

Lü Ji 吕纪

Active 1488–1505, Ming dynasty

***Eagles and Magpies in Snow* 四喜圖**

Ink and color on silk

Tianjin Museum

Lü Ji was one of the great Ming court painters whose Flower-Bird paintings set a new aesthetic standard for the “academy” style. The landscape setting is rendered boldly with powerful “axe-cut” brushstrokes defining the rocks and freehand ink and washes for the pine. Four magpies below a pair of eagles who perched on high are carefully positioned to suggest a courtly audience by the emperor. Furthermore, “four magpies” (*si xi que* 四喜鵲) puns with “four happiness,” (*si xi* 四喜) in Chinese. Together they express “birds of happiness” conveying wishes for good fortune, prosperity, longevity, and happiness.

no. 2

Hu Mei 胡湄

Late 17th and early 18th century, Qing dynasty

Plum, Bamboo and Mandarin Ducks

梅竹鴛鴦圖

Ink and color on silk

Tianjin Museum

Mandarin ducks are the symbol of happy marriage; plum trees and bamboo are considered plants of noble characters. Hu Mei's elegant coloring and meticulous brushwork were much appreciated at the court of Kangxi emperor (1661-1722), though Hu was not a resident court painter. His student Shen Quan (1682-1760) went to teach in Japan and contributed to the establishment of the realist Nanping school of Flower-Bird painting in Edo Japan.

no. 3

Jiang Tingxi 蔣廷錫

1669–1732, Qing dynasty

Lotus 千葉蓮圖, 1722

Ink and light color on paper

Tianjin Museum

Jiang Tingxi was a high-ranking official at the Qing court, known today as the compiler of a voluminous encyclopedia published in 1726. He was also an official painter specializing in flower painting, versatile in a variety of styles.

Lotus flowers are symbols of purity in both Buddhist and secular worlds as the plant grows in mud and blossoms above the water. Jiang presents the rare species of multi-layered lotus flowers with two beautiful but decaying leaves in keeping with the seasonal time of fully blossomed lotus. The orchid leaves add a calligraphic touch to the composition. Together they are bundled in a crackle-patterned vase ready to be placed on an altar.

no. 9

Lu Zhi 陸治

1496–1576, Ming dynasty

Pear Blossom and Two Swallows 梨花雙燕圖

Ink and light color on paper

Tianjin Museum

*In search of beautiful scenery in the southern
country, it's hard to find an old acquaintance to
whom I can entrust my heart.
A lonely figure among flowers in late spring, its
leisurely mood is reflected on the water.
Clouds dance in wind, and snow falls on clothes.
Lamenting the early arrival of autumn, birds fly
away without attachment.*

Integrating calligraphy, poetry, and painting, Lu Zhi inscribed a poem to celebrate the auspicious arrival of spring, echoing his exquisite painting of blossoming pears with a pair of playful swallows. Carrying on the scholar-artist (also known as literati or amateur artist) tradition of the preceding dynasties, Lu Zhi was one of the most accomplished disciples of Wen Zhengming (1470–1559) in the Suzhou (Wu) region. In praise of the fine and freehand brushwork, Wen Zhengming prominently inscribed a colophon for his student on the top-right. In the best of scholar-artist tradition, nine other contemporary and later admirers expressed appreciation with seals and inscriptions, including the Qing dynasty Emperor Qianlong (1736–1795).

no. 20

Scholar or Literati Painting

The flower-and-bird paintings in this section are created by China's educated elite, the scholar-officials known as *wenren* 文人, who are both policy makers and some of China's most accomplished poets, calligraphers and painters. Scholar or literati artist painted in ink on paper, using the same disciplined brush skills required for writing or calligraphy. As a result, their paintings are distinctly personal, which distinguishes them from the more colorful and descriptive style preferred by court artists and other professional painters.

Nature subjects like flowers, plants and birds offer an array of visual forms and shapes for the scholar painters to use as vehicles through which they could lodge their thoughts and feelings with ink and brushwork. By integrating poetic inscriptions, calligraphy and pictorial imagery in a single work, literati paintings convey the thoughts and emotions of the artist.

