

# 石田

## 大穰

吴门画派之沈周



Wu School Painting Series: The Art of Shen Zhou

苏州博物馆编 古吴轩出版社







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# 吴门画派宗师沈周

单国霖

明代中期，在苏州地区活跃着一批画家，他们在“浙派”风靡一时之后，继承元末江南地区文人画的传统，创立具有时代气息的文人画新潮流，后世称之为“吴门画派”，沈周是这一画派的创始人。

沈周（1427~1509），字启南，号石田。长洲（今江苏苏州）相城（近阳澄湖）人。出身于文人世家，祖父澄、伯父贞吉、父恒吉，都未应科举，依靠开垦和租赁田地为生。沈周生活的时代，明王朝的政权已得到巩固，社会趋于稳定，经济处于上升阶段，沈周对于汉族统治的朱明王朝是采取拥护态度的。他一生不应科举，隐身乡里，其实是惮于明初治吏的峻刻和畏惧官场争斗的险恶，所采取的一种韬晦保身的处世方式。沈周以儒家道德规范律己，对父母兄弟尽孝悌之道，为人诚挚宽厚，乐于济人之难，善于奖掖后进，他结交的朋友不少是著名的诗人、书画家，又和一些朝廷显宦保持着亲密的友谊。沈周高洁的人品、恬淡温和的性格以及诗文书画的广博才能，深受社会各阶层人士的尊敬，誉重吴中，流播四方，自然地成为吴门艺苑的宗师。

贞吉、恒吉兄弟工诗善画，绘画师从杜琼，杜琼山水师法王绶，上追王蒙，远宗董巨。故贞吉、恒吉画风亦源于王蒙、董巨。沈周受家庭环境的熏陶和祖、父辈的亲授，自幼酷爱诗文书画。他师从学问渊博的陈宽学习诗文，绘画得到杜琼、刘珏的指导。同时，他广交文友和鉴藏家，在友人家里观赏到许多宋元名画，对传统深加研习。此外，沈周也很重视体察自然山川，他曾在一部自画册中题道：“今之画家无不效法宋元，而竟不得其奥解。余尝梦寐深求，间为入室弟子，余未越其藩篱也。此册自谓切要，循乎规矩格法，本乎天然，一水一石皆经耳目所睹，记传其神采。”继承传统和师法自然两者并重，使沈周的绘画突破前人藩篱，开拓出新的面貌。

沈周画艺精博，擅长山水、花鸟、人物各科，尤以山水画成就最著。沈周的山水画题材广泛，从主题内容来归分，大体可分为访胜纪游、文会雅集、书斋别墅、寻访送别、游冶山川等类型，此外还有师古的仿古山水。

沈周一生游履并不广，主要活动在江苏、浙江一带。他经常游览吴中和江浙等地名胜，创作了诸多访胜纪游的佳作。如《两江名胜图册》、《苏台纪胜图册》、《吴门十二景册》、《西山纪游图卷》（上海博物馆藏）、《天平山图轴》、《灵隐山图卷》、《张公洞图卷》、《千人石夜游图卷》（辽宁省博物馆藏）等，写出江南山明水秀、草木葱茏的绮丽风光，同时传导他的主观情绪。如他六十一岁（1487）所作《西山纪游图卷》，描绘苏州洞庭西山丘壑起伏、山路迂曲、泉流淙淙、湖水空阔、村舍掩映的秀美景色，颇具现实感，并抒写畅神适意的情趣。如他自题中所说：“余生育吴会六十年矣，足迹自局……时时棹酒船，放游西山寻诗采药，留恋弥日，少厌平生好游未足之心。归而追寻其迹，辄放笔想像一林一溪、一壑一坞，留几格间自玩。”又如五十九岁（1485）所作的《湖山佳趣图卷》（浙江省博物馆藏），绘写丘壑起伏、溪流湍急、树木郁茂、江水广漠、雁群掠空、山麓间掩映村舍板桥凉亭的景色，是他从浙江西湖游归后纪游之作，将浙中湖山的秀美景象与自己畅神怡适的情感融合成一体，为游览山水之佳作。

沈周一生沉潜于诗文书画，乐于和文朋画友相聚唱酬。在他的作品里，出现大量描绘文人雅集和庭园、书斋的题材。表现文人雅集的典型作品，如《魏园雅集图轴》（1469）（辽宁省博物馆藏），绘写他和刘珏、陈述、祝颢、周鼎、李应祯等人，在魏昌家魏园会饮、赋诗、作画时怡然自乐的情景。《雪夜宴集图卷》绘写杨循吉、赵立夫、陈景东等友人雪夜过访沈周，于客堂宴集的情景。

送别类山水图，有成化十五年（1479）送别吴宽的《吴文定公送行图卷》，弘治十年（1497）又为吴宽画《京



口送别图卷》（上海博物馆藏），两图绘江边舟船待发，送行者或在岸边挥手相送，或在船舱依依话别，朴实无华地表达出他和至友吴宽离别时的缱绻情怀。此类作品还有弘治四年（1491）写沈周、文林（文徵明父）等人在京江送别叙州太守吴愈赴任的《京江送别图卷》（故宫博物院藏）、弘治五年（1492）送宫谕王鏊还京的《送行图卷》、十一年（1498）送文林赴温州任的《虎丘送别图卷》等，都反映出文友之间的真挚友情。

