

MODERN CHINESE ART

The
Khoan and
Michael Sullivan
Collection

Revised and Expanded

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The Khoan and Michael Sullivan Collection

REVISED AND EXPANDED

Ashmolean Museum

Oxford

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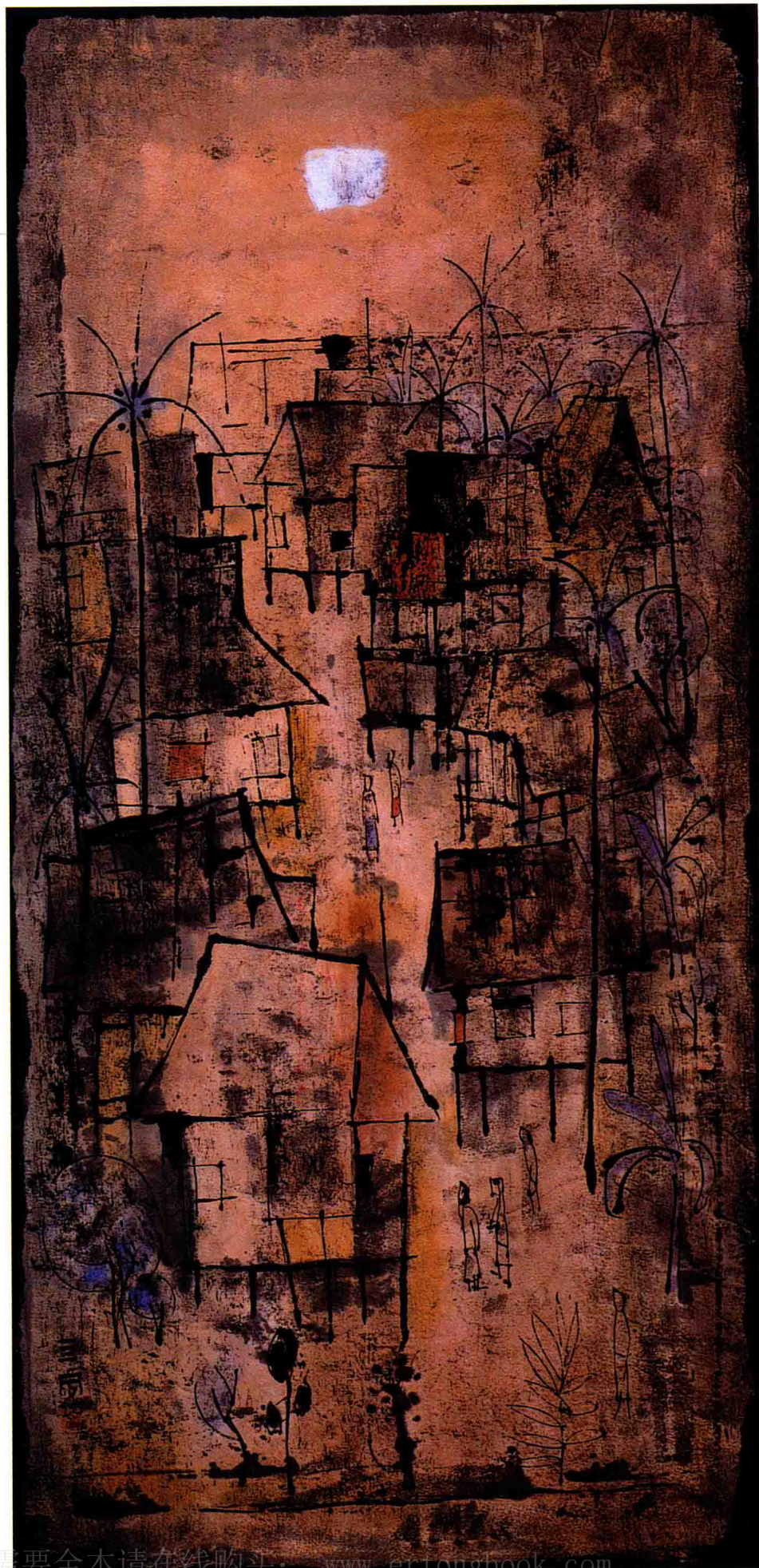
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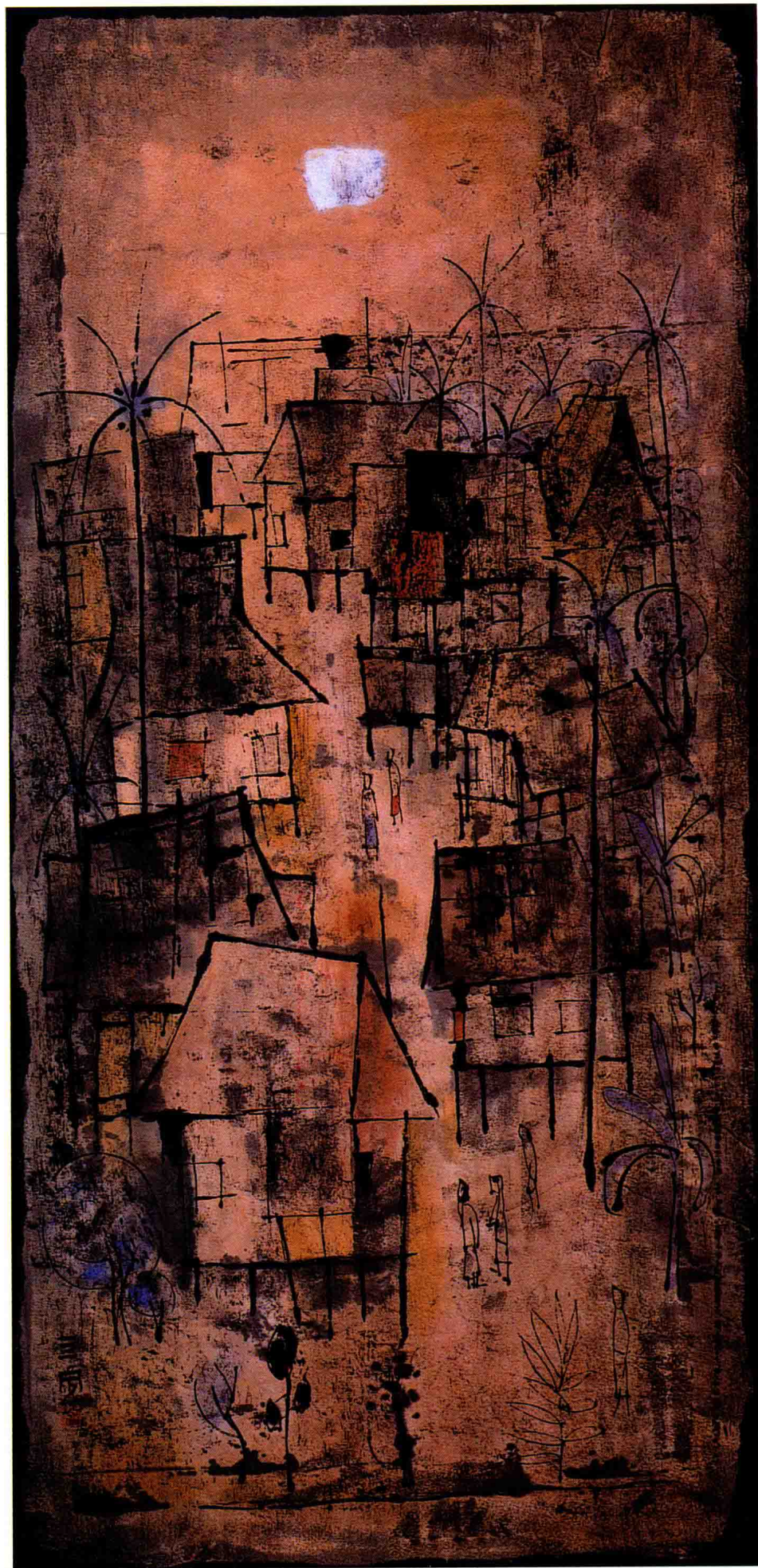


