

Qu Leilei 曲磊磊

Qu Leilei (1951, Heilongjiang, China) is a talented and influential contemporary Chinese artist who holds a significant place in the history of art. He was one of the founding members of the **Stars Group** (1979), the very first movement that fought for artistic freedom and launched the beginning of contemporary Chinese art. Since the end of the 1970s, Qu Leilei has continued to create groundbreaking artworks, perpetually revealing his ability to master both Eastern and Western traditions.

In his wide artistic repertoire, Qu Leilei explores the beauty and strength of human forms, presenting a harmonious union between the traditional Chinese medium of ink and paper with an exceptional level of realism that was once achieved by European Renaissance masters.

Globally recognised, his work has been exhibited at the **Venice Biennale** and collected by some of the most prestigious museums in the world, such as *The British Museum, The Victoria and Albert Museum, The Ashmolean Museum, The Japan Modern Art Museum, The China National Art Museum* and *Barclays Bank*.



Stars Group 1979

They launched the beginning of contemporary Chinese art

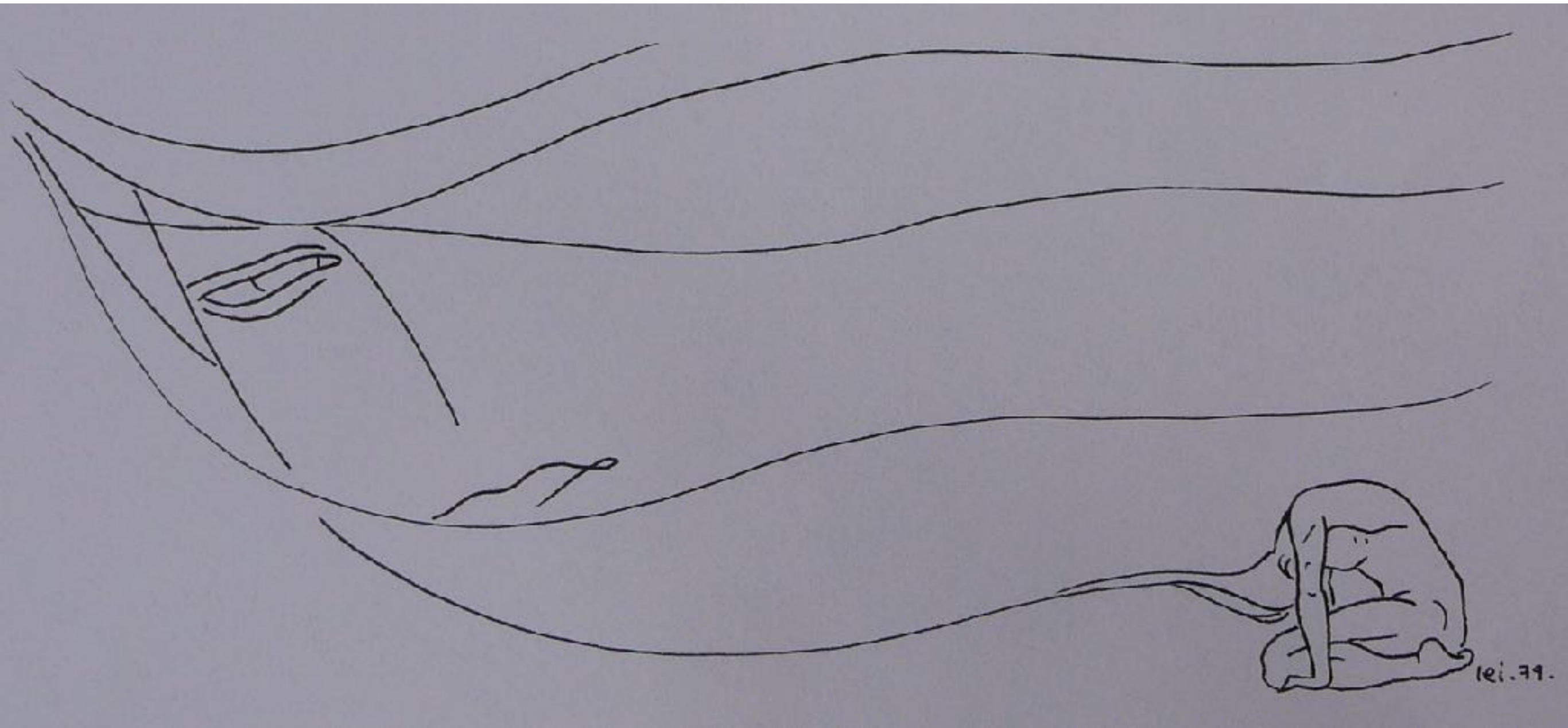
Demonstration, striving for artistic freedom. Qu Leilei was holding the small yellow sign on the right



