



CHINA  
2000  
FINE  
ART

**Zeng Xiaojun** 曾小俊 (b.1954)

Sound of Pines and Stream

Early 1990s

Ink and color on paper, hanging scroll

53.25 x 25.25 in. (135.2 x 64.1 cm)

Signed Xiaojun with one seal: Zeng Xiaojun

Provenance: Acquired directly from the artist

Exhibited and illustrated: *The Paintings of Zeng Xiaojun*, New York: L. J. Wender Fine Chinese Paintings, 1996, and published in the exhibition catalogue, plate 27.





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The first impression of Zeng Xiaojun's painting is the vigorous and powerful presence of subterranean energy evinced solely through traditional Chinese calligraphic brushwork. A connoisseur of rare woods and collector of classical Chinese furniture and scholarly objects, Zeng pursues a contemporary literati ideal in his painting by exploring the innate connection between man and nature in his subjects through his meticulously exquisite brushstrokes. The inspiration for his art is derived collectively from the Song dynasty monumental landscapes of Fan Kuan and Guo Xi, from renowned Ming dynasty literati-style landscape painters like Shen Zhou and Wen Zhengming, the seventeenth century reinterpretation of landscape painting by Kun Can, and a final reincarnation in the twentieth century by the renowned Huang Binhong. Zeng's mind and spirit are further cultivated by the depth of his knowledge of ancient Chinese furniture, scholar's rocks, and scholar's objects. Zeng's vision and his distinctly personal style arise from the enormous strength of a centuries-old literati tradition of refining the soul of the artist. Along with classical technique, Zeng has internalized the lesson that the brush is wet not only with ink, but also with the spirit. Brushwork without a depth of spiritual meaning is brushwork without a soul, and soulful brushwork is the only kind that breathes life into a painting and forms the very essence of art.

**Zeng Xiaojun** was born in 1954 in Beijing and entered the Central Art and Craft Academy in 1977 in the first enrollment of students since its closing during the Cultural Revolution. In 1983, after his graduation, Zeng moved to the United States. He exhibited in solo and selected group exhibitions and received numerous awards and critical acclaim. In 1997, he returned to Beijing where he now lives. Zeng's study is enclosed within the walls of a traditional courtyard house in an historic district of Beijing. His antique painting table is covered with ancient desk objects, originally collected by Chinese scholar literati. The background music is "new age." In this environment, Zeng feels at home, and his recent work expresses self-confidence and courage. Though firmly rooted in the contemporary world, Zeng searches for classical inspiration when he paints. With the resulting combination, he creates new ways of seeing old themes, new expressions for capturing the natural world. Zeng has reached a level of maturity and refinement in his painting that few artists attain at his age, and that many artists never acquire during a lifetime. His work has been shown nationally and internationally, including the exhibition "Fresh Ink: Ten Takes on Chinese Tradition" at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.

### **About my painting by Zeng Xiaojun**

When I was young, I tried to capture everything I saw through sketching. It was as if a full mountain stood in front of me. The more I looked at it, the more substantial and fascinating it became. Then I started to study Chinese ink painting. At that time, we had only nature to sketch from since our resources were limited. It was simple and without distractions, and I believed then that I was born to paint. Once I was in a remote village in Guizhou province. Holding two brushes in my right hand, one for sketching the outlines and the other for washing with ink, I did sketches of the village, of its buildings and its women and children. The village on the paper seemed as familiar to me as the original land. I realized at that moment that the landscape paintings of Song and Yuan Dynasties were not simply an interaction between men and their surroundings, but a tribute to the human soul.



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I have always felt nostalgic for my ancestral village, even though I have not really lived there. Maybe it is because of my love of tradition. For dozens of years, I concentrated on paintings of landscapes and trees and stones, going from sketches to freehand to the abstract, and then back to freehand. The images that draw me are ones that make me forget myself. As a painter, I have begun to long for eternity. To me art is a tree. Its leaves might have fallen, yet its roots are reaching deep. New leaves grow from old breaks, they change and die, but the roots remain the same. I have strived for new territory, yet I find myself thriving where I was. It is not transmigration, but a renewal of the old.

It is fashionable to go against tradition nowadays, as it was in an earlier period. I prefer a return to the ancients. No matter how one puts it, I try to capture the essence of nature from the seemingly confusing reality. It is question of which is true: what one sees or what one feels.

