

COLLECTED AND CURATED

MASTERPIECES OF CHINESE ART FROM THE UNIVERSITY MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY



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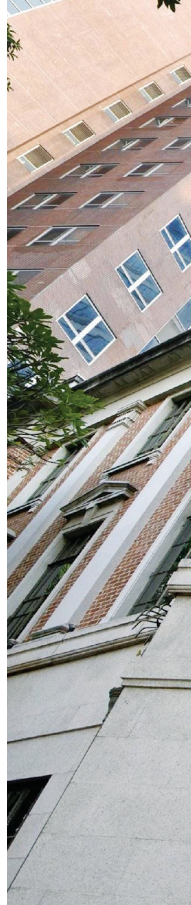
INTRODUCING CHINESE ART AND MATERIAL CULTURE THROUGH OBJECTS FROM THE UNIVERSITY MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY

The University Museum and Art Gallery (UMAG) of the University of Hong Kong is dedicated to collecting representative forms of Chinese art and curating educational displays of Chinese material culture and local heritage. Through artefacts from various time periods and regions, school pupils, university students and the general public gain a deeper understanding of these rich traditions.

As the oldest continuously operating museum in Hong Kong, UMAG continues to serve as a significant venue for contemporary art exhibitions. It excels at collecting, documenting and teaching about local and regional artists and art forms, while fostering ongoing and new relationships with distinguished members of the art community.

Increasingly recognised as an essential teaching resource, UMAG has expanded its collection and programming through generous donations from patrons and artists, along with support from the University of Hong Kong and the HKU Museum Society. Since 1953, curators and educators have leveraged this support to expand, display and teach with a collection that highlights artefacts ranging from Neolithic cultures (ca. 6500 BCE–ca. 1900 BCE) to the early kingdoms and dynasties of imperial China (ca. 1500 BCE–1911). UMAG has also gained a reputation for its fine selection of works by artists—predominantly painters—of the 20th and early 21st century.

UMAG displays many of the artworks featured here in its permanent galleries and rotating thematic exhibitions. These exhibitions facilitate the teaching of Chinese history and culture at The University of Hong Kong, and reach local and international audiences through digital exhibitions and the distinguished





University Learning Lab online platform. The museum's mission is to provide artistic and cultural experiences that are accessible to people of all ages and backgrounds, fostering a greater appreciation for the arts and nurturing a strong sense of cultural values and belonging within our diverse community. In so doing, UMAG preserves and teaches both the past and present, serving as a platform for ongoing discussions about the meaning of art and its significant role in contemporary society.

Dr Florian Knothe
Director, University Museum and Art Gallery,
The University of Hong Kong



Jar, China, Neolithic period, Majiayao culture, Banshan phase (ca. 2650–2350 BCE), earthenware with slip decoration, H: 34.3 cm, W: 44.2 cm, HKU.C.1955.0164, Gift of Mr P. Y. Tang



Jue with Cloud Design, China, Shang dynasty (ca. 1600–1046 BCE), cast and chased bronze, H: 20.2 cm, W: 17.7 cm, D: 8.8 cm, HKU.B.1953.0004

Neolithic Period (ca. 6500–ca. 1900 BCE)

During this ancient period, there were no fewer than twelve chronologically successive subcultures, some of which were nomadic and lacked established settlements. The most significant art objects from this period include numerous mass-produced ceramic vessels, which were primarily used for food storage. These vessels were often left undecorated or adorned with simple painted patterns. The slip decoration typically features a dark watery clay brushed onto the surface, creating a visible contrast with the beige colour of the clay vessels.

Shang Dynasty (ca. 1600–1046 BCE)

In the Shang dynasty, rare early objects such as oracle bones exemplify the highly developed written culture. In the visual arts, the technological advances in craftsmanship are effectively illustrated by finely detailed cast bronze vessels used in ritual ceremonies. These objects were central to the way burial chambers were equipped for the afterlife, ensuring that the deceased would continue to enjoy a luxurious existence. Known from archaeological excavations, these extremely high-quality artefacts have often remained undisturbed for centuries. As a result, they are now characterised by a greenish patina and remarkable encrustations that formed as the metal alloy reacted with salts and other minerals over the centuries.

Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE)

The Han dynasty is known for the rise of imperial China, marked by prosperity and the corresponding diversity in art, particularly in terms of ceramic production. Elegantly crafted clay objects feature the first glazes and the initial development of finely detailed decorations. In addition to a wealth of domestic objects are funerary artworks, including models of guard towers, houses, wells and guard dogs, all designed to enrich the afterlife. During this industrious time period, the shapes and forms of some ceramic types were influenced by the designs of more expensively produced bronze objects.



Dog, China, Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), sculpted earthenware with green glaze, H: 31.2 cm, W: 35.1 cm, D: 12.1 cm, HKU. C.2020.2475, Gift of Songyin Ge Collection

Tang Dynasty (618–907)

The Tang dynasty was marked by continued artistic advancement, though it remained largely focused on funerary culture. Distinctive artefacts from this era include ceramic figures of horses, camels and humans, which reflect, among other themes, economic and cultural exchange along the Silk Road. In addition, representations of musicians and dancers illustrate the vibrant court culture. These and other functional objects are often embellished with a three-colour (*sancai*) glaze, a sophisticated decoration incorporating shades of maroon, straw, green and occasionally blue.



Horse, China, Tang dynasty (618–907), sculpted earthenware with three-colour (*sancai*) glaze, H: 71.5 cm, HKU. C.1993.0989, Gift of Dr T T Tsui, Tsui Art Foundation Ltd



Ewer, China, Liao dynasty (907–1125),
stoneware with amber glaze, H: 30.3 cm,
W: 12.9 cm, HKU.C.1990.0933



Bowl, China, Jiangxi province, Ji'an
county, Southern Song dynasty (1127–
1279), glazed stoneware (Jizhou ware),
H: 12.1, D: 12 cm, HKU.C.1953.0060

Five Dynasties (907–960)

Liao Dynasty (907–1125)

Jin Dynasty (1115–1234)

The year 906 CE marked the end of the Tang dynasty, followed by the brief era of the Five dynasties. The subsequent rise and stability of the Song dynasty was preceded by the development of the Liao and Jin dynasties. As with the Tang, the exchange along the continental Silk Road continued to exert a strong influence on art, such as that of Middle Eastern silversmithing techniques on the forms of Chinese ceramic objects.

Song Dynasty (960–1279)

During this crucial historic period, spanning over three hundred years and divided into the reigns of the Northern Song (960–1127) and Southern Song (1127–1279), ceramic experimentation flourished, with continuous advancements in various glazes. The body of these clay pieces became increasingly delicate, leading to the development of proto-porcelains that included the white *Ding-yao* wares, the delicate *Qingbai* and *Jun-yao* bowls, *Jizhou* wares and the first *Longquan* celadon ceramics. Many of these exceptional works have been among the most admired, collected and recreated artefacts from their creation to contemporary times.

Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368)

The Yuan dynasty is known for its political and cultural openness. The Mongol rulers actively promoted cultural exchange, fostering trade and artistic influence that led to the creation of new types of artefact. Characteristic works of this period include the first large blue-and-white vases and bowls crafted from refined clay and adorned with motifs such as lifelike painted birds, fish and flowers within decorative borders. Also notable are vessels featuring moulded low-relief decoration that show Middle Eastern stylistic influences. While many of these objects were made in China for the local market, and represent a novelty in the history of Chinese art, others were specifically produced for export to Persia and the emerging Ottoman Empire.



Kendi, China, Fujian province, early Yuan dynasty (1271–1368), porcelain with white glaze (Dehua ware), H: 19.8 cm, W: 21 cm, HKU.C.1978.0635

Ming Dynasty (1368–1644)

Throughout the Ming dynasty, artisans demonstrated increasingly fine workmanship and a dedication to quality across a wide array of artefacts, including ceramics, vermilion and coromandel lacquerware, *Huanghuali* furniture and scroll paintings. Art centres flourished, notably in Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province, where pottery workshops with highly specialised kilns emerged. These workshops used lighter porcelain clay and highly refined painting techniques to produce porcelain objects, such as pieces decorated with blue-and-white underglaze. These items were exported in large quantities to the West via the expanding maritime Silk Road, where they were enthusiastically collected as prized treasures and often imitated.

