



THREE PERFECTIONS

Poetry, Calligraphy and Painting in Chinese Art

Level 1 (through to Mezzanine via up ramp)

GUAN Shanyue 關山月

Chinese 1912–2000

The harbinger of spring

迎春圖

c. 1980 China

ink and pigment on paper

Presented by The Federation of Chinese Associations, 1983 AS6-1983

Guan Shanyue is one of the most celebrated artists of contemporary China. The traditional theme of blossoming plum trees is painted in a vibrant modern style. The prunus – the first flower of the year to blossom, even before the snow has melted – is the harbinger of spring. The excitement of life is felt in new branches shooting upwards.

A feeling of joy and excitement heralds the arrival of spring. It expresses the modern spirit of China – Mao Zedong once said, ‘Let a hundred flowers blossom’ when referring to a blossoming of cultural and artistic activities. Guan visited Melbourne when this painting was exhibited here in 1983.

CHAN Ping Kwong 陳丙光

Chinese 1940–, worked in Australia 1970s–

Lotus and cat 荷花猫石图

1994 Canberra

ink and pigments on paper

Purchased through the NGV Foundation with the assistance of
The Thomas William Lasham Fund, Governor, 2001

2001.138

As we view this scroll, our perspective shifts from looking up at the cat to looking down into the pond, as if from the cat's viewpoint. The painting is executed with free, suggestive calligraphic brushstrokes. With withering leaves, the lotus is portrayed at the end of summer.

On the right side of the painting is a colophon inscribed in the cursive style of calligraphy by Chao Shao-an (Zhao Shaoang) (1905–1998), Chan's teacher, saying that Chan painted this painting and that he himself inscribed the colophon when he was ninety years old (by Chinese counting).

CHEN Wen Hsi (CHEN Wenxi)

陳文希

Chinese 1906–91, worked in Singapore 1948–91

Squirrel in the midst of bamboo and plum blossoms 竹梅松鼠图

1950s –60s, Singapore

ink and watercolour on paper

Gift of Jason Yeap OAM through the Australian Government's
Cultural Gifts Program, 2012

2012.277

This delightful painting is painted in a circle, which is evocative of the moon, a circular window or the circular Chinese fan. The plum blossom is accomplished by a single dynamic and expressive calligraphic brushstroke in ink across the upper half of the painting depicting the trunk of the tree, and by sweeping brushstrokes depicting branches and red blossoms.

On the trunk is a playful, furry squirrel looking down with full and alert concentration. In the lower left is the artist's intriguing signature, accomplished by using his fingertip dipped in ink and followed by his seal.

DING Yanyong 丁衍庸

Chinese 1902–78

Frogs and orchids 青蛙芝蘭图

1977 Melbourne

ink on paper

Purchased with funds donated by Jason Yeap and Min Lee Wong, 2009 2009.445

It was Ding Yanyong's ambition to create a new form of modern Chinese art. When studying Western art in Japan, he admired the paintings of the French artist Henri Matisse. He saw similarities between Matisse and the expressive style (*xieyi*, meaning writing or expressing ideas) of Chinese scholar-amateur artists.

The animated and playful frogs are 'written' in expressive, abbreviated brushstrokes. They are personified as noisy children in a schoolyard – jumping all over the place and gesticulating to one another. In this work, Ding seems to have been influenced by the Japanese genre of spontaneous and playful painting named *asorbi* in Japanese.

DONG Qichang 董其昌

Chinese 1555–1636

Mountain landscape 山水軸

1617 China

ink on paper

Purchased, 1978

AS4-1978

Dong was a brilliant scholar and a prominent scholar-official of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). To escape from the political turmoil at the imperial court in Beijing, he interrupted his official life with long intervals of retirement in the south. Through his paintings and writings, in which Dong restated the literati (scholar-amateur) theory of painting, he exerted great influence on his contemporaries and later generations.

