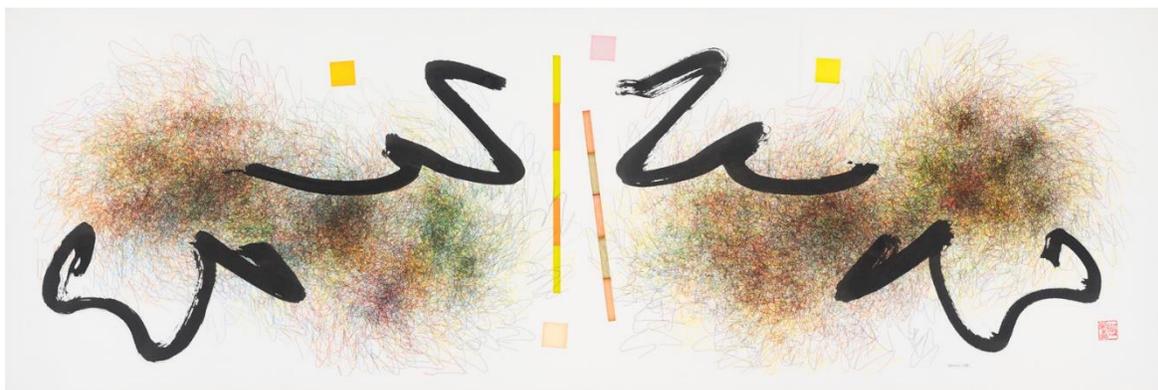
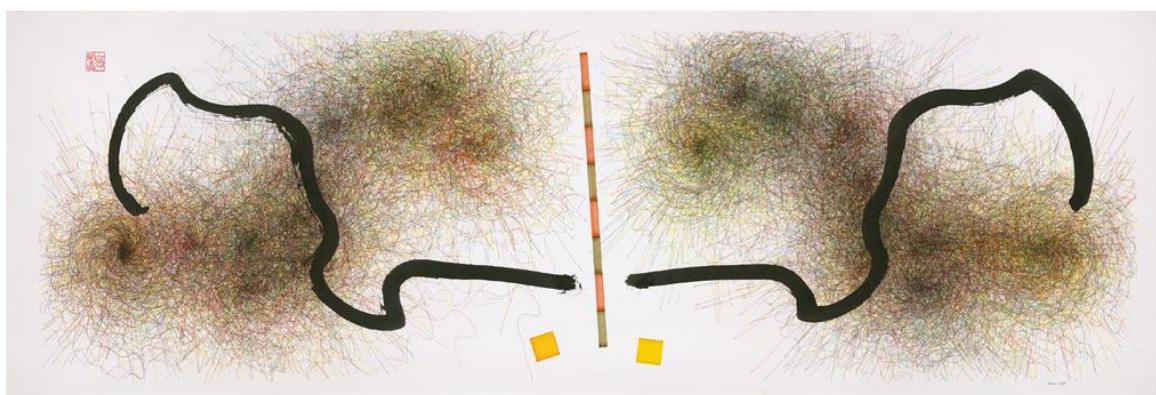


## Dragon Mountain: East & West joined in Algorithmic Art



**Lung Shan I (Dragon Mountain 1)**, 72" by 24", 2/23/1989, algorithmic pen, ink & brush drawing.  
V&A Computer Art Collection, London, UK

The art work shown above is the first of two versions. This version, *Lung Shan I*, was shown, along with work by Harold Cohen, in *The Technological Imagination: Machines in the Garden of Art*, MCAD, Minneapolis MN, 1989. The second version (below), *Lung Shan II*, 1989, was shown at the Dallas SIGGRAPH in 1990 and published in the Leonardo edition featuring that show.

