

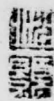
LYRIC

IN INK
LINES

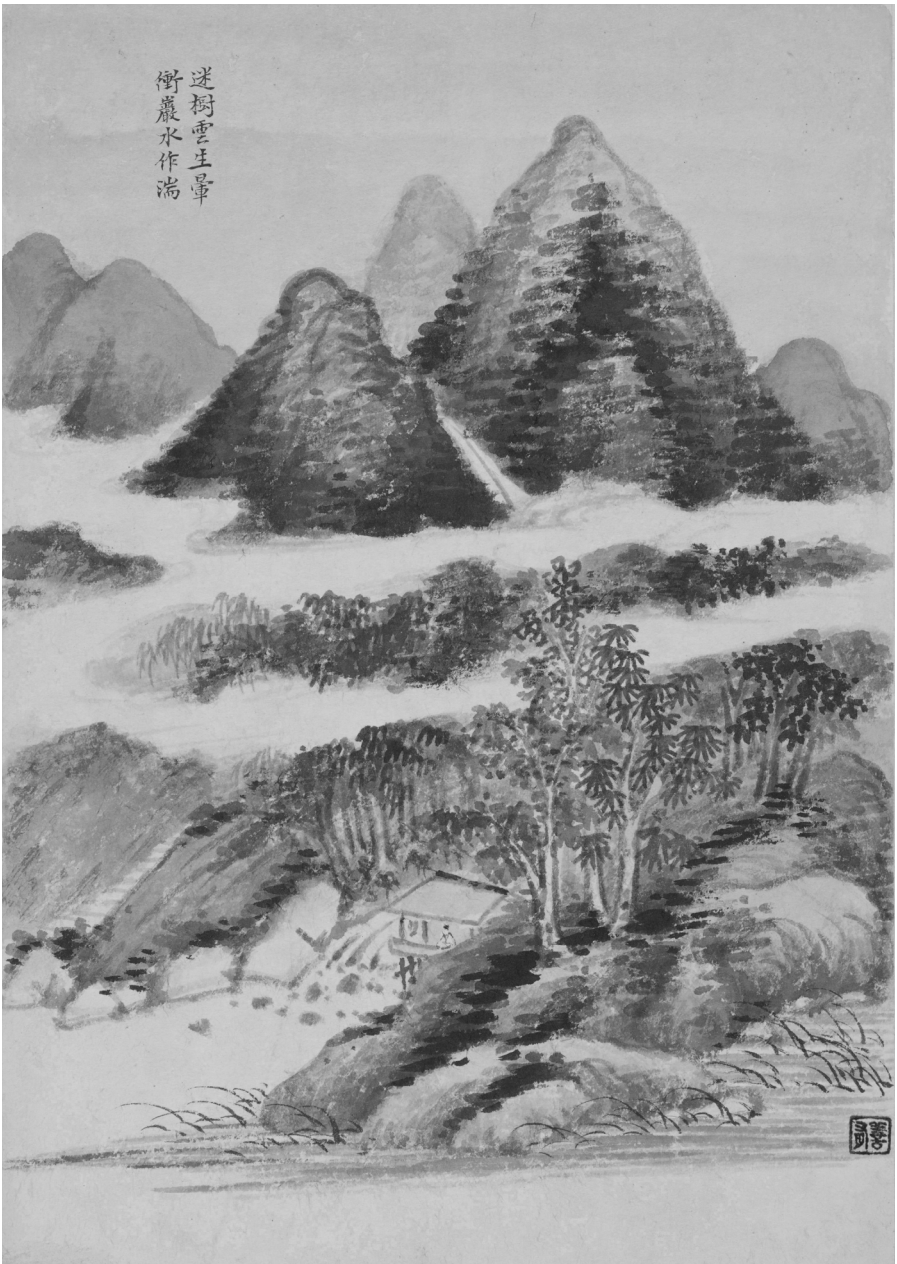
*Painting and
Poetry in the Arts
of China*

26.05.2023–
10.09.2023

許
詒古不及伯虎
恐又不及龍
敢自



English



Gu Shanyou (active first half 17th century)
Leaf c of the album *Landscapes and Poems*
Ming dynasty, dated 1639
Museum Rietberg, Zurich, Gift of
Charles A. Drenowatz, RCH 1140c

LYRIC IN INK LINES

Painting and Poetry in the Arts of China

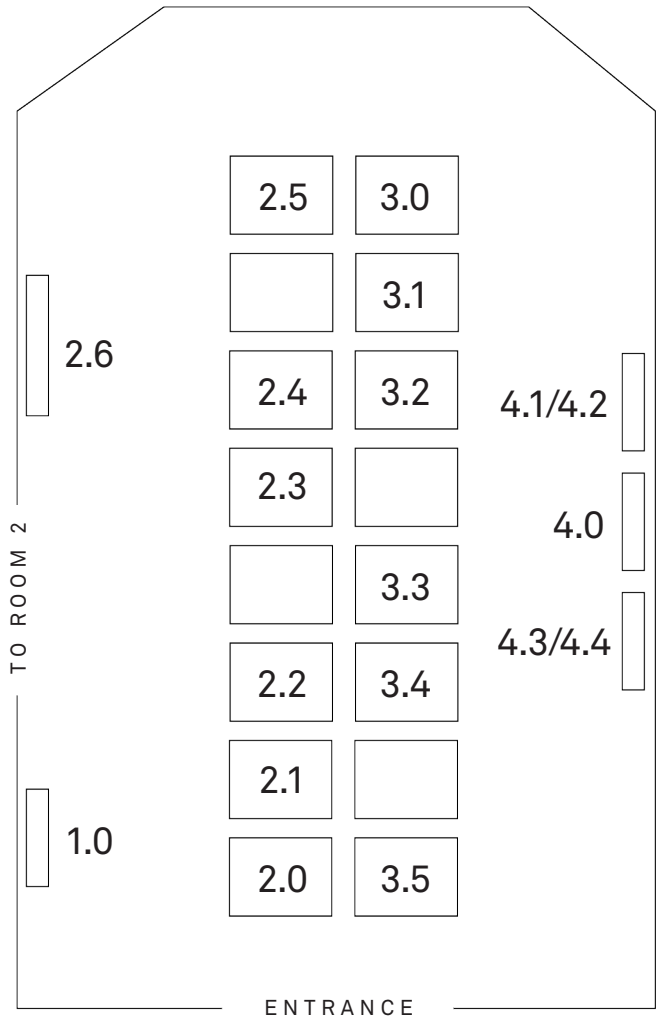
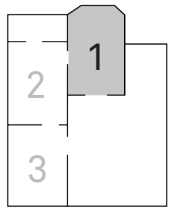
The interplay of painting and poetry is a distinctive feature of Chinese landscape painting. Already in the eleventh century, artists spoke of poetry as “painting without forms” and of painting as “poetry without words.”