In this highly original and revolutionary work, the austere, solitary, semi-abstract landscape does not so much represent an actual place as express the artist's inner spiritual world. The close relationship between calligraphy and painting is illustrated by Dong's comment on nature and art:

*Painting is not equal to 'mountains and streams' for the wonder of scenery;
but 'mountains and streams' are not equal to painting for the sheer marvels of brush and ink.*

HUANG Yongyu 黄永玉

Chinese 1924–

Cranes on a beach

春潮帶雨晚來急

1981 Melbourne

ink and gouache on paper

Presented by Mering Corporation Pty Ltd through
the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2013

2013.52

The artist inscribes the title *Spring tide bringing the rain came in swift currents in the evening*. The cranes are an abstract configuration applied quickly with brush and ink. Swift, continuous, apparently careless brushstrokes evoke swift currents of the rising tide. Like calligraphy, the execution of brush and ink is so carefree and spontaneous that it is as if the artist had painted with his eyes half closed, or with his mind's eye.

Huang visited Melbourne in 1981. The cranes are vehicles expressing his experience of Melbourne beaches. In this work one can feel the breeze and sweeping tides.

HUANG Yongyu 黃永玉

Chinese 1924–

Penguins 企鵝

1989 Melbourne

ink, watercolour and gouache on paper

Gift of Jason Yeap, 2007

2007.441

The inscription reads: *The spring of 1989, penguins sketch from life.* Huang visited Melbourne in 1989. He must have been so inspired by his visit to Phillip Island that he executed this painting in one outburst of creative energy. His exhilaration is expressed by quick abstract movements of brush and ink that evoke, rather than describe, penguins walking on a beach.

The suggestive powers of the brush have captured the individual postures and movements of the penguins as they waddled, balancing from side to side. With the bravura of one continuous streaky 'flying white' (*feibai* 飛白) brushstroke sweeping across the entire painting, the artist has created the shoreline of the beach. With their feet immersed in shallow water, the penguins appear forging their way against the wind in the cold. By tuning into the painting, one can almost feel the cold of the fresh sea air.

MI Wanzhong 米萬鐘

Chinese 1570–1628

**Chrysanthemums,
bamboo and rocks** 菊竹石圖

1624 China

ink on silk

Purchased, 1986

AS1-1986

The inscription by the artist states that this work was painted in the eighth lunar month of the autumn of 1624 while inside the Pure Awakening pavilion of the Shao Garden. In his estate near Beijing, Mi Wanzhong, a scholar-official and amateur painter, built the contemplative Shao Garden (now part of Beijing National University) as a gathering place for high officials and literary men. The chrysanthemum, flower of autumn, is traditionally associated with the sentiment of nostalgia and the scholar-recluse. The chrysanthemum and evergreen bamboo symbolise longevity and the moral virtues of a refined gentleman.

Kim Hoa TRAM (SHEN Jinhe)

沈金和

Chinese, born Vietnam 1959, worked in Australia
1984–

No mind 無心

2005 Melbourne

ink on paper

Lillian Ernestine Lobb Bequest, 2007

2007.398

Two Chinese characters *wuxin* 無心 (no mind) are written in the cursive style of Chinese calligraphy. 'No mind' in the Buddhist context means a pure and calm state of mind that is beyond the differentiations or distinctions of logical thinking, and thus free and cleansed of worldly thoughts. In Buddhism, everything in the world is an illusion created by the mind. Even the mind is created by the mind which is unreal and also an illusion.

The artist has accomplished the writing in 'one breath', or in one continuous brush movement. The windswept, streaky flying white (*feibai* 飛白) brushstrokes are evocative of rain and wind and the roots and branches of tenacious old trees. The dynamic brush movements express the life force of nature as well as the inner strength and power of the artist.

WANG Xiaomin 王小敏

Chinese 1954–, worked in Australia 1989–

Tang poem 1 唐詩之一

1999 Melbourne

ink on paper

Purchased, 2001

2001.141

Wang Xiaomin has taken a great deal of freedom in the writing and composition of words and characters. In traditional Chinese calligraphy, characters in the regular script are stylised and transformed into the expressive cursive script while retaining their basic, recognisable form. In Wang's calligraphy, however, characters cannot be easily deciphered and the artist remains reticent and enigmatic in this regard. Like an abstract painting, the calligraphy is evocative of wisteria in nature.

