

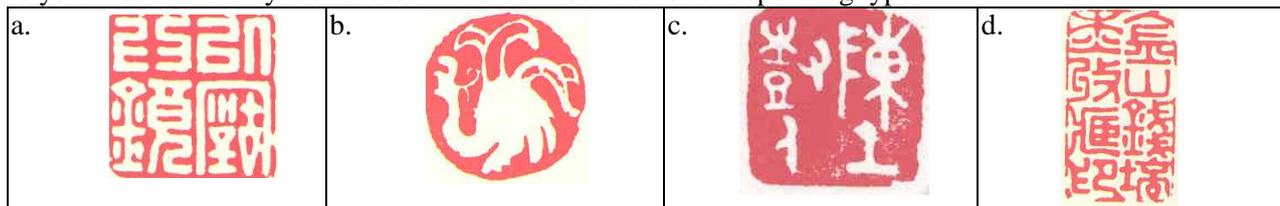
Seal Carving Collection of The K. S. Lo Gallery
An Introduction to Seal Carving – Worksheet

Welcome to the Exhibition of The K. S. Lo Gallery “*Calligraphy on Stone: Seal Carving in Hong Kong*”. You can appreciate the art of seal carving and know more about the history of seal carving in Hong Kong here. Let’s have fun in the world of seal carving together!

1. An Introduction to Seal Carving

Over the dynasties in Imperial China, seals were used for official and private purposes. There were several types of seals, as distinguished by their inscriptions: **name seals**, **collector’s seals**, **archaic verse seals**, **pictorial seals** etc. Pictorial seals were also known as graphic seals. In ancient times, some of these pictorial seals combined picture and text that complemented each other.

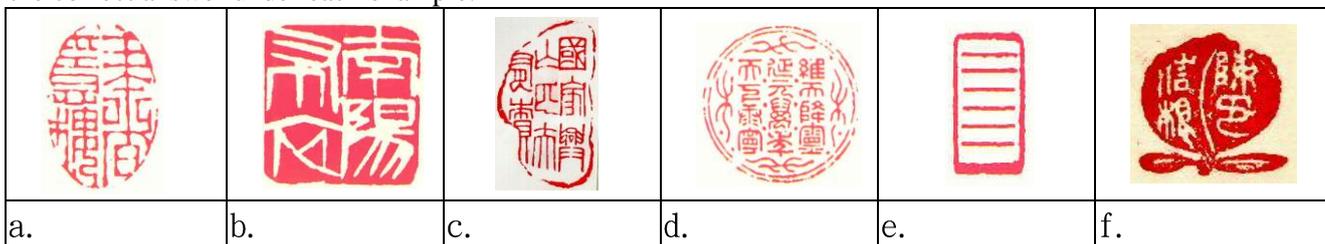
Do you know what they are? Please match each seal to its corresponding type.



- | | | | |
|------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| • | • | • | • |
| • | • | • | • |
| name seal | collector’s seal | archaic verse seals | pictorial seal |

(1) Shapes

Seals come in many different shapes: **square**, **rectangular**, **round** and **oval**, **irregular** as well as graphic icons like **peach**, **fish**, **heart**, **gourd** and **bird**. Can you differentiate which shape for the following seals? Please write the correct answer under each example.



(2) Intaglio carving and Relief carving

There are two methods of seal carving, namely, **intaglio carving** and **relief carving**. In intaglio carving, the strokes of characters are incised to create white text against a red background. This method is also called incised carving. In relief carving, the strokes of characters are in relief as the blank parts are incised. When the characters of an inscription vary greatly in their number of strokes, carving may be done in alternate **intaglio and relief carving** to create a balanced effect.

Do you know which technique has been applied in the following works? Please help to match each seal to its corresponding carving technique.



- | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| • | • intaglio carving |
| • | • intaglio and relief carving |
| • | • relief carving |

Apart from seal script, seals can also be carved in oracle-bone script, Shang and Zhou bronze inscription script, stone drum script, regular script, running script etc.

(3) Seal knob and Thin carving

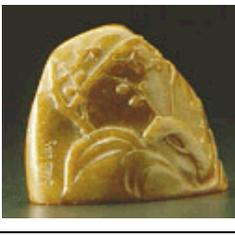
The original idea of carving **seal knob** was to make carrying and stamping easier. As time went on, this became an ornamental feature. Seal knobs have a long history of more than 2,000 years. The host of carving styles reflects specific notions and ideas of different historical periods. In the Qin and Han Dynasties, for example, seal knobs were symbols of hierarchy for noblemen. The emperor used an imperial jade seal with a tiger knob while the queen's seal was made of gold and featured a tiger knob. There were also seal knobs in the shapes of snake, coiling dragon, animals, human figures, plants and even melons, fruit and flowers. In addition to animated design, simple line design was popular too, such as bridge knob and pagoda knob.

Thin carving is a combination of Chinese painting and relief carving. It first appeared in the Ming and Qing Dynasties as a seal knob carving technique. Depending on the seal material, the seal maker decorates four sides of the seal with thinly carved motifs. Compositions are quite diverse. Examples are landscape, flowers and birds, portraits etc. A seal with thin carving is particularly refined and attractive.

Please help to differentiate the **seal knob** and **thin carving** and circle the right one for following parts.

