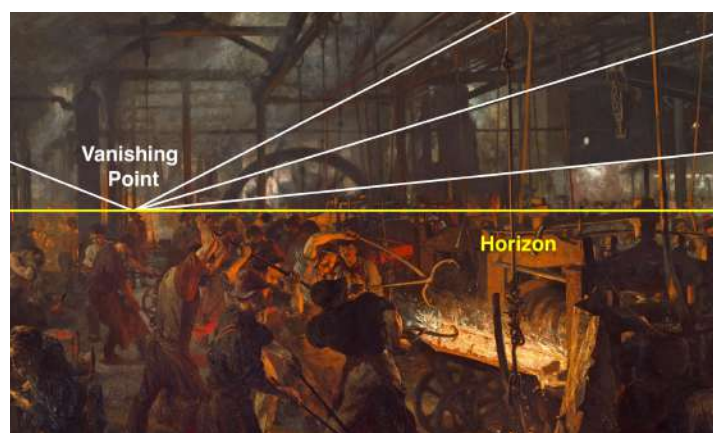




Adolph Menzel
Iron Rolling Mill (Modern Cyclopes)
1872-1875
Oil on canvas
254.0 x 158.0 cm

This compelling painting depicts an industrial setting in the 19th century. The tone strongly sets the mood and creates a convincing illusion of depth. Nearer the front, the workers are sharply defined by the bright glow from the molten metal. The vivid colours captivate viewers' attention immediately, clearly defining dominance in the work. This provides a dramatic tonal contrast to the musty background, faintly illuminated by diffused daylight. Forms in the background are indistinct, gently emerging from the dark and only subtly suggested by the interchanging pale orange tints and soft shadows.

The perspectival construction of space is sophisticated. By using a high horizon, the viewer's perspective is elevated such that the angle of vision does not align with that of the workers in the painting. This distances the viewer from the scene, producing the effect that one is an external observer uninvolved with the happenings in the painting.





Perspective lines are seen to converge in the hat of a man standing on the left, identified as the site manager. This is symbolic, because even though the figure is seemingly insignificant, he is, literally and figuratively, the mastermind of the scene. Menzel further accentuated his difference in status by juxtaposing the isolated manager against the bustling crowd in other sections of the painting.

Elements in the painting are similarly strategically positioned, creating a dynamic sense of movement leading diagonally upwards from the girl crouched on the bottom-right, through the blazing furnace, into to the deep recesses of the iron mill.





李成 **Li Cheng**

读碑窠石图 (Reading Stele Nest Stone)

五代时期

Ink and Wash Painting

126.3cm x 104.9cm

In the absence of colours, one would expect wide tonal ranges in order to create a convincing sense of form and depth. However, the paint washes in this painting are predominantly light (1 to 5 in the tonal range), producing the illusion that the setting is shrouded in mist. Darker strokes are sparsely used to define the jagged forms of tree branches and rocks, conveying a

sense of rhythm. The interplay of Yin (strong dark tones) and Yang (lighter washes) evokes a deeply melancholic mood.

Chinese painters are typically less concerned with completion in paintings, instead they strive to express the essence of the scene. Through his generous use of emptiness, Li manages to capture the essence of the setting — desolation. Nevertheless, within emptiness (虚), there are marks that fill them in; and within fullness (实), there are breathing spaces. Balance in Yin and Yang is thus achieved.



Fullness in emptiness



Emptiness in fullness



Visual movement arises from Li's manipulation of space and variation of line qualities. Trees are strategically placed such that their silhouettes frame the stele stone. Their strong dynamic strokes first capture our attention, and our eyes travel up the branches along the frame. Upon reaching the edge, our vision is guided downwards by the two figures. We then follow their gazes towards the stone. Only after which do our eyes move over to the less-defined strokes in the foreground and background. This fluid movement that weaves together separate elements in the painting is what the Chinese call *qi*.