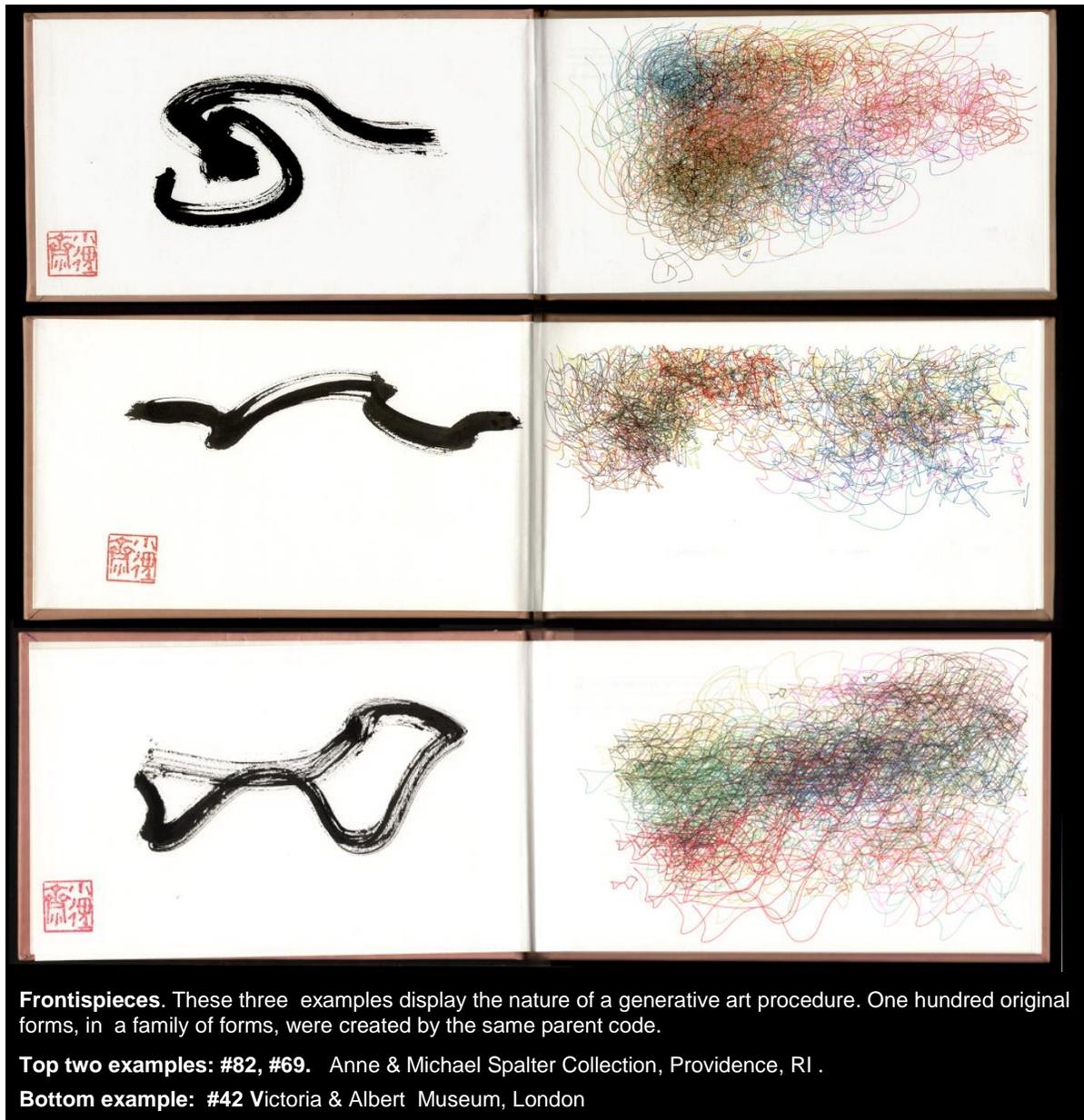


**Lung Shan II (Dragon Mountain 2)**, 72" by 24", 1989, algorithmic pen, ink & brush drawing.  
Print #1 from the original: St. Vincent Archabbey Collection, Latrobe, Pa. USA.

My algorithmic art grew from an interest in software that attempted to mime intelligence. I wanted to create an artistic intelligence with coded procedures that would be able to generate my art ideas. This interest grew from the early days of computing when artificial intelligence (AI) seemed to be close at hand and computing power was awesome compared to an adding machine. I was rather naïve then about the immense magnitude of this quest as I had been seduced by what seemed to me to be the unlimited capability of computers. This quest, even with my very limited programming abilities, did lead me to explore visual form in radically new ways.

This work represents the first stage of my hard copy algorithmic work quite well. Here I wanted to reconcile, in the same picture field, the spontaneous qualities of brush strokes generated with the same controllers that arranged pen and ink stroke distributions. That control is present throughout the work even though the controlling coordinates and pen

stroke distributions were generated with random decisions. The procedure allows several levels of random distribution within underlying limits set by a standard of deviation. Consequently, random distribution and controlling limits are fused in the same picture field yielding an in depth self-similarity. Fields of distribution echo the brush stroke controllers..



The same routines were used to create the frontispieces for my 1990 edition of an excerpt from George Boole's "*Investigation of the Laws of thought...*"<sup>1</sup>. For this edition, my studio created 100 original, one of a kind, frontispieces and end-pieces from the same parent code. Each pen and brush stroke was executed with a DMP52 between 1989 and 1990.

These form features loomed large in my "*Elle Passe*"<sup>2</sup> series of paintings in the 1960's. The "*Elle Passe*" works grew from my Paris cave-drawings that drew on a highly personal automatism. However, my "*New City*" series joined this automatism with a disciplined rational structure yielding tension, opposition and visual resolution in the same picture field.

For me the translation of these earlier art-making ideas into workable software code gave me confidence to continue my commitment to algorithmic art.