WANG Xiaomin 王小敏

Chinese 1954–, worked in Australia 1989–

Tang poem 2 唐詩之二

1999 Melbourne

ink on paper

Purchased, 2001

2001.142

This calligraphy can be appreciated as an abstract painting. It is evocative of a cityscape. It is interesting to note that the artist signed in the middle of the picture, in the empty space that suggests a river in the cityscape. Perhaps, in the true spirit of the appreciation of calligraphy, it is independent of the meanings of the words. Moreover, in the words of the scholar Zhang Yanyuan (c.815–?) of the Tang dynasty (618–906): *Calligraphy and painting differ in name but are essentially the same.*

WU Zangkan 吴藏龕

Chinese 1875–1927

Wisteria 紫藤

1922 China

ink and pigment on paper

Purchased, 1975

AS22-1975

Wu Zangkan was the son of Wu Changshuo. This work, created when Wu Zangkan was forty-seven years old, shows great potential in the use of calligraphic strokes (in the coiling stems of the wisteria) and subtle gradation of colours. If he had not died at the age of fifty-two, Wu Zangkan would have become a great painter. Here, traditional use of calligraphic strokes is combined with modern use of opaque colours, probably influenced by European paintings. The subtle shadings of colours for each leaf are picked up by the wet brush and then, in one brushstroke, the form, texture and the different colours of the leaf are created.

The artist has inscribed a poetic couplet: *Coiling the green bamboos [are] wisteria blossoms; Flying white [brushstrokes] no need to ask Ziyun [possibly a person].* This is followed by the year 1922, intercalary month, *Anji* [place name], and *Wu Zangkan imitating a monk of rice porridge.*

WU Zhen 吳鎮
Chinese 1280–1354

Bamboo in spring rain 墨竹
early 14th century, China
ink on silk

Presented through the NGV Foundation by Jason Yeap,
Founder Benefactor, 2005

2005.532

Wu Zhen was a scholar-artist, one of the four great masters of the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368). Although he received a good education, Wu Zhen never attempted the examination to become an official. He lived a meagre life, relying on painting for a living. The bamboo is painted in swift calligraphic brushstrokes. Each bamboo leaf is painted or 'written' in one brushstroke. The painting is a segment of nature, evocative of spring rain. The windswept bamboo, drooping with rain, is shooting with new leaves. 'Written' with animated brushstrokes, the bamboo is dancing in the wind.

WU Zuoren 吴作人

Chinese 1908–97

Pandas and bamboo 熊猫图

1964 China

album: ink on paper, 8 paintings, cardboard, paper, silk and gold leaf cover, concertina glued binding

Gift of an anonymous donor, 2007

2007.791

Wu Zuoren was an artist of traditional Chinese painting as well as of Western painting in oil. From 1929 to 1930 Wu studied in France. He then studied in the Royal Brussels Academy, Belgium, and in 1931 was awarded a Gold Medal. He was the first artist to choose pandas as a subject matter for painting, and he is yet to be surpassed in this genre. In 1980 Wu and his wife Xiao Shufang (born 1911), a renowned painter of flowers, visited Melbourne in association with the exhibition *Chinese Paintings of the Ming and Qing Dynasties*, which was first held at the National Gallery of Victoria, and then toured to the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, and Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide. They both visited the Melbourne Zoo and enjoyed looking at the koalas.

WU Zuoren 吴作人

Chinese 1908–97

Pandas and bamboo 熊猫图

1964 China

album: ink on paper, 8 paintings, cardboard, paper, silk and gold leaf cover, concertina glued binding

Gift of an anonymous donor, 2007

2007.791

The first painting is inscribed with the year 1964, when the paintings were executed, followed by the name of the artist and his seal. The pandas are portrayed in a bamboo grove, feeding on bamboo leaves. With a great mastery of ink and brush, Wu Zuoren has captured the lively and playful nature of the pandas with a maximum economy of means. A mere brushstroke depicts the eyes and gaze of a panda, and the wet ink spreading out on the paper with subtle tonality evokes the fur of the animal. The bamboo leaves and shoots are each painted with one brushstroke.