明中期，苏州地区随着经济的发达，财富的积聚，豪门富贾营造花园别墅的风气盛起。苏州最大的园林拙政园，自嘉靖六年（1527）至十七年（1538），营建了十二年时间，园主王献臣曾请文徵明规划造园。一些官员和文士也仿效此风，即便是几间茅屋，也题上一个文雅的堂斋名，布置精巧的花木湖石，构成雅致的居住环境。当时苏州私家花园多达二百多处。如杜琼结草亭于乐圃东隅，名“延绿亭”；刘珏在齐门外依水叠石为山，号“小洞庭”；王鏊在洞庭山建别墅名“招隐园”；沈周在相城筑“有竹居”；文徵明居处名“停云馆”等。这些书斋庭园，是文人生活和举行聚会、观赏书画的场所，很自然地成为画家们喜画的题材。沈周为老师杜琼所画的《东原图卷》，绘写临河坡地上一所丛竹林木翳阴的草亭，即“延绿亭”，简朴又幽静；《东庄图册》（南京博物院藏）画吴宽父亲孟融在阊门内的别墅及周围景色，别墅只是柴栅内几间平屋，更多篇幅以写实的手法直现江南田园风光。此外，《岸波图卷》（苏州博物馆藏）画傍山依水的文人别业，文士踞坐室内，桌上堆满书籍，颇有“高秋气爽，啜茗长啸”的诗意。

成化、弘治以后，苏州地区经济繁荣，社会生活安定，文人热衷于会饮、品茗、垂钓、听泉、赏花、观月、访友、游冶山林等文化型的社交消遣活动，这类文人雅事都在沈周的笔下得到表现。如《盆菊幽赏图卷》（辽宁省博物馆藏），绘写画者与二位友人在郊外茅亭把酒赏菊的悠然情景。《一坞杨梅图轴》（安徽博物院藏）描写作者与友人薛尧卿去杨梅村坞采摘杨梅，因时节已晚，只采得一颗尝味，然而并不懊丧，并为此事作图，在题诗中戏谑地道：“属厌往腹宜为少，适可濡唇不在多。”意在偕友游览尽兴已足矣，不在尝梅多少，传导出文人交际的怡然心态。《桐荫乐志图轴》（安徽博物院藏）画江岸桐荫下，文士盘坐船头垂钓，图上题诗道：“钓竿不是功名具，入手都将万事轻。若使手闲心不及，五湖风月负虚名。”即将垂钓看做是一种精神休闲活动，并不在于钓鱼的收获，意在养心怡神，领略五湖风光之美。此外，并有《听泉图卷》、《柳荫垂钓图轴》、《汲泉煮茗图轴》、《策杖图轴》、《泛舟访友图卷》、《桐荫濯足图轴》等，俱表现出高雅闲适的情趣。

他在这些山水画里，表达了对自然山川的挚爱之情和怡情养性的文人雅趣。就如他在《写生图册》中自题道：“我于蠢动兼生植，弄笔还能窃天机。明日小窗孤坐处，春风满面此心微。戏笔此册，随物赋形，聊自适闲居饱食之兴，若以画求我，则在丹青之外矣。”沈周的山水画构图力求平稳，于平中求奇，境界宁静优雅，充溢着平和怡适的情调，而与元末文人画家的隐逸山水所传导的枯疏空寂的意境迥然相异，注入了入世的愉悦之情，体现了明中期在野文人对自身人生价值和文化精神的充分肯定，这是他所处时代文人精神心理通过绘画形式的映现，他的艺术情趣为吴门画派建立起美学的典范。

沈周的山水画在技法风格方面，经历了前后的衍变，本次特展所选作品大致涵盖了他早、中、晚各个时期的风格面貌，得以一窥他山水画艺术的演进脉络。

文徵明曾阐述沈周的绘画风格递变说：“自其少时作画已脱去家习，上师古人，有所模临，辄乱真迹。然所为率盈尺小景。至四十始拓为大幅，粗枝大叶，草草而成。虽天真烂发，而矩度点染，不若向时精工矣。”

沈周四十岁以前之作，受杜琼、刘珏和父辈影响较深。如《为碧天上人作山水图轴》（瑞士苏黎世莱特堡博物馆藏），自题“辛巳（1461）为碧天上人赠”。是年三十五岁，为传世有确切纪年的最早作品。画法从杜琼直追王蒙，山峦重叠繁复，皴染稠密，多用柔婉的披麻皴、解索皴等，反映他早年精谨缜密的风格特点。又如三十八岁所作《幽居图轴》（日本大阪市立美术馆藏），画山麓溪旁的幽居景致，布局接近刘珏的《清白轩图轴》，技法仿王蒙，又取巨然法，勾斫笔致细碎峭利，皴笔柔长，点叶密集，此图体现出他早岁山水谨细和



稚拙的笔意。《采菱图轴》（日本京都国立博物馆藏）是他丙戌年（1466）四十岁时之作，图式取倪瓒一水两岸简洁布局，笔墨师杜琼和董巨，山峦勾皴圆浑柔长，赭石、花青轻染。此图意境的清寂冷逸沿着元代隐逸山水的主题。但若细细比照，可看到沈周的用笔稍加粗重，趋向简练和豪放，已经开始流露出他自己的性格。