Often the lines of poetry on the paintings were composed by the artists themselves. The words extend the imagery and enrich the visual experience with additional sensory references such as the sound of rushing water or the whispering of the wind, the chill of autumn air or the tender light of the moon. They thus transform the picture into a heightened sensual experience. At the same time they convey a multitude of concepts: from personal feelings to references to great role models of the past to political commentary.

Over time, lyrical inscriptions became an integral component of paintings. To combine painting, original poetry, and fine calligraphy in a single work was considered an aesthetic ideal of the literati artist. Famous poems and prose texts served as sources of inspiration for landscape painters from the very beginning of the genre. The iconic texts were widely known among the educated upper class, and so a single verse was often enough to call to mind the content of an entire poem. Pictorial inscriptions are full of such quotations and allusions.

The exhibition shows album leaves of Chinese landscape painting from the 17th to the 19th century from the Charles A. Drenowatz Collection. It offers a translation of the inscriptions and explains their meaning. In this way, the small landscape scenes are revealed as part of a universe of personal and cultural references.

Room 1



1.0 The Landscape as an Ideal Realm

Long before the landscape became the most important subject of painting in the tenth century, poets in China sang the praises of nature in their works. Natural phenomena were regarded as manifestations of the fundamental principles of the cosmos. Only by immersing oneself in nature and merging with it could this higher order be understood. Therefore, as early as the third century, artists and scholars went out to wander among the mountains and valleys. In their poems, they described their mystical experiences and insights.

At the same time, natural phenomena became metaphors through which artists could express personal feelings as well as social or political messages. A recurring theme is the loyal official who – disillusioned by the intrigues and power struggles at the imperial court – retreats to the solitude of the mountains to lead a peaceful life in harmony with nature, far from professional obligations and social constraints. He became a figure of identification for countless intellectuals, right into the twentieth century. In politically chaotic times, physical or mental retreat promised a way to find solace and peace within nature's eternal cycle.

This theme also underlies the albums shown here. The artists comment on the turmoil of their times, be it the collapse of the Ming dynasty in the early seventeenth century, the conquest of China by the Manchus a few years later, or the decline of the Chinese central administration when pressured by foreign powers in the nineteenth century. The albums draw on iconic models from history in their poetic inscriptions as well as in the stylistic elements of the paintings.

2.0 Landscapes and Poems

Gu Shanyou (active first half 17th century)
Landscapes and Poems
Ming dynasty, dated 1639
Museum Rietberg, Zurich, Gift of
Charles A. Drenowatz, RCH 1140

This album is a potpourri of poems and images arranged in a finely tuned composition that highlights the synthesis of poetry, calligraphy, and painting.

On each of the leaves, the painter, scholar, and official Gu Shanyou has illustrated two lines from poems by his admired superior Fan Jingwen (1587–1644). The scenes capture not only details of the poetic descriptions but their atmosphere as well, rendering them in a varied repertoire of styles.

The texts juxtaposed with the images come from various sources. On leaves b to e, in a fluid cursive script, Gu Shanyou has written poems from *Autumn Meditations*, a famous series by the great Tang-dynasty poet Du Fu (712–770). In his melancholic verses, the uprooted and impoverished official laments not only his own fate but also the sad state of his country, which is plagued by uprisings and unrest.

There is no doubt that Gu Shanyou is drawing parallels here with his own time. The corrupt system of the late Ming dynasty, shaken by power struggles, threatened many loyal scholars and officials. Gu Shanyou's patron Fan Jingwen, for whom he painted the album, had also fallen into disfavor and been removed from office. Leaf a bears a text in an elegant regular script. It is a poem by Wen Zhengming (1470–1559), the leading figure of the circle of artists and intellectuals in the cultural metropolis of Suzhou, in whose tradition Gu Shanyou saw himself:

West of the islet of fragrant grass, last night's
rain has stopped.

Reeds grow wild under the Spring Inspection
bridge.

Mountains with green pines surround a temple
on every side;

Two white birds fly over a full lake.
It is late spring – the ruins of the old fort stand
silent,
The man in the little boat is too far away to call.
Looking at the scene, moved by thoughts of the
past,
I pour a cup of wine in the setting sunlight, and
sing.

The couplets on the paintings can be read as:

2.1 Leaf a

He leans against the window, listens to the
wavelets,
And lifts the curtain to see the clear mountains.

2.2 Leaf b

The nearby mountains are a moist green;
The low plains are covered with distant mist.

2.3 Leaf c

The clouds glow faintly as they wander among
the trees;
Eddies form where waves strike the cliffs.

2.4 Leaf d

A path leads to a distant temple in the mountain
haze;
A thousand-foot waterfall plunges into the lake.

On the last leaf of the album, Gu Shanyou depicts a winter scene. The painting bears only one line of poetry and a dedication to his highly revered patron:

2.5 Leaf f

He sweeps away the snow as clouds drift
through the trees.

Painted on a spring day in the year *jimao* [1639]
and presented to Master Fan Si.

Gu Shanyou

In a long prose text juxtaposed with the painting, the artist gives an account of the making of the album:

The poems of Wang Yucheng [Wang Wei (699–759)] of the Tang dynasty are characterized by purity and grace. It is said that Yucheng was well versed in the art of painting, and that for this reason his poems are like paintings. The poetry of my teacher, Mr. Fan Si [Fan Jingwen (1587–1644)], President of the Board of War, enjoys a wide circulation in the world, and he creates thousands of wonderful images with his brush. Thus it can be seen that he must have a profound understanding of painting as well. Mr. Fan comes from an illustrious family, . . . and he now holds an important post in the central government. When free from discussions of military affairs, he continuously writes poetry while drinking wine, in the spirit of those men of the past who wrote while sitting on horseback, or while holding a lance [an allusion to two famous poet-generals, Cao Cao and Yuan Hu of the third and the fourth century]. I am base and unworthy, but I have the good fortune to hold a low position under Mr. Fan. When it comes to painting, I have the talent of an ass. Neverthe-

less, as I was sitting in my mountain home with nothing to do, I recalled with emotion Mr. Fan's great virtue, and decided to select some of the superb lines from his collected poems, to illustrate them with paintings . . . and to put these pictures together into a small album to record my admiration for him. But how could my work compare with Mr. Fan's poems, which have the vast sweep and rich elegance of "hills and ravines"?

