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## Prologue

Welcome to The Hong Kong Museum of Art, the first public art museum in the city, now custodian of an art collection of over 17,000 items, presenting a wide world of contrasts, from old to new, Chinese to Western, local to international with a Hong Kong viewpoint.

The exhibition we will tour today is titled Art of the South Nanling: A Selection of Guangdong Painting from the Hong Kong Museum of Art. The exhibition is located on the 4th floor in the Chinese Painting and Calligraphy Gallery. Before we proceed to the exhibition, let's take a moment to orient ourselves in the gallery and to locate the selected paintings through the tactile floor plan.

The exhibition is divided into five parts. The first part showcases Guangdong paintings from the early Ming and Qing dynasties; the second part showcases Ju's bird and flower paintings in the late Qing dynasty; the third and fourth parts showcase Eclecticism and Traditionalism Guangdong paintings from the twentieth century; and the fifth part showcases paintings of Hong Kong landscape.

This tactile booklet presents four selected paintings from the exhibition. Before we begin the tour, let's explore some of the common Chinese painting techniques that are used in the selected paintings, to deepen our understanding and appreciation of Chinese paintings.

1. "Textural Strokes": This refers to the use of thick and thin lines to express the texture of different geographical environments and the texture of various rocks, such as rugged rocks and steep cliffs. The changeable form of the brush reflects the artists' observation of nature and expresses their understanding of the shape of mountains and rocks.
2. "Mottled Moss": This is often seen in Chinese landscape paintings; brushes are used to intersperse ink dots at the intersection of mountains and rocks to show the different layers of mountains and hills, and nearby grass or distant trees on mountains slopes, for example.
3. "Water infusion": This is a colouring technique commonly used by Ju Lian. The brush is used to inject water into the undried colour. This is used mainly to depict the branches of flowers and leaves. The edges are stained to form contour lines, creating a natural "outlining" effect. The infiltrated part, close to the natural and true colours, also highlights the textures of the flowers and leaves.
4. "Powder infusion": This colouring technique, commonly used by Ju Lian, is used mainly to depict petals. When colouring, white powder is used to break the colour to make the powder float on the surface of the colour so that the petals appear moist and loose. Shadow effects are created using different shades of the powder.

5. "Colour wash": This refers to blending the colour with water to form a layered effect of changing shades. You can also add another colour to the semi-wet colour to achieve the effect of blending.

## Exhibition Introduction

“Lingnan” is situated south of the great Nanling Mountains that geographically separate it from the region of Jiangnan, while leafing through the history of art brings up the term “Lingnan” as a cultural footnote marking the development of art in southern China. Over the past 100 years or so, the region of Guangdong has become the cradle of modern Chinese painting. From its origins, Guangdong painting quickly flourished and established itself in Chinese art history as a new offshoot branching out from the traditional mainstream of its northern counterparts.

This exhibition showcases over 80 works from Guangdong dating from the late Ming dynasty to the 20th century that outline the historical and artistic development of Chinese painting in the Lingnan region. Highlighting the regional style of Guangdong painting, the exhibition presents how artists from Guangdong paved the way for the modernisation of Chinese painting by adopting both traditional and modern ideas, and integrating local and foreign elements during the revolutionary era in China. Guangdong painting first developed in the Ming dynasty, made great progress in the Qing dynasty and was once again elevated by the Lingnan School and Chinese Painting Research Society in more modern times. Guangdong painters have always been dedicated to finding a way to progress, and, although they took different routes, the early eclectics and the traditionalists were essentially aiming for the same goal. Clashing with and complementing each other and thus giving full scope to 20th century Guangdong painting, they not only exerted a major influence on Hong Kong’s early painting movement but also wrote an important chapter in the history of modern Chinese painting.

If you are also listening to the tactile floor plan pdf, please switch back to that pdf and listen to Section 1 now before continuing.