ZHANG Ruitu 張瑞圖

Chinese 1570–1641

River landscape 溪山草堂圖

1628 China

ink on silk

Purchased, 1994

AS12-1994

Zhang Ruitu was a high official and a fine poet, painter and calligrapher. In the quest of spiritual enlightenment, he immersed himself in Buddhist philosophy and meditation. He signed himself as 'man of the mountain' at the 'Fruit Pavilion'. This mountain retreat is Zhang's spiritual refuge and 'fruit' refers to the fruit of spiritual cultivation. The sparse landscape also portrays a state of mind, inner calm and stillness, cleansed of 'dusty' worldly thoughts and human presence. A master calligrapher, Zhang shows remarkable control and sensitivity in the use of brush and ink. Mist and waterfalls are created by the blank surface of the silk.

WANG Gai 王概

Chinese active c. 1677–1705

Landscape 山水圖

17th century, China

album: ink and pigment on paper, 12 leaves,
silk and cardboard, glued concertina binding

Gift of Kenneth Myer, 1976

AS27-1976

In this album of twelve leaves, Wang Gai, a scholar-amateur artist, has expressed his experience of the seasonal changes in the Jiangnan (South of the Yangtze River) region of China. Wang was a native of Xiushui, Zhejiang province, but lived in Nanjing for most of his life. He became well known as the author of *Jieziyuan huajuan* (*Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting*), the most influential of all Chinese instructional manuals on painting.

HUANG Shen 黃慎

Chinese 1687–1768

Birds and flowers 花鳥圖

mid 18th century, China

album: ink and pigments on paper, 10 leaves,
cardboard and silk cover, glued binding

Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria with the assistance
of the Estate of Miss G. S. Grimwade, Fellow, 1982

AS27-1982

Huang Shen was one of the eight eccentric masters of Yangzhou. He specialised in figure painting and was proficient in flowers and insects, as well as landscapes. Huang was a professional painter and emulated the scholar-amateur painters in expressing himself with calligraphic brushstrokes and poetic inscriptions.

HUANG Shen 黄慎

Chinese 1687–1768

Red Orchid 蘭花

mid 18th century, China

album leaf, from an album of 10 leaves ink and pigments on paper

Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria with the assistance of the Estate of Miss G. S. Grimwade, Fellow, 1982

AS27-1982

The spray of red orchid sketched with swift brushstrokes in red and green is cropped at the top. A poem, written in a highly individualistic style of cursive calligraphy, is integrated with the painting into an abstract design and is translated:

The newly-ripe cherries scatter like coins of elm seeds.

It is also April in Yangzhou.

Last night red orchids in the thatched hut burst into blossom.

Worrying about the wind and rain [that might ruin the blossoms], unable to sleep.

Simplified and abbreviated, the Chinese characters appear broken up, united by a scattering rhythm.

CHAO Shao-an (ZHAO Shaoang)

趙少昂

Chinese 1905–98

A pair of calligraphy

1989 Hong Kong

ink on paper

Gift of Jason Yeap OAM through the
Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2012

2012.279.a-b

Chao Shao-an was born in Guangzhou (Canton) in Guangdong province, southern China. He has lived through a turbulent period of political history. In 1948, a year before the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Chao left China and settled in Hong Kong, then a British colony. Teaching there from 1948, Chao made the Lingnan school of painting the most popular style in Hong Kong and among Chinese artists overseas.

