



ICONOGRAPHY OF CLOUD 云游

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 valuable metaphors of all time in plays, poems, songs, and novels, from philosophy to design. Moreover, the semiotics of cloud ranges from motifs, framing devices, poetic imagery, and a desktop icon. The cloud's ubiquity reminds us, perhaps, that it is humanity's most significant icon in history and today. 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 a vision of the future. Cloud is constantly drifting freely, knows 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, or 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.



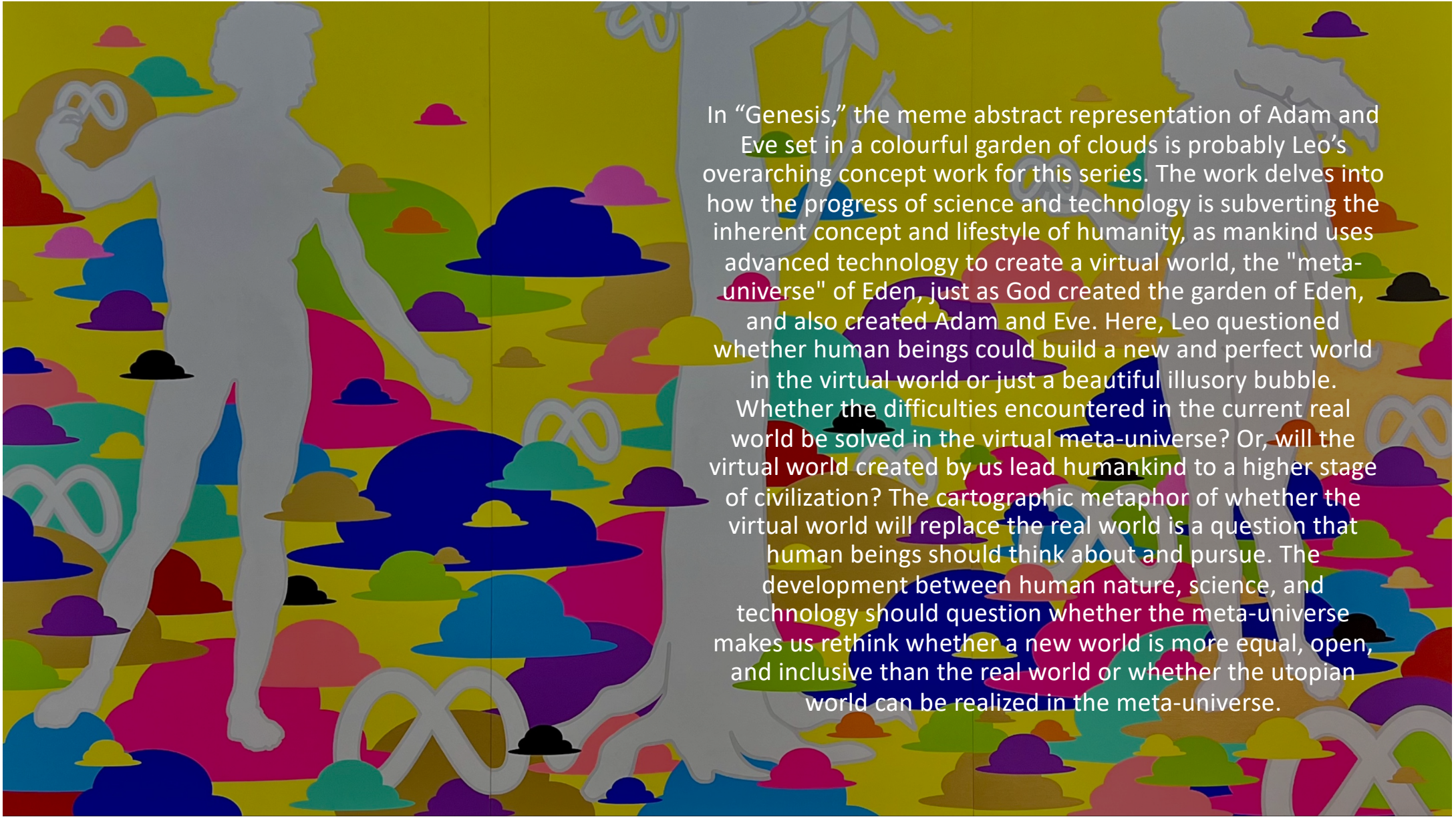
Blessing #1
2022
Acrylic on Canvas
90 x 90 cm