The first Stars Group Exhibition outside the National Art Gallery in Beijing in 1979



Qu Leilei - Wind, 1979, pencil on paper - Stars Group



Qu Leilei at The
**British
Museum**



Two artworks by Qu Leilei, inks *Lei Feng* and *Journey* (images above) have been collected by the British Museum and publicly displayed next to *The Admonitions Scroll* (image on the right) whose original version is attributed to renowned ancient Chinese master Gu Kaizhi. *The Admonitions Scroll* is regarded as one of the most famous Chinese paintings in the world, and Gu Kaizhi as the father of classical Chinese figure painting. The stunning inks by Gu Kaizhi and Qu Leilei create an exceptional dialogue between past and present, ancient and modern, traditional and contemporary.





Conference about Qu Leilei and the beginning of Contemporary Chinese Art
The British Museum
London, 2015

Nude Series

Ink on paper



Hands Series

Ink on paper



HUA

Sketches of nudes

Ink on paper



Calligraphy

Mixed media

古風變春謝公于夏誠實也者也連
機露秋陰雷降皇靈變於六寒
一集三百九。○古者種秋以冬不
聖人歸履不勞而自以黃土春青大
對侯乾物子如何之名富變變然
又陽馳且轉眼新江海○四海連只
世系天地念念結於一○同土○食
辛勤耕種也者也我德我且谷軒轉

Abstract landscapes

Ink on paper



HUA

Portraits

Ink on paper



Professor Michael Sullivan

One of the greatest
experts of Chinese art,
deep connoisseur and
admirer of Qu Leilei

Essay about Qu Leilei

Qu Leilei is a talented and influential contemporary Chinese artist who holds a significant place in the history of art. He was one of the founding members of the *Stars Group*¹ (1979), the very first movement that fought for artistic freedom and launched the beginning of contemporary Chinese art. Since then, Qu Leilei has continued to create groundbreaking artworks, perpetually revealing his ability to master both Eastern and Western traditions.

Globally recognised, his work has been collected by some of the most prestigious museums such as by *The British Museum*, *The Victoria and Albert Museum*, *The Ashmolean Museum*, *The Japan Modern Art Museum*, *The China National Art Museum* and *Barclays Bank*.

As Michael Sullivan, the highly regarded authority in Chinese art explained, there are three things that make Qu Leilei so special: firstly his unquestionable talent, as there is nothing he cannot do. One example is the human hand, one of the most complicated subjects to draw. Qu Leilei paints it beautifully, transforming it into a powerful image carrying deep human feelings of love².

Secondly, whilst some of the most prominent contemporary Chinese artists after having created a specific style that made them successful they keep repeating it, Qu Leilei cannot be confined to one single genre as he continues to explore different possibilities of forms and subjects.

From his initial naive work at the end of the 1970s until today he has experimented with a diverse range of themes, reaching the highest level of beauty in his exquisite *Hands and Nudes* series. Thirdly, the way Qu Leilei paints his nudes is revolutionary.

By combining Eastern and Western techniques Qu Leilei reveals how the Chinese medium of ink and brush can through gentle and deft gradations of lights and shades generate those tactile and sculptural feelings of Western art³.

With a deep understanding of the human anatomy Qu Leilei's delicate nudes carry a variety of yin and yang elements such as luminosity and darkness, lightness and heaviness, fulness and emptiness as well as complexity and simplicity.

His works maintain an Oriental spirit and integrate it with the exceptional level of realism that was once achieved by European Renaissance masters.

But while Western artists employed oil on canvas, Qu Leilei's practice preserves the Chinese tradition of paper,⁴ resulting in images aesthetically challenging and captivating. His capable hand, spirit of observation and deep commitment to art create nudes with contrasts of texture and interplays of mass and lines, stillness and movement; bodies that seem to evoke silent revelations, bodies that as Michael Sullivan defined are “both intriguing and satisfying”⁵.

Qu Leilei's artistic repertoire incorporates various styles among which are also stunning abstract landscapes, fluid sketches and tiny delicate watercolours. Clearly different from his realistic nudes, these works show a freehand simplicity and exude a genuine freshness running through lines and compositions. But no matter which style we are looking at, Qu Leilei's work remains calm and tranquil. In the serenity of his images one can perceive a sense of inner liveliness, what in Chinese is called *Qiyun Shengdong*⁶

Like the ancient Chinese masters combined a high level of concentration with freedom in their brushstrokes Qu Leilei through his contemporary sensibility also creates meticulous yet spontaneous artworks; artworks whose glorious execution has achieved international recognition and continues to leave us speechless in front of its endless, silent beauty...