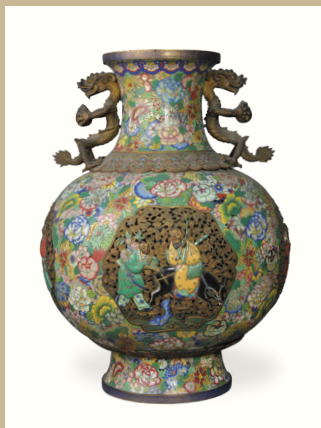


Klapmuts Bowl, China, Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen, Ming dynasty (1368–1644), porcelain with underglaze blue decoration, H: 4.7 cm, W: 15 cm, HKU.C.1966.0301

Qing Dynasty (1644–1911)



Tureen, China, Jingdezhen, Qing dynasty (1644–1911), Qianlong period (ca. 1790), porcelain with underglaze blue and overglaze enamels and gilding, H: 13.7 cm, L: 28.6 cm, W: 23 cm, HKU.C.1997.1284, donated in memory of Miss Beryl Robina Wright by Mrs Gennie Lee



Vase, China, Guangdong province, Guangzhou, Qing dynasty (1644–1911), early twentieth century, cloisonné enameling, H: 47 cm, HKU.M.1980.0793

The early Qing dynasty, encompassing the reigns of Emperors Kangxi (1662–1722), Yongzheng (1723–1735) and Qianlong (1736–1795), arguably represented the pinnacle of finesse in China's decorative arts. This development was driven by two different but equally strong factors: the imperial court's demand for exquisite products and the booming trade and commerce with the West. While monochrome porcelain, which had been produced since the Song dynasty, remained popular in China, an increasing number of painted porcelain works were produced. Large shipments of polychrome ceramics were exported to Europe by the English East India Company (1600–1874) and the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie) (1602–1799).

From the beginning of the Qing dynasty and throughout its later years, ink painting reached unprecedented levels of perfection, with artists experimenting with Western techniques such as oil painting and reverse glass painting. Landscape, genre and mythological designs also served to decorate a variety of objects, including embroidered and woven textiles, lacquer, cloisonné enamels and porcelain. As the merchant class grew, so did the consumption of luxury goods, including art. Individuals began to emulate the style and opulence associated with the last emperors. The sizes and interiors of private homes came to reflect the wealth and success of their owners, as well as their patronage of artists. These artists created entire suites of paintings and textiles, furniture and smaller scholars' items in materials such as jade, bronze, ivory, horn and bamboo.

Republic of China (1912–1949)

People's Republic of China

(1949–present)

Over the past century, talented artists have continued to receive support from local elites in economic centres such as Beijing and Shanghai. Migration has also brought a greater number of painters and art collections south to Macau and Hong Kong, while small, highly respected artist colonies emerged abroad through emigration. While the 1920s and '30s saw the emergence of modern art and new themes, since the 1950s traditional techniques—along with the Lingnan School of painting—have been further developed and modernised.

Complementing the continuation of long-established artistic materials and techniques such as ink painting is the engagement of often younger artists with modern tools and technologies that define the most innovative contemporary artworks. Whether rethinking how paint is achieved and applied, or using computer aided 3D printing with plastics and ceramics, Chinese centres of creation have become hubs for both local and international artists experimenting with novel techniques and material combinations. These efforts have heralded scientific approaches to artmaking and the development of a new digital craftsmanship.

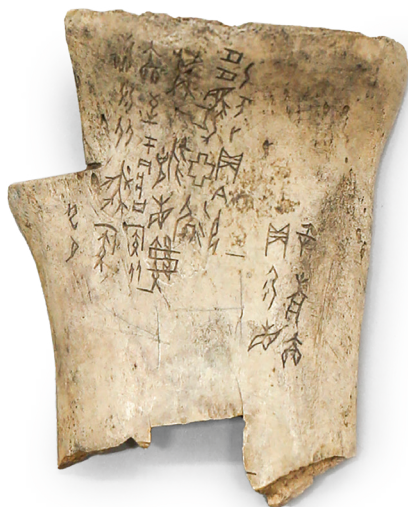


Birds and Rocks, Ting Yin Yung (Ding Yanyong, 1902–1978), China, People's Republic (1949–present) (inscribed '1962'), ink and colour on paper, H: 67.5 cm, W: 33.5 cm, HKU.P.1995.1045, Gift of the HKU Museum Society



Glass Entanglement V, Tobias Klein (b. 1979), Hong Kong, 2020, 3D Print (Stereolithography Apparatus SLA), nylon and glass, H: 37 cm, W: 33 cm, D: 26 cm, HKU.M.2020.2505, Gift of the artist

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Oracle Bone

China, Henan province, Anyang, Shang dynasty (ca. 1600–1046 BCE)
Bone, H: 8.4 cm, W: 7 cm, D: 3 cm
HKU.M.1956.0115

Oracle bones were made from ox scapulae and turtle plastrons for divination during the late Shang dynasty (1298–1046 BCE). They preserve the earliest noteworthy texts of ancient Chinese writing using an early form of Chinese characters. Altogether over 4,000 distinct characters are found in oracle bone script, of which approximately 1,300 still appear in modern Chinese dictionaries. Originally, diviners would submit inquiries to deities regarding the fortunes of members of the royal family, military endeavors, the weather, crop planting and similar topics. These inquiries were carved onto the bone or shell in oracle bone script using a sharp tool. This well-preserved oracle bone shows two groups of inscriptions addressing the questions whether (1) the King should issue an order for the officials to inspect the granaries along with the nobles; and whether (2) there was a need to inspect the granaries. The contents conform to the traditional style of inquiry and are presented in pictorial characters that are largely illegible to modern-day readers.



Fanglei

China, Shang dynasty (ca. 1600–1046 BCE)

Cast and chased bronze, H: 49.2 cm, W: 22.8 cm

HKU.B.2011.1866, Gift of Mr Anthony J Hardy, given in memory of
Professor Shih Hsio-yen

The *fanglei* is a covered wine jar used originally in ceremonial gatherings. The impressive size of this particular *fanglei* makes it one of the largest and most striking examples of ancient Chinese bronzes. For the ruling elite, prestigious objects made of bronze signified supreme political power, as well as devout spiritual beliefs and high social status. Foremost among these bronzes are vessels made for the preparation and offering of food, wine and water in ceremonial banquets conducted to seek and repay divine ancestral benevolence. The body of the *fanglei* is square and tapered. This example is distinguished by a relief *taotie* mask on the vessel's shoulder — a zoomorphic motif commonly seen on bronzes from the late Shang and Zhou dynasties (1046–256 BCE).



You

China, Shang dynasty (ca. 1600–1046 BCE)

Cast and chased bronze, H: 25.5 cm, W: 20.6 cm, D: 16.7 cm

HKU.B.1954.0095

The *you* is a lidded vessel used for wine offerings. It contains deep relief casting depicting various animals in four staggered frieze motifs. It is topped with a prominent knob placed at the lid's centre. The front and sides of the vessel, as well as the lid, are adorned with strong vertical ridges which originally extended into a large handle spanning the length of the oval-shaped body from one end to the other.

During the Shang and Western Zhou dynasties, archaic Chinese bronzes were typically made using piece-mould casting. In this process, a model of the object to be cast is shaped and a clay mould is made from the model. The negative form is separated into parts to free the model and then reassembled after firing to create the casting mould. Requiring a skill-based and detail-oriented work process, this technique allowed a high degree of precision and definition to achieve the deep, three-dimensional relief decorations.

Gui

China, Henan province, Luoyang, Early Western Zhou (1046–771 BCE)

Cast and chased bronze, H: 14.4 cm, W: 27.2 cm, D: 20.3 cm

HKU.B.1953.0020

This archaic bronze food vessel was excavated in Luoyang. Made from tin-copper alloys with varying concentrations of lead, these objects were created in smelting sites located along the Yellow River in Central China. This example has two ear handles and is decorated with a finely chased low relief representing a *taotie*, animal mask, and a cloud design on the vessel's exterior. The interior of the bowl contains a pictogram of two human figures facing each other and sharing a meal, which typically symbolises the specific clan for which the bronze was made. *Gui* from the early Shang dynasty (ca. 1600–1298 BCE) were mostly earless. After the middle of the Shang dynasty, two ears with animal heads were added, suggesting that this example is an early two-eared *gui* and that it dates to the late Shang dynasty (1298–1046 BCE).