Inscribed by Shanyou of Huating.

2.6 Autumn Meditations by Du Fu (712–770)

Du Fu is one of the most famous poets in Chinese history. He is known not only for his stylistic refinement and elegance, but also for his superior character and deep compassion for the sufferings of the common people.

His life was marked by the turmoil of the An Lushan Rebellion (755–763), an eight-year civil war that led to the uprooting and exodus of millions of people. Du Fu, who was just beginning his career as an official at the time, had to flee the capital. In his poems, he links his own sad fate to that of his country and his fellow citizens.

Autumn Meditation I

Gems of dew wilt and wound the maple trees
in the wood,

From Wu mountains, from Wu gorges, the air
blows desolate.

The waves between the river banks merge in
the seething sky,

Clouds in the wind above the passes touch their
shadows on the ground.

Clustered chrysanthemums have opened twice,
in tears of other days,
The forlorn boat, once and for all, tethers
my homeward thoughts.
In the houses quilted clothes speed scissors
and ruler,
The washing blocks pound, faster each evening,
in Baidi high on the hill.

Autumn Meditation II

On the solitary walls of Guizhou the sunset rays
slant,
Each night guided by the Dipper I gaze toward
the capital.
It is true then that tears start when we hear
the gibbon cry thrice:
Useless my mission adrift on the raft which
came by this eighth month.
Fumes of the censers by the pictures in the
ministry elude my sickbed pillow,
The whitewashed parapets of turrets against
the hills dull the mournful bugles.
Look! On the wall, the moon in the ivy
Already, by the shores of the isle, lights the
blossoms on the reeds.

Autumn Meditation III

A thousand houses rimmed by the mountains
are quiet in the morning light,
Day after day in the house by the river I sit in
the blue of the hills.
Two nights gone the fisher-boats once more
come bobbing on the waves,
Belated swallows in cooling autumn still flit
to and fro.
A disdained Kuang Heng [first century BCE],
as a critic of policy:

As promoter of learning, a Liu Xiang [79–8 BCE]
who failed.
Of the school-friends of my childhood, most
did well,
By the Five Tombs [near Chang’an, the capital]
in light cloaks they ride their sleek horses.

3.0 Album of Landscapes

Dai Xi (1801–1860)
Album of Landscapes
Qing dynasty, dated 1849
Museum Rietberg, Zurich, Gift of
Charles A. Drenowatz, RCH 1178

Like many nineteenth-century painters in China, Dai Xi was firmly rooted in the tradition of literati painting. He came from an old family of scholars in the cultural city of Hangzhou and received the classical training for a career as an official, the most prestigious profession in imperial China. At the age of 31, he passed the national civil service examination with flying colors and went on to hold high-ranking posts in the government. Despite his reputation as a loyal, prudent, and just official, his career received a setback in 1849. Because the emperor was displeased with his political views, he fell out of favor and was demoted several ranks. As a consequence, Dai Xi retired to private life. In doing so, he followed the example of countless scholars of earlier times who left government service in politically turbulent times and devoted themselves to art and culture.

He created this album of landscapes shortly after his retirement from official life. The poems reflect his state of mind at the time. On the one hand, they are full of sadness and melancholy about the injustice he experienced. On the other hand, they evoke the ideal of the hermit who has withdrawn from social life and finds peace in harmony with nature.

3.1 Leaf a

The spring chill bites me;
It's been raining all night.
No swallows fly by;
Apricot blossoms are falling.
Idly painted: A Corner of Spring Shade.

3.2 Leaf b

Two cranes are flying in the cold, moonlit night;
Deep in the mountains, mist envelops ten
thousand plum trees.
I seek pure dreams on my bamboo bed, behind
the paper curtain
And dream of visiting the home of the Recluse
on Lonely Mountain
A dream view, painted by Luchuang.

In this poem, Dai Xi alludes to the calligrapher, painter, and poet Lin Fu (967–1028), who lived for over twenty years on Lonely Mountain near Hangzhou and never once left his hermitage, where he planted plum trees and raised cranes. It is said that he called the plum trees his wives and regarded the flock of tame cranes as his children.

3.3 Leaf c

Gong Ding'an [Gong Zizhen (1792–1841)],
Minister of the Board of Rites, once said to me,
“West Mountain near the capital [Beijing]
sometimes seems to be in the vague distance,
beyond the Milky Way, and sometimes its
verdure seems to come right up to your desk
or bed. And this had nothing to do with the
weather – windy, rainy, clear, or cloudy.” In his
poem *West Mountain*, Gong wrote:
“This mountain says nothing, but only contem-
plates the Central Plain [meaning northern
China].” This truly captures the spirit of the

mountain.

I have painted this playfully in the style of the Junior General Li [Li Zhaodao (675–758) of the Tang dynasty].

3.4 Leaf f

Clouds are the screens of this mountain home,
Trees are its neighbors.

No horse-drawn carriages stop before the gate
Where the weeds are taller than a man.

Painting and poem – *The Noble Recluse*.

3.5 Leaf g

Beyond this little scene of transformed mist
– beyond brushwork and ink – there lies a
special tranquility. Those who are calm in mind
will easily understand this; but such people
are hard to find.

4.0 Album of Landscapes and Plants

Hongren (1610–1664)
Album of Landscapes and Plants
Qing dynasty, dated 1656
Museum Rietberg, Zurich, Gift of
Charles A. Drenowatz, RCH 1168

The barren, mostly uninhabited scenes of these paintings evoke feelings of solitude and melancholy. They are typical of the painter Hongren, whose life was marked by political upheaval. In 1644, Manchu troops overthrew the Ming imperial house and established a new dynasty. Many scholars and officials refused to accept the new rulers and withdrew from public life. Hongren, too, saw himself as a loyalist of the old dynasty. He fled to the mountains and entered a Buddhist monastery.