沈周四十岁以后拓为大幅，不仅是指尺幅的扩大，同时包含着笔墨从较工整细密向雄浑简劲的演变，这一转变期大致延续了二十年。在此期间，他继续学习董巨和元四家，同时于宋青绿山水，马远、夏圭流派的刚健粗简画法，兼收并蓄，丰富自己的表现技能。《九段锦图册》（日本京都国立博物馆藏）是沈周用心学习宋元大家的师古之作，其中《采菱图轴》（日本京都国立博物馆藏）一段上有其师杜琼题识，谓“继南（沈周之弟）出其兄所画采菱图求诗”，署年成化七年（1471），时年杜琼七十六岁，沈周四十五岁。此九段锦原为九幅，现存六幅，为仿宋惠崇、赵令穰、赵伯驹，元赵孟頫、赵雍，明王绂等家，佚去仿李成、王蒙、吴镇三幅。内中既有青绿山水，又有小景山水、青山江树、枯木竹石等画题，技法力学各家，颇得神韵。此外，他四十七岁画有《仿董巨山水轴》、四十八岁画有《临吴仲圭峦容山色图轴》、五十八岁画有兼取黄公望、倪瓒的《溪山秋色图轴》（南京博物院藏）等。此外，他研习倪雲林也颇为用心，先后画过多幅仿倪作品，然而往往用笔过于劲强，以致他的老师陈宽有“落笔太过”之评。特展中选入他四十七岁（故宫博物院藏）和五十三岁（上海博物馆藏）时画的《仿倪山水图轴》，布景采用倪氏的一水两岸图式，笔法简疏劲峭，墨色干淡，然较倪显得凝重劲健。他自己曾说道：“倪迂标致令人想，步托邯郸转谬途。笔踪要是存苍润，墨法还须入有无。”倪雲林那种若淡若疏、似嫩实苍的画法，是与他所要表达的幽寂虚空意境相匹配的，而沈周所追求的意境以浑厚苍郁为主，因此很难与雲林契合不二，这种“步托邯郸转谬途”的画法，不应该视做他的缺点，恰是他个性特色的发挥。李日华对此有很中肯的评价：“沈石田仿雲林小笔，虽树石历落，终带苍劲，而各行其天，绝无规模之意。所以较之孟端（王绂），终胜一筹。”

沈周广泛吸取前人的笔墨技法要素，加以融汇。正如王世贞在《艺苑卮言》中所云：“至启南而造妙，凡宋元名手，一一能变化出入，而独于董北苑、僧巨然、李营丘，尤得心印。”沈周中年时期，经过陶铸宋元各家，逐渐形成自己的风格。概括来说尺幅由小变大，景致由繁复转简疏，笔墨由早期较谨细柔婉转向粗重劲健，中锋侧笔并用，长勾短皴兼施，同时他将仿古与自然写生汇为一体，构景多曲折萦回之势，并点缀行人、舟楫、草亭、茅屋等景物，注入人事的生活气息，呈现出气势清旷苍郁、笔墨苍润雄浑的风格特色。

沈周五十八岁时自号“白石翁”，直至八十二岁去世，为他艺术晚期。他晚年倾心于黄公望和吴镇，把黄公望的松秀，吴镇的粗豪，王蒙的缜密，马远、夏圭的刚健，米氏云山的浑凝等技法，有机地融合成一体，形成疏简、苍劲、浑厚、沉郁的风格。此期的作品如六十岁所画《西山纪游图卷》（上海博物馆藏），将董巨的浑厚、黄公望的虚和、吴镇的苍劲、倪瓒的幽淡、王蒙的缜密，交融在一起，笔墨丰富而气势宏阔，是一件集大成的佳作。又如《京江送别图卷》（故宫博物院藏）作于六十六岁，景致简略，近处坡岸众人揖别，中部浩渺江面载一舟辞行，远方群山逶迤，境界开阔澄虚，笔墨洗练粗健，画风简洁苍润，雄劲浑厚，为他晚年典型风格。此外《虎丘恋别图轴》（1490）（无锡博物院藏）、《千人石夜游图卷》（1493）（辽宁省博物馆藏）、《京口送别图卷》（1497）（上海博物馆藏）、《灞桥风雪图轴》（天津博物馆藏）等，都是属于晚年画风的代表作。

沈周在花鸟画领域并有瞩目的成就。他继承了元钱选水墨淡彩和王渊水墨写生的传统，善于运用水墨点染和没骨设色的技法，笔法简洁，形象生动。《九月桃花图轴》（上海博物馆藏）是他较早期的花卉画，图上有其伯父沈贞吉和晚辈张灵的题跋。花瓣用胭脂色轻晕细染，树叶用花青和赭石双色渲染，笔致柔和，树枝勾皴沉凝，表现出九月桃花留住春光的芳华之美，颇有钱选水墨淡彩的遗韵。他在五十四岁时所画的《荔枝图轴》（故宫博物院藏）以水墨染写柿叶和柿实，点染荔枝，浓淡水墨破染，笔法较工整，这显然是继承了元代王渊、张中等水墨花鸟画的技法。苏州博物馆所藏的《花鸟册》，约是他六十岁时之作。不仅画了萱花、桃花、芙蓉、芍药等花卉，还描绘了石榴等果树、雏鸭等家禽，是一部较全面反映他中晚年时期花鸟画特色的作品。花卉多



用没骨设色法，晕染细腻，色彩轻淡；枝条的勾勒简练浑厚，湖石则以浓淡水墨渲染，兼备花卉之风姿和气骨。所画的雏鸭，以简洁的笔墨勾勒点染，而生趣盎然。又如《牡丹图轴》（故宫博物院藏）、《枇杷图轴》（故宫博物院藏）、《荔枝白鹅图轴》（广东省博物馆藏）等，大致都是他五十多岁时的作品，俱运用水墨晕染、点染和色彩没骨的方法来绘写物象。对元代淡彩和水墨没骨法的取习，奠定了他花鸟画的写生根基。

