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FINE ART

Artist Ping Zheng's personality surfaces in 'The Voice of Water'

By Andrew Dansby
STAFF WRITER

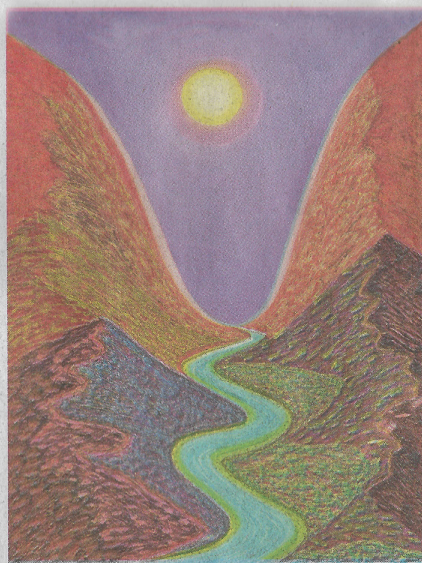
Ping Zheng's "The Heat of the Day" speaks to the ways particular perspectives can lead to different interpretations of visual art. The piece, oil stick on paper, features a blue river coursing through two hills. The sky pours down in a slur of purple. Local rappers should seek out Zheng's work, as the syrupy sky is a natural cover for a Houston hip-hop album.

But let's get back to land and sky because Zheng's works have nothing to do with Houston or hip-hop. "The Voice of Water" instead renders elements we take for granted — earth, water, sky — and recasts them in brilliant and radiant ways that flip positive and negative space, while also emphasizing the natural flow of elements through our planet.

Put more succinctly, these works — by a Chinese artist living in New York — take the most familiar of elements and position them with a new brilliance.

The title of "The Voice of Water" suggests a certain ethereal quality. But water — in her works as in our day-to-day — is a formidable force. Gentle as it appears, it cuts through land and leaves taller topography in its wake. Many of the works in "The Voice of Water" place wobbling water sources at the center of vibrant landscapes.

Among many favorites is "On Summer Days,"



Works included in "The Voice of Water" exhibition by artist Ping Zheng include, clockwise from top left, "The Heat of the Day," "Maze," "Infinity" and "Strange Time, A Strange Dream."

Photos courtesy of Ping Zheng

with tall and rippling land masses towering over a suggestive V-shaped body of water. "A Long Stream

of Water" doesn't contain the same geographical relief, but the winding stream at its heart is

sandwiched by a flush of floral landscape that starts with Van Gogh-ish reds among the yellows

and greens before melting into the horizon. The piece insists a viewer chase the water into the

Ping Zheng: 'The Voice of Water'

When: Noon-4 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays (appointment only Dec. 20-Jan. 3)

Where: McClain Gallery, 2242 Richmond

Details: free; 713-520-9988, mcclaingallery.com

horizon.

One can't help but consider time looking at these works. Zheng's pieces almost all feature a body of water at their center. A negative perspective would frame the pieces as documenting the slow erosion of rock by water threaded throughout "The Voice of Water." A different view would see the effect of water as wholly positive: It creates valleys and canyons. The sum of both views is a recognition of time and its slow, erosive effect.

Zheng's frames are void of mammalian activity. But they're full of life just the same. They're fundamental and the brilliant use of color underscores that philosophical core.

One could say any work of art benefits from an in-person viewing. But with Zheng's works in "The Voice of Water," there's a particular value in seeing the pieces in person. The brush strokes are so gentle as to avoid not just photography but also viewing from a few feet away. Lean in just a little, and the work of this young artist pulls you further into little worlds familiar and foreign.

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