His political attitude is also evident in his painting style. The restrained, simplified brushwork and the sparing use of dry ink are a reference to the famous painter Ni Zan (1301–1374),

who had retreated to the solitude of the mountains under the foreign rule of the Mongols and became the epitome of the loyal intellectual of integrity.

In the inscriptions, Hongren sometimes refers directly to his great role model, and sometimes identifies with the latter's mindset through poetic formulations.

4.1 Leaf e

... [Ni Zan] was able to paint in a most impressive way. In his later years, his style became relaxed and natural, and his brushwork simple and untrammelled. I am incapable of mastering his style, so I have only followed his simplicity. . . .

4.2 Leaf a

Willows like trailing mist, a wooden bridge arching like a rainbow – here we feel that the brushwork is simple but the spirit profound.

4.3 Leaf h

In his poem *Staying at an Inn on the Lake*, Jin'an [Wu Jie (1595–1674)] wrote:
“Bamboos and rocks – the mind of a Buddhist layman;
Winds and springs – the heart of a recluse.”
In this album I have tried to convey the feeling of these lines.

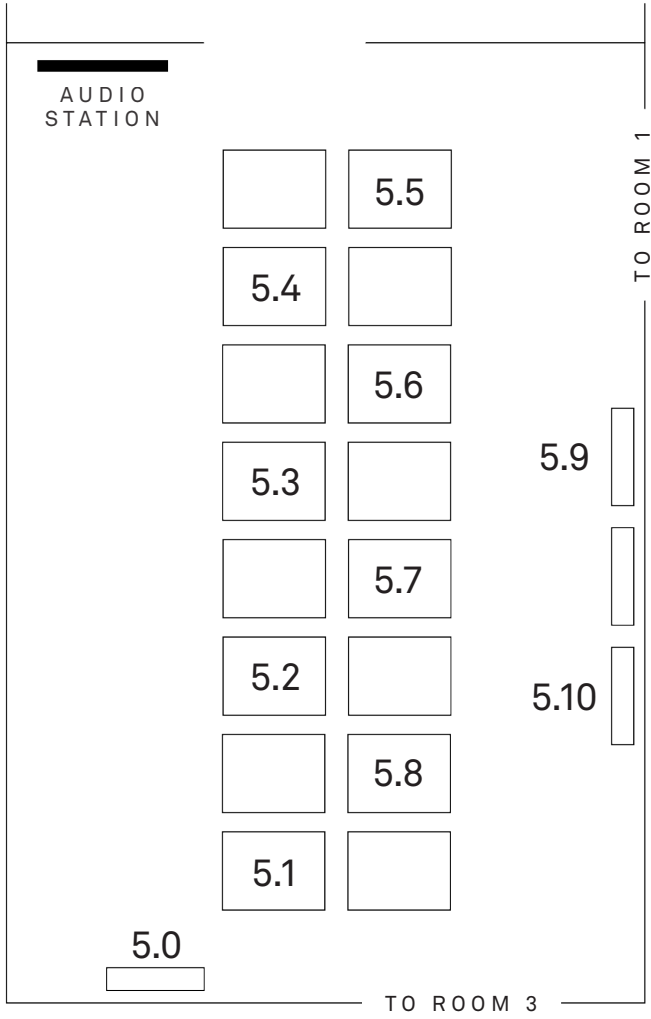
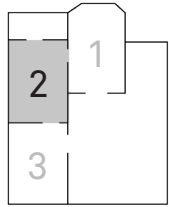
4.4 Leaf c

Changgong [Su Shi (1037–1101)] praised the essays of Ziyou [Su Che (1039–1112)] by saying that they were like “a waterfall plunging down a cliff, making one shiver with cold.” When a painter paints a waterfall, how can he be satisfied with a sloppy job? I hope the one in this picture isn't too bad.



Hongren (1610–1664)
Leaf h from *Album of Landscapes and Plants*
Qing dynasty, dated 1656
Museum Rietberg, Zurich, Gift of Charles A. Drenowatz, RCH 1148h

Room 2



5.0 Landscapes Illustrating Poems and Essays by Famous Writers

Jin Nong (1687–1763)
Landscapes Illustrating Poems and Essays by Famous Writers
Qing dynasty, dated 1736
Museum Rietberg, Zurich, Gift of Charles A. Drenowatz, RCH 1175

Famous poems and prose texts from Chinese literary history often served as sources of inspiration for landscape painters. These artists usually quoted shorter passages – often just a few poem stanzas – in their inscriptions. The predominance of the written word in the leaves of this album is thus exceptional.

The calligrapher, poet, and painter Jin Nong has chosen long odes and prose texts, which he integrates in full into the small paintings. The characters cover the entire unpainted space, penetrating deep into the compositions and thus acquiring a weight equal to that of the image. In addition, writing and painting correspond through the use of ink, in which Jin Nong deliberately avoids strong contrasts of light and dark.

The charismatic artist was one of the most interesting personalities of his time. His unconventional lifestyle and idiosyncratic approach to art made him a star in the art and cultural scene of Yangzhou, a city that loved all things eccentric.

Above all, his writing style was unusual and new. The rigid, angular characters seem artless and a little awkward, yet in their simplicity they unfold a primal power. They are a radical departure from the over-elegant cursive script that was the standard in Jin Nong's time. Indeed, he advocated a return to the archaic forms of writing of the early first millennium.

This artistic preference was linked to socio-political concerns. Many intellectuals of the eighteenth century considered their time to be decadent and lamented the decline in values.

They sought reform through a return to antiquity.

This attitude is also visible in the selection of poems. Their authors, all literary icons of the fourth to the fourteenth century,

served as high officials but eventually got caught between battling factions at court. Each suffered either demotion or exile, or withdrew from public life in disappointment. In their melancholy texts, they lament the injustice of the system and express their longing for an ideal society.