Market Gathering at Mount Luofu (Not dated)

Su Liupeng (1791 to circa 1862)

Ink and colour on vertical paper scroll

156.3 times 39.3 cm

### Artist's background and style

Su Liupeng lived in the critical period of the Qing dynasty where it was turning from prosperity to gradual decline. As his extant works show, he was adept at drawing elegant meticulous figures, such as literati characters enjoying a natural and solitary way of life. He also vividly portrayed the common people and their social milieu, capturing street singers, beggars, drunkards, tea makers and even opium addicts in their daily lives. Reflecting the true lives and spirituality of the common people, his works are historically and artistically significant. Su Liupeng was known by several artistic names. Many of them refer to his seemingly predestined relationship with Mount Luofu. He created a large number of figure paintings about folk customs. Markets on Mount Luofu is one of Su Liupeng's most popular genre paintings.

### Visual description and analysis

This is an ink and colour painting on a paper scroll, in vertical format, approximately 156 cm high and 39 cm wide, with an overall earthy tone. This painting can be divided to foreground, midground and background. In the background, two mountain ridges on the left and right sides of the painting. And in the top right corner of the painting, three vertical lines of calligraphy and a red square seal. In the midground, farmers and mountain dwellers bartering in the market in the middle of the bottom half of the painting. In the foreground, two tall trees growing on the cliff at the bottom left of the painting.

Beginning from the top left of the painting and go downwards, a gradient dotted pattern represents Mount Luofu in the background. The irregular lines of various thickness along the edge of the dotted pattern is the outline of the ridges. The irregular outlines and the patches merged on top represent the application of the Chinese painting techniques "textural strokes" and "mottled moss", respectively.

Next, keep touching downwards along the mountain, we come across leaves on the treetops and tree trunks in the foreground. The two trees span the bottom half of the painting. The tree on the left has a tint of red on its leaves, and leaves of the tree on the right has a tint of green. Between the two tall tree trunks are two smooth black shapes, representing a farmer and a mountain dweller. Swipe to the right of this pair, are more farmer figures spread out in a line, with 9 of them in total.

Mountain markets were basic farmers' markets in rural Guangdong where goods were bartered, with farmers and mountain dwellers bringing their crops and mountain produce

to trade or exchange at these temporary arrangements. These irregular markets were important as social occasions for people living in remote Mount Luofu in the old days. As a long-term resident, Su Liupeng could relate intensely to this kind of community life.

Moving back to the top right corner of the painting, we see irregular vertical strokes, representing calligraphy that reads, “At noon in the mountain market, there are many Hakka women. Their hairpins are decorated with a little chrysanthemum, and their waists are bound with Chinese usnea. They cover their laughs with their hats, holding a bulk of goods when leaving. Going to Luofu Mountain to get these sentences. ‘Zenshu’ Liu Peng”, and has the “Zenqin’s painting and calligraphy” seal.

Next to this tactile painting on the right, are four diagrams presenting close-up drawings of the line of mountain dwellers. Looking from left to right, the first two are in the top left diagram, the third and fourth are in the top right diagram, the fifth, sixth and seventh are in the middle diagram, while the eighth and ninth are in the bottom right diagram. In Su’s paintings, people are either whispering bids or having friendly chats, recording the everyday life on Guangdong’s famous Taoist mountain more than a century ago.

Flowers, Melon, Fish and Crab (1905)

Gao Jianfu (1879 to 1951)

Ink and colour on silk, set of four vertical hanging scrolls

99 times 27.8 cm

### Artist's background and style

In 1892, at the age of 14, Gao became a disciple of Ju Lian. The subjects and painting techniques of Gao's early works show that he inherited the style of his mentor. Deeply influenced by Ju, Gao inclined to Realism "to seek for inspiration from nature". Although Gao's painting style changed several times in his later works, his Realism approach remained basically the same. Ju's spirit of learning from nature and daring to innovate had a great effect on Gao's later innovations in Chinese painting.

### Visual description and analysis

*Flowers, Melon, Fish and Crab*, which was completed in 1905, is a set of four vertical hanging scrolls in ink and colour on silk. The four panels are put side-by-side from right to left, each panel 99 cm high and 28 cm wide. From right to left are, peonies, Chinese trumpet creepers, a lotus and a melon with flower, all of which are also common themes in Ju's paintings. This was one of Gao's early masterpieces, in which he used the relatively colourful and lively painting techniques of "water infusion" and "powder infusion" which he learnt from Ju.