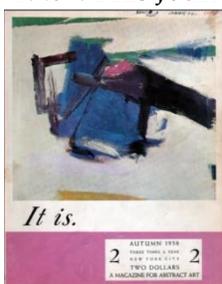
**Elle Passe**, 30" by 22", Watercolor, crayon & pencil, ca.1965. ("The face of this world is passing away", St. Paul letters, (1 Cor. 7,31), Artist's Collection.



**The New City Grows**, 3 ft. by 3 ft., 1965, acrylic, crayon and pencil with a white gesso base on wood. St Vincent Archabbey Collection, Latrobe, Pa., USA

My brush work with the pen plotter drew on my earlier experiences in New York as well as my later experiences in China. While in New York in the early 1960's I practiced brush-work influenced by abstract expressionists whom I had known personally. This included Barney Newman, Franz Kline, George McNeil and Robert Richtenburg. I followed Richtenburg's lectures at Pratt and understood very well the influence of oriental thought that was felt in the Post WWII New York School.

While the term "Abstract Expressionism" took hold the stronger underlying logic for the "New York School" painters in the late 1950's and early 1960's can be found in the Journal, "It is". This Journal, edited by Philip Pavia was published by Second Half Publishing (22 East 17th Street, NY). Active from 1958 to the early 1960's this Journal was richly illustrated with articles by practitioners, poets and critics who were actively engaged in the New York art scene at that time.



It stressed the pure phenomenon of the concrete work itself, best contemplated directly as "It is" rather than bearing content on questions like "What does it mean?", or "What does it represent?". The brush stroke was celebrated while descriptive line was anathema. The presence and physical reality of the picture field was everything. This phenomenological view had its forerunners in early 20th Century *concrete art* known also as *non-objective art*.<sup>3</sup> Artists who understood this well included Mondrian, Kandinsky, Malevich and the brothers Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner.

Later, in the 1980's, as I learned more about Zen I came to realize the kinship between "It is" and Chinese calligraphy known as *shūfǎ*. In 1982 I followed a seminar on modern China that included a trip guided by Sister Baulu Guan, a Benedictine nun who had been born and

raised there. Three years later, in 1985, I was invited to teach a course there. These China experiences led me to a greater appreciation of the kinship between “*It is*” and *shūfǎ*.

According to Zheng Sheng Tian, who invited me to teach there, mine was the first course in modern western art to be taught in China (note 5). For the spring term of 1985 I carried about 2000 slides and presented my full semester course on 20<sup>th</sup> C. Art at the National Academy in Hangzhou (now known as the China Academy of Art).

I studied Chinese before my first China trip in 1982 but I never learned much. I had some practice writing characters, worked a bit more on vocabulary and carried a Pinyin dictionary. I had read some on the history of Chinese culture and had the good fortune of having the *Shūfǎ* Master, Wang Dong Ling, follow my course. I learned more from him and his teacher colleagues than they learned from me.



*My 1985 class during my morning slide lecture.*



*A light moment with my translator, Shen Wei.*

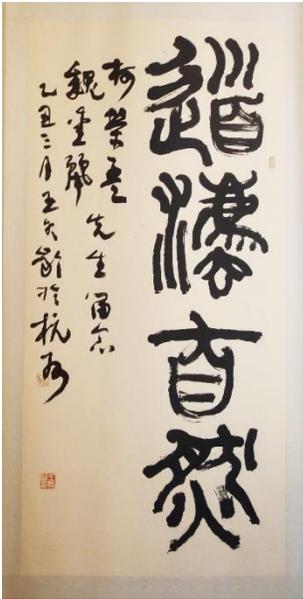
My class consisted of a group of young teachers who had been brought there from the various academies in China for my course. The idea was that they would return to their respective academies to introduce these art ideas throughout the academy system. I also traveled to five of these academies and gave one week summary lectures at each of them. My slides on modern western art were copied everywhere I went. My syllabus was also translated into Chinese and distributed to students. <sup>4</sup>

Through this China experience I learned about both traditional and Maoist culture. I read all of Mao's writings on art and had the opportunity to visit with worker artist groups whose work impressed me. I had good translators and the institutions provided special excursions with guides for guest teachers like me. I came back with a suitcase full of slides of both traditional and contemporary art in China and presented a four-part lecture series on contemporary art in the post Maoist China that I knew in 1985.

The influence of my course on the work of Wang Dong Ling and the influence of Wang Dong Ling on my work has been documented by Xiao-Lan Hertel in her study of cross-cultural encounters between Chinese and Western Artists in the 1980's. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.verostko.com/china/qYishu2016\\_v15\\_04\\_hertel\\_s\\_p006-fix.pdf](http://www.verostko.com/china/qYishu2016_v15_04_hertel_s_p006-fix.pdf)



Way, Laws, Beginning, Yes  
道法自然



Photo shows Wang Dong Ling as he executed and inscribed this scroll for us at the Academy in Hangzhou in 1985.

