

CHINESE GARDEN PAINTING

垂雲峯

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Xubaizhai Collection of Chinese Painting
and Calligraphy

1. Cooling off the hot summer by Wen Zhengming



Wen Zhengming (1470—1559), also known as Hengshan, was from Suzhou in Jiangsu province. He was directly taught by Shen Zhou (1427—1509). He was one of the core members of the Wu School. His style was very influential on later generations such as Wen Peng, Wen Boren, Chen Chun (1483—1544) and Hou Maogong (late 16th to early 17th century).

This work reveals a corner of Wen's ideal garden and shows the literati's outdoor activities such as dozing off in the garden, enjoying cool air in the shade and cooling the feet in a pond. From the house-

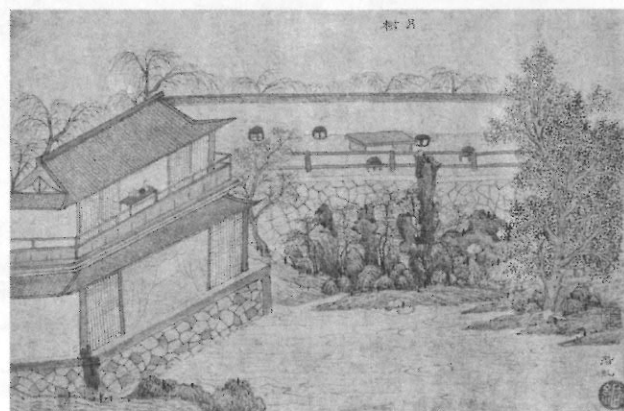
hold utensils and other articles in the picture, one can also tell that the literati enjoyed drinking wine or tea, appreciating calligraphy and paintings, and playing lute or reading in the gardens.

The white lotus flowers, coming out of the dirt completely untainted, in the bottom left-hand corner symbolize purity and virtue. Waterside willow trees are a common feature of garden landscape, and the five willow trees in this picture occupy a large proportion of the painting. The few banana plants bring a touch of the subtropical to the garden. Bamboo symbolizes integrity and fidelity because they have *jie* (meaning joints) which, in Chinese, also means integrity and fidelity. Tall trees can direct a sightseer's view from a level plain to an upward view. Wen cleverly placed the tall trees at the back of the painting thus guiding the viewer's sight from near to far, and from low to high, making the picture even more enticing. On the other side of the water there are two Chinese *wutong* (*sterculia plantanifolia*) trees, which are characterized by their late germination and early shedding of leaves. The *wutong* trees in this picture are large and luxuriant, indicating that the time is high summer.

2. Fifteen views of a garden by Wen Boren, Wen Peng

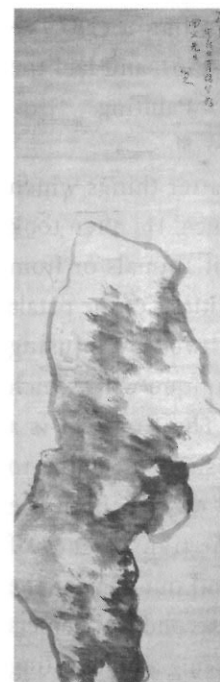
Wen Boren (1502—1575), also known as Decheng, was from Suzhou in Jiangsu province and was a nephew of Wen Zhengming. He specialized in landscape painting, and his style had a hint of Wang Meng (ca.1308—1385) of the Yuan dynasty (1279—1368). His brush strokes were fine, dense, strong and meticulous. Wen Peng (1498—1573), also known as Shoucheng, was also from Suzhou, and was the eldest son of Wen Zhengming. He was well-versed in landscape painting, calligraphy and seal carving. His style is very close to that of his father.

Inheriting his father's style, Wen Boren depicted a Suzhou garden in this work with a very deliberate composition, rich colours and remarkably varied brush stroke techniques. Rock and water are the two main components in the art of garden landscape. The artificial rock mountains are meant to emulate natural landscape; and the pond is there for the appreciation of water, which gives



a calming and purifying effect. Furthermore, Wen Boren painted many buildings of different sizes, shapes and functions to serve as decoration, for storing books and painting or reading. Each picture is accompanied by Wen Peng's calligraphy, which recalls the precise, classical small clerical script of the Wei (386—534) and Jin (265—420) periods, a perfect match for both the style and contents of the pictures.

3. Towering rock by Zhu Da



Zhu Da (1626—1705) had many other names, including Bada Shanren. He came from Nanchang in Jianxi province and was descended from an aristocrat of the Ming dynasty (1368—1644), Zhu Quan. After the collapse of the Ming dynasty, he became a monk. His paintings of flora and fauna are full of symbolism, through which he released his melancholy. His landscape paintings were mainly modelled on Dong Qichang; he also took his cue from Huang Gongwang and Ni Zan, but replacing their cool elegance

with desolate loneliness. He was honoured as one of the Four Great Monk Painters.

This painting depicts a single rock. Its upright shape indicates clearly that it was a rock from a landscape garden. Zhu Da put a lot of symbolism in his works as a protest against the prevailing political situation, and as an expression of his pain caused by the loss of his country. This work belongs to his later period; and the abstract expression and curious composition seen here are rare in other Chinese paintings. The gigantic upright rock seems to have renounced the world, but it seems unsteady and about to fall over, reflecting the painter's own unease. Plenty of ink was freely splashed to give ample variation in the tones. The grain and texture of the rock were perfectly integrated to further emphasize the abstractness of the work.