A poem in the form of a couplet is written in the semi-cursive style of calligraphy. It reads, from right to left: *Mountains on four sides can all enter a painting.* The left scroll reads: *In a year, not a day passed without looking at flowers.* On the left scroll the artist has also inscribed the following: *In the [cyclical year of] yisi [1989], the third month in spring, the light rain has just past, Chao Shao-an painted at the Chanyan Studio, at the time eighty-five years old.*

HUANG Yongyu 黄永玉

Chinese 1924–

Cat 猫圖

1989 China

ink and gouache on paper

Gift of Jason Yeap OAM and Wong Min Lee through
the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2010

2010.126

Huang is a painter, graphic artist, illustrator, cartoonist and satirist. During the Cultural Revolution, which took place from 1966 to 1976, Huang was severely denounced. This painting was created in Melbourne, possibly after the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989. The poem titled 'Sharing the Warmth and the Tragicomedy of Life' is translated:

During the Cultural Revolution, [we were] frightened with the fear that some crazy fellow [red guards] would break our doors, search our house and confiscate our property.

Whenever he [cat] heard the slightest noise, he was filled with fear and immediately jumped to a high place at the rooftop of the house.

He shared the terror with the family. For the concerns of man to be visited on animals in this way was yet another injustice [of the times].

CHEN Hongshou 陳洪綬

Chinese 1598–1652

Plum-blossom study

梅(棣)花書屋

mid 1640s, China

ink on paper

Felton Bequest, 1991

AS1-1991

In 1644 Chen Hongshou, from a scholar-gentry class, witnessed the Manchu conquest of Ming China. This poem, composed by Chen and written in the expressive semi-cursive style, is autobiographical. It speaks of the devastation of war. By implication China, like the plum blossom, will survive foreign rule and regenerate herself in spite of the hostile snow and frost. The poem reads:

*The Plum-blossom study is crowded by
chariots of war,*

*I have already lost my home but my uncle
has a house;*

*In dreams, I go to the plum blossoms and
wake up in the study,*

*But thick frost and light snow have finished
the blossoming plums [Chinese civilization].*

Kim Hoa TRAM (SHEN Jinhe)

沈金和

Chinese, born Vietnam 1959, worked in Australia
1984–

The Way, a spiritual path 人道

2005 Melbourne

ink on paper

Purchased with funds from the Victorian Foundation
for Living Australian Artists, 2005

2005.495

This painting is inspired by the philosophy of Zen (*Chan* in Chinese) Buddhism. Simple, elegant brushstrokes suggest the back of a monk and also a mountain. A sweeping movement of calligraphy flows like a stream. Or it could be the flowing robes of the monk, or the words he is chanting:

Led by our karma, we come to this life.

Loaded with karma, we depart from this world.

In life, so many anxieties, a lot of confusion.

*We simply cannot free ourselves from the
perplexities of delusions.*

*Perhaps, in this state of confusion, the Way (Dao)
[to spiritual enlightenment] will sprout forth.*

WANG Gai 王概

Chinese active c. 1677–1705

Listening to the rain 聽雨圖

album leaf, from an album of 12 leaves

17th century, China

ink and pigment on paper

Gift of Mr Kenneth Myer, 1976

AS27-1976

In a secluded corner of the lake, a solitary figure of the artist takes shelter in a boat and listens to the spring rain. The painting is accompanied by a poem by the artist:

Trees full of blossoming wisteria cover thatched huts

Waterbirds stand in a lake of spring water

*Fishing boats, facing my window, take shelter
for the night*

At dawn, misty lamps resemble a string of stars.

Beyond my boat, lake clouds are like flowing water

*Ten miles of beaded curtains bring back memories
of Yangzhou*

This solitary sail only allows me to keep a long flute

*Fully loaded with wanderings through rain and
mist in Jiangnan.*

WU Changshuo 吳昌碩

Chinese 1844–1927

Bamboo and rock 竹石圖

1915 China

ink on paper

Purchased, 1975

AS21-1975

Wu Changshuo painted the bamboo and rock with calligraphic brushstrokes and inscribed a poem about the moral virtues of bamboo:

Not keeping company with assorted trees

Dragon grandchildren [bamboo shoots], phoenix tails [bamboo leaves], brushing the blue clouds

Most people just carry on the empty talk of the 'three friends of winter'.

But only this gentleman [bamboo] is straight [upright], joined [with integrity] and open-minded [hollow stem].

