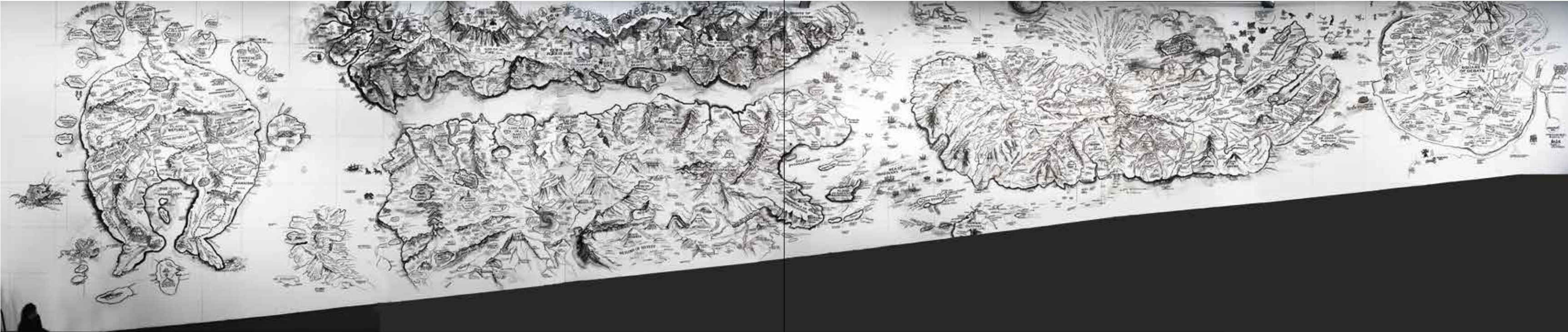


The Politics of Laughing
Göteborg International
Biennale, 2013
3.5 × 15 m

On Location

Large-scale ink murals





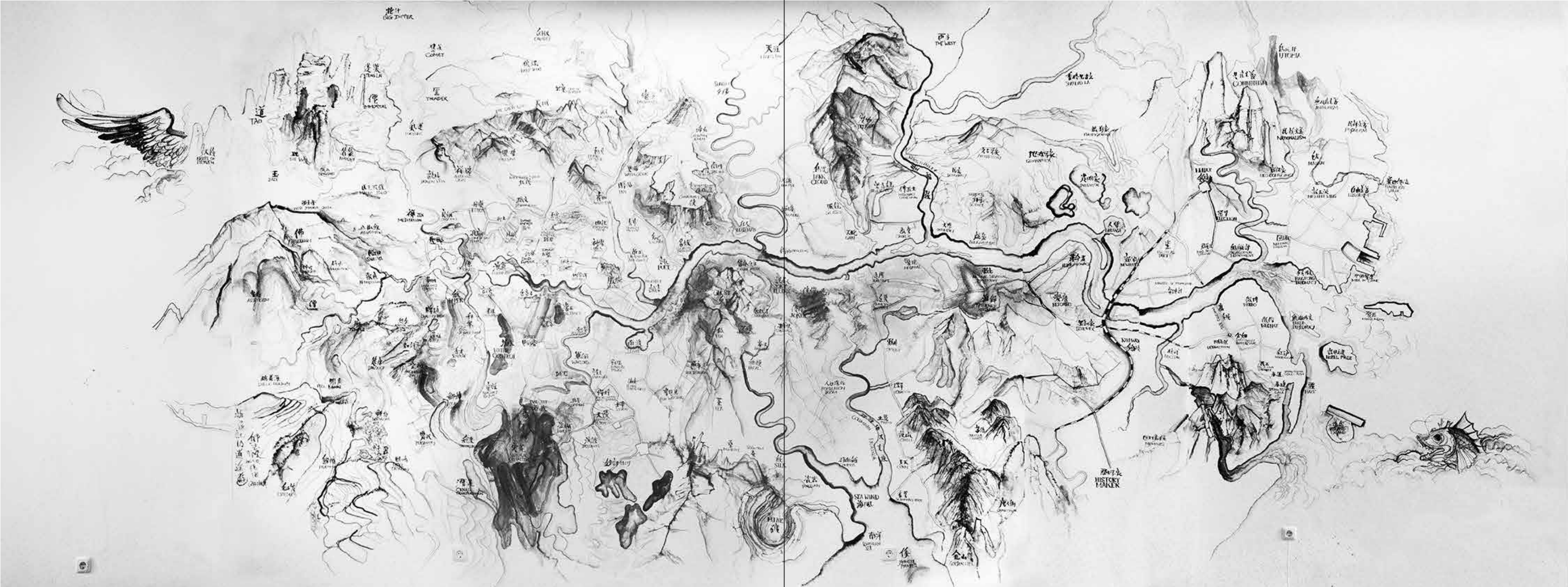