沈周晚年，进一步发展了水墨写意技法，运用笔的勾染点簇和墨的浓淡枯润来绘写物态，信笔挥洒，恣意自如，而深得花卉、蔬果、禽鸟、鳞介各种生物的形态和神采。如《玉楼牡丹图轴》（1507）（南京博物院藏）是他八十一岁时作，以水墨没骨法画牡丹，花瓣在水墨中略渗胭脂红，随意泼染，笔致洒脱，水墨写意技法已达到挥洒自如的境地。《菊花文禽图轴》（1509）（日本大阪市立美术馆藏）是他八十三岁最晚年之作，以水墨写意之笔勾点叶，双勾竹枝和菊瓣，尤精妙的是用随意洒脱的点染法，勾画张翅昂首的雄鸡和两只翩翩起舞的蝴蝶，笔简而神全。从花鸟画史的进程考察，明代中期，元代的水墨花卉禽鸟画技法为明人所继承的同时也发生了演进，出现了孙龙、郭诩、林良、吕纪等一批画家，创造了以写意和没骨设色的方法来表现花鸟的新技法。沈周与他们时代相近，他和郭诩还是好朋友，这些新技法的出现，很可能对沈周产生熏染和启示，使他在花鸟画领域进行了革新性的尝试，并取得了可观的成就。故明王世贞《艺苑卮言》评道：“石田氏乃能以浅色浅墨作之，而神采更自翩翩，所谓妙而真也。”沈周勾花点叶的花卉画法颇具创意，水墨点染树叶和花蕊，线条勾勒花瓣，运笔随意自如，笔墨本身的韵味更加强了，这对以后陈淳、周之冕的花鸟画深有启发。

沈周并擅长书法，他初学沈度台阁体，中年后专攻黄庭坚，笔力劲挺，体势奇倔，同时又融入钟繇、王羲之和米芾的结架和笔法，趋于平稳和清峻。特展中沈周的书法作品不多，《行书五律诗轴》（苏州博物馆藏）是他晚年的书作，已是黄庭坚的体势，结字紧结，笔力劲健，同时又融入王羲之婉和、清峻笔意。《行书落花诗扇页》（上海博物馆藏）约是他七十五岁时所作，结体瘦长，中宫紧聚，笔力清劲，转笔方峻，时露圭角，气格雄健，已达到人书俱老的化境。此外，他各时期绘画作品中的题跋，也反映出他书法衍变发展的轨迹。

苏州画坛自洪武至成化近一百年间，是吴派的酝酿阶段，直到具有独创性大师沈周的崛起，才标志着吴派艺术的成熟。沈周又是吴门画家艺术观和人生观的指导者。他的画艺精博，在继承宋元文人画传统的同时，能够加以光大和开拓，建立起明代文人画的美学理念，新的审美类型，反映出他那时代文人的精神气质、理想和感情，他理所当然地被推崇为画派的宗师。嘉靖年间苏州名士王穉登在《吴郡丹青志》中评“先生绘事为当代第一”，确定了他在画坛的崇尊地位。

苏州为吴门画派发祥之地，苏州博物馆以弘扬传统文化为己任，创意策划系列学术展览，今首展“石田大穰——吴门画派之沈周特展”汇聚故宫博物院、上海博物馆、辽宁省博物馆、南京博物院、安徽省博物馆及日本京都国立博物馆、大阪市立美术馆、瑞士苏黎世莱特堡博物馆等十四家博物馆之度藏珍品，以飨观众，可谓盛世之举。

乐为序。

# *Shen Zhou, Master of Wu School Painting*

Shan Guolin

In mid-Ming period (1368-1644), the literati painting tradition emerged in the Jiangnan region (a geographic area to the south of the lower reaches of the Yangtze River) during the late Yuan dynasty (1271-1368) was passed from the once highly renowned "Zhe School" down to a group of painters active in Suzhou region. Later celebrated as the "Wu School", these Suzhou-based artists set a new trend for scholar-amateur paintings, which was noted for its strong sense of contemporaneity. Shen Zhou (1427-1509) is regarded as the founder of the "Wu School".

A native of Xiangcheng (near the Yangcheng Lake) in Changzhou (today's Suzhou, Jiangsu province), Shen Zhou (style name Qinan, sobriquet Shitian [lit. meaning "field of stone"]) was born into a family of scholars, though none of his grandfather Shen Cheng, his uncle Shen Zhenji, and his father Shen Hengji participated in the Imperial Examinations. The family made a living by opening up wasteland for farming and leasing it to the peasants. In his times, the Ming court had already consolidated their power and social stability helped to ameliorate the economy. Shen Zhou advocated the dynasty's rule by the Chinese Zhu imperial family. Yet throughout his lifetime, he never attended the Imperial Examinations and instead led a rather secluded life in the countryside, probably out of self-protection from the ferocity of the court power struggles and for the severity of the disciplines of the officialdom. A person of sincerity, generosity, and altruism, Shen always acted in accordance with the Confucian teachings, showed strong affections towards family members, exhorted and promote the young. His gregariousness enabled him to befriend prestigious poets, painters, calligraphers and keep close ties with some high-ranking court officials. His integrity, mild temperament, and artistic and scholastic virtuosity inspired respect from people of all backgrounds and gained him enormous reputation in his native region and throughout the country, resulting in his being regarded as the master of the "Wu School".

The brothers Zhenji and Hengji were both well versed in painting and calligraphy. They once studied painting under Du Qiong (1396-1474), whose landscape paintings were modelled after Wang Fu (1362-1416) while showing considerable influences of master painters ranging from Dong Yuan (d. 962) and Ju Ran (act. ca. 10th c.) to Wang Meng (1308-1385). The family's penchant for arts nurtured Shen Zhou, who, early in his childhood, was already an ardent lover of fine arts and literature. He studied poetry and essays from the erudite scholar Chen Kuan, while Du Qiong, Liu Jue (1410-1472) instructed him on painting skills. Shen's extensive network in the circles of art connoisseurship and literature enabled him to view Song (960-1279) and Yuan (1271-1368)-dynasties' paintings in friends and acquaintances' private collection, enriching his understanding of traditions. In the meantime, he valued greatly observing nature. He inscribed on one of his painting albums that "almost all of today's painters model their work after Song and Yuan masters, yet the spiritual essence of ancient masterpieces seems to be beyond their grasp. Once I was also hankering after such attainment, yet never managed to accomplish anything. All the rules and keys are originally derived from nature. Every stream, every rock (painted) should be observed by my own eyes. Only by doing this can we represent the spirit (of the landscape). By attaching equal importance to traditions and observation of nature, Shen was able to break away from conventions and innovate traditional Chinese painting.

