



# 范曾

## 书画集

Album of Calligraphy and Paintings by

# FAN ZENG

People's

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# 范曾书画集

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## FAN ZENG' S ART TRAVELS FAR AND WIDE

### WRITTEN AFTER VISITING THE EXHIBITION OF FAN ZENG' S CALLIGRAPHY AND PAINTINGS

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On hearing of burglary in my house, friends told me, Fan Zeng tossed his head back and burst out laughing in such delight that his throat was said to be seen. Great, indeed, I told them. Only one with such a mighty heart deserves the epithet of "great master." For who else could have reacted the way he did? Now I know who knows me best. It is he.

Here on the *Xuan* paper effulgent with a silvery sheen, every dot or stroke possesses an uncommon ulterior sense. Uncommon it has to be, as otherwise neither calligraphy nor painting would be of any worth. Here it is that the accomplishment in brush, wrist, workmanship and learning all finds adequate expression along with the endowment of grace, vigor, integrity and talent, all which distinguish the unique from the mediocre. Every word in a classic poem of Li Po weighs as pure gold; every phrase from an aria of Mei Lan-fang's opera pours forth veritable pearls. The pearl is the sea condensed; gold is extracted from the whole of the universe. Neither is attainable without a prodigious power to contain, congeal, and coalesce. All inclusiveness and thorough mastery are the salient features of Chinese culture, exhibiting as they do its profundity, magnificence and grandeur. For the Chinese artist they are also the base and the summit on which he stands. With the base set on the summit, the eye receives into its embrace winds and clouds, sun and moon, magnificent rivers and majestic mountains, expansive plains and limitless deserts, and the currents of a vas-flowing vigor which circulates through these all.

Fan Zeng's mind began its tour from the deeps of history. It moved its steps then to Lao-Zhuang, then to Zen Buddhism, to the grove of steles, to the gallery of paintings, to poetry, to the ancients, to Nature, to the outlandish and to the Chinese. History vests him with an insight into the quintessence of reality. Life inspires him with a zeal for artistic creation. Zenist ecstasy keeps the tip of his brush from indulging in a dazzling display of technique. Poetic conception restores his rational contemplation to an esthetic appreciation of a higher order. Attainment in calligraphy endows his facile brush with a power to penetrate the surface of the paper. A

symbolic vision adds to his writing art a touch of the abstract. And comparison between Chinese and foreign art affords him a greater measure of self-confidence and self-awareness on the spur of which he goes forth to open the channels for an ancient culture to flow out to contemporary civilization.

With all these at work, Fan Zeng has designed a solid, colossal framework for the life of his art with calligraphy as its bone and poetry its soul.

Thus his poetry, calligraphy and painting fuse into one integral whole and usher people into a realm of power and grandeur.

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The works of Fan Zeng often give me a curious sensation. His characters, be it a man of eminence and virtue, an illustrious monk, an immortal of wine, an unruly and unconventional scholar, a country rustic, a washing maid, or an innocent child, and his wild crane, idle cloud, gurgling stream, torrential cataract, coiling pinetree, and crag of a weird, grotesque shape — all these are so many manifestations of the artist himself, with his unrestrained disposition, his suave and carefree spirit, and his magnanimous, dynamic bearing.

The mind of the artist is a melting-pot with the heat of a sun, into which the knowledge, experience, methods and stratagems of previous generations vanish and undergo transmutation. These then silently flow into the hot veins of the artist and, once touched off by inspiration, burst out into lava of a kind which shines forth the splendor of intense individuality. Among the tens of thousands of faces in the crowd one's own is the one unique and irreplaceable, which alone represents the highest value of art. The knowledge of books is by no means bookish knowledge, just as the fragrance of a wine differs in kind from the odour of its fermented malt. What the artist receives includes all ancient and modern, Chinese and foreign; what he pours forth is his soul. Although, in the texture of a line or curve in which Fan Zeng is adept can be seen the breezy ease of Zhou Fang, the earthwormy vigor of Zhang Ze-duan, the engraved and chiselled primitive simplicity of Chen Lao-lian, the quintessence of the eighteen linear styles, and the imposing air of *The Eighty-Seven Immortals*, nonetheless, neither Zhou Fang, nor Chen Lao-lian, nor Zhang Ze-duan is indeed anywhere visible: the original forms of both eighteen and eighty-seven have been digested completely. The keener the appetite of art is, the stronger its digestive power. Facile but not slick, primitive but not abrupt, vigorous but not stagnant — these are what Fan Zeng himself bodies forth. The line that varies with a varying character or intention or sentiment is also an opening forth of Fan Zeng himself. Every stroke of *The Eight Drinking Immortals* reveals the unruly haughtiness of the poets who "refuse to embark even at the call of the emperor." Every line of *The Venerable One* transcends worldliness and conventionality as does the pure, transparent mind of the noble man. What the brush flings off its tip in *Imitating Both Man and Nature* is the inexhaustible vitality of a boundless cosmos. What dances across *Tending the Crane* is an uncontrollable, sweeping pathos. I love especially those two imposing lines which delineate the pair of blind eyes of Jian Zhen the monk, for those lines

seem to embody the whole life and inner world of the Great Master, with his bitterness, pertinacity, suffering, and rectitude. Had the eyes opened, they would, I am sure, have pupils bright enough to illuminate the whole world.