Zheng Xie 鄭燮

1693–1765, Qing dynasty

Fragrance on the Mountain Top 山頂妙香圖,

1758

Ink on paper

Tianjin Museum

*Grown on top of thousands of peaks, diffusing a
strong fragrance through the cracks of rocks.
Beneath them floating clouds come and go,
but they remain indifferent.*

After resigning from office amid false accusations, Zheng Xie moved to the vibrant commercial city of Yangzhou to sell paintings and calligraphy for a living. He was known for his paintings of orchids, bamboo and rocks, symbols of purity, upright, and solidity. He integrated into the composition his restless calligraphy with spontaneous yet accentuated brushwork and dissimilarly styled script.

no. 25

Li Shan 李鱣

1686–1762, Qing dynasty

Flower, Birds, Insects 花鳥魚蟲冊, 1745

Ink and color on paper,
three leaves from an album of twelve
Tianjin Museum

After losing his official post, Li Shan turned to painting, often traveling back and forth to the commercially vibrant city of Yangzhou to sell his works. At the peak of his career, Li Shan loosened his freehand brushwork with an unrestricted application of ink wash and exquisite colors. The images created through this approach appear powerful and spontaneous, which earned him the accolade as one of the Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou.

Morning Glory after Rain

*Spider's web has just been woven, and crickets
are still chirping. A few morning glories stole
the color of the sky after the rain.*

Sandgull in Reeds

Sky and earth and a single sand gull.

Narcissus and Garlic

*Garlic (bulbs) also produce elegant and
vulgar types.*

no. 27

Tang Yuzhao 唐宇昭

1602–1672, Ming-Qing dynasty

***Lotus and Heron* 荷鶴圖**

Color on silk

Changzhou Museum

Although not as aromatic as orchids, this gentleman of flowers has an earnest fragrance. The painting shares the scents, sending them back to the lotus pickers on the river. Painted by the old man, Tang Yangzhou of the Half Garden in Piling.

Painted in the “boneless technique” by using colors directly without ink outlines, *Lotus and Heron* is one of the early paintings that successfully adopted a new and softer vision of flowers and birds. It was to have a lasting influence in and around Tang Yuzhao’s native city, Changzhou. Born during the late Ming dynasty to a distinguished family of scholars, Tang lived through the turbulent era of dynastic change to the Manchu-ruled Qing dynasty. He remained a Ming loyalist and refused to serve the Qing government. Most of his family fortune was confiscated. In his private garden, known as the Half Garden, Tang led a life of seclusion, only to hold occasional gatherings with fellow painters to explore painting techniques and study calligraphy and poetry.

no. 34

Yun Shouping 惲壽平

1633–1690, Ming-Qing dynasty

Vegetable and Fruits 蔬果冊頁, 1685

Ink and color on silk,

two from an album of four leaves

Changzhou Museum

Yun Shouping is one of the Six Great Masters of the Early Qing Dynasty and was a leading member of the influential Changzhou school of Flower-Bird painting. He remained a Ming loyalist, refused to serve the Qing government, and earned his living by selling paintings. A great poet, calligrapher, and painter of landscapes and flowers, Yun Shouping's brushwork was spontaneous and exquisite. He consolidated the "boneless method" of painting that was being explored by several artists in Changzhou and advocated direct observation and painting from nature.

Radishes

*Plucking out the jade of the golden land, with
earth's nutrition congealed on its velvety skin.*

Peach and Lotus Seed Pods

*I remember one autumn night by West Lake
under the moonlight, my fingers were tainted
with fragrance by cutting lotus flowers.
Playfully written at the Ouxiang Studio*

Taro

*I still remember the late night in the mountain
pavilion, where my friends were composing poems
in the cold lamp light. The Taro was simmering in
the firepit when I stood up and opened the window
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Studio in the early Spring of the yichou year (1685).*

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no. 35

Xugu 虛谷

1823–1896, Qing dynasty

Fish by Duckweeds and Flounder with Garlic

雜畫冊

Ink and color on paper,

taken from an album of four leaves

Tianjin Museum

Xugu served briefly as a regional military official but was soon disillusioned with the late Qing government and retired to become a monk around the age of thirty. He moved to Guangling (present-day Yangzhou) while frequenting Suzhou and Shanghai to sell paintings for a living. Well-known for painting familiar, everyday scenes, Xugu painted these album leaves with his expressive brushwork and ink tonalities.