A highly skilled painter with an extensive repertoire, Shen Zhou was particularly accomplished in landscapes, birds and flowers, and figure paintings. His landscapes cover a wide range of themes, including visits to monuments and places of interest, literary gatherings, scholars' studios and villas, visiting friends and bidding farewells, and touring mountains and rivers. There are also landscapes created in deliberately archaic styles which were modeled after ancient masterpieces.

Shen Zhou was not an adventurous traveller. His footprints were confined mainly in the region covering today's Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces. Nevertheless, he paid frequent visits to scenic spots in this area, which many of his excellent pieces were created to record, such as *Beautiful Scenery by the Two Rivers*, *Superb Views from the Gusu*



*Terrace, Twelve Views of the Wumen Bridge, Documenting the Trip to the West Mountain, Mount Tianping, Mount Lingyin, Zhanggong Cave, and Night Visit to Qianren shi* ("Thousand People" Rock). These are vivid representations of the charming, graceful landscape with clear waters and verdant trees typical of the Jiangnan region in which the artist's self-expression also find sustenance. A case in point is *Documenting the Trip to the West Mountain*, a handscroll created in 1487, when he was about sixty-one. The painting features the wavy terrain with zigzagging paths, gurgling streams, large water expanses, and barely visible country cottages among verdant trees. The realistically depicted landscape is imbued with the spirit of pleasant leisure and comfort. He states in self-inscription: "I was born in the Wu region and have already lived here for sixty years. My activities are largely confined in this area... Sometimes, I drink wine and cruise the waters, I visit the West Mountain for poetry inspirations or collecting herbs, lingering on in some places for a whole day. Travelling is always my passion which I will never have enough. When I return and recollect (those tours), I reminisce about every grove, every stream, every hill, every village with my brush, and keep the paintings for my own enjoyment." *Exquisite Scenery among Streams and Mountains* (Collection of Zhejiang Museum) created in 1485, when he was about fifty-nine, is another example. Painted after his tour of the West Lake in Zhejiang, the scroll portrays undulating hills, flashy streams, broad rivers, soaring wild geese, lush trees, country cottages, wooden bridges, and thatched pavilion in the mountains, a landscape masterpiece and projection of the painter's enjoyment of joy and relaxation.

Immersed in literary atmosphere throughout his life, Shen enjoyed social gatherings with literati and painters. Thus a substantial quantity of his paintings features literary gatherings, gardens, and scholars' studios. *Elegant Gathering in the Wei Family Garden* (dated 1469) exemplifies the scene of literary gatherings - Shen Zhou, Liu Jue, Chen Shu, Zhu Hao (1405-1483), Zhou Ding, Li Yingzhen (1431-1493) and others gathered at the Wei Family Garden to discuss poems and paintings while drinking wine. *Night Revels in Snow* illustrates a banquet with several friends including Yang Xunji (1456-1544), Zhao Lifu, and Chen Jingdong who dropped by in a night of snow.

As for landscapes featuring farewell and departure scenes, examples include *Parting with Wu Kuan* (1435-1504) created in 1479 (the fifteenth year of the Chenghua reign [1465-1487]), and *Bidding Farewell to Wu Kuan in Jingkou* dated 1497 (the tenth year of the Hongzhi reign [1488-1505]). Both express his reluctance to part with his best friend through simple but affectionate touches on scenes such as boats moored to the riverside, waiting to depart, parting friends bowing to each other with clasped hands, or two friends saying parting words in the cabin. Shen's works expressing similar warm friendship also include *Bidding Farewell by the Jingjiang River*, in which Shen records farewell from the painter, Wen Lin, and others to Wu Yu (1443-1526), Grand Protector (*taishou*) of Xuzhou who was on his way to the post, the 1492 (the fifth year of the Hongzhi reign) piece *Bidding Farewell* recording the parting with Wang Ao (1450-1524) who was about to return to the Capital, and the 1498 (the eleventh year of the Hongzhi reign) piece *Bidding Farewell at the Tiger Hill* for Wen Lin's (father of the famous scholar painter Wen Zhengming [1470-1559]) departure for an official post in Wenzhou.

In mid-Ming period, economic prosperity and accumulating wealth in the Suzhou region contributed to a construction boom of private gardens and villas among wealthy and influential families. It took twelve years, from the sixth to the seventeenth year of the Jiajing reign (1522-1566), to build the Humble Administrator's Garden (*Zhuozheng yuan*), the largest garden in Suzhou. The owner once commissioned Wen Zhengming to design the garden's layout. Some officials and scholars followed suit, creating elegant literary names for their studios, arranging in the most meticulous manner flowers, plants, small ponds, and decorative rocks so as to create refined living environment, even when their residences were nothing more than a few thatched cottages. In that epoch, the number of private gardens in Suzhou reached over 200, among which some famous ones include the Pavilion of Prolonging Verdancy (*Yanlü ting*), the residence of Du Qiong at the eastern corner of the original Song-dynasty