Map of the Third World
Moscow Biennale, 2015
7 x 17 m

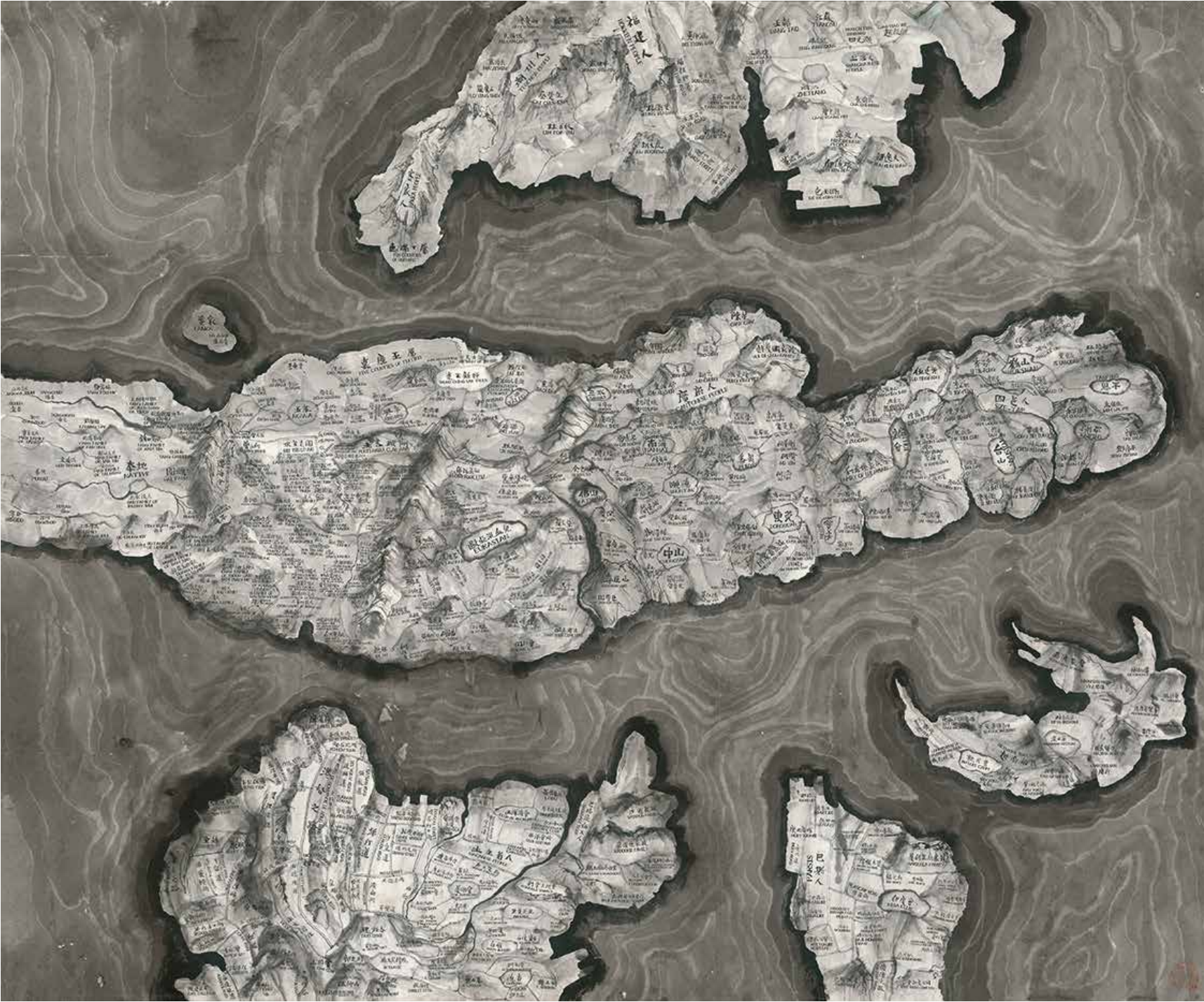




Who Still Remembers
the Free Traveling
Kunstmuseum Gelsenkirchen,
Germany, 2015
4 x 10 m



