



# ICONOGRAPHY OF CLOUD

Leo Liu XuanQi



CLOUD has been an indispensable art subject matter since ancient times, from Chinese literati paintings to the Western impressionistic take on the cloud. Mountains, waters, and clouds are monumental landscape paintings' three essential pictorial elements. Outside the visual art studies, the cloud may be one of the most useful metaphors of all time, in plays, poems, songs, and novels; from philosophy to design, and is even being iconised in computers - the cloud icon sitting in the top blue bar. In Leo's contemporary take on the cloud, his clouds are all-embracing and full of colours, be it totalitarian that covers the canvas or as a guest in his many portraiture of painting. There are always clouds or a piece of cloud in his works, which is the same in everyone's hearts, likened to there are countless colourful clouds, just like everyone's dream, and maybe one or more will come true. Leo's cloud evokes memories and also transcends vision of the future. Cloud is constantly drifting freely, know no boundaries, only running forward, just like chasing its dream, not knowing when they come and where they go. Cloud is both an entity and an empty body because it is unpredictable. Clouds can turn into rains to nourish all things. Clouds can be colourful when melded with sunshine. Contrary, in ancient Chinese symbolism, clouds were created between earth and heaven; they symbolise the celestial realm. Clouds are considered the union of Ying and Yang because they are a fusion of the elements of water and air, sky and earth. Moreover, "Yun", the word for clouds, sounds like the Chinese word for luck and fortune, therefore the two became intrinsically connected. In this hybrid of modern beliefs and ancient connotations of clouds, Leo narrates the story of life, its social issues such as popular culture like social media and fake news, and human behaviour and societal relations in our current times.



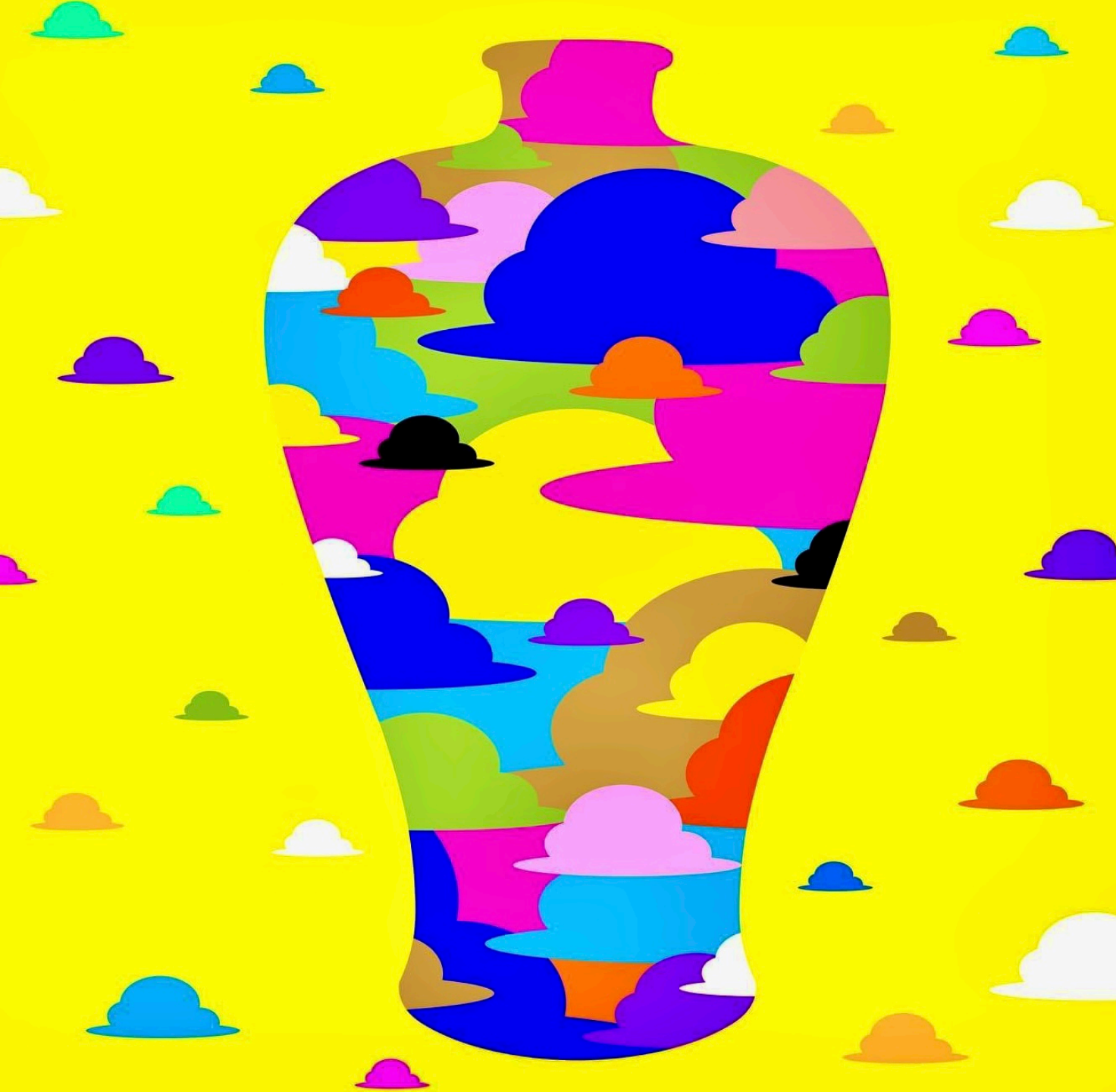
Rainbow Clouds #3  
2021  
Acrylic on Canvas  
34 x 32.5 cm