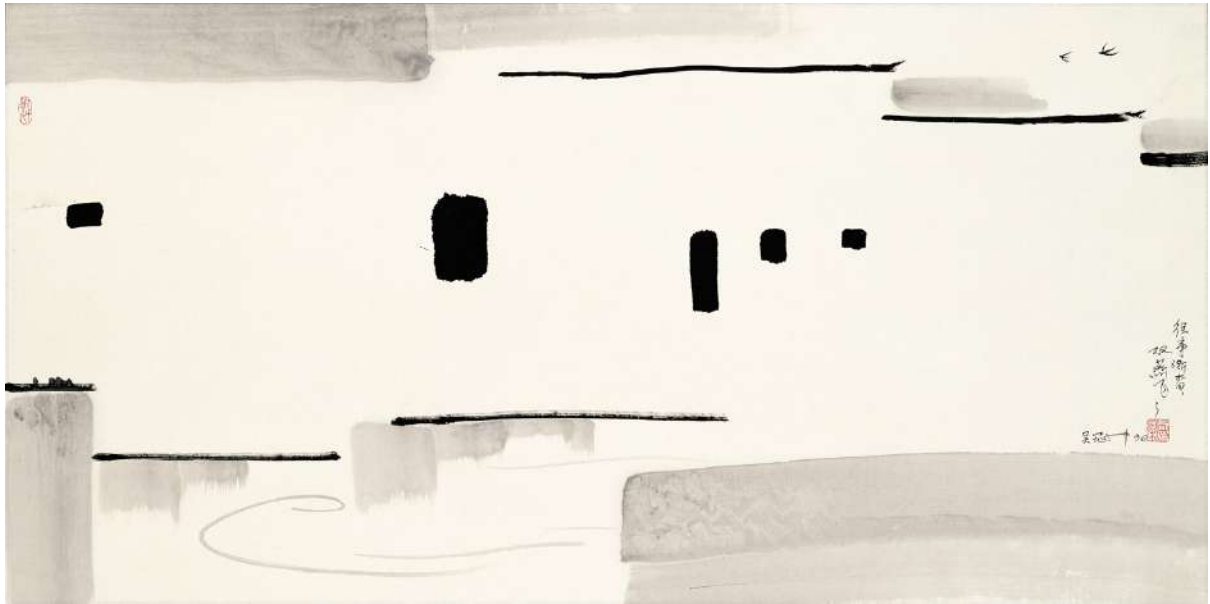
Difference in line quality



Strongly defined forms



Loose/blurry edges



吴冠中 **Wu Guanzhong**
忆江南 (Reminiscence of Jiangnan)
1996
Ink on Paper
137.8 x 68.5 cm

This painting is constructed almost purely through the use of lines, with most elements being drawn with one single stroke. Lines are used both as contour outlines to suggest form, and as form itself. By varying the weight of lines, taking advantage of negative spaces, and working around with three tones, Wu incredibly manages to materialise the scene of Jiangnan without losing aesthetic quality.



The use of space and lines is simple yet profound. Even without vertical lines to delineate different sections of the building, their forms are implicitly suggested by the black lines and grey ink-washes. Nearer the front, simply by contrasting the wavy lines against the rectilinear elements, Wu easily created the illusion of river flow.

Despite the austere simplicity, there is still an illusion of depth; one is able to discern the foreground (bottom-right grey washes that suggest the roof of another building), middle-ground (the centre building), and background (the two swallows). A sense of rhythm is injected

by the descending height of buildings and the playful composition of windows, which are not arranged in neat rows but instead alternate in size and height.

Despite using Chinese ink, the influences of Western art are clearly seen in the abstraction. Unlike typical Chinese paintings of architecture, the houses are not positioned within a landscape — the houses themselves *are* the landscape. Nevertheless, Wu manages to retain elements of Chinese painting through the expression of spirit resonance in his work, manifested in the harmonious and balanced composition of the painting.

Examples of how Chinese paintings usually depict houses



李可染 Li Keran
《春雨江南》



宋文治 Song Wenzhi
《江南早春图》