Map of Hong Kong
Cultures, 2015
145 x 175 cm
(14 parts)



Map of Hong Kong
Surnames

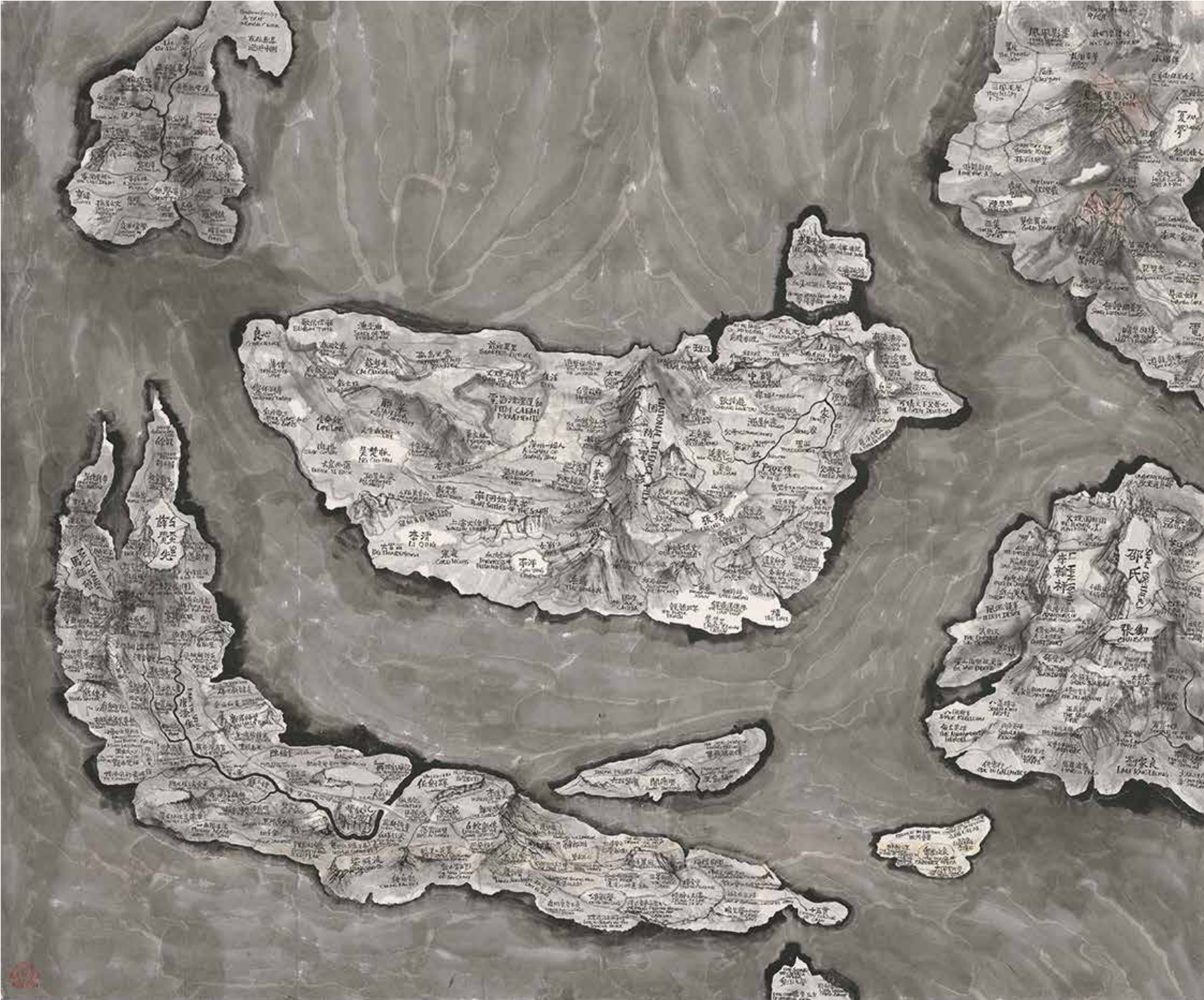
Map of Hong Kong
Newspapers, Magazines,
and Comics