Joy Garden (*Le pu*), Liu Jue's residence Little Dongting (*Xiao Dongting*) in Suzhou city's outer Qimen area, featuring accumulated rocks by the waterside, Wang Ao's villa Garden for Summoning the Recluse (*Zhaoyin yuan*) in the Dongting mountains, Shen Zhou's Studio with Bamboo (*Youzhu ju*) in Xiangcheng area, and Wen Zhengming's residence Studio of Moored Clouds (*Tingyun guan*). These served as both scholars' residence as well as venues for elegant gatherings where paintings and calligraphy were often discussed and appreciated. Such events naturally became one of the most favorite subjects for painters. Shen Zhou's *East Plain*, dedicated to his teacher Du Qiong, depicts a plain and tranquil thatched pavilion, i.e. the aforementioned *Pavilion of Prolonging Verdancy*, surrounded by trees and bamboo grove on the sloping waterside; the album *East Garden* paints the residence and its surroundings of Wu Kuan's father Mengrong near the ancient west city gate Changmen Gate. Although the resident amounted to no more than a few bays encircled by simple wooden fences, the realistic portrait of the Arcadian life in the Jiangnan region becomes the highlight of the album leaves. Besides, the handscroll *Viewing Ripples from the Riverside* (collection of Suzhou Museum) paints a villa along a river, in which a scholar sits beside a table with books on it. The painting brings to mind the atmosphere in a cool autumn day and fine taste of tea.

After the Chenghua and Hongzhi reigns, thanks to social stability and economic prosperity, activities such as drinking, tasting tea, fishing, listening to the gurgling springs, appreciating flower blossoms and the moon, visiting friends, touring mountains and forests gradually became *de rigeur* in literary circles, which Shen also recorded in his artwork. *Leisurely Appreciation of Potted Chrysanthemums* (collection of Liaoning Provincial Museum), for instance, delineates the scene of two close friends drinking and appreciating chrysanthemums in a small thatched pavilion in the countryside. *Chinese Bayberry Trees in the Riverside Village* (collection of Anhui Museum) features the painter picking bayberries with a friend named Xue Yaoqing in a village. Since the season already passed, they only found one bayberry to taste the flavor. Yet they were not at all disappointed. Shen even created a painting and joked in the inscription that "it would be better not to eat too much, one bayberry is enough for moistening the lips", meaning that the important thing is to enjoy oneself in the process, and that the quantity of bayberries does not really matter. *Pleasure in the Shade of Paulownia Trees* features a scholar sitting on a boat and fishing under paulownia trees by the riverside. On the painting his inscription reads: "the fish pole is not an instrument for catching wealth and fame, holding it, other earthly matters is no longer important. If the leisure at hand is not felt by the heart, all the beautiful scenery is but of futile and undeserved reputation." In this poem, Shen Zhou regards fishing as leisure for the spirit, rather than the means for catching fish. What really matters is resting the mind and enjoying the delightful riverscape. Besides, his paintings such as *Listening to the Spring*, *Fishing under the Shade of Willow Trees*, *Drawing Spring Water to Cook Tea*, *Walking with a Staff*, *Cruising and Visiting a Friend*, and *Washing Feet under the Paulownia Trees* all express his refined and delightful temperament.

These landscape paintings embody his passion for nature and emphasis on mental cultivation, as indicated by his inscription on an album entitled *Life Sketches*: "In themes of things that wriggle and things that grow, by playing with my brush, I can still work transformations. I shall sit alone in front of the window, the spring breeze caresses my face and many thought and feelings arise in my heart. I brushed this album with amusement, giving the objects forms on paper. The jolly mood arises from being in good keep and sitting all day at leisure. If I am requested to paint, it will not be painting for painting's sake." His landscapes are characterized by equilibrial composition in which sometimes unexpected features emerge out of the seemingly bland appearance. His landscapes are imbued with serene ambience and spiritual tranquility that differ markedly from the withering bleakness that permeates late Yuan-dynasty landscape of seclusion. The delightful worldly leisure which Shen obviously enjoyed demonstrates the self-confidence of mid-Ming-dynasty literati in terms of their *raison d'être* and the contemporary cultural *zeitgeist*. These paintings are manifestations of the psyche of the scholars in his epoch. His artistic taste helped to establish the aesthetic keynote of the "Wu School" artists.



Shen's landscape style evolved over time. The paintings selected in this special exhibition cover a variety of styles typical of various periods of his artistic career, which enable us to glimpse the evolvement of his landscape art.

When expounding the gradual change of Shen's artistic style, Wen Zhengming once commented: "In his early years, he already broke away from the family practices. He modeled his paintings after ancient masters. His copies of the chef d'oeuvre could almost always be passed off as genuine. Nevertheless, he usually painted small-scale landscapes. When he reached the age of forty, he began to create crude and sketchy large-scale paintings with broad strokes and rough outline. Although the new style is more spontaneous and straightforward, the touches and strokes are not as meticulously executed as it used to be. "