For the swimming fish, he inscribed “Fish do not know the waves (troubles) above the water” and for the flounder being prepared with garlic, “Playfully I (the Tired Crane) painted at the age of sixty-nine.”

no. 49

Leng Mei 冷枚

1669–1742, Qing dynasty

The Dog Squatting under the Shade of Flowers 花陰蹲犬圖

Ink and color on silk

Tianjin Museum

Leng Mei was a renowned court painter who served under three emperors Kangxi, Yongzheng and Qianlong of the Qing dynasty. His superb draftsmanship and color application brought a new level of excellence in flower-and-bird paintings. Though not surprisingly, his dates are unrecorded as the status of professional court painters specializing in colorful descriptive paintings of nature objects and architecture was low in a culture that hailed the supremacy of ink landscape painting.

no. 57

Sun Di 孫欵

Active late 17th century, Qing dynasty

***Peony, Magnolia, and Begonia* 玉堂富貴圖**

Ink and color on silk

Tianjin Museum

Images of nature objects in paintings have almost always carried auspicious meaning. This is based on the Chinese belief that by being near goodness, goodness will come. Through pictorial puns or rebus, flower paintings provided the most colorful offers of auspicious sayings which became increasingly popular from the late Ming dynasty onwards. Here, peony flower, traditionally associated with affluence and abundance, is combined with magnolia (yu-lan 玉蘭) and begonia (hai-tang 海棠) to suggest splendors of wealth.

no. 68

Li Boyuan 李伯元

1867–1906, Qing dynasty

Paradise Flycatcher Perched on Blossoming

玉堂富貴圖

Ink and color on silk

Changzou Museum

Li Boyuan was often referred to as one of the Four Great Novelists of the Late Qing Dynasty. Multi-talented, he also excelled in poetry, calligraphy, painting and seal carving. At the age of thirty, he went to Shanghai, the center of modernity, at the end of the 19th century and pursued a career in publishing. In the spirit of traditional scholar-painters, he painted this paradise flycatcher on a blossoming plum, both names in Chinese (shou 綬, mei 梅) share the same sound with “longevity (shou 壽) and arrival (mei 眉),” as a birthday gift for his brother-in-law. The long inscription next to the painting was added later by a 20th century collector-connoisseur who was from Li’s hometown Changzhou and possibly acquainted with Li’s descendants. He reflects upon Li’s life and laments the bygone achievements.

no. 66

Chen Chun 陳淳

1484–1544, Ming dynasty

Flowers 花卉圖, 1540

Ink on paper, handscroll

Tianjin Museum

no. 21 (3-5)

Chen Chun was known for his calligraphy and fabulous freehand brushwork in a uniquely spontaneous style in painting. Here, with the disciplined brush skills required for calligraphy, Chen painted the alternating flower branches in monochrome ink.

Magnolias

East wind blows constantly, peach and plum blossoms are falling. Among all beautiful flowers, only magnolias refuse to fall easily. 3

Daylilies

Commonly planted north of the hall, flowers bloom among rush leaves. They are easy to grow and can take away your worries. 4

Okra flowers

Blooming in autumn winds, they talk in their own words. Spring flowers don't laugh. My heart is vivid and loyal. 5

Xu Wei 徐渭

1521–1593, Ming dynasty

Fish and Crab 魚蟹圖

Ink on paper, handscroll

Tianjin Museum

no. 22

Xu Wei was skilled at poetry and calligraphy and excelled in painting flowers, creatures, landscapes, and figures alike. His Flower-Bird paintings are executed with wild and varied brushwork in freehand ink which greatly influenced later generations of painters.