The metal-plate
installation version of
this work is displayed
at Hong Kong West
Kowloon Station
Photo © MTR





Map of the World
 Gardens, 2016
 76 x 18 m

Commissioned by the
 University of California,
 Berkeley Art Museum
 and Pacific Film Archive
 (BAMPFA) for the exhibition
Architecture of Life
 Photo © Sibila Savage



Map of Technological Ethics
The Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT9), Queensland, 2018
18 × 36 m

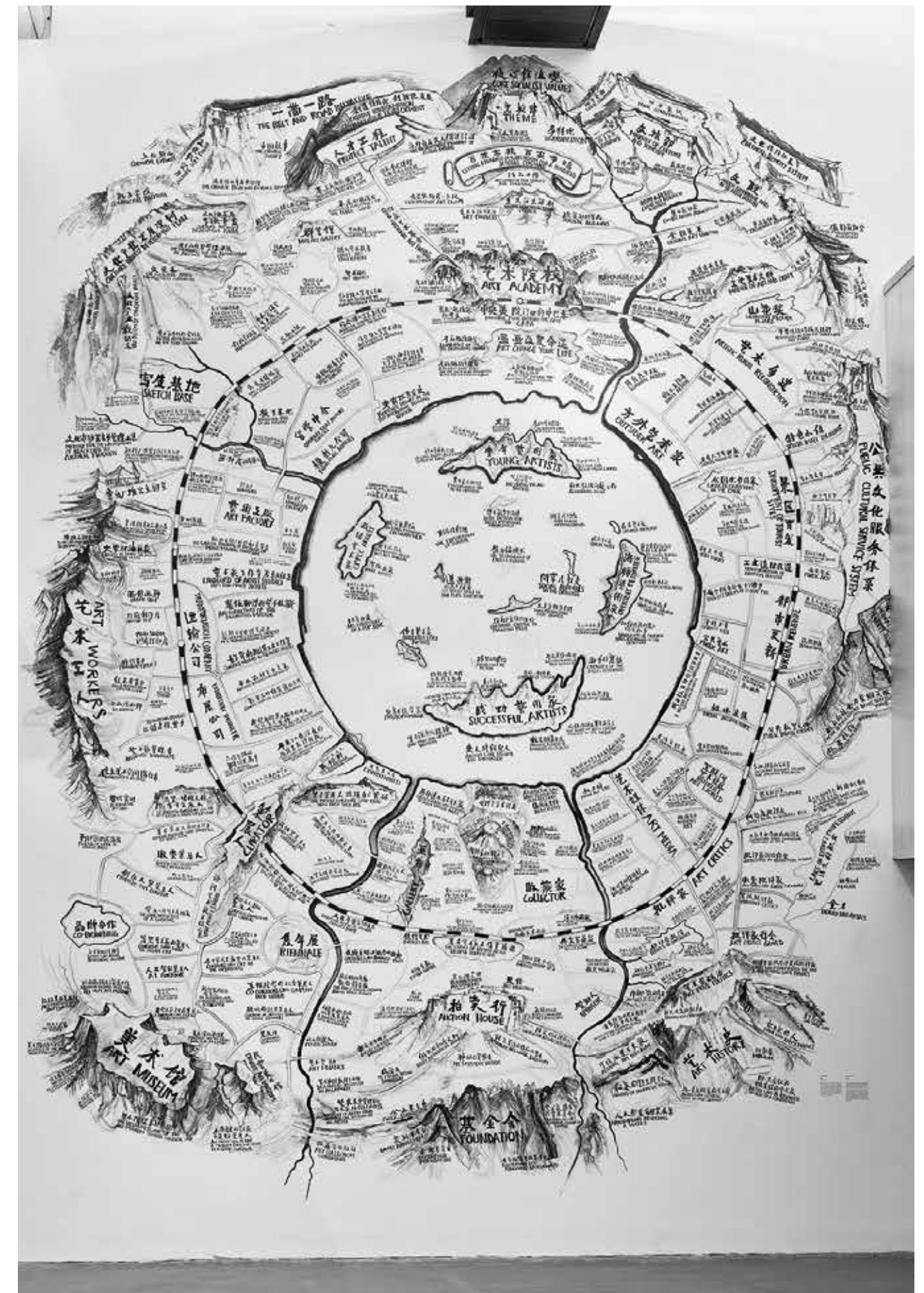
Map of the World Gardens
21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, 2018
ink on paper,
367 × 146 cm (19 parts)