Shen's paintings created before he reached the age of forty betray marked influences from Du Qiong, Liu Jue, and his own family traditions. On *Landscape Dedicated to the Monk Bitian* (collection of Museum Rietberg in Zürich, Switzerland), the self-inscription reads: "(created) in 1461 (*xinsi* year in traditional Chinese chronological system using Ten Heavenly Stems [*tiangan*] and Twelve Earthly Branches [*dizhi*]), as a gift for Bitian Shangren." In that year, he was about thirty-five *sui*, and this landscape piece is his earliest dated work. Judged from this painting, then his skills had already surpassed Du Qiong and started to resemble Wang Meng. The rolling, exquisite mountains are densely shaded with supple texture strokes resembling spread-out hemp fibers or unraveled ropes, epitomizing the subtle, painstakingly exquisite style in his early years. Another example is *Secluded Dwelling* in the collection of Japan's Osaka City Museum of Fine Arts. Created when he was about thirty-eight, the scroll delineates a secluded waterside residence by the mountains, of which the composition resembles that of Liu Jue's *Bower of Unsullied Reputation* (*Qingbai xuan*). He also emulated Wang Meng in artistic skills, while learning also from Ju Ran – with thin, intense twisted strokes, elongated, willowy texture strokes, and closely packed dots. This painting also demonstrates the studious, primitive, and lightly crude brush style in his early period. The hanging scroll *Gathering Water Chestnut* in the collection of Kyoto National Museum was created in 1466 (*bingxu* year), when he was about forty. The minimal tripartite composition with water span between two shores reminds view of the monochrome landscapes by Yuan master Ni Zan (1301-1374), while, on the other hand, the strokes and touches are inheritance from Du Qiong, Dongyuan and Juran. The hilltops are shaded with round, slightly elongated strokes and faintly colored with umber and flower blue pigments. The desolate and tranquil ambience is still in line with the secluded landscape paintings characteristic of the Yuan dynasty. Nevertheless, more thorough inspection reveals that, comparatively speaking, Shen Zhou tended to apply thicker and heavier touches to create simple but majestic scenery. At this point, his works started to show an inkling of his later idiosyncrasy.

The expansion of scales in Shen's painting after he turned forty, as noted by Wen Zhengming, refers not only to the size of the painting, but a transformation from exquisite, refined strokes to more improvised, uninhibited ones. It took him around twenty years to complete this transformation. In the meantime, he continued to follow the styles of Dong Yuan, Juran, and the Four Yuan-dynasty Masters, and enrich his skills by introducing elements such as the Song-dynasty blue-and-green landscapes as well as the strength and primitive simplicity embodied in works by Ma Yuan (act. ca. 1190-1230), Xia Gui (act. ca. 1180-1230) and their disciples into his artistic self-expression. His *Nine Pieces of Brocade* (collection of Kyoto National Museum) exemplifies his accomplishment in carefully emulating Song and Yuan masters. In this album, the leaf *Gathering Water Chestnut in the Reedy Pond* bears an inscription by Du Qiong saying that "Jinan (style name of Shen Zhou's brother) brought his brother's painting depicting gathering water chestnut and asked me to inscribe poem on it." Then Du signed the date "the seventh year of the Chenghua reign (1471)", when he was about seventy-six, and Shen Zhou forty-five. This scroll originally consisted of nine sections, of which only six are still extant, modeling after the styles of Song-dynasty masters Huichong, Zhao Lingrang, Zhao Boju (fl. ca. 1120-ca. 1162), Yuan-dynasty masters Zhao Mengfu (1254-1322), Zhao Yong, and Ming-



dynasty master Wang Fu, respectively. The three lost sections are emulations of the styles of Li Cheng (919-967), Wang Meng, and Wu Zhen (1280-1354). The subjects of the scroll include blue-and-green landscape, short sketch landscape, verdant mountains by the riverside, dry branches, bamboo, and rocks. Shen managed to capture the charm of each master. Besides, his *Landscape after Dong Yuan* and Juran painted at the age of forty-seven, *Copying Mountain Ranges in the Style of Wu Zhen* at forty-eight, *Autumn Scenery of the Stream and Mountains* (collection of Nanjing Museum) in the style of both Huang Gongwang and Ni Zan created at the age of around fifty-eight also belong to this period. He also studied closely Ni Zan's style, and created quite a few pieces in his style, which were, nevertheless, mostly overlaid with the strength of his brush strokes. His teacher Chen Kuan once criticized his "excessive brush strokes". This special exhibition selected two of his paintings in Ni Zan's style, created when he was forty-seven and fifty-three respectively. For both paintings, the tripartite composition with two water shores and one expanse of water in between is typical of Ni Zan's style, featuring sparse, imposing strokes, dry ink and pale ink wash. Yet the painting is more striking and majestic. Shen once remarked: "the handsomeness of Ni Zan's style is inspiring. In an attempt to imitate him, I embark on an erroneous road. If the strokes need to be sleek and majestic, the traces of the rendering of the ink wash must reach the point of being faintly noticeable. The bland, sparse touches and the deliberately primitive rendering of Ni Zan wed perfectly with the desolation and hollowness in his visual representation. While the ambience in Shen's landscapes is generally majestic and imposing, and this will not be properly realized with Ni's style. What Shen Zhou regarded as an attempt of imitation that went astray should not be regarded as his artistic deficiency, but a development manifesting his own idiosyncrasy. For this Li Rihua (1565-1635) made some convincing evaluation: "In terms of Shen Zhou's landscapes in Ni Zan's style, the trees and rocks are handsomely rendered, but always with a majestic strength. Still, each painted in his own way, without any intention of imitation. Thus, compared with Wang Fu, Shen Zhou is still a better artist. "

Shen assimilated extensively the key elements of previous masters' skills and achieved mastery through a thorough understanding of their key elements. As Wang Shizhen (1526-1590) pointed out in his *Words Flowing from a Goblet in the Garden of Art* (*Yiyuan zhiyan*): "(When the art of painting) is put into Shen Zhou's hand, it becomes intriguing. He was able to transform the styles of Song and Yuan masters, and was especially well versed in (modeling and transforming) the styles of Dong Yuan, the Monk Juran, and Li Cheng." By assimilating the styles of these ancient master hands, in mid-life Shen Zhou gradually cultivated his own artistic style. Generally speaking, the scale of his paintings was enlarged, the originally condensed landscape became sparser, the meticulously-rendered brush strokes typical of his early years were liberated and turned into broad, robust touches imbued with kinetic energy, characterizing balanced application of touches completed with brush held in upright or slant positions, elongated, folded strokes and stocky texture strokes. Incorporating archaic styles while sketching directly from nature, a large proportion of his compositions feature meandering or zigzagging paths dotted with subjects such as figures, boats, thatched pavilions, and cottages, animating his landscapes and forming a highly individual style exemplified by serene, verdant and luxuriant scenery and moist, vigorous brush strokes.

