



## Who is Wesley Tongson?

Wesley Tongson (1957-2012) was a Hong Kong ink artist best known for his method of splashed ink and finger painting.



## Tongson's chronology

- 16.09.1957: Born in Hong Kong.
- 1973: Diagnosed with schizophrenia at age 15.
- 1974: Begins formal training in traditional Chinese painting.
- 1977: Moves to Toronto and begins teaching himself splashed ink painting.
- 1981: Returns to Hong Kong, where he begins to create highly original works.
- 1985-1995: Exhibits work in solo and group shows.
- 2001: Begins to experiment with finger painting and integrating various styles.
- 2009: Stops using brushes, working primarily with his fingers and fingernails.
- 16.07.2012: Passes away in Hong Kong.

### Activity 1:

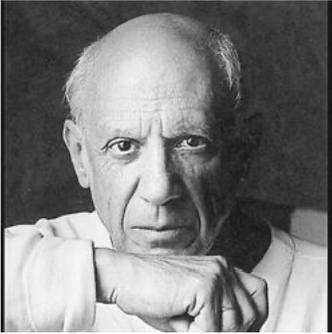
Please share your thoughts about Tongson's life with your teacher and classmates.

## Artists who influence Tongson's work



### Zhang Daqian (1899-1983)

Zhang Daqian is one of the most famous Chinese artists of the 20th century. He is best known for combining styles of traditional Chinese painting (*guohua*) with Impressionism and Abstract Expressionism. Zhang's splashed ink paintings had a particularly profound impact on Tongson.



### Pablo Ruiz Picasso (1881-1973)

Picasso is one of the most influential artists of the 20th century, and a pioneer of the movement known as Cubism. Tongson had great admiration for Picasso, and he especially liked how the Cubist works added volume to paintings.

#### Activity 2:

Based on the information provided, identify the creator of the following artworks.



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## Cubism



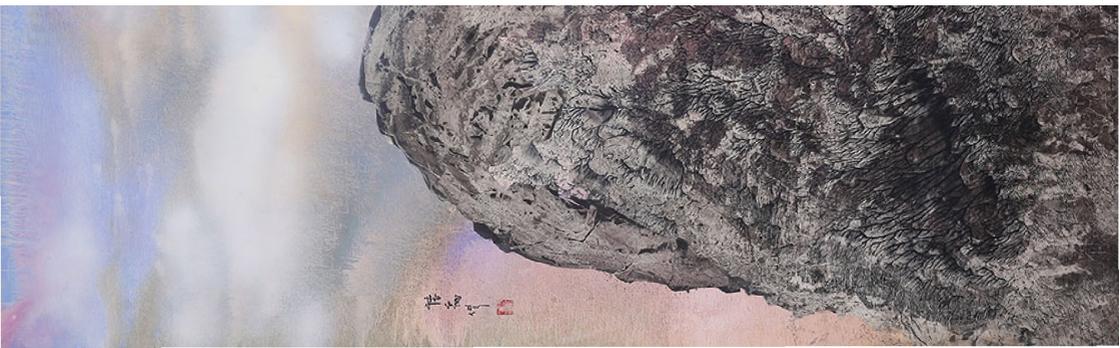
Cubism is another artistic movement that relates closely to Tongson's work. It is one of the most influential styles of the 20th century and Picasso was one of its pioneers.

Subjects in Cubist works are broken up and reassembled together in an abstracted form. They are also depicted from multiple viewpoints and then presented in greater context, thus enriching the volume of the picture.

The picture on the left "Girl with a Mandolin (Fanny Tellier)" was made by Picasso in 1910. It is a good example of a Cubist work.

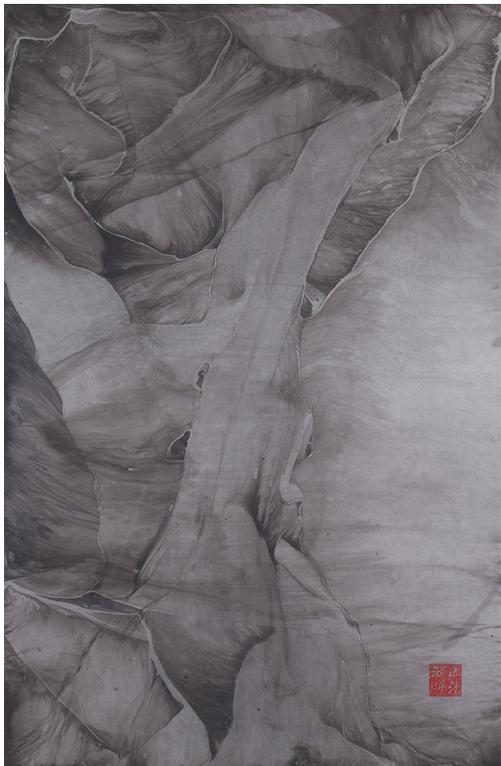
### Activity 4:

Use the concepts of Cubism to create an artwork on a piece of paper.





## Splashed ink



*The Rugged Path*, Wesley Tongson, 1997

Splashed ink painting has a long history in traditional Chinese art, which can be traced back to Tang dynasty. It involves applying layers of thinner and thicker ink, in which the more diluted ink is first added to the surface of the paper. Because the diluted ink contains so much water, random patterns are created due to the reaction between the two materials. When the ink is nearly dry, a thicker layer of ink is applied in random patterns to create gradations. Splashed ink is often seen in traditional Chinese landscape paintings.

### Activity 5:

Use inspiration from Tongson's work to create your own splashed ink patterns.

\*It is recommended that you use watercolour paper that is at least 190gsm for this activity.

## Splashed colour

Splashed ink-and-colour painting was an innovation of Zhang Daqian's in the 1950s. Paint is first mixed on a palette and then splashed onto the paper's surface. This first step creates the work's outline. The painting is further developed using a range of brushes. Similar to traditional splashed ink paintings, the patterns made by applying the colours are random.



*White Christmas*, Wesley Tongson, 1998,  
splashed ink-and-colour on board

### Activity 6:

Try to create your own splashed ink-and-colour work and think about how it differs from your earlier black-and-white splashed ink work.

\* It is recommended that you use watercolour paper that is at least 190gsm for this activity.



## Finger painting

Finger painting is a hallmark of Tongson's later period. He began to experiment with finger painting in 2001, and then by 2009 he was painting almost exclusively with his fingers, fingernails and hands eight years later. These works are powerful and emotional works. In the paintings, landscape elements are represented by energetic dots and lines.



### Activity 7:

Try to use your fingers to create a piece of work, and share your experience with your friends and family. Did you find it difficult to control?



## Seal

Tongson has created several seals and signatures throughout his career. Each of them represents how he wanted to represent himself at different periods of time.

From antiquity to modernity, seals have been widely used by Chinese artists. Primarily made of stone, seals are typically used with red ink or cinnabar paste. Two types of carving techniques are most commonly used for Chinese seals—Zhu Wen and Bai Wen. Zhu Wen seals are carved in relief, with the image's imprint appearing in lines of red. Bai Wen means that the seal image appears in white lines with a red background.

### Activity 8:

Can you identify the carving techniques used to make Tongson's different seals?