Map of Social Relations
at the Facebook
Headquarters, 2018
9 x 18 m

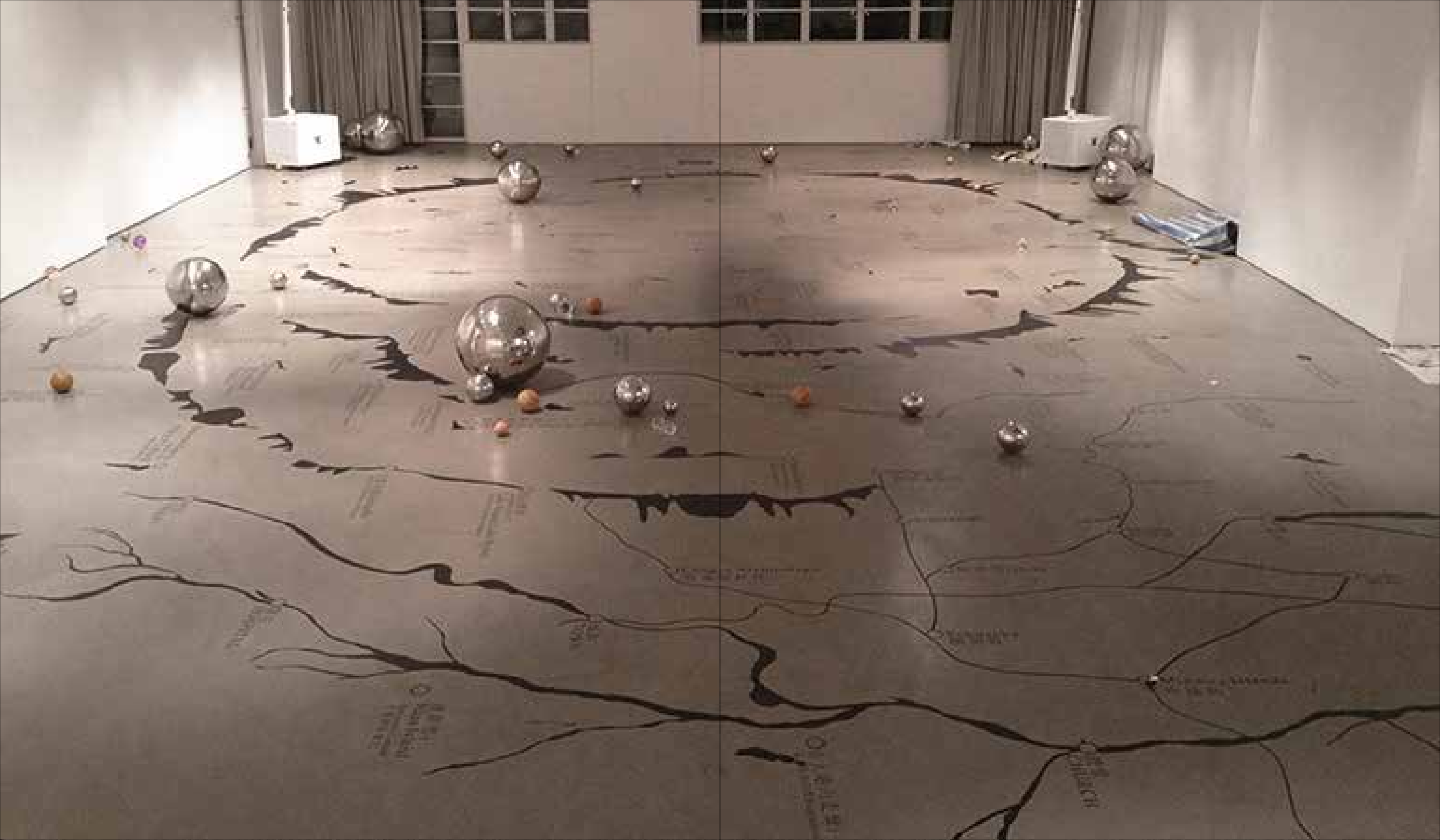
Map of the Art World
installed at the *Mappa*
Mundi exhibition,
UCCA Center for
Contemporary Art,
Beijing, 2019
8 × 10 m