Xu Wei's surviving Flower-Bird paintings are mostly multi-sectional long scrolls. Containing only two sections, this painting could well be a fragment from a longer scroll. With the

brushwork unrestrained, the ink saturated, and the composition succinct, this short handscroll depicts a crab holding a branch and a carp jumping among waves. As a common practice in Xu's work, here, each painting is paired with a poem.

Crab Holding a Branch

Wherever a crab can go, is still within the ocean.

Carp Leaping in Water

The paper smells like a stormy ocean, from which the white fish jumps out, leaving the ink pool empty. In this mundane world full of ordinary eyes, no one could see you are a dragon.

(Note: The Chinese legend speaks of carp being the preincarnates of dragons. Carp jumping in water is used as a metaphor for scholars venturing civil examination.)

Gao Fenghan 高鳳翰

1683–1749, Qing dynasty

***Camellias, Bamboos and
Orchids in Snow*** 花卉, 1720

Ink and light color on paper,
handscroll

Tianjin Museum

no. 28

Ancient moss embroidered with fish scales; vast sky filled with bright flakes. Bird traces written on snow; half gone when the wind blows.

Gao Fenghan utilizes the handscroll format to maximize the effect of visiting a garden in early Spring. Viewed from right to left, traditionally his handscroll would have been unrolled at arm's length, one section at a time. Gao displayed a full range of ink and brush possibilities to capture early

blossoms peering through traces of snow. Seventeen years after this painting, at the age of fifty-five, Gao was caught up in a corruption case. Although he was soon acquitted and released from prison, his right arm had become paralyzed. He gave up his official career and started to paint with his left hand, which induced a natural awkwardness well appreciated by scholar artists. (For an example of Gao's left-hand painting, please see *Jin and Jiao Mountains* in the SBMA Chinese gallery.)

Yun Bing 惲冰

Active first half of the 18th century,
Qing dynasty

Hundred Flowers 百花圖

Ink and color on silk, handscroll
Tianjin Museum

no. 41

Arranged in the order of seasons (from right to left), this painting depicts more than fifty kinds of flowers. Yun Bing was a fifth-generation descendant of the great Yun family who consolidated the influential school of Flower-Bird painting in Changzhou. She learned to paint from family members in the private chambers of home from a young age, specializing in the celebrated “boneless method” using exuberant colors and delicate brushwork. She was considered

one of the best painters in the Yun family since her great-great-grand father Yun Shouping and one of the best female painters of her time.

Zhu Da 朱耷 or
Bada Shanren 八大山人
1626–1705, Ming-Qing dynasty
Flowers on a River 河上花, 1697
Ink on paper, handscroll
Tianjin Museum

no. 33

This long handscroll, painted in a relatively free *xieyi* or “sketching ideas” style, is a striking, symphonic journey that gently coaxes the viewer, from right to left, through an intimate and mysterious world of ink washes and strange forms that exemplify the complexity and drama of Bada Shanren’s inner world. A member of the Ming royal family, Bada was a young adult when his dynasty was overthrown in 1644. He spent the rest of life in hiding. Paintings, poetry and calligraphy were his expressive outlets.

Bada’s primary subject here is the lotus, a flower that symbolizes purity and was especially dear to Bada throughout his artistic career. In the middle of the painting is a barren tree by a still pool of water, which leads to a gradual change of scenery of boulders and streams in a landscape delineated mostly with dynamic brushstrokes, dotted with orchids, fragrant flowers of purity, and bamboo, plant of virtue. Bada Shanren inscribed a long poetic ballad after the painting in his distinctive semi-

cursive calligraphy. The ballad is packed with densely layered literary and historical allusions, reminiscing a personal history haunted by loss and sorrow and lamenting loyalty and martyrdom. The unique combination of Bada’s two favored subjects, lotus and landscape, with the melodic verses make this painting a critical autobiographical statement as Bada sought to reconcile with the past while making peace with the present during his old age.

Note: This label text is adapted from “Bada Shanren’s *Flowers on a River*, a Landscape of Lotus and Mind,” published in the exhibition catalogue.