5.1 Leaf a

Returning Home by Tao Yuanming (365–427)

This famous work has become the manifesto in China of a scholar-official who turns his back on the corrupt official world to lead an unfettered life in harmony with nature. Disillusioned by political ambition and government service, Tao Yuanming resigned from the last of his official positions and returned for good to his native village in order to devote himself entirely to poetry, wine, and his beloved chrysanthemums. In the poem, he sings of his new life:

Leading the children by the hand I enter my
house
Where there is a bottle filled with wine.
I draw the bottle to me and pour myself a cup;
Seeing the trees in the courtyard brings joy to
my face.
I lean on the south window and let my pride
expand,
I consider how easy it is to be content with
a little space.
Every day I stroll in the garden for pleasure,
There is a gate there, but it is always shut.
Cane in hand I walk and rest
Occasionally raising my head to gaze into the
distance.
The clouds aimlessly rise from the peaks,
The birds, weary of flying, know it is time to
come home.

As the sun's rays grow dim and disappear
from view
I walk around a lonely pine tree, stroking it.
...
I have no desire for riches
And no expectation of Heaven.
Rather on some fine morning to walk alone
Now planting my staff to take up a hoe. . . .

You can listen to the entire poem in English and Chinese at the listening station.

5.2 Leaf c

Song of the Lute Player by Bai Juyi (772–846)

Bai Juyi is considered the epitome of a noble, virtuous person who sympathizes with the people, both as a poet and as an official. In his famous elegy *Song of the Lute Player*, he describes how, while on a boat trip with friends, he happens to meet a lonely musician who deeply moves him with her music:

We heard a sudden sound, a lute across the
water. . . .
She turned the tuning pegs and tested
several strings;
We could feel what she was feeling, even
before she played:
Each string a meditation, each note a deep
thought,
As if she was telling us the ache of her
whole life.
She knit her brows, flexed her fingers, then
began her music,
Little by little her heart shared everything
with ours.

The woman tells her tragic life story to those present: She once enjoyed fame as a renowned musician and admired beauty in the capital city. But when she had passed the zenith of her youth, she was forced to marry and now led a miserable existence as the lonely wife of a travelling merchant. Moved by the fate of the aging woman and by the expressiveness of her music, the poet draws parallels to his own situation as a disgraced and exiled official: “We are both unhappy – to the sky’s end. We meet. We understand.” He promises to compose a “pipa elegy” to her melody if she will play for a while longer:

Moved by what I said, she stood there for
a moment,
Then sat again to her strings – and they
sounded even sadder,
Although the tunes were different from
those she had played before. . . .
The feasters, all listening, covered their
faces.
But who of them all was crying the most?
This Jiujiang official. My blue sleeve
was wet.

You can listen to the entire poem in English and Chinese at the listening station.

5.3 Leaf d

The Bamboo Pavilions of Huanggang
by Wang Yucheng (954–1001)

The poet and official Wang Yucheng was famous not only for his talent, but also for his courage in openly expressing political and social grievances. This outspokenness led to several transfers and demotions.

He wrote the prose poem *The Bamboo Pavilions of Huanggang* in 999, after he had been relegated to an insignificant post in faraway Hubei. Instead of lamenting his fate, he sings of the simple joys of living in accordance with the rhythms of nature:

The pavilions commanded a view of radiant mountains in the distance and rivers flowing in the plain. It would be impossible to describe the tranquil beauty of the place in every particular. In summer, the heavy rains sound like waterfalls; in winter, thick snow breaks the bamboo with a sound like snapping jade. This is a good spot for playing the qin-zither, with its resonant tones, and for chanting poems, with their clear rhymes. Or one can play chess, the pieces going “ding ding,” and pitch-pot, the arrows going “zeng zeng.” All these sounds are improved by the bamboo construction.

When I have time off from my official duties, I put on a “crane feather robe” and a Huayang cap. With a copy of the *Book of Changes* before me, I burn incense and sit quietly. At such times, I feel far from all earthly anxieties. Besides the river and the mountains, the only things I can see are sailing boats, sand-birds, mist, clouds, and groves of bamboo. When the effects of wine have subsided, and the smoke from my teapot has died down, I say good-bye to the setting sun and welcome the moon. Such are the pleasures of my life in exile.

5.4 Leaf e

The Small Mound to the West of Gumu Pond

by Liu Zongyuan (773–819)

Liu Zongyuan was yet another high official who fell out of favor during factional conflicts at the imperial court and was demoted. In his poems, he describes the beauty of nature in Hunan, south of the Yangzi River, where he was exiled. However, the poetic descriptions of the landscape also conceal a subtle criticism of social constraints. In describing the magnificent natural phenomena in the remote mountains, he laments the fate of able-bodied men like himself who have to live far from the capital and cannot serve their country. In this poem, he tells of discovering a plot of land that he was able to buy for little money:

Eight days after I reached West Mountain, I was exploring about two hundred paces along the road that leads northwest from the mouth of the valley, and I found Gumu Pond. Twenty-five paces west of the pond, where the water flowed swift and deep, a fish-weir had been made. Above the fish-weir was a hill growing with trees and bamboo. Almost beyond counting were its rocks, which jutted out menacingly, rearing themselves aloft, spurning the earth in their emergence and rivaling one another in rare shapes. . . .

Then the fine trees stood out, the lovely bamboo were exposed, and the unusual rocks were revealed. When we gazed out from upon it, the heights of the mountains, the drifting of clouds, the currents of streams, and the cavorting of birds and beasts all cheerfully demonstrated their art and skill in performance for us below the hill. When we spread out our mats and lay down there, the clear and sharply defined

shapes were in rapport with our eyes; the sounds of babbling waters were in rapport with our ears; all those things that went on forever in emptiness were in rapport with our spirits; and what was as deep and still as an abyss was in rapport with our hearts. In less than ten full days I had obtained two rare places. Even those who loved scenic spots in olden times may well never have been able to equal this.

I must say that if I were to transport this splendid scenery to Feng, Hao, Hu, or Du-ling, the nobility who are fond of excursions would rival one another to purchase it. . . . But now it is left forsaken in this province; as they pass by, farmers and fishermen think it worth nothing. . . .

