

'Infinite Shades'**Art Institute of Chicago**

In recent years in contemporary Chinese art, the flashiness and irony of Political Pop and Cynical Realism have overshadowed the formality of the centuries-old practice of ink painting. This small but powerful exhibition proved that ink is

suggest an array of rock formations, vegetation, rivulets of water, and a dusting of snow that are nothing short of awe inspiring. —Lauren Weinberg



Kong Bai Ji, *It's Spring Again*, 2005,
oil on rice paper, 48" x 36".
Art Institute of Chicago.

still vital. The show's five artists use modern techniques to reinterpret a traditional theme—the grandeur of nature—and the results are fresh and original.

Li Huayi's *Landscape* (2002) was inspired by Chinese paintings from the 11th and 12th centuries, but his depiction of a tree growing from a cliff face high above the clouds is so colorful and crisply detailed that it looks like an anime cel. Kong Bai Ji rendered the dark scenery in *It's Spring Again* (2005) with oil paint on rice paper, but he uses characteristic bold brushwork to conjure the natural world, transforming horizontal black and green streaks into trees tossed in a storm. Other pieces were more strongly influenced by Western abstraction, such as Zhao Chunxiang's lively *Black Splash Six* (1980s), in which rough circles punctuate lines and swoops of black ink over a gray wash.

The highlight was Wucius Wong's *Searching for Mountains, No. 2* (2005), a large-scale painting of the side of a mountain in black, white, and gray. Wong uses the simplest of markings to