

Fact Sheet

Flowers on a River: The Art of Chinese Flower and Bird Painting, 1368–1911, Masterworks from Tianjin Museum and Changzhou Museum, China
Organized by the China Institute, NYC, March 23-June 25, 2023

SBMA, West Coast venue: October 15, 2023-January 14, 2024

Von Romberg and Emmons gallery—Reduced version

Works of Art: 17 Paintings (21 individual works), 17 artists

10 hanging scrolls, 5 handscrolls, 2 albums

This exhibition offers a historical examination of the much-appreciated but understudied genre of flower-and-bird painting through 17 works, including hanging scrolls, handscrolls, and albums, from the 15th to early 20th centuries (Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911)). Presented in three sections: Court Artists and the Imperial Taste, Literati and Individual Expression, and Flower-and-Bird Painting in Daily Life, the exhibition explores the natural world in terms of human experience, reflecting the deeply-rooted Chinese concept of “humanity in harmony with nature.” Most of the paintings are selected from the prestigious Tianjin Museum in northeastern China, where some of the most significant paintings from China’s long history reside. The remaining pieces come from the Changzhou City Museum in southern China, where a distinct regional style developed and dominated from the 17th century onwards. These works are on view for the first time in the Americas, including the premier showing of the forty-foot-long monochromatic handscroll painting, *Flowers on a River* (1697), by the eminent monk artist Zhu Da (also known as Bada Shanren, 1626-1705). The scroll, painted by Zhu Da at age 72, is a masterpiece of his life journey told through the life cycle of lotus flowers. As the master of individual expression, both meditative and joyous, Zhu Da’s free and loose brushwork anticipates Abstraction by hundreds of years.

Flower-and-bird painting is one of the three main genres of traditional Chinese painting, along with landscape and figure painting. Emerging in the third century, the practice expanded to include a variety of plants, fruits and vegetables, aquatic creatures, insects, and beasts. Over the years, a succession of masters and painting schools developed ever more innovative techniques and styles to capture

the abundance of nature. From colorful and descriptive portrayals of nature's alluring offerings to monochromatic renderings of nature's forms and rhythms, flower-and-bird paintings examine the intimate relationship between nature and man, revealing coded imagery that communicates meaning in daily contexts of human life.