Ding

China, Spring and Autumn period (770–476 BCE)

Cast and chased bronze, H: 34.2 cm, D: 46.5 cm

HKU.B.1997.1171

The *ding* is a large and heavy tripod-shaped food container with a reversible lid that can be flipped over and used to serve food items. It is cast as a round vessel with two facing handles supported by mask-headed and waisted legs. Its body is decorated with an interlocking dragon design. The vessel's usage in ritual ceremonies highlights the importance of this and other ancient bronzes and alludes to the context of their decoration. The dragon design, for example, has a significant auspicious meaning that symbolises an imaginary creature long revered as a deity in China. Beyond their usage as ritual vessels, the appreciation for archaic bronzes as pieces of art commenced during the Song dynasty, reaching a pinnacle during Emperor Qianlong's reign in the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), when his large imperial collection was recorded in catalogues known as the *Xiqing gujian* and *Xiqing jijian*.





Dui

China, Warring States period (475–221 BCE)

Cast and chased bronze, H: 21.7 cm, W: 24.4 cm, D: 18.6 cm

HKU.B.1955.0173

The *dui* is a ritual vessel designed as a food container consisting of two bowls that, when placed together, form a sphere. This example features a restrained and elegant string design that sets it apart from many ancient bronzes, including *dui* that were decorated with auspicious symbols or cosmological designs. *Dui* typically have two loop handles on either side of the rim of each bowl. The additional loops serve as both handles and feet. The reversible lid can be turned over to display food. Like other archaic ritual bronzes, this covered food vessel has counterparts made in stoneware with or, more commonly, without glaze during the Warring States era. Used primarily in domestic settings rather than religious contexts, these ceramic models were less expensive to produce and more fragile. They were most commonly used for storing or serving dry foods.



Mirror

Bronze mirror

China, Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE)

Bronze, H: 11.2 cm, Thickness: 0.6 cm, Weight: 284.8 g

HKU.B.1954.0145

This bronze mirror is inscribed rather than decorated with a low-relief pictorial design. The inscription (內清以昭明, 光象夫日月) includes decorative, though meaningless, symbols (而) to fill the circle design of the inner band on the mirror's reverse side. Its text translates to 'Inner clarity reveals brightness, radiance mirrors the sun and moon', referring to interpersonal relations and the importance of a steadfast character. Inscriptions have appeared on bronze mirrors since the early Western Han dynasty (206 BCE–9 CE). The overall design and inscription categorise this object as a Zhaoming mirror, the most common type during the Han dynasty. It was used in everyday life and was thought to have magic properties, such as the power to guard against evil spirits. The inscription on this example expresses the wish to maintain an inner purity and external brilliance.

Nestorian Cross

China, Ordos region, Yuan dynasty (1271–1368)

Cast bronze, D: 5.1 cm

HKU.B.1961.0243.56, Gift of Lee Hysan Estate Company

This Nestorian bronze cross was cast in the Ordos region in northwest China (Inner Mongolia) during the Yuan dynasty. It is a flat plaque-like ornament with an outline in high relief. The loop on the back suggests it was used as a personal seal or worn on the body. One of thousands of surviving small artefacts, they typically measure 3–8 cm in diameter and feature a loop facilitating their strapping to human clothing or girdles. The intricate motifs of cast Christian and occasionally Buddhist symbols — like the Christian cross and Buddhist swastika in this example — along with the rare preservation of red ink deposits in the lower area of the design, suggest that these seals were used as chops, transferring their individual designs onto other materials through printing.



Funerary Jar

China, Eastern Han (25–220 CE)

Earthenware with green glaze, H: 35.3 cm, W: 28.7 cm

HKU.C.1964.0272, Gift of the Asia Foundation

One of the most common types of vessels found in Han tombs, this round storage jar (*hu*) would have been used to hold offerings of wine. Moulded designs on the shoulder show a hunting scene with a mounted archer shooting at leaping felines. Originally a central Asian practice, hunting was adopted by the Han elite as a way of displaying imperial power. Like many early ceramic shapes, the jar's form is based on bronze vessels, particularly inlaid bronzes from the late Shang dynasty, complete with vestigial ring handles held in the mouths of stylised animal masks known as *taotie*. The moulded relief decoration is enhanced by a solid, opaque green glaze that, particularly bright for its time, serves as a precursor to the fully developed celadon ceramics.





Camel

China, Tang dynasty (618–907)

Earthenware with three-colour (*sancai*) glaze, H: 81.3 cm

HKU.C.1957.0186, Gift of the Asia Foundation

Camels were included in the repertoire of tomb figures from around the 6th century, reflecting their key role as ‘ships of the desert’ that transported luxury goods such as silk, lacquerware and bamboo products along the Silk Road to bustling markets in Central Asia, Samarkand, Persia and Syria. Large glazed figures like this would have been expensive to produce and were likely intended for the tombs of deceased royalty or aristocrats. The sculpture’s colouring—almost resembling the natural brown of the animal’s fur—represents a technological advancement in the application of ceramic glaze. The now famous three-colour (*sancai*) decoration was first created during the Tang dynasty by using green, brownish yellow and a near colourless glaze highlighting the off-white shade of the slip-coated ceramic. Many *sancai* ceramics are only partially glazed and rare examples stand out for their deep blue colour.



Wrist Rest

China, Tang dynasty (618–907)

Earthenware with three-colour (*sancai*) glaze, H: 7 cm, W: 14.4 cm

HKU.C.1961.0433, Gift of Mr Matsushige Hirota

Wrist rests were used by literati (scholar-bureaucrats in ancient China) to steady the hand when writing calligraphy and painting. Along with music and the game of Go, painting and calligraphy were used by the educated elite to demonstrate academic and artistic achievement. This sculptural object combines the shape of a rabbit with the practical function of a finely shaped plate or plateau, providing support for the scholar's elbow or lower arm. It is decorated with a three-colour (*sancai*) glaze applied in a visibly liquid, runny state, which embellishes the elbow rest—particularly the prominent top—rather than highlighting the animal's features or the design pattern.

Water Pot

China, Henan province, Gongyi, Tang dynasty (618–907)
Earthenware with blue-and-white glaze, H: 7.5 cm, W: 9 cm
HKU.C.1953.0028

Chinese blue-and-white ceramics from the Tang dynasty were virtually unknown until shards were recovered from the coastal city of Yangzhou in Jiangsu province in 1975. Likely made at kilns in Gongxian (now Gongyi) in Henan province, they were decorated with blue cobalt imported from Iran, which was part of the Abbasid Empire in the 9th century. Many were exported to the Middle East or to Southeast Asia, where they were presumably sold at a high price. In addition to its distinctive glaze, which reflects the innovative ceramic making technology of the Tang dynasty, this small water pot also highlights the well-established scholar culture of the era. Along with other contemporary utensils used for writing and painting, it underscores the widespread presence of literacy, artistic practice and cultural engagement that characterised Tang dynasty China.



Guanyin

China, Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279)

Porcelain with greenish-white (*qingbai*) glaze, H: 18.5 cm, W: 8.5 cm, D: 4.5 cm

HKU.C.1981.0852

This figure represents Guanyin, the bodhisattva (‘enlightened being’) of mercy and compassion. One of the most popular Buddhist figures in China, Guanyin originated in India as the male bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, who was transformed—after the introduction of Buddhism to China during the Tang dynasty—into a female bodhisattva associated with the virtues of compassion and mercy. This seated representation was likely made to be worshipped on a small household altar, highlighting the influence of Buddhism and the practice of private religious ceremonies in domestic settings. The ceramic’s uniform greenish-white (*qingbai*) glaze represents a technological advancement of the Song dynasty. Ceramicists in Jingdezhen and other neighbouring areas in Jiangxi province, southeastern China, used a whitish kaolin-based porcelain clay, decorating it with a nearly colourless glaze. Highly sought after today, plates and bowls with this glaze were produced on a large scale and used by commoners, rather than being made as special orders for imperial courts.





Bottle

China, Yuan dynasty (1271–1368)

Porcelain with underglaze blue decoration, H: 25.5 cm, D: 14.4 cm

HKU.C.1978.0632

The shape, size and ornamental decoration of this bottle were influenced by metal bottles from the Middle East. During the Yuan dynasty and Mongol rule in China, trade along the continental Silk Road flourished and Chinese objects began to exhibit Western influences as they traveled east to Chinese production centres. At this time, traders and patrons in the West became clients of Chinese ceramics (along with silk and other goods), and domestic objects such as large platters, pots and bottles were made specifically for the Islamic market. The Topkapi Palace in Istanbul holds a remarkable collection of Chinese ceramics collected by the Ottoman Empire. First made in the Song dynasty (960–1279), *yuhuchun* (‘pear-shaped’) bottles were likely used as decanters for rice wine. They were made in various forms and materials to suit different tastes: from monochrome or blue-and-white ceramics to elaborately gilded works in precious silver. Blue-and-white versions were not made until the 14th century. The patterns resembling Islamic calligraphy on this vase were also inspired by designs on objects from the Middle East.