Seal knob		Thin carving	
a. 	b. 	g. 	h. 
c. 	d. 	i. 	j. 
e. 	f. 	k. 	l. 

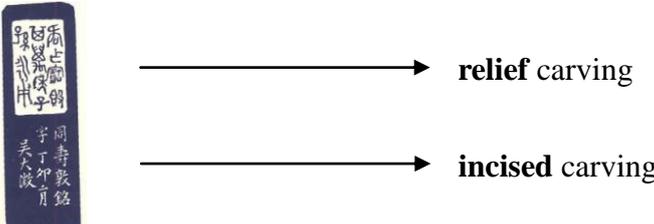
Can you see what is it? Please write down the correct answer.

	a. _____ This flower is the symbol of purity.		b. _____ The hollow design was to make carrying easier.
	c. _____ This animal is the king of animals and is highly respected in Buddhism. It is also the symbol of power and wealth in the society and people believe it can help to get rid of the evil spirit.		d. _____ This flower is the symbol of integrity.

(4) Inscription

The **incised** and **relief** carving on the sides and top of a seal are signature inscriptions. Short inscriptions are called **short postscripts**, with the number of words ranging from two to about a dozen. The inscribed characters contain information like the name or alias of the seal maker, time and place of manufacture, the designated user and purpose of the seal. Some seal inscriptions are made up of tens or even hundreds of Chinese characters. These are called **long postscripts**. Usually placed at a corner of the artistic composition and sometimes set within the painting, the inscriptions are similar to Chinese painting postscripts.

Example 1



→ **relief carving**

→ **incised carving**

Example 2



Inscription: incised short postscripts
 Alias of the seal maker: 南田
 Place : 甌香館
 Time of manufacture : 癸亥春王正月

Please refer to the example 1 & 2 and write down the following information.



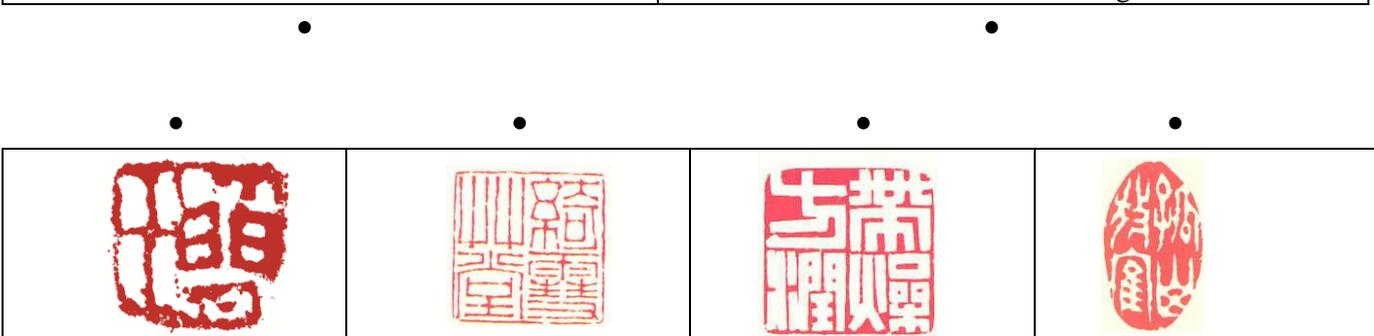
Inscription: _____
 Name of the seal maker: _____
 Alias of the seal maker: _____
 Place : _____
 Time of manufacture : _____

Inscriptions of official seals contain the name of the maker, manufacture date and remarks. Inscriptions of literati seals are more versatile in both the number of characters and contents. Contents include political views, philosophy for life, literary vision and expressive or emotional writing.

(5) Appreciation

When appreciating seal carving, we can divide them into two main groups according to style and composition. Regarding the following 4 seals, please match each seal to its corresponding group.

The first group	The second group
Neat and orderly with uniformly laid out carved characters. The vertical and horizontal spacing of character strokes must be evenly arranged to create smooth and steady beauty.	More versatile in composition. It may be complex and bold, without being constrained by the shape of the seal. Carved characters can be freely arranged and details like broken edges and incomplete characters can be added for extra vintage charm.



Along with the structure and layout of carved characters, the calligraphy script type of seal inscriptions is also highly variable. Seal script, clerical script, regular script, running script and cursive script are used both independently and in combination. Seal inscriptions perfectly express the beauty of calligraphy. When complemented by images, they can demonstrate the versatility of seal carving art. Moreover, the contents of carved characters and inscriptions, as well as the shapes of seal knobs and their designs, also have great appreciation value.

~ End ~

Reference books :

Pictorial Encyclopedia of Seal Carving Techniques by Zhuang Xin-xing; Shanghai Shudian Press, 2002.
Beginners' Guide to Seal Carving by Fu Ji-liang et al; Shanghai Shuhua Publishing Company, 2008.

(5)

Time of manufacture : 辛未秋七月
 Place : 香林齋
 Alias of the seal maker: 六峯
 Name of the seal maker: (沈) 峯 (pronounce "gao")

(4) Inscription: incised short postscripts
 d. Thin carving in the shape of plum blossom
 a. Thin carving in the shape of lotus b. bridge knob c. lion knob

(3) Seal knob : b d e f Thin carving : g j k

(2)

(1) a. oval b. square c. irregular d. round e. rectangular f. peach

Answers:

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