5.5 Leaf f

The Pavilion of the Drunken Old Man by Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072)

Ouyang Xiu was one of the most influential scholars of his time. As a high-ranking statesman, he reformed the civil service examinations and compiled several important historical writings. But his career was also marked by setbacks. Several times he was demoted to small posts far from the capital. He wrote this poem while in exile in 1046. In a very personal yet humorous way, he reflects on his degradation, describes the idyllic natural world as well as his friendships with the local population, and refers to himself as the “Drunken Old Man”:

The governor would come with his guests to drink here; and when he had gotten a little drunk, he, being the eldest of the company, gave himself the nickname “Drunken Old Man.” The Drunken Old Man’s interest was not in the wine itself but in being here amid the mountains and waters. The delight in mountains and waters was first found in the heart and then lodged temporarily

in the wine.

When the sun comes out and the forest haze lifts, or when the clouds come back to the hills and the caves in the cliffs grow dark, all the transformations of light and shadow are the passages from dawn to dusk in the mountains. Wildflowers spring up and give off secret fragrances; then the cassia trees rise high and form dense shade; then winds blow high up and the frost gleams in purity; then the waters sink and stones appear: these are the four seasons in the mountains. At dawn we go there and at dusk return; and as the scenery of the four seasons is never the same, so our delight, too, is limitless.

5.6 Leaf g

Ode on the Red Cliff by Su Shi (1037–1101)

The poet, art theorist, and high official Su Shi is one of the most famous figures in Chinese history. He became the model of the highly educated and morally blameless man as well as the archetype of the upright yet wrongly accused official. He wrote *Ode on the Red Cliff* in 1082 while in exile.

The long prose poem describes a moonlit boat trip on the Yangzi River that Su Shi took with friends. During the journey, one of the guests makes a melancholy remark about the ephemerality of human existence, characterizing human beings as nothing more than:

May flies caught between Heaven and Earth, a speck of grain in the boundless sea. Grieved by the brevity of our lives, I envy the inexhaustibility of the Yangzi.

Su Shi counters this with a longer philosophical reflection in which he describes human beings as part of a constantly changing yet never vanishing universe:

Do you know about the river and the moon?
The former flows on and on but never departs.
The latter waxes and wanes but never grows
or shrinks. If you look at the things from the view-
point of the changes they undergo, nothing in
Heaven or Earth lasts longer than the blink of an
eye. But if you look at them from the viewpoint
of their changeless traits, neither the objects of
the world nor we ever come to an end. What is
there to envy?

You can listen to the entire poem in English and Chinese at the listening station.

5.7 Leaf h

Elegy on the Sound of Autumn by Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072)

In this poem, Ouyang Xiu contemplates transience. Not only does it manifest itself in nature in autumn, but human beings are also subject to it. Ouyang Xiu comes to realize that in the face of old age, all worldly striving is in vain.

Alas, how sad! . . . This is the sound of autumn,
why has it come? If you wish to know the signs
which distinguish autumn, its colors are pale
and mournful, [the] mists dissolve, and the
clouds are gathered away; its face is clear and
bright, with the sky high overhead and a sun
of crystal; its breath is harsh and raw, and
pierces our flesh and bones; its mood is dreary
and dismal, and the mountains and rivers lie
desolate. Therefore the sound that distinguishes
it is keen and chill, and bursts out in shrieks

and screams. The rich, close grass teems [in] vivid green, the thriving verdure of splendid trees delight us; then autumn sweeps the grass and its color changes, touches the trees and their leaves drop.

...

Alas, the plants feel nothing, whirling and scattering when their time comes; but mankind has consciousness, the noblest of all intelligence. A hundred cares move his heart, a myriad of tasks weary his body; the least motion within him is sure to make his spirit waver, and how much more when he thinks of that which is beyond the reach of his endeavor, worries over that which his wisdom is powerless to alter! . . . But remembering who it is who commits this violence against us, why should we complain against the sound of autumn?

5.8 Leaf i

The Chalet of Cranes by Su Shi (1037–1101)

This prose poem was written by the exiled official and renowned poet Su Shi during his banishment in southern China. It recounts his visit to a hermit living with a group of tame cranes in a simple mountain hut. Su Shi envies the man for his untrammelled life, free of all worldly cares, and says to him:

Are you aware, sir, how perfect is the happiness you enjoy? Happiness that I would not exchange even for the diadem of a prince. Does not the *Book of Changes* speak of the crane's voice sounding in solitude, and the harmony that prevails among its young? Does not the *Book of Poetry* tell us that the crane's note rings through the marsh, and is heard far away in the sky? For the crane is a bird of purity and retirement,

taking its pleasure beyond the limits of this dusty world of ours. Therefore it has been made an emblem of the virtuous man and of the lettered recluse.

On the last two leaves of the album, Jin Nong has written poems he composed himself. They describe the joys of meeting like-minded friends and the peaceful atmosphere in a remote Buddhist monastery:

5.9 Leaf k

The bell starts to boom from Jiao Mountain
Temple

As the moon rises over the river.

The moon climbs, and the tide swells –

Sounds of wind and water mingle in a weird
dissonance

Then die out in the withered reeds, with a dry
whisper

That makes frightened birds fly squawking into
the air.

The long waves roll through distant mist for
ten thousand miles;

The central current flows towards the Milky Way.

...

After sitting together, we walk in the broken
shadows of pine trees,

Where blossoms on frost seem to crackle on the
ground.

Lapis lazuli palaces, crystalline realms –

Cold and clear, this is the Buddha-world.

Good friends and splendid scenery are not easy
to find,

Yet heaven has granted us both of them in
a single evening. . . .

5.10 Leaf I

Spring has not yet come to the mountains,
Pines and bamboo stand out sharp and clear.
A yellow crane hovers over me
And leads me to a hidden place
Where a monastery stands in a clearing,
Wide and open, untroubled by the world.
The monks came here – to the Siming
Mountain – in their simple robes,
And planted enough vegetables for a hundred
people.

All my life I've travelled in distant places
Without knowing that this one was so near!
Today I am visiting a learned old monk
Whose house is surrounded by winding paths.
Deep in the night, a shrine lamp is lit;
A small moon shines above a forest wet
with snow.

We chant poems, eschewing vulgar images,
Sitting together until morning birds start
to sing. . . .



Jin Nong (1687–1763)
Returning Home by Tao Yuanming (365–427)
 Leaf a of the album *Landscapes Illustrating Poems and Essays by Famous Writers*
 Qing dynasty, dated 1736
 Museum Rietberg, Zurich, Gift of Charles A. Drenowatz, RCH 1175a

6.0 Taking the Old Masters as Models

In traditional China, the perfect social order was not to be found in an indefinite future but rather in classical antiquity. This is why, especially in times of political crisis, there were repeated calls to revive the values and culture of the idealized old times. In painting, too, references to the old masters became a central element. Since the eleventh century, conveying the “spirit of antiquity” has been one of the most important qualities of a fine painting.