Gao also upheld Ju's practice of drawing scenes of real life in this set of paintings. Gao noted that when Ju drew insects, he would pin them up or keep them alive in a glass container, to observe them meticulously and then sketch them. Ju also closely observed insect forms on bean vines, melon trellises and bushes. This set of paintings also shows evidence of Gao's innovative trials. He coloured the background extensively with multiple washes, which Ju had never done before, to create visual depth and a reflective water surface; hence, Realism.

Note the displacement of the four panels: the movement of the stems and tendrils, the treatment of space, and the refreshing style of the layout which distinguishes him from his predecessors. This series already points to the artistic direction that he was about to take.

## Peonies

In this peony panel, in the top half of the painting are two bright and consummate peonies, the one at the front is pink and the one at the back is purple, with layers of leaves setting them off. In the bottom half of the painting is a large sturdy stone with some green grass piles growing under. In the top left corner of the painting, there are two vertical lines of calligraphy and a square seal.

Starting from the centre of the top half of the painting, is the main character of the painting—a peony. The rosiest full-blown peony is like a flowy dress, flaring out towards the left of the painting. The gradient dotted pattern on the petals represents the painting technique called "powder infusion", with denser dots at the centre of peony and, sparser dots at the edge of petals. At the five o'clock direction from the peony, are some double-lined leaves, drooping slightly, with a second peony hidden behind the branches.

Moving downwards along the branches, we see a large stone occupying most of the bottom half of the painting. The coarse lines convey ink-traced stone contours and the stone's sturdy texture. Double-lined geometric pattern on the stone's surface represents the use of "water infusion" technique to emphasize the stone's three-dimensional quality. At the bottom of the stone are some weeds shown as horizontal lines.

In the top left of the painting are, irregular vertical strokes, representing calligraphy, which reads "To my brother Shouxi. In June of 1905, from Gao Lun", and it has the "Gao Lun's longevity" seal.



## Chinese Trumpet Creepers

In this painting, the flowers creep onto twigs, and the main branch spans the whole painting from top to bottom. The flowers and leaves are intertwined in the second and third quarters of the painting from top to bottom, blooming in mid-air and setting each other off. In the bottom left corner, are one vertical line of calligraphy and a square seal.

Touching from the top, a smooth and black shape represents the main branch of Chinese trumpet creepers. It spans across the whole panel and illustrates the “water infusion” technique. In the second and third quarters of the painting from top to bottom, looking from left to right, we can feel clusters of flowers and leaves fluttering in the wind. The orange-red flower is saturated in colour, and looks like an upward trumpet when it blooms. Each flower has five smooth-edged petals, with stamens in the centre, reflecting Gao’s meticulous observation of nature. The jagged-edged leaves have different shades of green according to their distance from the artist. The leaves are more simply illustrated than the flowers, with the “water infusion” technique applied to express a three-dimensional quality.

In the bottom left corner, the calligraphy reads “Made by Gao Lun” and it has the “Lun” seal.

## Lotus

In the centre of the top half of this painting is, an elegant white lotus in front of a large lotus leaf, both swaying in the wind. The bottom half of the painting has an extensively coloured reflective water surface. On the right is a small lotus leaf, and in the centre is a small crab sitting on a floating lotus petal. In the middle of the right border of the painting, are one vertical line of calligraphy and a seal.

In the centre of the top half of the painting, is a lotus, like a shy maiden, swaying gently in the breeze blowing from the right. Its petals are illustrated with a gradient small-dotted pattern, representing the application of the “powder infusion” technique. Behind the lotus is a lotus leaf, extending from the lotus at the seven o'clock direction. It is twice the size of the lotus. The lotus leaf spans the top half of the painting, with its two sides curling slightly inwards. The front side of the leaf is represented by large-dotted pattern, while the back side is represented by smooth black surface.

Swiping up from the bottom to the centre of the painting, we see a few spots of smooth black wavy shapes representing the lotus pond in the background, coloured extensively with the “colour wash” technique. In the slow-moving pond water, a small crab rests on a lotus petal. Gao realistically depicted subjects from daily life and points out in the calligraphy that this is a real-life painting. Next to this tactile painting on the right, is a close-up diagram of a meticulously drawn crab on the petal. Gao precisely captured the form and structure of the crab, even depicting the punctiliously fine hairs on its legs. Below is a top view diagram of the crab for viewers to better understand crab's morphology.