Jardinière

China, Ming dynasty (1368–1644), Jiajing period (1522–1566)
 Porcelain with underglaze blue decoration, H: 62 cm, D: 72.3 cm
 Inscribed with *Da Ming Jiajing Nianzhi*
 (Made in the Jiajing Reign of the Ming dynasty)
 with a Jiajing six-character mark in one horizontal line in official script
 HKU.C.1996.1093, Gift of Dr T T Tsui, Tsui Art Foundation Ltd

This large jardinière is cylindrical in form, with underglaze blue-and-white decorations. The underside is unglazed and the interior is unadorned. On the exterior, below a band of classical scrolls and between two bands of stylised pendant lotus petal lappets, two pairs of strong lions with thick manes, blazing eyes and four-clawed paws are depicted amidst swirling ribbons and decorated balls. The four lions signify ‘four generations together’. A rectangle enclosing an underglaze blue six-character mark *Da Ming Jiajing Nianzhi* (Made in the Jiajing reign of the Ming dynasty) is painted below the upper band. Imperial kilns that specialised in producing vats were already established in Jingdezhen during the early Ming dynasty. The number of vats produced reached their zenith during the Jiajing period. However, today such samples are rare due to their sheer size, as the thick and heavy biscuit posed a risk of cracking if the firing process was not carefully executed.

Brush Pot

China, Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen, Qing dynasty
(1644–1911), Kangxi period (1662–1722)
Porcelain with underglaze blue and overglaze enamels,
H: 16.9 cm, D: 18.8 cm
HKU.C.1972.0431

Brush pots serve both a utilitarian and decorative function. The detailed designs on this example demonstrate the sophisticated porcelain enameling techniques that developed during the reign of the Kangxi Emperor. A great supporter of the arts, Kangxi initiated major efforts to rebuild the kilns at Jingdezhen, which had been destroyed in 1674 by Ming rebels. Among the technological advancements developed in the re-established manufactories was the complex application and multiple firing processes required to achieve both underglaze and overglaze decoration. Underglaze colours were applied and fixed with opaque pigments beneath a coat of colourless glaze, while overglaze painting was brushed onto the glazed surface — often to add variety in colour and enhance detail — and required additional firings.



Vase

China, Jiangxi province, Jingdezhen, Qing dynasty (1644–1911), Kangxi period (1662–1722)
Porcelain with powder-blue glaze and gilding, H: 44 cm, D: 17.5 cm
HKU.C.1953.0012

The speckled blue surface of this vase is called ‘powder blue’, a technique that was perfected during Emperor Kangxi’s reign by ceramicists that blew cobalt powder onto the unfired porcelain. Other lesser practiced decorative methods are exemplified by the employment of gilding, used here to include a painting and an inscription. While the painting illustrates the pavilion of the Prince of Teng, the text provides an important literary reference by presenting part of the famous preface to *The Pavilion of the Prince of Teng* by the Tang dynasty (618–907) scholar Wang Bo (650–676), in which Wang laments his inability to profit from his literary talent. Bo composed the text for the poems written at a literati gathering that occurred in October 675, at the well-known pavilion located, from its construction in 653 to its destruction in 1926, on the city wall of Nanchang in Jiangxi province.





Bowl

China, Qing dynasty (1644–1911), Qianlong period, 1776

Porcelain with underglaze blue, incised and inked epitaph on base, H: 5.5 cm, W: 27 cm

HKU.C.1991.0939, Gift of Mr and Mrs K S Fong

The interior of this chrysanthemum-shaped bowl is decorated with a landscape scene with a pavilion surrounded by willows and blossoming peonies. The exterior is incised with an epitaph in black ink. The text's subject is *cong wuyi Ruren*—the deceased wife of an imperial official. The description provides her name, Zou, and nickname, Jugu, 'lady of the chrysanthemum', from which the dish presumably takes its shape. Traditional epitaphs were often carved onto stones or ceramics. They describe the lives of the deceased and were typically reserved for people of high social standing and wealth. Here, the willow may deliver an important message, as the Chinese word for the type of tree, *liu*, sounds similar to the word for 'stay', suggesting that it may be an expression of yearning for Zou by her family.



Box with Cover

Japan, 15th century,
Carved cinnabar lacquer, H: 6.5 cm, D: 24.5 cm
HKU.L.1970.0460

This round box is decorated with finely carved depictions of a *qilin* and peonies. It is a Japanese 15th-century copy of an earlier Chinese design. The time-consuming and meticulously precise technique of *diaoqi* (carving lacquer) was first developed during the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279). It gained unprecedented recognition when an imperial workshop was founded in Lingjing hutong in 1416, near the Imperial City in Beijing. 5000 workers from southern China were employed by the imperial workshop to produce wares from the sap of the Chinese lacquer tree. The cover of this example is decorated with a *qilin*, a mythological animal that symbolises benevolence and integrity, while the peonies represent wealth. Peonies, a common motif in Chinese iconography, are frequently depicted, whereas *qilins* are uncommon. According to local legend, a *qilin* appeared to the pregnant mother of Confucius (6th century BCE) and foretold the future greatness of the unborn child. As a result, the *qilin* is occasionally affiliated with Confucianism and, more broadly, symbolises the wish for sons.



Box with Conjoined Cover

China, Qing dynasty (1644–1911), Qianlong period (1736–1795)
Carved cinnabar lacquer, H: 17.3 cm, W: 31 cm, D: 23 cm
HKU.L.1971.0457

This elegant box with cover is shaped in a conjoined rhomboid or lozenge form. Its exterior surface is executed with a deeply carved cinnabar lacquer over a black background, depicting male figures in a landscape. The interior surface is embellished with a flat black lacquer with golden decoration in imitation of the Japanese *maki-e* style. The meticulous attention to both exterior and interior detail suggests that this box was intended to be opened and its interior displayed. It may have served as a storage or presentation box, possibly for housing a valuable collection rather than documents, which were typically kept in square chests often fitted with hinged lids and locks. The double-lozenge shape (*fangsheng*) signifies victory and success and, considered one of the Eight Treasures (*babao*), was a common motif during the Ming and Qing dynasties. Lozenge-shaped lacquer boxes, produced since the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), were extremely popular at the court of Emperor Qianlong.

Rubbing of a Stone Relief Depicting Confucius Visiting Laozi

China, Shandong province, Wuzhaishan village
Eastern Han (25–220 CE),
Yuanjia period (151–153 CE) (stone),
late Qing dynasty (1644–1911),
late 19th century or early 20th century (rubbing)
Rubbing, ink on paper, H: 31 cm, W: 160 cm
HKU.R.1955.1997

This rubbing is taken from a stone relief at the site of the Wu Family Shrine in Wuzhaishan village in Shandong province. Dating from the Yuanjia period in the late Han dynasty, these pictorial carvings, and the ink rubbings made from them, illustrate a meeting of Confucius and Laozi, the two founders of Confucianism and Daoism. Since the Song dynasty (960–1279), the carved images of Wu shrines have been known through early rubbings that helped disseminate the site's imagery. The Wu shrines are recognised as a significant historic location, essential for dating excavated Han tombs and artefacts, and instrumental in shaping academic approaches to the study of Chinese art and history.





