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Masterworks of Chinese Painting: In Pursuit of Mists and Clouds

"It is like clouds and mists passing before my eyes, or the songs of birds striking my ears. How could I help but derive joy from my contact with these things? But when they are gone, I think no more about them. In this way, these two things [painting and calligraphy] are a constant pleasure to me, but not an affliction."

Su Dongpo, 11th-century statesman, poet, and connoisseur on collecting
Translation by James Cahill

Masterworks of Chinese Painting: In Pursuit of Mists and Clouds features distinguished Chinese paintings amassed over nearly 50 years by the preeminent scholar and UC Berkeley Professor Emeritus James Cahill and the Cahill family. This extraordinary collection represents virtually every period of Chinese painting over the last 900 years.

The exhibition consists of works from the Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, including major figure paintings and a selection of bird-and-flower paintings. The greatest strength, however, is the landscape paintings. Considered the highest category of painting in China, the landscape embodies the ideals of the Confucian scholar. In this area do we find the most daring experiments, the greatest developments, and the most intense art historical scrutiny. *Masterworks of Chinese Painting* presents hanging scrolls, hand scrolls, and album leaves, ranging from a delicate early 13th-century hanging scroll by the court painter Ma Yuan (fl. 1190–1230) depicting a quiet detail of mountain scenery to a bold mid-17th-century hanging scroll by the innovative Ming figure painter Chen Hongshou (1598–1652), reinterpreting a poignant encounter in Chinese history. The exhibition also includes a monumental mid-15th century landscape by Dai Jin (1388–1462), a major painting by the 16th century Wu School painter Wen Zhengming (1470–1559), and several works by Gong Xian (1618–1689), the foremost of the Individualist painters based in 17th-century Nanjing.

Professor James Cahill began collecting Chinese paintings in 1955 while on a Fulbright fellowship in Japan, where he was completing his dissertation on 14th-century Yuan painting. There a noted Japanese scholar bestowed on him the name Ching Yüan Chai, which roughly translates as "Studio of One Who Is

Looking intently at the Yüan Dynasty.” “Collecting deepened my understanding of Chinese painting ... forcing me to make judgments of quality and authenticity,” noted Professor Cahill. He used the collection as an opportunity to explore areas of connoisseurship and as a tool for teaching others about these same disciplines. Professor Cahill and family members passed on key works from the collection to the University of California at Berkeley, where he taught for over thirty years. James Cahill’s son Nicholas Cahill, an associate professor of art history at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, has lent several works to this exhibition.

Masterworks of Chinese Painting: In Pursuit of Mists and Clouds is organized and circulated by the Berkeley Art Museum and guest curated by Julia M. White, curator of Asian Art at the Honolulu Academy of Arts. The exhibition is made possible by Dorothy Dunlap Cahill, Hsingyuan Tsao and James Cahill, Nicholas Cahill, and Sarah Cahill, and by an anonymous donor. Major support is provided by United Commercial Bank, the Shenson Foundation, and Jane R. Lurie.

Generous local support for this project has been provided by Anonymous Fund, Brittingham Fund, Inc., Hilldale Fund, Dane County Cultural Affairs Commission with additional funds from the Madison Community Foundation and the Overture Foundation, Wisconsin Humanities Council with funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Wisconsin Arts Board with funds from the State of Wisconsin.

Educational programming for *Masterworks of Chinese Painting: In Pursuit of Mists and Clouds* has been coorganized by the Elvehjem Museum and Department of Art History and funded in part by the University Lectures Committee, Anonymous Fund, Center for East Asian Studies, and International Institute.

Reception

On Friday, January 23, 2004 at 5 p.m. Martha Carter will deliver a prereception lecture on Chinese bronze mirrors by the collector: Dr. Carter will present a brief slide lecture on her collection in Elvehjem room L140, followed by informal viewing of the mirrors in the Mayer Gallery.

From 6 to 7:30 p.m. Opening reception for *Circles of Reflection: The Carter Collection of Chinese Bronze Mirrors and Masterworks of Chinese Painting: In Pursuit of Mists and Clouds*

Educational Programs

Friday, January 30, 3:30 p.m.

Julia K. Murray, professor of art history, UW–Madison, “Scholar’s Choice.” Professor Murray will discuss a selection of paintings that interest her from Masterworks of Chinese Painting, Gallery VII

Thursday, February 5, 4 p.m.

James F. Cahill, professor emeritus, history of art, University of California at Berkeley, “Collecting Chinese Painting: A Scholar’s Perspective,” Elvehjem room L140

Friday, February 6, 12:05 p.m.

James F. Cahill, “Passages of Felt Life: A Genre Shift in Ming-Qing Figure Painting,” Elvehjem room L150

Thursday, February 26, 4 p.m.

Susan E. Nelson, professor, History of Art and East Asian Languages and Cultures, Indiana University, “Playing with Nature: The Open-air Concert in Chinese Landscape Painting,” Elvehjem room L140

Friday, February 27, 2 p.m.

Family event: Chinese brush painting demonstration by Wei Dong, professor of environment, textiles, and design, UW–Madison. The event begins in Gallery VII with a short tour of Chinese paintings in *Masterworks of Chinese Painting*.

For more information, interactive features, and video interview with James Cahill:

<http://www.bampfa.berkeley.edu/exhibits/masterworks/>

The Elvehjem Museum of Art is open Tuesdays-Fridays 9-5 pm; Saturdays and Sundays 11-5 pm; closed Mondays and major holidays. Admission to galleries and educational events is free. The museum is located at 800 University Avenue on the campus of the University of Wisconsin-Madison and is accessible to wheelchairs from the Murray Street (north) entrance. Parking is available at the city of Madison’s Lake Street and Frances Street ramps, university lot 46 on Lake Street between Johnson and University Avenue, university lot 47 on Johnson Street between Park and Lake streets. Evening and weekend parking is also available under Grainger Hall with entrance on Brooks Street between University Avenue and Johnson streets. The Elvehjem Museum of Art will provide sign language interpreters for associated programs by three-week advance request to Anne Lambert, Curator of Education, weekdays, 608 263-4421 (voice).

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