The bamboo, one of the 'three friends (pine, bamboo, prunus) of winter', is a metaphor for uprightness and resilience, as illustrated by the popular saying that 'the bamboo bends before the wind but does not break'.

HUANG Binhong 黄宾虹

Chinese 1864–1955

Landscape 山水圖

1922 China

ink on paper

Felton Bequest, 1975

AS1-1975

Huang Binhong's secluded landscape is inspired by a poem by Tao Zongyi (c.1360), a scholar of the Ming dynasty (1364–1644):

In broad daylight the surround is quiet.

*With birds singing and not a care in the world,
I am sleeping in.*

*[Everywhere] creeping vegetation is extending
in long tendrils.*

Green roof and thin thatched eaves,

Whenever the rain passes the bamboo wall,

*Winds [come through] the window and play
with my books.*

No longer is there any track of horses and carriages.

[Yet] I am taking delight in my rustic hut.

*What is there for me to linger over those
[worldly aims]?*

By nature, I enjoy solitude.

HUANG Binhong 黄宾虹

Chinese 1864–1955

Landscape 山水圖

c. 1942 China

ink and pigments on paper

Felton Bequest, 1975

AS2-1975

Huang Binhong had a distinguished literary career and was an art historian and theoretician, a connoisseur and collector, as well as an archaeologist and philologist. He travelled widely in China, visiting scenic mountains and drawing inspiration from nature and old masters, as expressed by this landscape and inscription:

In the Emei Mountain [in Sichuan province] there is a Longmen [dragon gate] gorge.

The mountain ranges are steep and precipitous.

With the conception of the paintings of the Northern Song [960–1127] I did this painting.

The seal at the bottom right corner reads: *Going off on a long journey all by myself, I am both carefree and self-contented.*

DING Yanyong 丁衍庸

Chinese 1902–78

Reeds and wild geese

鴻雁水草圖

1975 Hong Kong

ink on paper

Purchased with funds donated by Westpac Banking Corporation
and NGV Supporters of Asian Art, 2010

2010.43

This painting is inspired by the expressive calligraphic style of Bada Shanren (1626–1705), who was known as the mad monk painter. The living creatures are personified with human expressions. Tension and drama is created by the confrontation of the predators and prey. The poem, a part of the abstract composition of the painting, reads:

*Wild geese returning from south in pairs,
A solitary fish swimming in the water,
This scene most fitting for a moonlit night,
Water reeds blossom in a shallow river bank.*

Bi Haizhou 碧海舟

Chinese 1954–

Two lohans 羅漢圖

c. 1992 China

ink and pigment on paper

Purchased through The Art Foundation of Victoria with
the assistance of The Sidney Myer Fund, Governor, 1998

1998.280

This painting depicts two lohans, Buddhist holy men who have attained the stage of self-realisation but are yet to develop the Bodhisattva ideal of universal salvation. The calligraphy, an integral part of the painting, is quoted from a seventh-century writing on the temple wall by the highly learned Chinese Buddhist monk Shenxiu, from the north, to show his understanding of Buddhism when it was time to choose the sixth patriarch of Zen (*Chan* in Chinese) Buddhism, which began in China in the sixth century. It reads:

The body is the wisdom-tree

The mind is a bright mirror in a stand;

Take care to wipe it all the time

And allow no dust to cling.

ZHANG Huan 張洄

Chinese 1965–,
worked in United States 1998–

Shanghai family tree

上海家譜圖

2001 Shanghai
type C photographs

Purchased with funds donated by
Jason Yeap and Min Lee Wong, 2008

2008.95.a-i

After receiving his artistic training and holding several art performances in China, Zhang Huan moved to New York in 1998. In this set of nine photographs, Zhang Huan has introduced the traditional art of Chinese calligraphy to contemporary art, writing directly on the faces of three people, including the artist to the right of each photograph. The writing becomes denser and the faces become darker until finally, in the last photograph, the faces become totally black, with high-rise apartments behind them.

Chinese has the expression *mianse*, which literally means 'the colour of the face', and by extension means complexion and subtle facial expression. There is a Chinese saying that someone's face colour (*mianse*) expresses more than what he or she actually says. Of this work one may ask: do the black faces express anger, hopelessness or a way of hiding feelings?