In the middle at the right border of the painting, the calligraphy reads “Gao Lun sketches from life at the Dragon Boat Festival in 1905” and it has the “Lun Yin” seal.

## Melon with Flower

In this panel with melon and flower, cross-overlapping bamboo sticks span the entire painting. In the middle right of the top half, is a big green round melon hanging behind the bamboo sticks and a yellow melon flower. The melon vine climbs up along the vertical bamboo stick, and the melon flower grows on the right side of the vertical bamboo stick. Right below the melon and the flower are two leaves swaying in the wind, and below the leaves are two fish, appearing to swim into the frame from a distance. In the bottom left corner of the painting, are three fish swimming in a lake and a reflection of a full moon right below them. In the middle of the left border of the painting are a vertical line of calligraphy and a square seal.

Touching along the top border line, we can find the top of the cross-overlapping bamboo sticks, outlined with alternating thick and thin lines. Further down along the stick is the intersection point, and right below it, is a big melon with a solid round body, about the size of a regular adult's head, represented by gradient dotted pattern. The melon flower on the right side of the melon resembles an upward trumpet, with fan-like patterns on its petals. The melon vines, flower receptacles and stems are represented by smooth black shapes. The bamboo and the leaves are outlined in double lines, meaning the use of "water infusion" technique.

Swiping up from the bottom to the centre of the painting, we see a few spots of smooth black wavy shapes, representing the lake, in the background, coloured extensively with the "colour wash" technique. Below and to the left of the lake are three more simply illustrated fish swimming in the shimmering lake water. Their distances are differentiated by shades. Below the fish is a reflection of the full moon, about the size of the round melon above. Gao has realistically illustrated the melon flower by the lake under the moonlight.

In the middle of the painting at the left border, the calligraphy reads "Jianfu, Gao Lun drawn in Jianlu" and it has the "Gao Lun" seal. Gao Jianfu was formerly known as Gao Lun. This was the first painting in which he used his new name. This was a significant gesture, which suggested his determination to move out of Ju's shadow and forge a new path.

Sepia (Not dated)

Gao Jianfu (1879 to 1951)

Ink and colour on vertical paper scroll

135.8 times 69.1 cm

### Artist's background and style

One of the founders of the Lingnan School and one of the Three Masters of Lingnan alongside Gao Qifeng and Chen Shuren, Gao Jianfu studied in Japan and advocated “eclectically synthesising China and the West and bridging the modern with the ancient”. He believed anything and everything could be a subject matter for painting. The work *Sepia* featured here exemplifies his modern view of painting.

Lauded as a “revolutionary painter”, Gao Jianfu once joined the Tongmenghui as an active proponent of the revolutionary mission of overthrowing the Qing empire. He later dedicated himself to art and applied his revolutionary passion to the reformation of Chinese painting. After mastering Japanese ink and colouring techniques, Gao Jianfu pioneered an entirely new style based on the natural reality of ink diffusing in water. He also inherited the two Jus’ tradition of sketching from life. Having observed their movements and appearance in detail, he produced a vivid interpretation of the squid in both form and spirit.

### Visual description and analysis

This is an ink painting on a vertical paper scroll, in rectangular format, approximately 135 cm high and 69 cm wide.

We cannot clearly distinguish the foreground, midground and background in the painting. At first glance, one might think that is a rather traditional subject of a Chinese dragon emerging from behind a dark cloud in different shades. It vaguely presents a dragon’s head, limbs and claws in a patch of dark cloud in the sky. But when we look closer, we see it is actually a shoal of squid trying to escape capture by squirting ink into the water. The artist’s ink-wash technique allows the ink to diffuse into a nebulous mass.

Exploring freely from top to bottom or left to right, we see two different sets of dotted patterns. But if we touch carefully around the bottom half of the tactile painting, we can find a few patches of smooth black irregular shapes faintly appearing within the dotted patterns. These smooth irregular shapes in black represent the main visual elements of the painting—a shoal of squid of five different sizes, two of them in white and the other three in dark grey. The larger gradient dotted pattern represents the cloud of sepia ink ejected by the squid, with varying density gradually spreading out from the centre of the bottom half to the top half of the painting, while the smaller gradient dotted pattern represents area with clear water. The head of the squid mostly emerge in the dense dark ink, while their curvy tentacles are clearly visible. Each squid has ten tentacles of various lengths.