**Wang Dong Ling**, a master calligrapher, brushes ancient characters for "Way", "Laws", "Beginning", and "Yes":

道法自然。

Wang followed my course at the Art Academy in Hangzhou and later lived with us for one semester as a visiting Professor at the U of MN.

*Photo by my wife Alice Wagstaff*

Shortly after my return I gained access to a pen plotter and began translating my earlier algorithms for display on monitors into routines for guiding the drawing arm of drawing machines. The idea of coding for the brush followed. My first algorithms for robotic brush painting dates from early 1987, two years after returning from China.<sup>5</sup>



Photos were taken in my studio at the time of completion. The brush position for Lung Shan I (left) would have been at the position where it was when the last stroke was completed. Lung Shan II (right) would have been up to a week or so later and was posed without the brush mounted on the plotter.

The *Lung Shan I* work is more than expressionist brush work. It includes the conjunction of both rational and non-rational elements; control and un-control, something akin to Yin Yang, light and shadow, hard and soft, sweet and sour, the Chinese genius for the marriage of opposites.

As I look back now I'm unable to say whether Chinese or Western traditions were indeed the greater influence. After all I had my affair with the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fauve painters the Bauhaus and both the structure and color of Josef Albers. And, in New York, I had been especially influenced by the brushwork of Kline and Motherwell. And the large concrete casting in the



monastery, **"BROTHER"**, based on my New York and Paris brushwork, had been installed in 1967, 16 years before my first trip to China.

Even so, my Lung Shan pieces show the importance of the China experience when I returned. These pieces bear my seal made at the *Xi Ling Society* with my Chinese name, *Ke Róng Mèng*, 柯荣孟. This was before Wang Dong Ling came to Minneapolis and lived with us for a period of time from late summer 1988 until after the Tiananmen Square crisis in 1989. During his stay with us he carved the studio seal for my "Pathway Studio". Since then I have frequently used it when signing my art work. The two *Lungshan* works bear my 1985 "name" seal rather than the Pathway Seal carved by Wang Dong-Ling.

Below are 3 of the seals that appear most frequently on my art work. For translations details and all my seals see: <http://www.verostko.com/seal.html>



May 1985

Verostko Roman  
kē róng-mèng,  
柯荣孟 simplified  
柯榮孟 traditional



May 1985

Wagstaff Alice  
wèi ài-lì  
魏爱丽 simplified  
魏愛麗 traditional



Summer 1989

Lesser Pathway Studio  
xiǎo jìng zhāi  
小径斋 simplified  
小徑齋 traditional

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<sup>1</sup> DERIVATION OF THE LAWS is [Chapter III from George Boole's Investigation of the laws of thought . . . \(1847\)](#) with a *Statement* and illustrations by Roman Verostko and a *Preface* by Roger Malina. Saint Sebastian Press, Minneapolis, 1990. ISBN: 1-879508-08-7

<sup>2</sup> "Elle Passe" is borrowed from the French version of a passage from St Paul's letter to the Corinthians "Elle passe, la figure de ce monde (The face of this world is passing)". 1 Corinthians 7:31

<sup>3</sup> The term "abstract art" referred to art forms that were "abstractions" based on subject matter. Cubists, futurists and Northern Expressionists, based on various formal approaches, created an art related to or derived from a subject such as a still life, model, landscape, or an event ("Guernica" comes to mind). The term "abstract" art was resisted by A. Ozenfant (L' *Esprit Nouveau*), *De Stijl* and the constructivists in general. They were more interested in a "concrete art"; they were, as it were, "purists".

<sup>4</sup> For more on my China experience see: <http://www.verostko.com/china>. Art Academies & Art Schools I visited after Hangzhou were in Nanjing, Tianjin, Beijing, Chongqing and Wuhan.

<sup>5</sup> Zheng Sheng-Tian cited my course as a "key event" in the emergence of the *New Wave Movement* in China:

<< In 1985 I invited Professor Roman Verostko of the Minneapolis College of Art & Design to Hangzhou to give a lecture series on modern Western art. This was the first time Western modernism and post-modern art were openly discussed in a classroom since 1949. The students were all extremely excited to look at slides of the art work that used to be categorized as "reactionary and decadent trash" by Soviet cultural supremo Andrei Zhdanov and Mao's wife Jiang Qing. Verostko's introduction of Western modern art is considered today to be one of the key events that contributed to the emergence of the New Art Wave movement in 1985 in China. >>

Source: [East / West Dichotomy: Is There A Middle Way?](#) by Zheng Shengtian. Presentation for "The Culture of Culture: East / West a False Dichotomy? 4th International Sculpture Symposium", University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, February 18 -22, 2009