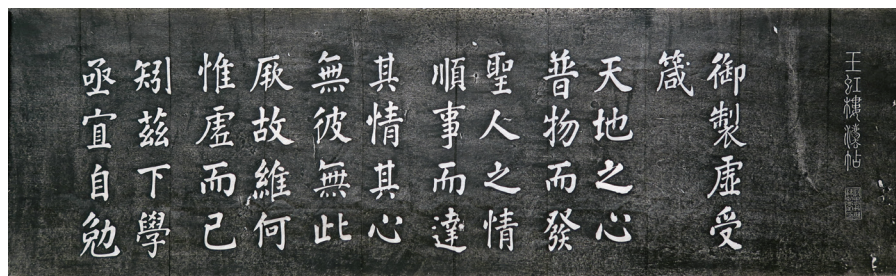
Preface to the Sacred Teachings

China, Tang dynasty (618–907)

Rubbing, ink on paper, H: 30.5 cm, W: 15.5 cm

HKU.R.1955.2036

This rubbing by an anonymous master presents text from the preface to the *Sacred Teachings*. Originally titled *Yantra Sacred Teachings*, the work features calligraphy by Chu Suiliang (597–658), one of the four great calligraphers of the early Tang dynasty. The text is also referred to as the *Great Tang Tripitaka Sacred Teachings*, a copy of which includes a preface by Tang dynasty Emperor Taizong (598–649). Considered a crucial yet incomplete writing sample, Taizong employed the monk Huairen (mid- to late 7th century) to collect characters from the calligraphic works of the Jin dynasty (265–420) writer Wang Xizhi (303–361), pieced them together and then engraved them into an inscription known as the *Tang Collection of Youjun Sacred Teachings Preface and Notes*, or *Huairen Collection of Wang Xizhi's Sacred Teachings Preface*. The full text of *Sacred Teachings* consists of 1,904 characters, including a preface by Emperor Taizong, a note by Emperor Gaozong Li Zhi (628–683) and a sutra translated by the monk Xuanzang (602–664).



Yu Hong Lou Fatie Album

Kong Jisu (1727–1791)
China, Qing dynasty (1644–1911)
Rubbing, ink on paper
HKU.R.1955.2040

An album of canonical writing, the *yu hong lou fatie* rubbing collection contains calligraphic works copied and inscribed by Confucius' 69th-generation grandson, Kong Jifu, during Emperor Qianlong's reign (1736–1795). Originally presented as 584 stone carvings divided into 14 categories, the rubbings taken from the relief panels constitute the earliest large-scale collection of calligraphic works compiled and inscribed in China as model calligraphy. Rubbings of model calligraphy were commonly taken from inscribed horizontal stones. Calligraphic rubbings can sometimes rival the quality of the original work and are regarded as a significant art form. Most ancient calligraphy is preserved in the form of ink rubbings, as the originals are often damaged or lost. In this way, rubbings become the only surviving copies of crucial artworks, making them invaluable sources for studying Chinese history, culture and calligraphy.

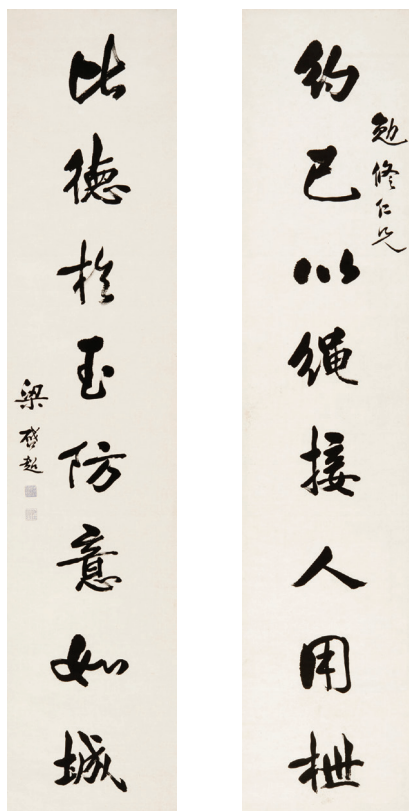
Couplet

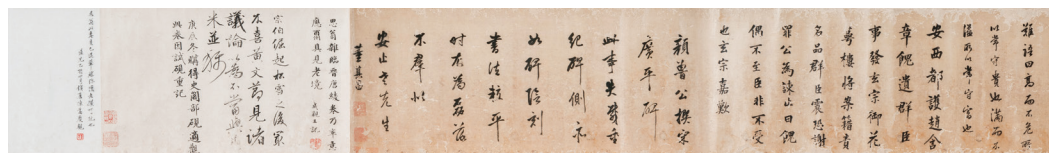
Liang Qichao (1873–1929)

Couplet in running script, ink on paper, each H: 188 cm, W: 41 cm

HKU.Ca.1990.0952, Gift of Ms NG Shun Wah

Couplets display texts in corresponding sentences that are arranged in a pair and contain an equal number of characters that — when read — present a balanced rhythm that is reinforced by a parallel structure of nouns, verbs and adjectives. The couplet's antithesis and rhythmic correspondence determine the scholarly quality of the text, elevating it to a true art form, especially when the couplet is used as a form of dialogue between scholars and the literati. This well-balanced example juxtaposes the sentences '(One's) virtue should be compared to jade as he defends against selfishness like guarding cattle' with '(A respectable person) constrains oneself with discipline but treats others with leniency' to relate to the values of virtue and discipline.





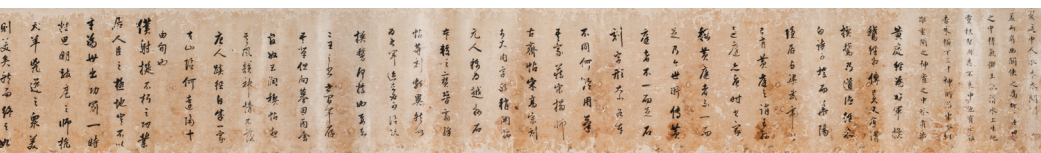
Calligraphy in Regular Script

Dong Qichang (1555–1636)

China, Ming dynasty (1368–1644)

Ink on paper, H: 24.5 cm, W: 372 cm

HKU.Ca.2015.2170, Gift of Julia and Luke Tao



Dong Qichang was a well-known scholar who practiced calligraphy and painting and developed theories of art while serving as a politician within the Ministry of Rites, the department which oversaw the imperial examination and China's foreign relations during Emperor Wanli's reign (1573–1620). Traditionally trained, his calligraphic practice was influenced by Jin and Tang dynasty calligraphers, as well as the prominent Yuan and Ming dynasty masters Zhao Mengfu (1254–1322) and Wen Zhengming (1470–1559). This calligraphic panel exemplifies his practice. Dong copied and thereby reintroduced the *Huangting Jing* ('Yellow Court Classic'), a Daoist text that the Jin dynasty (265–420) politician and writer Wang Xizhi (303–361) had transcribed and made famous during his own lifetime. Another section shows a transcription of *Guangping Bei* by Yan Zhenqing (709–784), who was a leading calligrapher, military general and governor in the Tang dynasty (618–907).



Landscape

Zhang Hong (1577–1668)

China, Ming dynasty (1368–1644), Wanli period (1573–1620), 1619

Ink and colour on paper, H: 33.8 cm, W: 234.8 cm

HKU.P.1987.0229



Painting practices in China during the Ming dynasty built upon the achievements of the Song (960–1279) and Yuan dynasties (1271–1368). For the first time, painters were distinguished by local schools, such as the Zhe School and the Wu School. Painters of the Wu School experimented with the expressive calligraphic styles of Yuan literati painters, who emphasised self-cultivation and restraint. Zhang Hong was a native of Suzhou in Jiangsu province. He excelled at finely rendered landscape paintings that are based on actual landscapes. This handscroll painting embodies the style and characteristics of the literati paintings of the Wu School, however it shows the skill of a more innovative painter, as Zhang was able to take Wu School landscape painting in a new direction. This composition is remarkable for its bird's-eye perspective and shifting ground planes presenting topographical elements that may indicate the influence of European Jesuit painters in China from the late Ming dynasty.



Landscape in the Six Dynasties Style

Li Jian (1747–1799)
China, Qing dynasty (1644–1911),
Qianlong period (1736–1795), dated September 1793
Hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk, H: 108 cm, W: 47 cm
HKU.P.1966.0310

Li Jian was a talented poet and celebrated painter who was influenced by many earlier landscape painters, such as Ni Zan (1301–1374) and Shi Tao (1642–1707). He used several courtesy names, including Jiamin and Weicai. Most of Li's paintings were produced during trips between his hometown of Shunde and Guangzhou, where Li would sell his works and teach to earn a living. This colourful autumnal landscape was painted with a combination of ink and mineral pigments, including malachite, gold and cinnabar. Autumn leaves and the robes of a scholar in a pavilion stand out in bright red, in pleasing contrast with the muted colours of the silk background. In the distance, the silhouette of a mountain range appears in flat ink, applied using the 'boneless' technique (*mogu*), in which an ink wash is used directly without a delineating outline. In the inscription, Li Jian mentions his use of techniques developed in the Six Dynasties period (220–589 CE), and includes the name 'Village of Red Flowers', a village in Foshan not far from Guangzhou, where this painting was likely painted.