Why does Fan Zeng pick out just these ancient sages and saints who enjoy popular love and reverence, these upright, magnanimous, indomitable personages, for artistic representation? Is it because these people embody the spirit, virtue, courage and insight, and ideals and aspirations of the Chinese nation and prove themselves conducive to the genius of the artist? Or because the artist finds in them the medium through which to complete the quest he has taken upon himself as a man? Quest is the cutting edge of individuality. It is always in unequivocal quest that art displays its individual character. This is probably the reason why the paintings of Fan Zeng never fail to remind one of Fan Zeng the man.

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Portrait painting underwent a steady decline after the Tang dynasty, largely as a result of the inhibitions and restraints which the feudal society placed on the life of the mind. The imprisoned mind became rigid and ossified so that the creative power of the whole nation withered. There followed a chain of reaction such as the absence of innovative impulse in science and technology and the stagnancy in social development. To seek personal safety most painters stayed away to find sanctuary in the mountain mist, the shimmering waves, the scent of flowers, and the twitter of birds. A corollary of such an abnormal outlet of talent was enthusiasm for mountains, streams, flowers and birds on the one hand and indifference to portraits on the other. The want of social purpose in painting became conspicuous. As what relates most closely to the social thought of the time is still portrait painting, the lively atmosphere in the realm of social thinking since the May 4th Movement has led to its sudden revival. The development of new portraits in the last few decades has turned an almost dried-up course into a river swollen with rushing torrents and glistening with the flash of rolling waves. There is seen Fan Zeng, along with those who battle with wind and wave in midstream, dauntlessly forging ahead.

The most important bequest which Chinese painting receives from the past is the principle of "the reproduction of the spirit." The "spirit" of the figures in portrait painting, which constitutes its very quintessence, consists in their manner, mood, mien, and mind. Of these the last, namely, the inner mental activity, is the most difficult to represent. Fan Zeng's *Yi Xing Looks at the Sky*, which I love best, portrays the eminent monk, the epitomy of Chinese wisdom in astronomy, meditating with eyes closed, lost in contemplation of celestial phenomena, his face faintly betraying beneath a serene and reassured countenance the intensity of the ruminations in his mind. And the movement of the hands throws into relief his inner comprehension and calculations. At that very moment all in heaven, a change of wind and cloud, a roaring thunder, or a flash of lightning, seems to be channelled into his head. It is evident that Yi Xing will surely emerge victor from the mystical contest between human intellect and Nature. This hymn of praise to man, superbly conceived, is warbled forth in a truly sublime style.

In the use of ink this painting can also be rated as a work of consummate virtuosity. The vestment is drawn with an indulgent splash of ink, whereas the face and the hands are just linear sketches meticulously executed. In one case ink is valued as gold, yet in the other gold is squandered as so much dirt. The former exhibits workmanship; the latter, vigor and daring. In contrast alone inheres emphasis, and by means of emphasis the workings of the human mind are revealed in peerless precision.

Art is in essence creation out of nothing. It is a blank piece of paper before the pen touches it. The fine tip of a brush and a tiny blot of Chinese ink both make for creation. How does a blade of grass or a block of stone become art? The figure of a human being and the shape of a physical object are gifts from life; import and passion spring from feeling and sensation. As to the mind, charm, quality, conception, implication, profundity, bearing, and strength of character, these are abstruse and unfathomable, all the more so in view of the fact that they are all to be fused into the narrow space of a painting. The feat is never achievable if the artist does not diffuse his own flesh and blood and soul in between the brush-touch and the ink-dribble.

The best way of making friends with a true artist is through appreciating his works. Every time I look at Fan Zeng's paintings, I experience with him a communion of minds. As everyone knows this, they all enjoy his calligraphy, painting, and poetry. The greatest happiness for an artist comes from the fact that the characters in his creations have a wider circle of friends than he does and travel much farther. Fan Zeng is one of those blessed; though he stays at home, his characters roam the whole world.

Feng Ji-cai

Tianjin

January, 1988

## FROM ANTIQUITY TO ETERNITY

### PREFACE TO THE ALBUM OF FAN ZENG'S CALLIGRAPHY AND PAINTINGS

Just as the Yellow River flows from lofty mountains to boundless seas, so the Yangtze runs from antiquity to eternity. The view of a sail riding blue waves or a moon floating over silvery ripples tends to throw one into ecstasies. Hence the exclamation of a rapturous Du Fu: "Deathless as the ever-flowing rivers."

In the infinity of time and space there has existed another river in China, one which flows from the reality of the artist's soul to the ideal celestial kingdom of man, an eternal stream likewise endless and illimitable.