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FOREWORD

This is the catalogue of a unique collection of modern Chinese painting formed by the great scholar and connoisseur of Chinese painting in the West, Michael Sullivan, and his wife Khoan who began collecting in the province of Sichuan in Western China in the 1940s and have continued until today. What makes this such a fascinating collection is not just the Sullivans' great taste and discrimination but the fact that many of the artists represented here were or are friends of Michael and Khoan and so the collection is also the record of many friendships.

The Sullivan collection is being exhibited, very appropriately, in the Khoan and Michael Sullivan Gallery of Chinese Painting at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford during 2001 and 2002. This is the only gallery in the United Kingdom to have been built specifically for the display of Chinese paintings, funded by the Christensen Foundation and an anonymous American benefactor. It was opened in 2000, and along with the generous gift of the Reyes collection, has made the Ashmolean Museum a centre of international repute for the study of twentieth century Chinese paintings.

Michael Sullivan is the world authority on twentieth century Chinese painting. His book *Chinese Art in the Twentieth Century* (1959) was the first ever on the subject, while his *Art and Artists of Twentieth Century China* (1996) provides the most complete survey and includes biographies of the artists. In the present catalogue he gives a personal account of his engagement with Chinese painting and his meetings and friendships with the artists.

Michael and Khoans' move from Stanford to Oxford has been of lasting benefit to Oxford University, and to the Ashmolean Museum in particular, and we welcome the opportunity of publishing and exhibiting this remarkable collection for the first time.

CHRISTOPHER BROWN
Director

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Khoan and I would like to express our warmest thanks to everyone who has been involved, in one way and another, in the making of our collection, and in the exhibition of selections from it at the Ashmolean Museum.

First of all, our gratitude goes to the artists without whose generosity we would never have formed our collection at all. Recently we have bought a few pictures, but most of them were given to us over nearly sixty years by the artists, as recorded in the following pages. Our debt to them is immeasurable.