When he was about fifty-eight, Shen Zhou adopted the sobriquet "Baishi weng" (lit. the old man of white stone). The period from then until his death at the age of eighty-two is regarded as the late period of his career. In his later years, he was especially fond of the art of Huang Gongwang and Wu Zhen. Integrating the handsomeness of Huang's style, the uninhibited spirit in Wu's painting, the scrupulousness of Wang Meng, the strength and kinetic energy in Ma Yuan and Xia Gui's art, and the imposing solemnity as represented by the Mi family's misty mountains, the aged painter forged a mature style featuring minimal simplicity, boldness, sedimentary thickness, and tranquil sincerity. *Documenting the Trip to the West Mountain* (collection of Shanghai Museum), created when the artist was about sixty, epitomizes the rich variety of his touches and the majestic spirit derived from the



harmonious blending of the vigor, placidity, strength, understated elegance, and delicacy drawn respectively from Dong Yuan and Ju Ran, Huang Gongwang, Wu Zhen, Ni Zan, and Wang Meng's works. Shen Zhou painted *Bidding Farewell by the Jingjiang River* (collection of the Palace Museum) when he was about sixty-six. The scroll is a sketchy depiction of several figures bowing farewell at the shore in the close distance, a barely visible boat mooring on the river in the middle distance, and a distant view of rolling mountains. The open, translucent scenery, succinct, lively touches, and austere and vigorous style typify his late-period paintings. In addition, his other paintings such as *Emotional Farewell at the Tiger Hill* (dated 1490, collection of Wuxi Museum), *Night Visit to the Thousand People Rock* (dated 1493, collection of Liaoning Provincial Museum), *Bidding Farewell to Wu Kuan in Jingkou* (dated 1497, collection of Shanghai Museum), *Wind and Snow near the Bar Bridge* (collection of Tianjin Museum) are also from the same period.

Shen was also an accomplished bird-and-flower painter. A disciple of the Yuan dynasty traditions of Qian Xuan's ink and pale color paintings and Wang Yuan's monochrome sketches, he was adept in vividly portraying subjects with simple, ink monochrome touches and the "boneless" (*mogu*) technique. *Peach Blossoms of the Ninth Lunar Month* is one of his early pieces in this subject, which bears the inscriptions of his uncle Shen Zhenji and Zhang Ling, a junior of Shen Zhou. The petals are tenderly and carefully tinged using coccineous pigment, and leaves with umber and flower blue pigments. The branches are textured with sturdy, robust strokes, manifesting the splendid exuberance the blossoms retain in the ninth lunar month, almost as if it were springtime. The virtuosity reminds the lingering charm of Qian Xuan's (ca.1239-1299) ink and pale color paintings. His *Lychee and Persimmon* (collection of the Palace Museum), completed when he was about fifty-four, depicts the persimmon leaves and fruits with ink wash and lychee fruits with ink wash of rich tonal variations and exquisite brush strokes, demonstrating the influences from ink monochrome bird and flowers by Wang Yuan (act. ca. 13th-14th c.), Zhang Zhong (fl. ca. 1341-1368) of the Yuan dynasty. A Suzhou Museum collection, a set of album leaves entitled *Birds and Flowers* was completed by Shen Zhou when he was about sixty. A comprehensive overview of his mid-life attainments in bird and flowers, the leaves feature not only daylilies, peach blossoms, cotton hibiscuses, Chinese peonies, but also pomegranates and ducklings. For most of the flower blossoms, Shen employed the "boneless" technique, tinged the petals exquisitely with pale color; for the branches and twigs, he applied plain yet spirited delineation and texturing; the grotesque rockeries are ink washed with attention to tonal changes; and the ducklings are vividly represented with minimal brush strokes and ink wash. Other bird and flowers created in his fifties include *Peonies* and *A Branch of Loquats* in the Palace Museum collection, as well as *White Goose under a Lychee Tree* in the collection of Guangdong Museum, in all of which monochrome ink wash and "boneless" technique are employed to depict the subjects. Shen's studies of Yuan-dynasty pale color and ink monochrome paintings using "boneless" technique formed the basis for his attainment in bird-and-flower sketches.

In his late years, Shen Zhou honed his ink monochrome freehand techniques. With an extensive repertoire of techniques, he was able to wield the brush with great facility, representing in the most vivid and evocative manner flowers, fruits and vegetables, birds, fish, and other living creatures. Painted at the age of eighty-one, *Peonies by the Jade Pavilion* (dated 1507, collection of Nanjing Museum) manifest the perfection of his techniques – peonies painted in "boneless" ink monochrome style, the petals radiate a slight tinge of rouge amid the ink wash, for instance. One of his last paintings, *Chrysanthemum and Rooster* (dated 1509, collection of the Osaka City Museum of Fine Arts, Japan) was completed when he was about eighty-three. Shen traced the contours of leaves and stems in the freehand manner, double-outlined the bamboo and chrysanthemum petals, slashed with ink wash and, with great freedom and ease, delineated the rooster, with upheld head and fluttering wings, and two gracefully flying butterflies. The history of traditional Chinese bird and flowers indicates that the mid-Ming dynasty witnessed the inheritance and transformation of Yuan dynasty ink monochrome bird-and-flower painting techniques by