An Operatic Performance outside a Village

China, Qing dynasty, (1644–1911),
25th year of the Jiaqing period (1796–1820), 1820
Gouache on paper, H: 49 cm, W: 80 cm
HKU.P.2007.1788, Gift of the HKU Museum Society

This depiction of a village scene illustrates the opulent details of a temporary opera stage in a rural setting in South China. The painting workshop, one most likely specialised in producing vernacular and landscape views, excelled in capturing the pleasant atmosphere, vivid colours of the performers and anticipated excitement of the spectators. These performances were provisional in nature, as troupes toured between villages and set up simple movable stages for entertainment. This example is a typical Chinese export painting for the European market from the late 18th and early 19th centuries, when Westerners who were curious about the customs and habits of Chinese people bought, or even commissioned, such works. This example is executed in gouache on paper, a Western media, and its size is exceptionally large for a contemporary export painting.

Green Silk Zither Garden

Huang Binhong (1865–1955)

China, Republic period (1912–1949), inscribed '1931'

Hanging scroll, ink on paper, H: 93.2 cm, W: 31.2 cm

HKU.P.2011.1900, Gift of Mr Tang Cho-fung and Ms Leung Wai-ye

Huang Binhong was a noted landscape painter born into a family of scholars and painters. His work can be divided into two periods: the early 'White Binhong' era, characterised by delicate brushwork and a style reminiscent of Xin'an School painting, and the later 'Black Binhong' era, which developed when Huang was in his eighties and had begun to paint intuitively with powerful brushstrokes in thick dark ink. This refined monochrome landscape demonstrates traces of his earlier White Binhong style. It depicts a complex of houses and gardens constructed in 1929 in Tai Po, Hong Kong, to house the *lǜqítai*, a famous zither from the Tang dynasty. Because the garden was destroyed by a typhoon in 1937, it is unclear if the painting depicts a realistic or idealised landscape.





Song of the Pipa

Xu Beihong (1895–1953)

China, Republic period (1912–1949), inscribed '1938'

Ink and colour on paper, H: 87 cm, W: 66 cm

HKU.P.2002.1424, gifted by the artist to the Chinese Society of HKU on the occasion of an exhibition of his collection of paintings and calligraphy held at the Fung Ping Shan Library in 1938

Xu Beihong was a celebrated painter of expressive ink and monumental oil paintings who grew up in Yixing, Jiangsu province, where he began learning painting by copying the works of ancient masters with his father Xu Dazhang at the age of six. As an adult, he formally studied Western painting at the École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris while living in Europe between 1919 and 1927.

In this unusual composition, a man sitting with his back to the viewer leans forward to offer his sympathy to a woman who is sorrowfully strumming a pipa. The scene relates to *Pipa xing* ('Song of the Pipa'), a poem by the famed Tang poet Bai Juyi (772–846), which centres on an entertainer singing of her faded beauty and unhappy marriage. The poem is set on a boat, but Xu transports the scene to a candle-lit stage to highlight the emotions of the entertainer.



Zen

Lui Shou-kwan (1919–1975)

China, People's Republic (1949–present), inscribed '1970'

Ink and colour on paper, H: 147.3 cm, W: 79.8 cm

HKU.P.2002.1408, Gift of the artist

Lui Shou-kwan was a renowned painter with a profound understanding of Chinese traditional art and philosophy. He was particularly interested in Buddhism and started to experiment with Zen paintings in 1968. In this work, he used a broad brush and spontaneous brush strokes to create rectangular bands and overlapping shapes of varying ink tones that convey the aesthetic associated with the idea of 'spiritual resonance' (*qiyun shengdong*) formulated in the Six Principles of Chinese Painting (*Huihua Liufa*), an early 6th-century text by the theorist Xie He (active ca. 500–535). It shares some of the subject matter and style of the Zen paintings of other contemporary painters, including Liu Guosong (b. 1932), as well as Abstract Expressionism. After it was shown overseas, Lui achieved international acclaim and went on to teach many artists who contributed to the Hong Kong-based New Ink Painting Movement, which sought to modernise traditional Chinese painting through the integration of various Western modern art forms and styles in a local context.

Abstract Composition

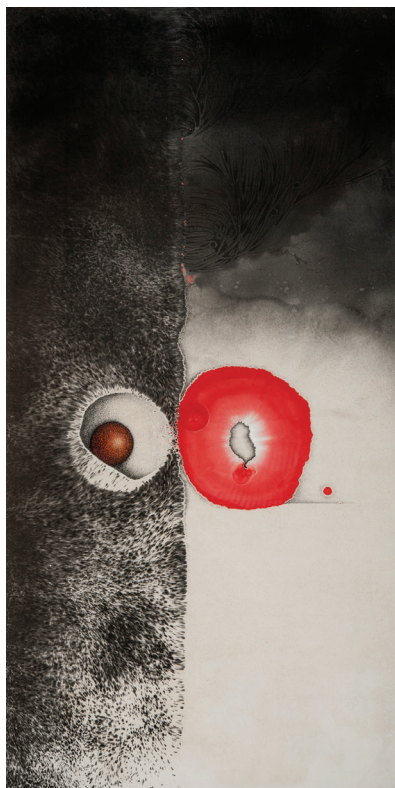
Irene Chou (1924–2011)

Hong Kong, 1980s

Ink and colour on paper, H: 138.8 cm, W: 69 cm

HKU.P.1986.1414

Irene Chou was a highly accomplished Hong Kong painter who executed this exquisite work during a period of depression after the deaths of her teacher Lui Shou-kwan (1919–1975) and husband Yang Yanqi (1920–1978). Her works from this period were informed by her exposure to Abstract Expressionism, Neo-Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism. Two spheres sit side by side at the centre of this abstract composition, separated by an uneven vertical line. On the left side, dense ink and the artist's distinctive violent and short brushstrokes — which she called 'impact structural strokes' — form a vertical zone, with a white ball at the centre. Seemingly simple, the composition demonstrates Chou's mastery of a range of techniques associated with both the 'impact structural strokes' of her *Impact* series, and techniques associated with her 'Dark Painting' style, which she developed in the late 1970s.





Mount Huang at Dawn

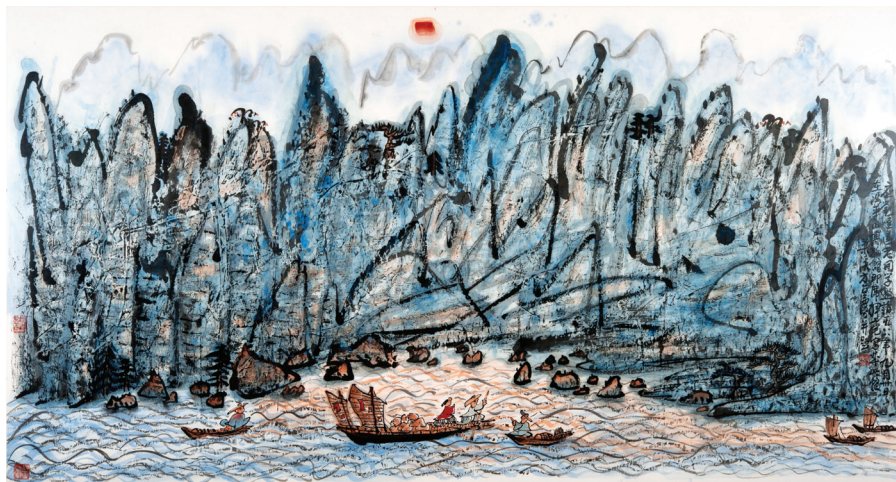
Liu Haisu (1896–1994)

China, People's Republic (1949–present), inscribed '1982'

Splashed ink and colour on paper, H: 144 cm, W: 368 cm

HKU.P.1997.1133, Gift of the artist

Liu Haisu was born in Changzhou, Jiangsu province, and rose to become one of the most celebrated 20th-century Chinese painters and a noted art educator. He excelled in Chinese ink and oil painting, 50 of which he donated to the University Museum in 1992. Although many Chinese artists have painted Mount Huang in southern Anhui province, Liu Haisu's views are particularly celebrated. He visited the mountain several times in his lifetime. An inscription reveals that it was made in the Beihai Hotel, after Liu had climbed the mountain for the ninth time at the age of eighty-six. One of his larger works, it demonstrates Liu's unique blending of Western and Chinese techniques. Largely self-taught, he was exposed to the former during a three-month painting course in 1909 at the Institute of Stage Scenery in Shanghai, and during several visits to Japan in the late 1910s. His synthesis of the two, together with an emphasis on the observation of nature, set him apart from his contemporaries, who typically painted by imitating earlier works.