Blessing #2
2022
Acrylic on Canvas
90 x 90 cm



Genesis, 2022, Acrylic on Canvas, 244 x 366 cm



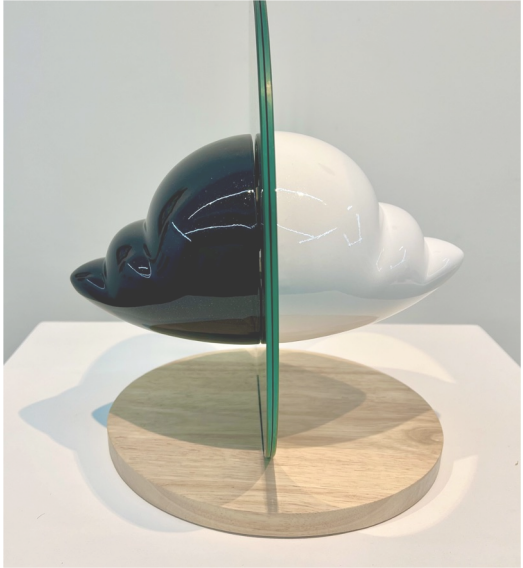
In "Genesis," the meme abstract representation of Adam and Eve set in a colourful garden of clouds is probably Leo's overarching concept work for this series. The work delves into how the progress of science and technology is subverting the inherent concept and lifestyle of humanity, as mankind uses advanced technology to create a virtual world, the "meta-universe" of Eden, just as God created the garden of Eden, and also created Adam and Eve. Here, Leo questioned whether human beings could build a new and perfect world in the virtual world or just a beautiful illusory bubble. Whether the difficulties encountered in the current real world be solved in the virtual meta-universe? Or, will the virtual world created by us lead humankind to a higher stage of civilization? The cartographic metaphor of whether the virtual world will replace the real world is a question that human beings should think about and pursue. The development between human nature, science, and technology should question whether the meta-universe makes us rethink whether a new world is more equal, open, and inclusive than the real world or whether the utopian world can be realized in the meta-universe.

Up into the Sky
2022
Acrylic & Charcoal on Canvas
122 x 91 cm



Strolling on the Clouds
2022
Wood & Acrylic Paint
50 x 70 x 5 cm





Unparalleled
2022
Fiberglass, Mirror & Wood
32 x 30 x 30 cm





Whimsical Cloud #1
2022
Ceramic
14 x 11 x 22 cm



Whimsical Cloud #3
2022
Ceramic
14 x 11 x 22 cm



Whimsical Cloud Silver
2021
Electroplate Fibreglass
15 x 13 x 24 cm
Edition 10/60



Whimsical Cloud Gold
2021
Electroplate Fibreglass
15 x 13 x 24 cm
Edition 10/60



Whimsical Cloud Pink
2021
Electroplate Fibreglass
15 x 13 x 24 cm
Edition 10/60



“Above the Clouds” clever use of contemporary semiotics floats simultaneously with the spatial totalitarian clouds, representing Leo’s visual depiction that the clouds have 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 reorients and disorients in today’s digital landscape. Cloud is also known to have the potential to loosen entrenched perspectives.