Above the Cloud  
2022  
Acrylic on Canvas  
140 x 198 cm





In Leo's work, "Above the Clouds", his visual depiction of the clouds has left the earth's physical space and entered the virtual world. As a technology, the cloud refers to the immediacy of the infinite, connecting individuals across vast periods and space to create new forms of togetherness. Traversing boundaries and scalar proportions, the cloud both reorient and disorients in today's digital landscape. Cloud is also known to have the potential to loosen entrenched perspectives. Clouds are thus both natural phenomena and generative entities whose propensity gestures towards liminal realms, the great clouds of unknowing. In Leo's vision, the cloud represents the known – unknown, the past, now, and the future.



Praise of the Cloud  
2021  
Acrylic on Canvas  
119 x 121 cm

In the work “Praise of the Cloud”, the imperial vessel comes to life through the cloud form. Ceramic and bronzes are typically relegated by the discipline of art history to the categories of the applied arts or dismissed as superfluously decorative. Here, Leo painted the swirls on the ceramic vessel that manifest endless iterations of indeterminate colours of blue, green, yellow, pink, and brown that bind the pictorial beauty into the vessel, reminiscence of the timeless, elegant, and beauty of the imperial vessel. As Shi Tao (1642–1707), the seventeenth-century individualist monk-painter, commented that clouds as pictorial metamorphoses that bound the painting’s composition: “rivers and clouds, because of the way they gather or disperse, constitute what binds the painting together”.



Rainbow Clouds #2  
2021  
Acrylic on Canvas  
33 x 41 cm  
45 x 53 cm (w/ Frame)





Cloud Bottle  
2012  
Acrylic on Canvas  
91 x 91 cm

Cloud Bowl  
2012  
Acrylic on Canvas  
91 x 91 cm





“Every time I see clouds in the sky, I think of my hometown. I always feel that these clouds come from there, familiar and yet strange. This may be a feeling of living abroad. I like watching clouds because they are always unpredictable, sometimes like people and sometimes like animals. It is fascinating when the cloud is angry, it turns black, and when it cries, it rains, and when it feels better, it makes a rainbow”.

Leo Liu Xuanqi



Leo Liu Xuanqi (1977)  
Seesaw Game  
2021  
Resin & Stainless Steel  
123 x 89 x 40 cm



When things reach balance, it is the perfect moment, but the most perfect is often the most easily broken and vulnerable. Moreover, after breaking, there is confrontation. Conflict and the game will occur when the world is in binary opposition. Due to the role of inertia, one party will always be injured or hurt each other. Only when the balance is reached again will the injury stop. The "Sword of Damocles" hanging in the middle will eventually give fair approval and punishment for imbalance. Looking at the world's current situation, the whole world is rapidly unbalanced, especially the geopolitical situation between the two superpowers. Elsewhere, from regional conflicts, economic and trade wars, energy problems, ethnic and cultural struggles to the earth's environment, and climate change, it is all caused by imbalance. The reason is still because of human problems! Only tolerance, harmony, and equality can make the unbalanced balance return to a balanced state! Finding a balance between rapid development and sustainable development is worthy of our attention and thinking.

*Leo Liu Xuanqi* (1977) is a Chinese contemporary artist currently residing in Singapore. A graduate in Art & Design from Shanghai Publishing and Printing College ( The University of Shanghai for Science and Technology ) in 1999. He moved to Singapore in 2006 and left his decade long career as an Art director in design and advertising in 2009 to pursue art full-time. He was awarded Platinum Award at the 31st UOB Singapore Painting of the Year Competition for his artwork "Wandering Cloud".

Leo's works fuses modern graphics design elements with traditional painting techniques, achieving a sense of contrast in dynamic design versus still realism. His play on dualism and dialectics inspires reflection on the interaction between tradition and the contemporary, within this rapidly evolving world. He is inspired by history and society at large, often seeking to provoke his audience into thinking about contemporary issues facing humanity and the world around them. In 2009 his work is an ongoing reflection of personal identity embedded within popular culture. In his "Cloud" series, Leo plays with the idea of permanence and the temporal, and explores the tension that arises at the crossroads of rapid globalization. In 2012 he also made an important pivot towards fusing charcoal realism with POP Art paintings to manifest greater freedom in artistic imagination and expression. In 2014 he also begun to explore using contemporary styles to express traditional Chinese ink painting, bringing traditional ink into installation art to achieve an artistic breakthrough in uniqueness and style.

Since 2010, he has held six solo exhibitions and participated in many international art fairs, such as Art Stage Singapore, Art Taipei, Hongkong Art Central, etc. His works are collected by private collectors and public institutions.