At 7 o'clock is, the biggest squid, designed in die-cut structure as a pull-out to provide visitors with a better understanding of the morphological structure of the squid. Squid is a rare subject in Chinese painting. By using minimal strokes to optimal effect, Gao captures a vivid scene of movement and action of a fleeing squid. This is truly a Lingnan School masterpiece.

At 12 o'clock position, is the artist's vertical signature signed "Jian Fu" and the "Gao Lun" seal in a red square. At the bottom right corner, is another red square seal that reads, "This man has become old before he is honoured".

Victoria Peak (1958)

Huang Bore (1901 to 1968)

Ink and colour on vertical paper scroll

127.8 times 66.8 cm

### Artist's background and style

Huang Bore worked in Hong Kong for many years as a painter, inspired by the local landscape, and as an authority on Guangdong art and culture. Whatever the future of Chinese painting and the views of future critics, the art of Huang will stand as something worthy of the age in which he lived. More than any other painter of Hong Kong, Huang understood its landscape and finally formed his own style of landscape painting in the last 10 years of his life. No other painter has interpreted our local scenes with more fondness and imagination. As we are appreciating the fifth part of the exhibition, it is not difficult to notice that most of the Victoria Harbour paintings drawn by Huang were set against the backdrop of Victoria Peak. He focused mainly on capturing his impressions of the scenery with lines and strokes, and less on the accuracy of forms.

### Visual description and analysis

*Victoria Peak* was completed in 1958. This is an ink and colour painting on a vertical paper scroll, in rectangular format, with approximately 127 cm high and 66 cm wide.

Victoria Peak is the highest mountain on Hong Kong Island, so it has always been regarded as a Hong Kong landmark. It used to be called the "Red Censer Peak" by the local villagers before it was renamed as "Victoria Peak" by the British. Nowadays, it is normally called simply "The Peak".

This painting can be diagonally divided into bottom left and top right. The bottom left part consists of the undulating green-blue Victoria Peak running continuously from foreground to midground, separated by a swirly white cloud. In the foreground, is a white zigzag hiking trail with a handrail, with the mountain extending into the midground and a clump of trees in the bottom left corner. The top right part has two mountains seen from afar in the background. The upper mountain sits in the horizon which divide the sky from the sea. The lower mountain is Green Island, with a lighthouse on top. In the top left corner, is a vertical line of calligraphy and a red square seal.

First, let's analyse the foreground and midground. Touching from the top left to the bottom, we first encounter the Victoria Peak in the midground. The contours of the mountains are represented by coarse droplet-shaped brushstrokes, embodying Huang's ink outlining brushwork. The gradient dotted pattern on the mountain surface represents the mountains coloured with black ink and cobalt blue in dotted-shaped brushwork. The denser pattern indicates the shaded area, while sparser pattern indicates the brighter area, through this we

can understand its three-dimensional quality. This indicates Huang's new attempt to illustrate modern landscape with traditional painting technique. Passing by the swirly white clouds, we are now touching the Victoria Peak in the foreground. The zigzag trail with handrails built along the west of Lugard Road, offers a captivating view of Victoria Harbour, Lei Yue Mun in the east and Green Island in the west. The southward descent leads to the Pok Fu Lam Reservoir, and the Aberdeen Reservoir via Keung Fa Kan.

Let's explore the die cut pull-out extended page from the bottom left part of the tactile painting, representing, the visual concept of the continuous landscape of the undulating Victoria Peak from a more three-dimensional perspective.

In the Song dynasty, people believed that landscape paintings needed to reach the artistic realm of "being able to visit, observe, travel and inhabit". Imagine that we are standing on the trail in the painting, overlooking the lighthouse on Green Island in the distance from the misty Peak. The way in which the water and sky blend in the horizon awakens our imagination. In the top left corner of the painting is, the artist's inscription in calligraphic script, which reads "Huang Bore painted this on Victoria Peak during January of 1958" and the "Huang Bore" read square seal.