6. Eight views of the Northern Villa by Cheng Tinglu

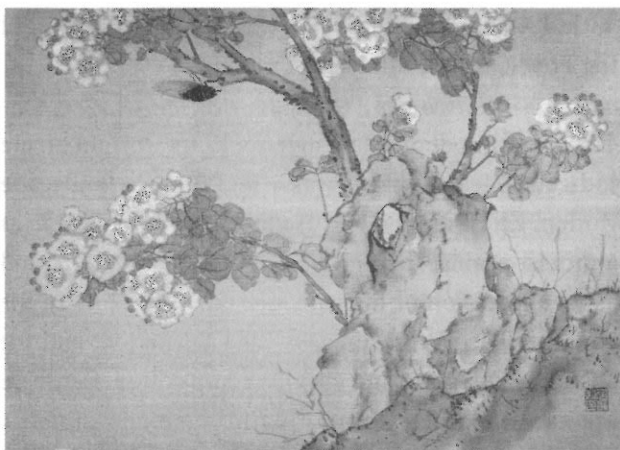
Cheng Tinglu (1796—1858), also known as Boxu and Hengxiang, studied in Jiading and lived in Suzhou for a long time. He was well-versed in poetry, calligraphy, painting and seal carving. He studied landscape painting with Qian Du (1763—1844) who had a clear and elegant touch, but he was also quite close to the style of Li Liufang (1575—1629). His seal carving is comparable with that of Ding Jing (1695—1765) and Huang Yi (1744—1801), and he had captured even more of the essence of the Qin (B.C.221—206) and Han (B.C.206—A.D.220) periods.

The Northern Villa in the painting was a garden mansion built following the natural contour of the land. Landscape gardens aspire to "wildness" and seclusion, with an emphasis on a return to nature and a yearning for the simple pleasures of fishing, cultivating the land, woodcutting and reading. The topics of this work include reading under moonlight, tea tasting under a Chinese *wutong* tree, strolling along a bamboo-lined path, viewing flowers and paintings, etc, all manifestations of a cultured man's pursuit of reclusive ideals. The pictures are accompanied by poems that express the freedom and serenity of life in retirement. Leaf 6.2 depicts the host and the visitor admiring an



antique treasure acquired by chance on a spring day. With a long gallery running across the garden, a rock and tall trees in the front, and a clean and bright attic study at the back; this is a truly delightful place for reading and painting. Leaf 6.3 depicts a rural scene, with the two figures chatting about spring planting. Outside the window is an intoxicating view of peach blossoms, green willow trees and flowers in full bloom. A leisurely perusal of this volume will convince the viewer that "to live there, one would remain forever young; to visit there, one would stay for good; and no one would ever tire of wandering around there."

7. Flowers by Ju Lian



Ju Lian (1828—1904), also known as Guchuan and Geshan Laoren, was from Panyu in Guangdong province. He and his cousin, Ju Chao (1811—1865), founded the Geshan School, and were jointly known as the Two Jus. He specialized in painting flowers, birds, grass and insects, and was particularly skilful at life sketching. His brush strokes were combinations of the meticulous and the casual. He studied with Song Guangbao (19th century) and Meng Jinyi (19th century), but subsequently developed his own style.

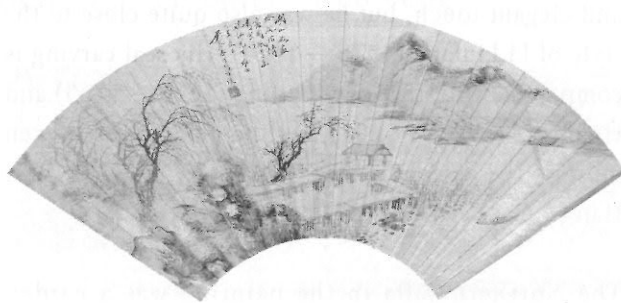
He had many pupils, including Gao Jianfu (1879—1951) and Guan Huinong (1878—1956), and laid the foundations of the Lingnan School of Painting.

Ju Lian often took as his subject matter things which were native to the Guangdong province. He often took his inspiration from the activities of animals or from still life. The tonal and textural gradations of the petals and leaves in this album were achieved by infusing colour pigments with water, a technique with which Ju Lian was particularly familiar. The first leaf is a cicada on a summer day, the composition is similar to the “framing” technique in garden design. Both the solidity of the cicada's body and the transparency of its wings are very realistic, and stand out against the graceful background of flowers. The second leaf depicts butterflies flying amongst flowers, giving an interesting and lively contrast between movement and stillness. Adding his own feelings and impressions to his penetrating observation, Ju Lian was able to create remarkably true images of flora and fauna with which viewers can empathize.

8. Scenery of Li Garden by Wu Qinmu

Wu Qinmu (1894—1953), originally named Tong and also known as Lengfeng Jushi, was from Shanghai and specialized in landscape.

The Li Garden in the painting was located by the Li Lake in Jiangsu province, and was designed after the views of the lake itself. This kind of “view borrowing” in landscape design is actually very similar to the process of painting. Before starting to paint, the artist would make a detailed observation of the subjects, select their good points and then blend them with his own ideas, form an image and then decide on the theme and mood. The same process applies to landscape design. There is a rectangular pavilion in the picture from where one can see all the scenery around. The pavilion has four pillars but no wall, creating an “empty opening”, by virtue of which the surrounding scenery



can be “brought in” thereby “filing up” the “empty space”. The bridge in the picture has many changes of direction which serve to extend the length of the tour, giving the sightseer a different view every time he changes direction or angle. And this idea of turning and twisting is also a subtle way of turning what is limited into unlimited. It sets one to thinking and encourages the viewer to stretch his or her imagination.