Dagmar Carnevale Lavezzoli
Contemporary Chinese Art Specialist

*The current essay was extrapolated from essay *Silent Beauty* by DCL

1 Please see beginning of the presentation in The Stars Group section.

2 In the *Hands Series* Qu Leilei reveals his deep concern for the destiny of humanity as the language of the human hand transcends all nationalities, social classes, and religions. His expressive hands can therefore represent the story of one man, one family, one nation or the entire world.

3 Michael Sullivan, Qu Leilei - Brush, Ink, Light, Shadows, Littleton & Hennessy Asian Art, New York, 2008

4 The specific type of paper used by Qu Leilei is Xuan paper, the most suitable medium to convey the ancient spirit of Chinese calligraphy and painting.

5 Michael Sullivan, Qu Leilei - Brush, Ink, Light, Shadows, Littleton & Hennessy Asian Art, New York, 2008

6 *Qiyun Shengdong* is translated in English as “spiritual resonance and lifelike motion”. This is the first and most important of the six principles formulated by Chinese art critic Xie He (479-502) in order to judge the quality and value of Chinese paintings. These principles deeply influenced artists of later generations.

Museums

The British Museum

The Victoria and Albert Museum

The Ashmolean Museum

National Art Museum of China

Museum of Modern Art Japan

HRH The Prince of Wales

Lectures

1990 - currently

Visiting Lecturer : Classical and Contemporary Chinese Art

Mary Ward Centre, London

Ruskin School of Art, Oxford

Chinese Brush Painters Society, UK

SOAS / Christie's Institute, London

Sotheby's Institute, London

Buckinghamshire Education Centre, Gt. Missenden

The Victoria & Albert Museum, London

The British Museum, London

The British Library, London

Swan Hellenic

The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

Royal Academy of Art, London

1999- President, Chinese Brush Painters Society, UK

Main Exhibitions

2018 'A Chinese artist in Britain' solo show
Ashmolean Museum Oxford

2017 'Enlightenment' solo show 3812 Gallery
Hong Kong

2016 Silent Revelations: Qu Leilei, The Great
Master of Ink, Hua Gallery, solo show, London

2015 Permanent collection and display British
Museum London

2014 'Modern Brush and Ink', FrankPage Gallery,
solo show, Geneva

2011 'Brush Ink Light Shadow' solo show,
The National Art Museum of China, Beijing

2009 Leda Fletcher Gallery, solo show, Geneva.

2008 'Brush, Ink, Light, Shadow'
Littleton&Hennessy Asian Art, solo show, New
York

2007 'Brush Ink Light Shadow', Leda Fletcher
Gallery, solo show, Shanghai

2006 Campbell Gallery, South Kensington, solo
show, London

2005 'Everyone's Life is an Epic', solo show, The
Ashmolean, Museum, Oxford

The 2nd Beijing Biennale, Beijing China

2004 Blunden Oriental, 'Art on Paper' Royal
College of Art, London

2003 Joint Exhibition with Caroline Deane, The
Aldeburgh Gallery, Suffolk

2002 Galerie Leda Fletcher, solo show, Geneva

2001 49th Biennale di Venezia, Venezia, Italy
The Paragon, The Cape of Good Hope Gallery,
solo show, Singapore

2000 Galerie Leda Fletcher, solo show,
Geneva, Art Towards Reconciliation,
Guernica Museum, Spain, 'The Stars' 20th
Anniversary Exhibition, Tokyo, Japan

1999 48th Biennale di Venezia, Venezia, Italy
'Here and Now - to Face a New Century' solo show, The Trueman Brewery Gallery, London
'Nude', The Redfern Gallery, solo show, London
1998 'Chinese Contemporary Art' Mountboron castle, France, [5000+] Bilbao, Spain
1997 Chinese Contemporary Gallery, solo show, London, 'Far From Shore' Pitshanger Manor and Gallery, London
1996 'Contemporary Chinese Art' Gallery Asur, Oslo, Norway, 'Fine Chinese Work of Art' Christie's, Paris
1995 Join Exhibition, The Blue Gallery, London
1993 'East Going West' Tricycle Gallery, solo show, London
1992 'Linear Rhythm' Calligraphy Exhibition, The Central Gallery, Covent Garden, solo show, London

1991 Barclays business Centre, Covent Garden, London. one man show
1989 'Never Forget' Pompidou Centre, Paris
'The Stars' 10th Anniversary, Hanart Gallery, Hong Kong and Tai Pei
1988 'Artists and Places' Barclays Business Centre, Covent Garden London
1987 'Contemporary Chinese Art' Royal Festival Hall, London
1986 'East Meet West' Joint Exhibition, Holland Gallery, London
1985 'National Ceramics' Exhibition, Beijing, China
1980 'The Stars' Exhibition 2, Beijing, China
1979 'The Stars' Exhibition 1, Beijing, China

Selected publications