Playground, 2013
printed maps with
wooden and metal balls,
dimensions variable

Name the Objects





Map of Cigarettes, 2013
ink mural and
cigarette packs,
2.5 x 4 m

*A History of Plants
Colonization*, 2013
bamboo woven baskets,
fruits and vegetables,
dimensions variable



*-isms at the End of
the World, 2017*
installation of 28 ink
rubblings mounted
on plaster boards,
dimensions variable





Buddha
98 × 88 cm

Hipsterism
151 × 80 cm

Mistake
214 × 114 cm

Colonialism
152 × 90 cm

I Want to Believe
170 × 73 cm

Nationalism
158 × 103 cm



Communism
193 × 110 cm



Imperialism
180 × 92 cm



Opportunistic
Workaholic
158 × 84 cm

Dunkenness
of Capital
169 × 117 cm



Introspection
190 × 73 cm



Paradox
213 × 88 cm



East Asia
130 × 115 cm



Machiavellianism
168 × 113 cm



Polytheism
168 × 103 cm



Realism
159 × 93 cm



The Christian World
161 × 117 cm



Where Is the Truth
212 × 115 cm



Regime
147 × 101 cm

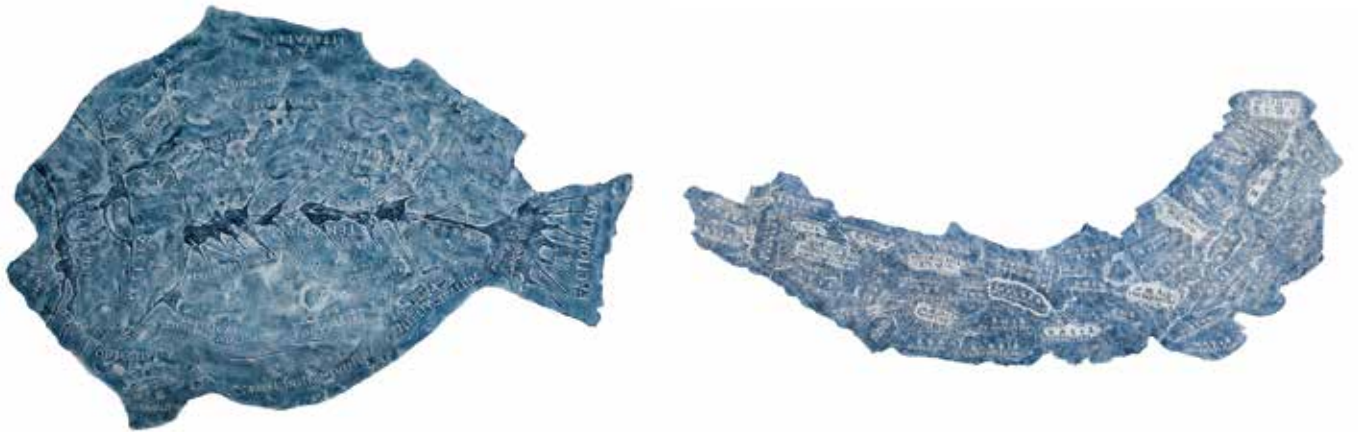
Yoga
174 × 95 cm

Religion
178 × 95 cm

The End of Reason
279 × 110 cm

The Islamic World
210 × 90 cm

Science Oh Science
220 × 88 cm



*Human is the Scale
for All Things*
136 × 112 cm

The Third World
251 × 10 0cm

Style of Language
173 × 68 cm

Totalism and Anarchism
140 × 75 cm





Biography

Qiu Zhijie was born in Zhangzhou, Fujian Province, China in 1969. He graduated from the Printmaking Department of Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts (now China Academy of Art, CAA), Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, China. He is currently dean and professor of the School of Experimental Art at the Central Academy of Fine Arts.