Landscape

Fang Zhaoling (1914–2006)

Hong Kong, 1988

Ink and colour on paper, H: 96.4 cm, W: 180 cm

HKU.P.1989.0957, Gift of the artist

Fang Zhaoling was one of China's foremost 20th-century artists, celebrated for combining traditional Chinese styles with contemporary themes. She studied painting under Qian Songyan, Zhao Shao'ang and Zhang Daqian, and was initially influenced by the Lingnan School before developing her own distinctly personal style. The artist painted this landscape on 30 September 1988, at the request of Dr Michael Lau, her classmate and a former curator and director of the Fung Ping Shan Museum (the original name of the University Museum and Art Gallery). The landscape depicts a sea view with people rowing boats. The backdrop features a mountainous landscape of blue dots and washes outlined with calligraphic brushstrokes. Painted with diluted red ink, the sun stands still over the mountains.



Seated Woman with Fan

China, late Qing dynasty (1644–1911),
late 19th or early 20th century
Coloured pigments on glass, H: 65.3 cm, W: 44.9 cm
HKU.P.2020.2495

Reverse glass paintings portraying images of beautiful women were particularly popular, as were port views, bird-and-flower paintings and compositions with auspicious symbols. This example shows an elegantly dressed woman seated with a fan, which is inscribed with extracts from two Tang dynasty poems. On the right half of the fan is ‘Morning Levee at Daming Palace’ by Jia Zhi (718–772), and on the left is ‘The Riverside Village’ by Du Fu (712–770). Like many paintings of ‘beauties’ from the late Qing dynasty, the staged items around the sitter are attributes conveying information about her societal status, taste and learning. While, for example, the peonies in her hair symbolise wealth and nobility, the depiction of famous poems are chosen to indicate her high level of education, interest in poetry and refined lifestyle.



Taking a Boat Trip on West Lake

China, probably Hebei province, Republic period (1912–1949), ca. 1930
Coloured pigments and mirroring on glass, H: 39.3 cm, W: 59.7 cm
HKU.P.2022.2580, Gift of Haitang Mayer-Liem and Rupprecht Mayer

This mirrored panel is another example of painting on glass rather than the typical canvas or paper. The image was painted on the back so that the viewer can see the picture by looking through the glass. The artist who produced the work therefore had to paint everything in reverse. Chinese glass paintings using imported glass were popular in Europe from the 18th century onward and many were made specifically for export, usually in the port city of Canton (Guangzhou). This fine example was undoubtedly painted for the domestic Chinese market. It depicts a scene from *The Legend of the White Snake* in which Xu Xian is shown enjoying a boat ride on West Lake. The lake is indicated by a few linear brushstrokes in light blue on a mirrored surface, while Xu Xian is seen in the foreground holding an umbrella. The White Snake and her companion the Green Snake watch him with interest before, as the story tells, Xu lends his umbrella to the White Snake when they first meet.



Gathering of Immortals

China, Qing dynasty (1644–1911),

late 18th century or early 19th century

Woven silk (*kesi*) with metallic threads, H: 124.8 cm, W: 61.5 cm

HKU.T.2008.1671, Gift of Dr Lam Kwok Pun

This finely woven *kesi* depicts a gathering of over thirty Daoist immortals, such as Shoulao (God of Longevity), the Eight Immortals, Hehe Immortals and Magu (Goddess of Longevity), along with auspicious mythical creatures such as *qilins* and phoenixes. The immortals are shown surrounded by two trees bearing abundant *xiantao* fruit, accompanied by waves and clouds. Depictions of immortals were popular among the upper class in the Qing dynasty due to their auspicious connotations of longevity and prosperity. They were typically displayed indoors or exchanged between scholars as gifts. Various weaving techniques create the vivid imagery. The *gou* (‘connecting’) technique was used to outline the robes and highlight the figures’ silhouettes, while the rocks and ocean waves were woven with the *changduanqiang* (‘long-and-short propping’) technique. This process employs various long and short, light- and dark-coloured wefts that offset each other to create a fluid and natural colouration. Another similar method known as *mushuqiang* (‘wood comb propping’), in which wefts of similar tones are woven into a comb-like edge pattern, creates the reddish pink *xiantao*.

Dragon Robe

China, Qing dynasty (1644–1911), 19th century

Silk embroidered with coloured silk and metallic threads, H: 142 cm, W: 217 cm

HKU.T.1996.1095, Gift of Dr T T Tsui, Tsui Art Foundation Ltd

This dragon robe is embroidered with five-clawed dragons and other auspicious motifs, such as cranes, clouds and the character for longevity in the *nashaxiu* ('counted stitch') technique. Artisans used silk gauze as the ground fabric and then incorporated coloured silk threads into the holes to create patterns revealing sections of the underlying gauze. The slits in the centre front of both robes mark them as men's garments. Embroidered items for the imperial court were manufactured by imperial embroidery workshops (*xiufang*) established during the Qing dynasty in Jiangning, Suzhou and Hangzhou. According to *Daqing huidian* (Collected Statutes of the Great Qing), an official text describing the clothing system, golden yellow was reserved for the emperor; the blue dragon robes were worn by princes of the first and second rank and purple or red-coloured robes were often worn by noblemen. In the imperial dress hierarchy, robes with the five-clawed dragon motif worn by princes or noblemen were called a *mangpao* ('mang robe'), while the emperor wore a *longpao* ('dragon robe').





Ladies and Children

China, Qing dynasty (1644–1911), 19th century
Silk and embroidered with coloured silk threads,
H: 179 cm, W: 126.7 cm
HKU.T.2005.1595, Gift of Virginia and Wellington Yee

The panel designs illustrate a peaceful landscape of noble ladies and children playing, each with a different character and facial expression depicted using a range of coloured threads. A pavilion, fences, ornamental rocks and trees create a typical Chinese garden scene often found in paintings and illustrations, revealing the leisurely life of wealthy women in ancient China. The choice of decoration is complemented by the work's medium; embroidery, also known as *nugong* ('women's work') was an important pastime for wealthy young women in dynastic China. In her *Xiupu* (Treatise on Embroidery, 1821), the noted artisan Ding Pei, active during the reigns of the Jiaqing (1796–1820) and Daoguang (1821–1850) Emperors, recognised embroidery as the feminine art of writing, with the needle serving as one's brush, the silk as paper and the floss as ink. The production of such works was thought to cultivate the moral character and technical skill of young women, and embroidered handkerchiefs, sashes and shoes were also popular items for women's bridal goods.

Horseshoe Armchair

China, Qing dynasty (1644–1911), Kangxi period (1662–1722)
Zitan wood, H: 98 cm, W: 60 cm, D: 46 cm
HKU.W.1996.1081, Gift of Dr T T Tsui, Tsui Art Foundation Ltd

Chairs with continuously curved backs and arm supports first developed alongside other high-backed chairs during the Tang (618–907) and Song (960–1279) dynasties. An illustration of a round-backed chair appears in the late Ming encyclopedia, *Sancai tuhui* (Pictorial Encyclopedia of Heaven, Earth and Man) along with the caption ‘*yuanyi*’ (round chair: ‘*quanyi*’ or ‘*quanli*’ in modern Chinese). This model depicts a refined and more elegant version that became popular during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), and remained in production through the Qing (1644–1911) into contemporary times. Examples made with expensive imported hardwoods like *zitan* or indigenous *huanghuali* were historically owned by only the most affluent members of society. They signified status and wealth in formal room settings and could be converted into sedan chairs with the addition of two carrying poles under the seats.



Lacquer Furniture

China, Qing dynasty (1644–1911), late 19th or early 20th century
Carved cinnabar lacquer on wooden core,
throne: H: 130 cm, W: 124 cm, D: 89 cm
HKU.L.1998.1315-1319, Gift of the D H Chen Foundation

This impressive group of carved cinnabar lacquer furniture is part of a set composed of an eight-panel screen, a throne, throne fans, hanging lanterns and pedestal tables. It is decorated with elaborate designs, including status-laden symbols such as the five-clawed dragon—an emblem of the emperor—and auspicious bats and flowers intended to convey its owner's social standing. Originally cushioned and accompanied by various implements, it would have been placed in a reception room on a raised platform with a screen behind to follow common *feng shui* rules to protect its occupant from negative influences. Imperial interiors of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) regularly used such furniture in audience halls in which the emperor would receive visitors and hold court. However, the imperial sets of thrones and screens are typically larger and made of hardwood, suggesting this ensemble was created for a private patron.