In the sixteenth century, in the scholarly circle around the influential art critic and painter Dong Qichang (1555–1636), the conception of a “true” and “correct” landscape painting tradition emerged. When studying the ancient masters, the artist was to decode their pictorial principles and structure his own work as a free reinterpretation. Accordingly, countless works were painted “in the manner of old masters.” They subtly allude to the stylistic or compositional elements of time-honored models and thus enter into an inventive art-historical and spiritual dialogue with the past.

This art movement was promoted by the imperial court and declared orthodoxy. Meanwhile, individualist painters began to consciously distance themselves from the established conventions and experiment with new forms of expression. Even for them, referencing the great masters often remained an important issue, although they found their own personal approaches to the iconic models.

7.0 Landscapes in the Manner of Song and Yuan Masters

Zhang Zongcang (1686–1756)
Landscapes in the Manner of Song and Yuan Masters
Qing dynasty, dated 1748
Museum Rietberg, Zurich, Gift of Charles A. Drenowatz, RCH 1162

The professional artist Zhang Zongcang, a representative of the so-called orthodox school, cultivated a traditionalist style of landscape painting, which focused on referencing the old masters. In this album, Zhang Zongcang presents a broad repertoire of painting styles and motifs employed by canonical landscape painters of the past. These small-scale studies are far from precise copies or imitations. Zhang's creativity is shown in the way he modifies his model and interprets it in his own brush language.

Each leaf is accompanied by a poem or inscription that reveals the artist's source of inspiration and classifies the style in terms of art history. The complexity of the references is obvious. Often he goes beyond mentioning a single painter to enumerate an entire line of tradition, as on leaf d:

7.1 Leaf d:

Those who want to emulate the manner of the Foolish Old Man [Huang Gongwang (1269–1354)] should begin by studying Dong [Yuan (ca. 943–ca. 962)] and Ju[ran (active mid-10th century)]. A powerful spirit should be expressed with an unrestrained brush. A feeling of naturalness should go together with adherence to the old masters. Such a work will be a masterpiece.

Such lines of transmission should not be understood as teacher-pupil relationships; rather, they were created by representatives of the orthodox school. Through the inscriptions, the painters demonstrate that they, too, are part of the venerable

tradition of artists who have grasped and transmitted a higher wisdom in their paintings.

7.2 Leaf a

Leaf a is a tribute to Ni Zan (1301–1374), one of China's most revered and copied artists. The typical elements of his style, which have been quoted again and again, are the motif of the solitary kiosk next to a group of ragged trees in front of a broad expanse of water and the extremely brittle and dry brushwork. In his inscription, Zhang Zongcang places even Ni Zan in a line of tradition, but at the same time emphasizes his individuality:

The noble scholar Ni [Zan (1301–1374)] created a school of his own, but his manner can be traced back to Jing [Hao (ca. 870–ca. 930)] and Guan [Tong (ca. 907–960)]. Hence his vision was unique in his time.

7.3 Leaf c

The inscription on leaf c reveals the dilemma of painters striving to capture the spirit of the great masters in their paintings:

In this painting, I tried to imitate the manner of Juran (active mid-10th century), but I couldn't achieve even a fraction of it. In a sweat I threw down my brush.

The inscriptions in this album in the style of the old masters also include landscape poems, some of which in turn make reference in their imagery to the works of the artists quoted.

7.4 Leaf e

The thatched hut overlooks South Lake.
The color of the water and the radiance
of the mountains freshen the air.
No gulls fly by; no fish rise to the surface.
Falling flowers and chanted poems are

carried by the wind.

Again in the manner of the Perverse Old
Man [Ni Zan (1301–1374)].

7.5 Leaf g

The hermit is no longer in his thatched hut.
Mist hangs heavy over the village by the distant
stream.

The water runs high under a crumbling bridge
– no boats are crossing.

Who is there now to care for the green
mountains and white clouds?

In the manner of Gao, President of the Board
[Gao Kegong (1248–1310)].

8.0 Album with Landscapes in the Manner of Old Masters

Wang Jiu (active ca. 1759–1800)
*Album with Landscapes in the Manner
of Old Masters*
Qing dynasty, dated 1759
Museum Rietberg, Zurich, Gift of
Charles A. Drenowatz; RCH 1165

Wang Jiu is a typical follower of the traditionalist school. In his paintings, he strives to revive the “spirit of antiquity.” All his life he studied the works of old masters and tried to capture their essence.

He seems to have identified himself with the famous Yuan-dynasty painter Huang Gongwang (1269–1354), even choosing his artist names with the latter in mind. Because Huang was known as “First Peak,” he referred to himself as “Second Peak”; referencing Huang’s nickname “the Great Fool,” he called himself “the Second Fool.”

In this album, however, Wang Jiu names other role models. At the same time, he clearly states that a painting “in the style of the great masters” should not only copy a painting style, but also capture the character traits and virtues of the revered icons.

8.1 Leaf c

In this picture, the river and sky are broad and vast; the trees and foliage grow in profusion. This is close to what is meant by “a thousand miles in an inch.” I began by studying Juran [active mid-10th century], and almost came close to Guandao [Jiang Shen (ca. 1090–1138)]. But it was too difficult even to paint like the latter; how could I dare to emulate Master Ju?

8.2 Leaf h

After snowfall, I painted this cold sky, the bare trees, and the rocks jutting out like teeth, for those who understand me. I wanted to express our great spirit, our steadfastness and purity.

9.0 Silent Poetry

Shen Hao (active 1630–1650)
Silent Poetry
Qing dynasty, mid-17th century
Museum Rietberg, Zurich, Gift of
Charles A. Drenowatz, RCH 1148

The painter Shen Hao chose a rather unusual path in life. As a young man, he received a traditional education, but did not aspire to a career as an official; instead, he became a monk and entered a Buddhist monastery. In middle age, however, he returned to lay status and devoted himself entirely to painting, writing, and poetry. He became particularly famous for his theoretical works on art. In them, he urges painters not to blindly follow the prescribed rules of a particular school, but to find their own style and “go their own way.”