Above the Cloud
2022
Acrylic on Canvas
140 x 198 cm

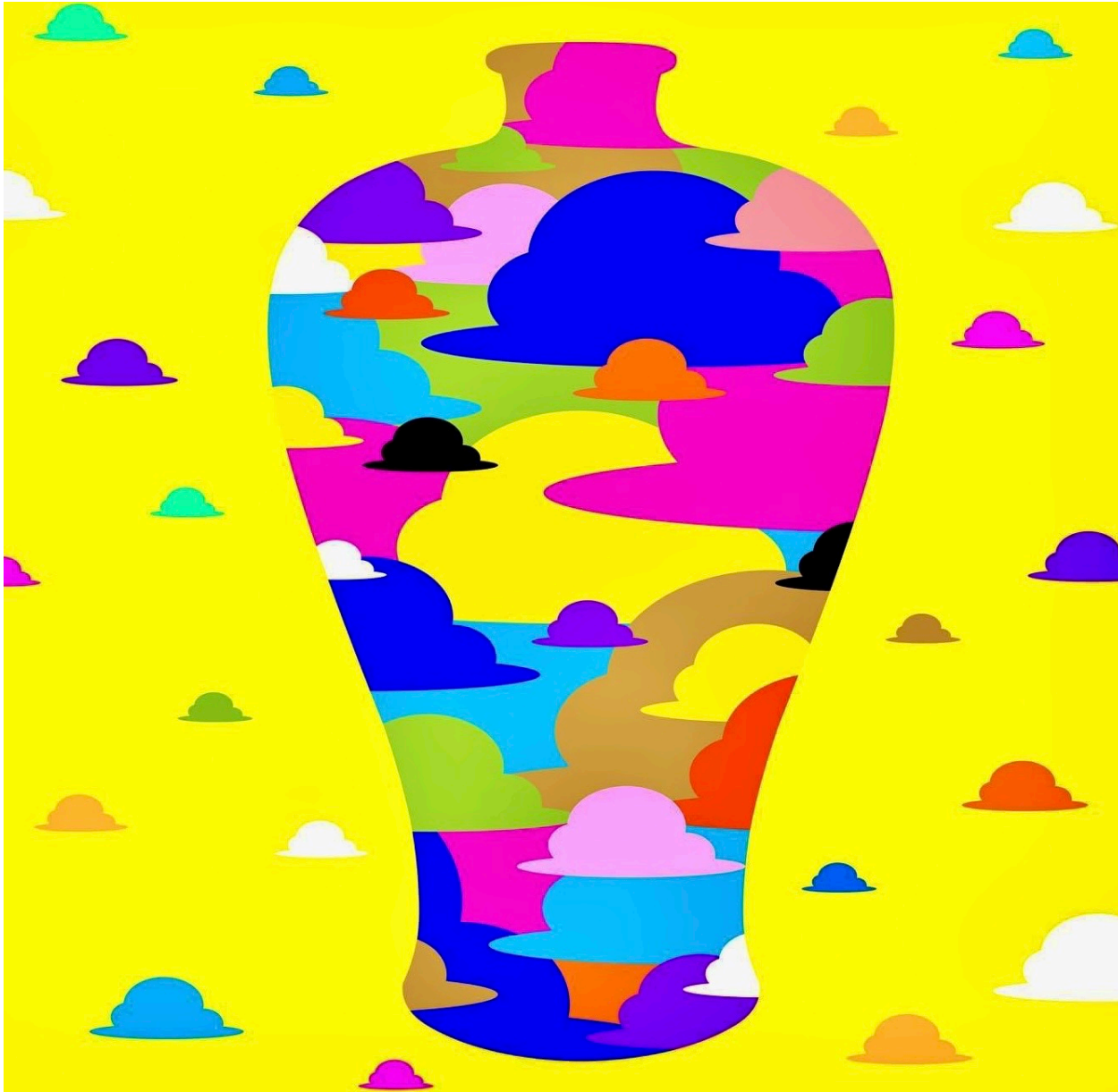




Rainbow Clouds #2
2021
Acrylic on Canvas
33 x 41 cm



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



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”.





Unbounded
2020
Oil on Canvas
60 x 46 cm



Luxury
2020
Oil on Canvas
43 x 43 cm



The Beginning...