As an artist, Qiu Zhijie is known for his calligraphy and ink painting, photography, video, installation and performance works. His art engages a new kind of experimental communication between the Chinese literati tradition and contemporary art, social participation and the power of self-liberation of art.

As an art writer, Qiu Zhijie published several books, among which: *The Image and Post Modernism* (2002), *Give Me a Mask* (2003), *The Limit of Freedom* (2003), *The Photography after Photography* (2004), *On Total Art* (2012). Catalogs of his work include, among others: *Breaking Through the Ice* (2009), *The Shape of Time* (2007), *Archaeology of Memory* (2006).

He curated the first video art exhibition in China in 1996, and a series of *Post-sense Sensibility* exhibitions between 1999 and 2005, promoting the young generation of Chinese artists. In 2012 he was the chief curator of the 9th

Shanghai Biennale, *Reactivation*. In 2017 he was the chief curator of the Chinese Pavilion at the 57th Venice Biennale.

He was shortlisted for the Hugo Boss Prize administered by the Guggenheim Foundation for his work *The Nanjing Yangtze River Bridge Project*. He was awarded the "Artist of the Year" prize of Award of Art China in 2009, and was again nominated for the same award in 2016.

His works are collected by major museums and institutions around the world, among which: Guggenheim Museum and Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, Fondation Louis Vuitton, Fondation Christian Dior, Ullens Foundation, Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, and White Rabbit Gallery in Sydney.

Exhibitions

Selected solo exhibitions

- 2020

Tide, Galleria Continua, Beijing
- 2019

Mappa Mundi, UCCA Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing
- 2018

Living Writing, 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa
Qiu's Notes on the Colorful Lantern Scroll, Minsheng Art Museum, Beijing
- 2017

Journey Without Arrivals, Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, Geneva
Journey Without Arrivals, Van Abbeuseum, Eindhoven
- 2016

Racing Against Time, Galleria Continua, San Gimignano
- 2015

The Big Project, Fujian Art Museum, Fuzhou
Ink Remix: Contemporary art from China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, Canberra Museum and Gallery, Bendigo Art Gallery, the UNSW Galleries in Sydney, and the Museum of Brisbane
So, we'll go no more a roving, Café Florian, Venice
- 2013

The Unicorn and The Dragon, Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Venice
Satire, Galleria Continua, Beijing
- 2012

Blueprints, Witte de With Contemporary Art Center, Rotterdam
- 2009

Twilight of the Idols, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin
Breaking Through the Ice, UCCA Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing
- 2008

A Suicidology of the Nanjing Yangtze River Bridge 1 – Ataraxic of Zhuang Zi, Zendai Museum of Modern Art, Shanghai

Selected group exhibitions

- 2019

Leaving the Echo Chamber, 14th Sharjah Biennial
- 2018

Art and China after 1989: Theater of the World, Guggenheim Museum, New York
- 2016

BenTu des artistes chinois dans la turbulence des mutations, Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris
Architecture of Life, Berkeley Art Museum
Language Pavilion, M21 Museum, Shanghai
- 2015

All the Worlds Future, 56th Venice Biennale, Venice
- 2014

How to (...) Things That Don't Exist, 31st São Paulo Biennale
- 2013

INK ART: Past as Present in Contemporary China, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Play: Recapturing Radical Imagination, Göteborg Biennale
- 2009

What is Coming, Chinese Pavilion of the 53rd Venice Biennale
- 2008

A Question of Evidence, Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Vienna
- 2007

The Real Things: Contemporary Chinese Art, Tate, Liverpool
- 2005

International Triennial of Contemporary Art, Yokohama
- 2004

Technology of the Visible, 5th Shanghai Biennale, Shanghai Art Museum
- 2003

Tower of Babel, Mainz City Museum
- 2002

25th São Paulo Biennial
- 1993

New Art in China, Post-1989, City Hall, Hong Kong