Shen Hao’s independent attitude is evident in this album. In each of the delicately colored leaves, he offers an inscription referring to a great artist of the tenth to the fourteenth century. But he treats his models in a very playful, even joking way. The inscription on leaf a, for example, reads:

9.1 Leaf a

Honggu zi [Jing Hao (ca. 870–ca. 930)] was a rare talent of the late Tang. His *cun*-strokes and rocks cannot be done by weak hands.

Jing Hao was considered the founder of monumental Chinese landscape painting. His compositions, usually dominated by a towering central mountain, were interpreted as portraying an ideal hierarchical order. Shen Hao, too, places a massive

mountain in the center of this small album page. On closer inspection, however, it turns out to be a small hill set in isolation in the foreground of the composition. It seems that Shen Hao deliberately evokes associations in order to play a trick on the viewer. In this way, he not only emphasizes his independence, but also subtly criticizes the intellectuals of his time, who superficially evoked the old ideals and moral concepts but failed to put them into practice.

In his inscriptions on these album leaves, Shen Hao does something unheard of: not only does he make fun of the sacrosanct icons of the past, which have been elevated as the paramount role models; he even places himself above them. For the followers of the orthodox school, this must have been pure blasphemy.

9.2 Leaf b

Composing Poetry under the Shadow of Pines.
Li Gonglin [ca. 1041–1106] is no match for Lang
[Shen Hao himself]. A laugh!

9.3 Leaf d

Xigu [Li Tang (ca. 1070s–ca. 1150s)] is no match
for Bohu [Tang Yin (1470–1523)], and I fear
Bohu is no match for Ququ [one of Shen Hao's
pen names]. I dare to praise myself.

Leaf g shows that Shen Hao is definitely anchored in painting tradition. The dense, narrow rock formations on the right-hand side of the picture look like living, moving entities and are reminiscent of the style of the famous painter Wang Meng of the Yuan period. The overall composition, however, reveals Shen Hao's own individual style. The inscription reads:

9.4 Leaf g

I have seen Shanqiao's [Wang Meng (1308–1385)]
painting *Kaopan* [which is based on a poem,
taken from the Zhou-dynasty *Book of Poetry*,

that deals with life in the Kingdom of Wei] in the collection of Educational Commissioner Zou. It is rich and beautiful, very pleasant indeed. This painting looks like it.

The last painting of the album is, according to the inscription, a self-portrait of the artist. It shows a group of simple straw huts in a fenced area. In the center sits a figure in a meditative posture. A fog-shrouded moon bathes the scene in pale light. In the inscription Shen Hao writes:

9.5 Leaf h

Chan meditation under a frosty sky. Langqu depicting himself.

This image may give a hint to Shen Hao's non-conformist attitude, for it suggests his close connection to the Chan school of Buddhism. Although based on a canonical lineage of teachings, the Chan school holds that the final step towards awakening can only be taken individually.

10.0 Album with Landscapes

Yi Da'an (1874–1941)
Album with Landscapes
1930s
Museum Rietberg, Zurich, Gift of
Charles A. Drenowatz, RCH 1189

Yi Da'an was a man of tradition in a time of upheaval. In his youth he received the typical training for a career as a government official. Later he completed his studies at the renowned Guangya Academy near Guangzhou, which had been established to provide the new elite leadership with modern training adapted to the times. While many of his classmates ascended to high positions in the government after the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912, Yi Da'an chose the life of a traditional scholar-artist, dedicating himself entirely to literature, painting, and connoisseurship.

The intimate scenes in this album convey the powerful, perfect order of nature, but simultaneously evoke an atmosphere of nostalgia. The poetic lines of the inscription likewise reveal the artist's yearning for a long-lost, ideal world where humankind and nature existed in harmony.

10.1 Leaf a

An orderly spirit pervades heaven
and earth
But the waterfall comes irregularly.
Those who share your mind
Throughout the ages are very rare.

10.2 Leaf d

Who, on this quiet autumn night,
Comes to look at the solitary round moon?

11.0 Album with Landscapes

Qian Du (1763–1844)
Album with Landscapes
Qing dynasty, dated 1841
Museum Rietberg, Zurich, Gift of
Charles A. Drenowatz, RCH 1177

Qian Du, too, experienced social upheaval in the last years of his life. In the so-called Opium War (1839–1842), Great Britain defeated the domestically weakened Chinese Empire with only a handful of warships. This led to a crisis of legitimacy in the halls of power and a century of foreign domination. In Qian Du's paintings, however, there is no trace of the political chaos. The painter came from an old family of officials, enabling him to lead a carefree life as a scholar-artist. Stylistically, he follows the school of the iconic literati painter Wen Zhengming (1470–1559). Accordingly, he cultivates the ideal of the highly educated, refined, and self-contained artist who practices painting as an elitist pastime.

ROOM 3

11.1 Leaf a

Enjoying the Summer under the Shadows of the Phoenix Tree
Shubao [Qian Gu (1508–1572)] of my family deeply captured the spiritual essence of Tingyun [Wen Zhengming]. I now try to grasp the general idea.

11.2 Leaf b

Based on Qiu Shizhou [Qiu Ying (1494–1552)] imitating the brushwork of Ding Yunpeng [1547–1628].



Zhang Zongcang (1686–1756)
Leaf a from the album *Landscapes in the Manner of Song and Yuan Masters*
Qing dynasty, dated 1748
Museum Rietberg, Zurich, Gift of Charles A. Drenowatz, RCH 1162a

Colophon

Curator: Alexandra von Przychowski

Visual Communication: Rüdiger Schlömer and Fabia Lyrenmann

Exhibition poster: Rüdiger Schlömer

Multimedia: Masus Maier

Copy-editing: Anne McGannon

Translations

5.1 after James Robert Hightower, *The Poetry of T'ao Ch'ien*, p. 268.

5.2 after Witter Bynner, *The Jade Mountain*, p. 125.

5.4, 5.5 after Stephen Owen, *An Anthology of Chinese Literature*, pp. 611, 613.

5.6 after Ronald Egan, *Word, Image, and Deed in the Life of Su Shi*, p. 222.

All others after Chu-tsing Li, *A Thousand Peaks and a Myriad Ravines*.