“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



Playing with Butterfly in Spring
2010
Acrylic on Canvas
102 x 76 cm



Love Duckman
2011
Acrylic on Canvas
102 x 76 cm

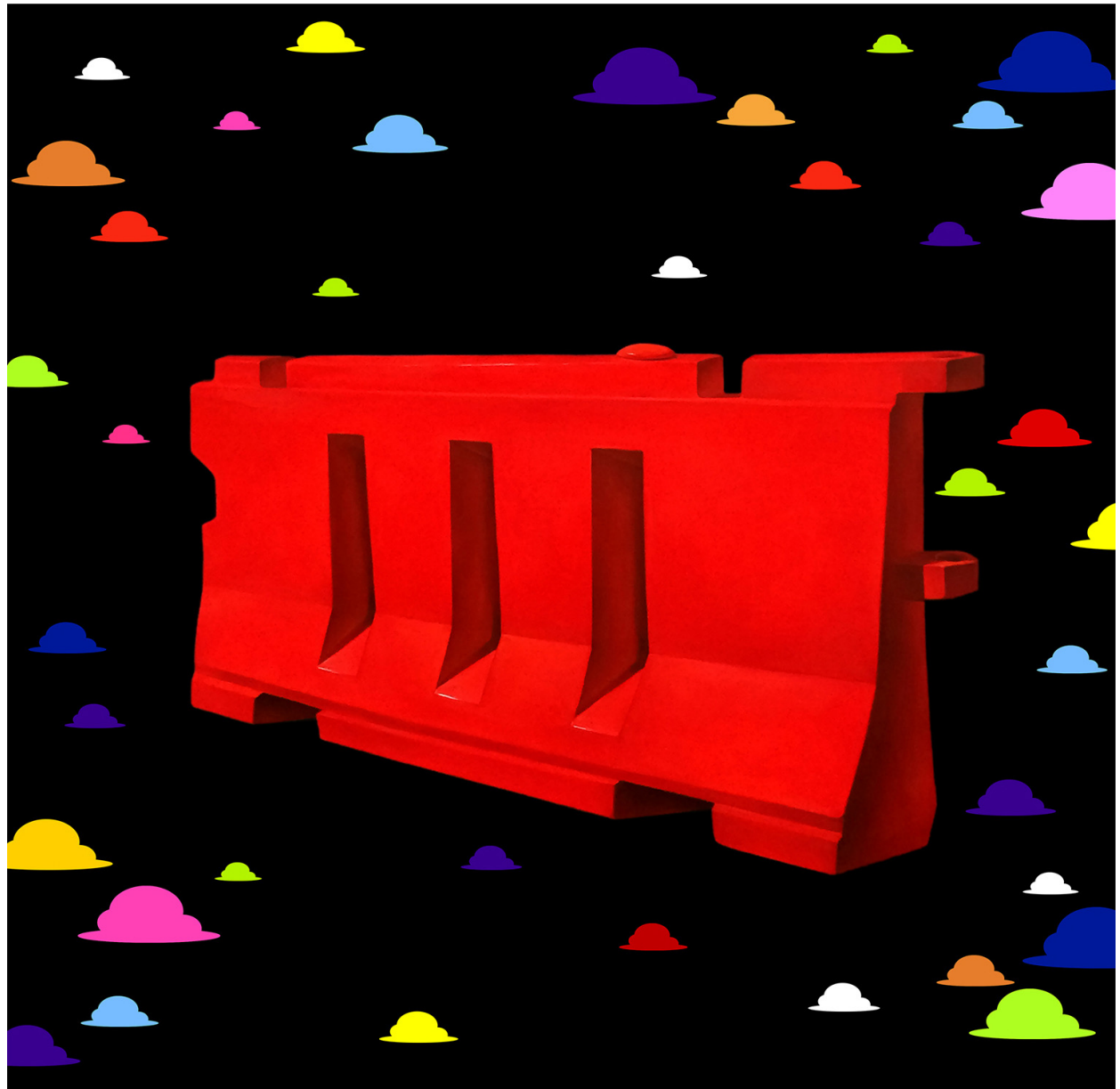


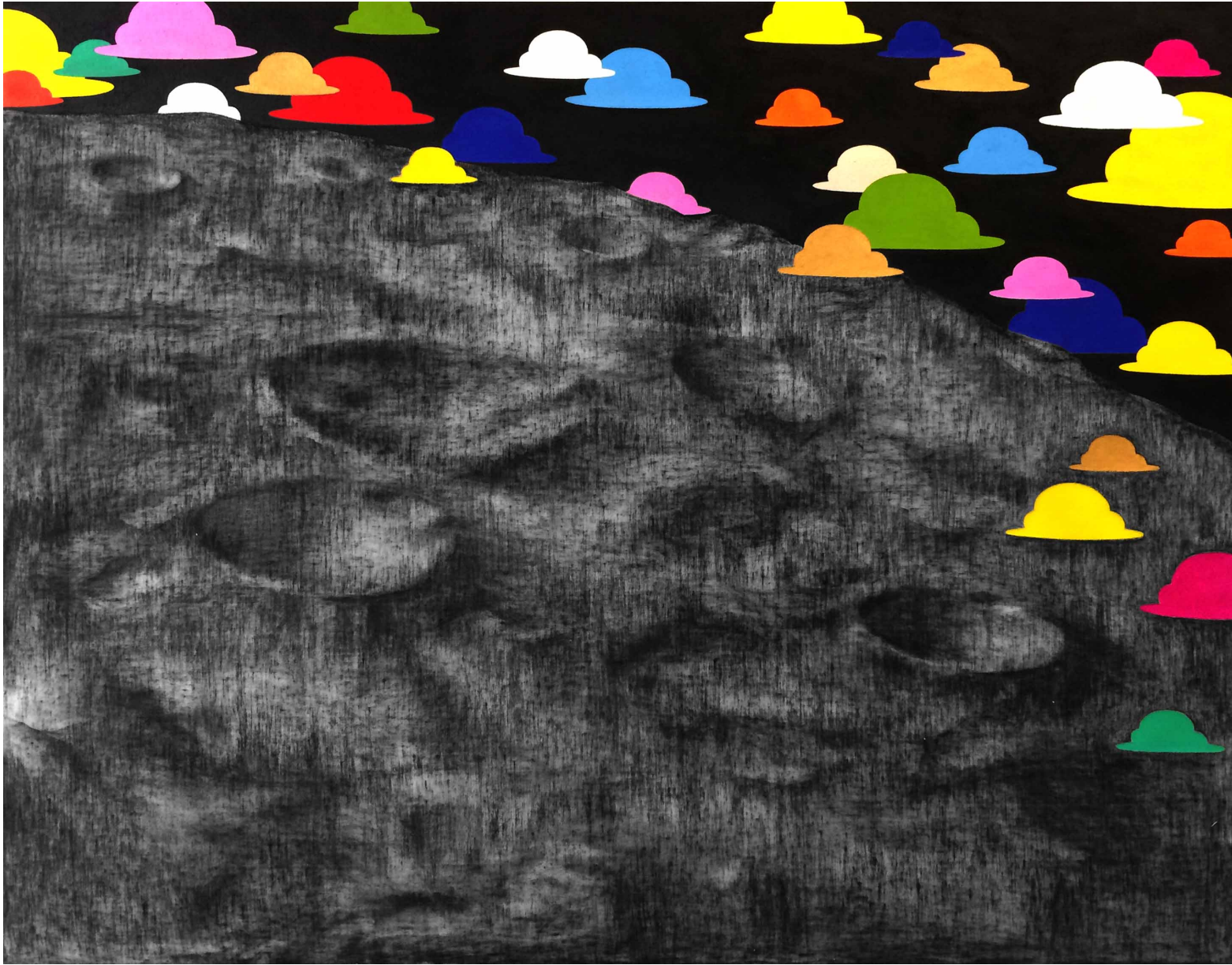
Float
2011
Acrylic on Canvas
150 x 120 cm