Brush Washer

China, Qing dynasty (1644–1911)

Bamboo root, H: 4.5 cm, W: 13.4 cm, D: 12.1 cm

HKU.M.2020.2478, Gift of the Sanyu Tang Collection

This brush washer was used to remove excess ink from a brush while painting or practicing calligraphy. It was carved from the root of a bamboo plant to resemble the shape of a blossoming lotus flower. Imported from India, the lotus—which is rooted in the bed of a pond, but blossoms above the water—is linked to Buddhist images of purity and rebirth. While naturalistic depictions of lotuses in different seasons also evoke the ephemeral nature of physical beauty, bamboo has long been seen as a symbol of virtue that is closely related to nobler characteristics and the positive spirit of people. The famous Tang dynasty (618–907) poet Bai Juyi (772–846) summarised the merits of bamboo according to its physical characteristics: its deep roots denote resoluteness, straight stems represent honourability, its interior modesty and the clean exterior exemplifies chastity. In painted depictions, and as a material of choice for scholars' objects, such as this brush washer, bamboo represents moral integrity, resistance, modesty and loyalty.



Landscape

China, late Qing dynasty (1644–1911), 19th century
Rhinoceros horn, H: 16.4 cm, W: 14.7 cm, D: 17.8 cm
HKU.M.2017.2394, Gift of Tan Siew Nguk

This miniature landscape appears to have been carved for a scholar's table and stands out for the costly material and the skilled craftsmanship required to create the three-dimensional depiction. Rhinoceros horn has long been believed to possess medicinal properties; beginning in the Warring States period (475–221 BCE) through the Qing dynasty, it was regularly carved into libation cups for ritual purposes, as it was thought that the horn could serve as an antidote to poison. It was also fashioned into a variety of other objects, including medicine and snuff bottles, hair pins, waistbands, belt hooks, dress toggles and sculptures. One particularly unusual example is this carved wooded mountain, whose composition closely resembles painted depictions from the same era.

Living World

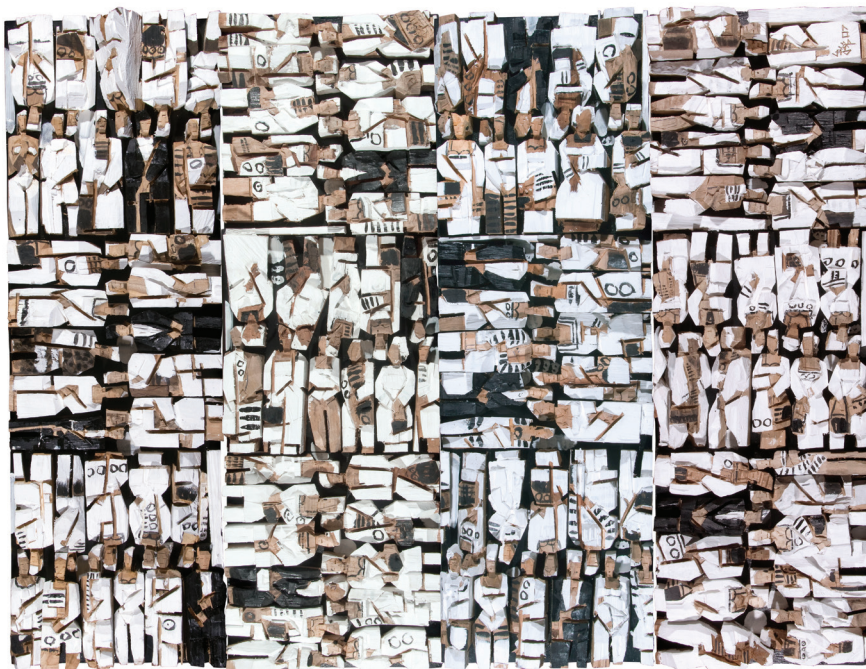
Ju Ming (1938–2023)

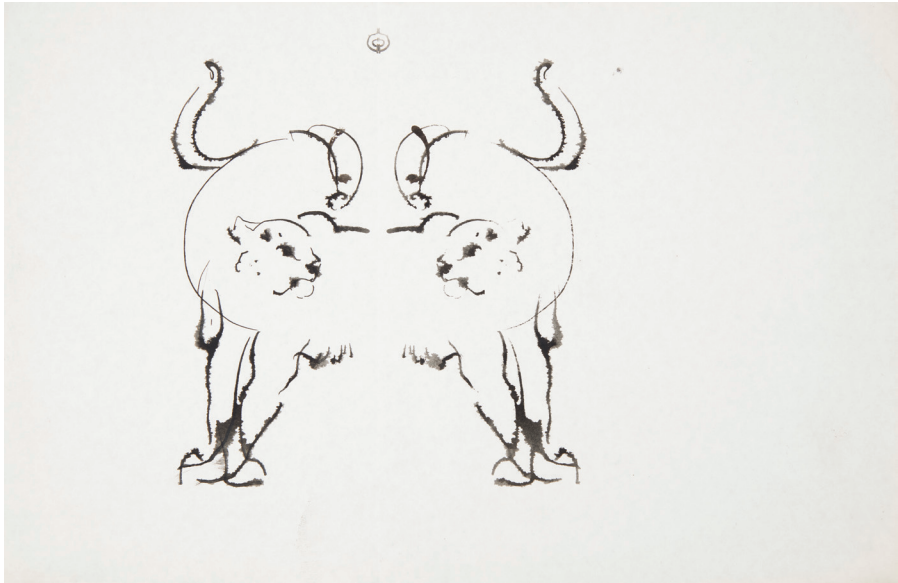
Taipei, 2007

Painted wood, H: 123 cm, W: 166 cm, D: 10 cm

HKU.W.2010.1910, Gift of the HKU Museum Society

Ju Ming was a Taiwanese-Chinese sculptor who trained as a woodcarver and later expanded his practice to a variety of media, including wood, bronze, Styrofoam, ceramics and stainless steel. He first gained recognition in Taiwan in the 1970s, and achieved international fame with his *Living World* series, which he began in the 1980s. This large number of sculptures offers a portrait of society through vibrant figures depicting the human form in all its diversity. The sculptures, often life-sized or larger, are frequently displayed in public spaces, serving as public art within our living communities. Over the course of three decades, the series evolved to include monochromatic black-and-white figures, imparting a minimalist quality that explores the fundamental human traits of good and evil. The white symbolises goodness, while the black represents viciousness, reflecting the duality of humans. The relief sculpture illustrates the essence of our community, showing people coexisting in a crowded environment. Each figure carries unique features, yet no specific individual can be recognised within the crowd.





Easy Rider

Antonio Mak Hin-yeung (1951–1994)

Hong Kong, 1993

Bronze; H: 42 cm

HKU.B.1995.1046

Doubles: Tiger I

Antonio Mak Hin-yeung (1951–1994)

Hong Kong, 1980s

Ink on paper; H: 21.5 cm, W: 33 cm

HKU.P.2019.2405, Gift of Susan Fong, the Antonio Mak Estate

Antonio Mak was renowned for his cast bronze sculptures of hybrid human bodies, horses and tigers. His large repository of drawings and sketches often served as preliminary designs for his sculptural work. The UMAG collection contains a horse and a tiger sculpture, along with ten ink and ballpoint drawings and a self-portrait. Of Cantonese-Chinese decent and born in the Philippines, Mak first studied painting at Goldsmith's College, School of Art, University of London in 1971–1975, before continuing his studies in sculpture at the Slade School of Art, University of London. He also created work at the Bronze Foundry of The Royal College of Art in London 1975–1977, and in 1986, Mak travelled to the US for intensive training in the latest technical methodologies of bronze casting at the Johnson Atelier Technical Institute of Sculpture in New Jersey.

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Cover image:

Landscape

Zhang Hong (1577–1668)

China, Ming dynasty (1368–1644), Wanli period (1573–1620), 1619

Ink and colour on paper, H: 33.8 cm, W: 234.8 cm

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University Museum and Art Gallery
The University of Hong Kong