In the ceaseless march of time, a good many people have paced the meandering shore, trying in vain to wade across, and as many more have been afloat, drifting toward nothingness. . . . For humanity entire, the twentieth century, with its great joys and sorrows and drastic rises and falls, represents but "a moment in eternity." For those not courageous enough to attempt the crossing, it is such a dull and dismal long scroll and such an inaccessible grand stage, but for "a frolicker with waves" like Fan Zeng it is so full of sound and color.

The rays of history bring their light to focus;

The cool eye intersects the warm in its gaze.

Our painter, tearing through surging waves and riding astride a great roc in a refreshing breeze, is seen roaming in a twinkling in a valley of waves or sauntering on a tidal crest, leaving behind him a bright moon, a perfect rainbow, a cry of wonder, and a sigh of admiration, in addition to the ever-perplexing enigma of the Sphinx.

Mr. Fan Zeng detests enigmas, as indeed all dedicated artists do. For enigmas are in fact nothing but so many legendary tales which well-intentioned readers tend to fabricate.

An adept in the consummate art of poetry, calligraphy and painting, Mr. Fan Zeng writes an exquisitely subtle verse and paints with a talent enough to blend the seven hues of the spectrum. Although he has been through many vicissitudes of life, his climb up to the top of the Pyramid

has been staunch and steady. If one sizes up the spiritual world of the painter in the candlelight of his personality, one can see a panorama of peaks and valleys, and of pools and ponds which are clear and transparent to a fault.

The force of Fan Zeng's personlity is inseparable from the daring spirit of his art, just as is the case with simplicity and profundity, and lucidity and suggestiveness.

Fan Zeng's position has always been representing the soul of the nation in the sturdy strokes of the inspired pen.

Thus it is that a Qu Yuan pacing the riverside and pouring out his doleful lays, a Cao Cao mellow with wine, contemplating the ceaseless Yangtze before him, a Yi Xing observing the heavenly bodies, a Bodhi-dharma sitting face to wall for nine years to win through meditation to a thorough understanding of the world, a Nu Wa mending the sky, a child prodigy frolicking on tidal waves, a Zhong Kui dressed in black, a Zhuang Zhou relating his dreams — these and many more appear vivid on paper as if resurrected and swarm into one's vision. In order to represent the glory and dream of this oriental nation, Fan Zeng's painting brush exhibits penetrating insight into both the present and the past, and takes as its province of expression not merely the magnificence and heroism of the human character, but also the wisdom derivable from a moment of conversion and a tenderness and elegance which characterize the poetic mood. Only thus endowed, can Mr. Fan's calligraphy and paintings emit a refreshing exuberance of charm and generate a weighty historical sense.

Of this leading figure who has helped to begin the modern Chinese tradition of portrait painting, those who appreciate his art speak highly of the animating grace, radiating vigor, consummate workmanship, of vigorous strokes, and gorgeous and pure colors, and lines now in the shape of silk worms nibbling at mulberry leaves, now of the tip of an awl running over sand, or of the traces of a roof leaking . . . . Truth there is in all these observations. However, the Chinese painter, who, though just reaching the prime of his life, has journeyed six times to Japan and has seen much of Europe and America, and who has won the largest readership in the world — this man has done more. He has thrown, between the past and today, an exquisite bridge, the cornerstone of which is the steadfast burning love of the artist for real life and the age-old art of Chinese painting.

As Fan Zeng observes, Chinese painting oversteps the physical limits of the temporal and the spatial, revealing a timeless mind and a spaceless vision. Its ultimate aim is not merely to delineate the image of an object, but to evoke emotion through the physical correlative, so that the external and the self vanish, and the artistic conception stays aloof to transcend the variegated phenomenal world and reach, in the union of the personal and the physical, the plane of profundity. Here lies the basic reason why Chinese painting has been able to stay in the gallery of world art and stand the test of time.

In any time of any country, there are only a few artists who embody the wisdom of the whole nation. The spirit of Chinese painting may be submerged in a sea of mediocrity, but this is undoubtedly a transient phenomenon. Like washing gravel in billowy water, "It is hard to pan

and filter without stop, / But gold will appear when all the sands are washed away" (to quote Liu Yu-si).

There has been, in China, a tradition to compare and classify since ancient times. A careful look at the history of painting reveals the fact that every generation produces its own masters of unique talent and feeling. Who then, let us ask, bears any resemblance to Fan Zeng? We may recall Wu Dao-zi of Tang, Liang Kai of Sung, Chen Lao-lian of Ming, or Ren Bo-nian who lived around the end of Qing and the first years of the Republic of China... but none of them does. We do not mean to belittle the ancients; nor do we want to call Fan Zeng great. The fact of the matter is that the very comparative mode of perception is found wanting: None of the great masters can take the place of the others. In the field of intellect it has always been that "one Kui is enough."

The ancients walk over the bridge toward today.

Fan Zeng's art journeys from here to eternity.

Liu Chuan-ming

Hefei, An Hui

Summer, 1987

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THE ALBUM OF FAN  
ZENG'S CALLIGRAPHY  
AND PAINTINGS





画家范曾



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