Absolut Vodka
2012
Acrylic on Canvas
122 x 92 cm



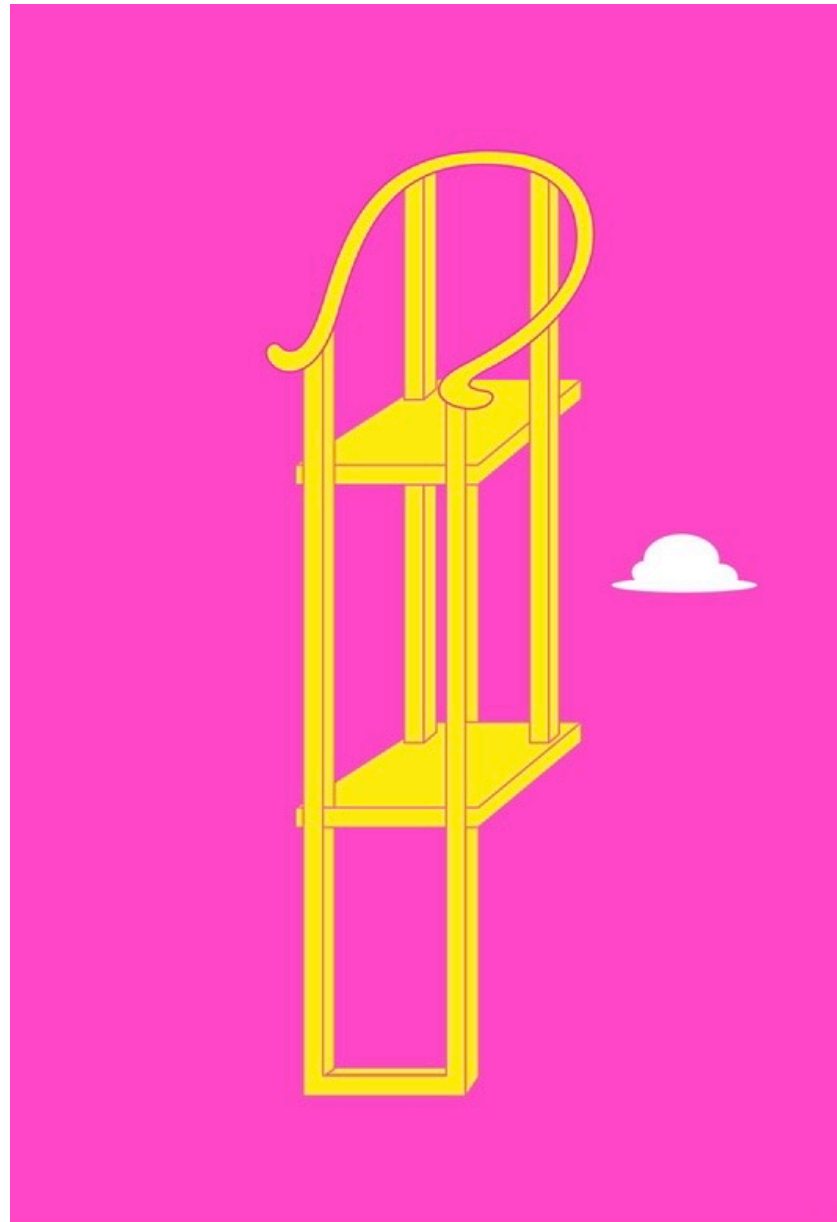
Transcend
2013
Acrylic on Canvas
140 x 140 cm






238,856 Miles
2015
Acrylic & Charcoal on Canvas
122 x 95 cm

Chair - Pink
2014
Limited Artist Print
105 x 74 cm



The Performance #2
2017
Acrylic & Charcoal on Canvas
122 x 100 cm





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 began 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.

ART SEASONS

@ June 2022 Art Seasons Publication