CHINESE

Water pot with spoon

水壺和匙

possibly late Ming dynasty 16th century,
China

stone (waterpot), metal (spoon)

Purchased, NGV Supporters of Asian Art, 2013

This water container was placed on a scholar's desk, along with the 'four treasures' of brush, paper, ink stick and ink stone. The water container was usually placed next to the ink stone. This example is unique insofar as it is made of stone and is in the shape of a shoe. It is paired with a metal spoon adorned by a dragon head at the tip of the handle. The metal spoon was used to scoop water from the water pot onto the ink stone.

With the water, the ink stick was then ground into black ink on the ink stone.

In the *Dao*, or way of self-cultivation, the water container is seen to calm the mind and nourish the spirit, washing away the dust (i.e. worldly concerns) of the dusty world (i.e. banal world), and hence purify the mind.

CHINESE

Ink stone 墨硯

Qing dynasty, Qianlong period 1778, China
stoneware

Gift of Miss Mow Fung, 1959

124.a-c-D5

This ink stone is made of fine clay, brownish-black in colour with green streaks. When covered, the ink stone resembles a crouching tiger. The ink-grinding surface, on which an ink stick was ground with water, is slightly concave. The ink pool is in the shape of a yin yang symbol, with the yin side as the pool where the ink accumulates.

Inscribed on the underside of the cover are verses in clerical style by Emperor Qianlong (r. 1736–95) of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), dated 1778, followed by two imperial seals. An almost identical ink stone is in the collection of the National Palace Museum in Taipei, Taiwan.

CHINESE

**Scholar's rock
used as a brush stand** 笔架

unknown date (rock),
early 19th century (base), China
Lingbi rock, wood

Purchased, NGV Supporters of Asian Art and Karen
and Leon Wender in memory of Ross Stretton, 2013

2013.5

For thousands of years, Chinese scholars sought spiritual refuge in nature, where they found solace from the demands of politics and official duties. Scholars built gardens in which rockeries represent mountains. On their scholars' desks, miniature rocks also symbolised mountains. By contemplating these majestic rock formations, the scholars were transported in imagination to the wilds of nature without having to leave their urban residence.

Rocks collected from nature were put on a stand and used as a brush rest. This sculptural rock is evocative of a mountain range, with rising and falling peaks, and the Chinese character *shan* (山), meaning mountain. The character symbolises three peaks of a mountain.

CHINESE

Scholar's desk screen

大理石插屏

Qing dynasty 19th century, China
marble, wood

Felton Bequest, 1976

AS10.a-b-1976

This desk screen is made of a circular marble plaque framed in a wooden stand. The white marble with dark and light black markings is evocative of a landscape with a mountain peak in the foreground and distant mountains enveloped by mist. It resembles a misty landscape painting by Mi Fu (1051–1107), with the distant mountains in subtle tonal washes of ink. The ink inscribed this marble picture has unfortunately worn off.

WANG Yuanqi 王原祁

Chinese 1642–1715

The Fuchun Mountains

仿黃子久富春長卷筆意

1699 China

ink on paper

Purchased through The Art Foundation of Victoria
with the assistance of Alcoa of Australia Limited
and the Alcoa Foundation, Governor, 1987

AS1-1987

The artist's inscription, dated 1699, states: *Modelled on the brush conception of Huang Gongwang's [1269–1354] Fuchun Mountains scroll, Wang Yuanqi.* This is followed by two artist's seals. Read right to left, the landscape is constructed with abstract forms. Clouds and mists are evoked by the paper's blank surface.

Wang Yuanqi was the most innovative master of the orthodox scholar-amateur tradition of painting during the early Qing dynasty (1644–1911). His grandfather Wang Shimin was a pupil of Dong Qichang and leader of the orthodox school of painting. Wang Yuanqi served as a high official and artistic adviser to the Kangxi Emperor (r. 1662–1723). Wang's artistic influence at the court was immense and his style dominated paintings in the court academy.