We would like to express our thanks to Dr. Christopher Brown, Director of the Ashmolean Museum, for his support and for writing the Foreword to this catalogue, and in particular to thank Shelagh Vainker, Keeper of Chinese Art, for her great help in arranging the two exhibitions. It is a pleasure to work with her. Also our thanks go to David Gowers and his colleagues in the Photographic Department of the Museum, to Ian Charlton, Publications Officer, to Behram Kapadia, who designed this handsome catalogue, and to my conscientious copy editor Helen Kemp.

We would not have been able to build up our collection without the help of a number of gallery owners and friends of whom I can name but a few: Michael Goedhuis (London); In Hong Kong; Harold Wong, Alice King (Alisan Fine Arts) and Johnson Zhang (Hanart TZ); Mel Maggio (CourtYard Gallery, Beijing); Arnold Chang and L. J. and Carol Wender (New York). Our warm thanks go to them all.

I have had valuable help with the reading of inscriptions from David Hawkes, James McMullen and Wang Tao, while much work on the Catalogue has been done by Xiu Huajing Maske, Liling Hsiao and Lin Hsiaoting. Most recently, Hiromi Kinoshita has been involved with checking the illustrations and other valuable secretarial and editorial help. The hours we have spent with these young scholars have been among our happiest since we came to Oxford.

Finally, none of this would have happened if Khoan and I had not moved from Stanford to Oxford at the invitation of Alan Bullock, Founding Master of St. Catherine's College, with the generous backing of Allen and Carmen Christiansen and their family. So it is with deepest pleasure that Khoan and I acknowledge our debt to Alan, to his wife Nibby, and to the Fellows of St. Catherine's, whose hospitality have given us so much pleasure over the last twenty years and more.

Since the above was written eight years ago, Khoan has died, and the collection stands as a memorial to her. Over the years it has grown, chiefly through the generosity of the artists whose names are recorded with the works they gave us, and to whose friendship and generosity I owe so much.

In recent years, a selection of works from the collection has been exhibited in the Lakeside Art Centre, University of Nottingham (2005), the Oriental Museum, University of Durham (2006), Seattle Art Museum, and Asia House, London (2008).

To the list of those to whom I am indebted for work on this new edition, I am happy to add the names of D. Phil. students at Oxford, past and present. They include Dr Josh Yiu Sifu, now with the Seattle Art Museum, and Celine Lai, Deng Fei, Jiang Qiqi, Chen Xin and Chen Yi who, as I write, are still at Oxford. Additional photography has been done by Wang Ruohong, proof-reading by Dr. He Weimin, and the book has been designed, as before, by Behram Kapadia and seen through the Press by the Publications Officer, Declan McCarthy.

MICHAEL SULLIVAN

Oxford

March 2009



INTRODUCTION



ABOVE: *Ding Cong*. Cartoon of Michael Sullivan, Chengdu, 1945.

OPPOSITE: Zhang Daqian with Khoan Sullivan at his exhibition in the Stanford University Art Museum, 1967. *Photo by Leo Holub*.

Khoan and I never set out to be collectors. In fact, it is only very recently that we have begun to consider ourselves as collectors at all – because other people said we were. We never planned our acquisitions. Over the years, paintings and prints, drawings, a few albums and fewer pieces of sculpture came to us, chiefly as gifts from the artists, with one valuable bequest. Only recently have we bought paintings, and our aim in buying will be made clear later on.

The Chinese tend to look on works of art not only as precious in themselves, but as symbols of friendship. In this respect, Khoan and I have been extraordinarily fortunate. Our friendship with artists began in Chengdu, Sichuan, in the mid-1940s. Chengdu, with its own two universities and five refugee ones from ‘down river’, was just out of range of the Japanese bombers (unlike the wartime capital Chongqing), and had become a haven for artists, writers, theatre people, scholars and teachers from the coastal cities. Guilin, ‘the Paris of Free China’, was another centre of cultivated life until it was overrun by the Japanese in 1944. In Chengdu, Khoan was working as a bacteriologist, making small-pox vaccines for the Public Health Service, while I was on the staff of West China University Museum, teaching and working in Sichuan archaeology under Cheng Te-k’un.

So it was in Chengdu that our collecting began, and it was there that Khoan in her own special way began to build bridges and open doors for me, who would otherwise always have been looked on as a foreigner. Some of the artists we came to know had already made adventurous journeys into the western borderlands – an activity that was to be taken up again after ‘Liberation’ by artists anxious to escape from the stifling conformity of Beijing and Shanghai. Wu Zuoren had travelled in Gansu, Qinghai and Xichang, and gave us an oil sketch of a local market scene from which he later, on our verandah, made the much larger painting now in the National Gallery, Beijing. Pang Xunqin had spent a year among the Miao Minority of western Guizhou and Yunnan; he gave the beautiful paintings of peasants and Miao people and his exquisite Tang dancers to us at that time; Ding Cong – Xiao ‘little’ Ding – had travelled among the Qiang and Lele minorities of western and south-western