

*Shanshui (Stele)*

2020

Chinese Mò ink, Gypsum plaster

Courtesy the artist

Since the Tang Dynasty (618–907) the *bei* 《碑》 has been the major medium for stone inscription in China. Used for both sacred and secular purposes a *bei*, or stele, is often used to disseminate information through religious teaching or government laws and regulations. Designed as objects of social and political purpose, these stelae are monolithic in construction: a lasting testament to the ideologies and cultural climate of their time.

Kien Situ strips the stele of its purpose and remodels the monumental slab as an aesthetic object for visual dialogue. The artist rots away the very core of his stele to reconsider the object with caution and skepticism. *Shanshui (Stele)* is the largest work Situ has created; it exists as an experiment in material, craft and artistic practice, filled with material disbelief and an uneasy sense of collapse. The confident rigidity of the piece's edges and corners gradually give way to manufactured internal loss begging to be filled and made whole again. Through the work's deconstructive analysis of cultural identity, Situ asks us to consider the transience and porousness of personal and societal structures.

*Shanshui (Wall Plate)*

2020

Chinese Mò ink, Gypsum plaster

Courtesy the artist

Kien Situ's *Shanshui (Wall Plate)* works are evocative of square-format traditional Chinese ink and brush landscape paintings transmuted in material and streamlined in perspective. Read via a birds-eye view, the works are legible as a flyover of an internal diasporic landscape, with the viewer's eye sensually following the tactile terrain along with the artist's gestural application of gypsum plaster and Mò ink. Amorphous in shape and ambiguous in perceived geography, the works are lyrical in depicting internal discourse, undulating with stilted fragility and suspension of movement captured in the density of their inherent materiality.

Conversely, the perspective employed by Situ echoes the compositional plane of heaven, which is used to depict mountains that embody the "heart" of a *shanshui* painting. Routinely mixed with water to create delicate nature scenes with a calligraphic flair, Mò ink, when mixed with gypsum plaster, renders the material with a void-like darkness and soaks up light into the contours and jagged ridges of Situ's work. The artist trades the precision of ink and brush painting for physical, bodily force resulting in expressive imaginary scenes—their tension, release and flow being at odds with the intrinsic weight of the work.

*Shanshui (Scroll)*

2020

Chinese Mò ink, Gypsum plaster

Courtesy the artist

*Shanshui (Scroll)* was conceived as an object representative of a decorative domestic vertical scroll. Throughout the artistic process it became an experiment in material durability with Kien Situ pushing his material to its structural limit. The artist sought to depict a familiar household experience with typical and often banal decoration fractured through cultural amnesia and personal identity. The resulting work depicts what the artist describes as “being between the generic and specific” of objects which permeate society during the globalised information age. Situ’s practice of creating artificial decay generates an emergence of new spatial possibilities through the blurring of cultures and being realised in this body of work.

As an interior decorative object bastardised by Situ’s application of shanshui materials and concepts the scroll is recontextualised as both a cultural symbol and exploration of an internal landscape. Seeking to depict the fragmentation of personal connections to both physical and cultural geographies over space and time, Situ’s *Shanshui (Scroll)* offers an understanding of positive and negative space within an object and its role in society standing as an inversion on the theme of memorial and ruin.

*Shanshui (Column)*

2020

Chinese Mò ink, Gypsum plaster

Courtesy the artist

Utilising the most ubiquitous feature of architectural and engineering construction Kien Situ's most successful fusion of his East Asian upbringing and Eurocentric architectural education culminates in *Shanshui (Column)*. The piece exhibited within *Holding Patterns* is a larger scale of previous work with ratios increased by multiples of four and eight. Eight and four are superstitious numbers due to the Chinese pronunciation of each number as being similar to "fortune" and "death" respectively, meaning Situ's calculations become a symbolic balancing act of auspiciousness and disaster.

Situ's piece embodies dualities: the act of casting, a scientific process with a predetermination of form with a global industrial material versus the local, artistic material employed by hand and mind in a moment of material behaviour and personal touch. The resulting work balances physicality and absence within a conceptual framework to approach the readability of decorative and functional structures. Seeking to engage with intellect, emotions and psyche within a physical manifestation is something the artist believes contemporary architecture does not address or attain and is what Situ is striving to achieve within his practice.