

Mountain and Water 山水: Selections from Japan and China

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Known broadly in the West as landscapes, Mountain and Water art 山水 (*shān shuǐ* in Chinese, or *sansui* in Japanese) has a long and revered history. In China and Japan, this genre is associated with Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, and other thought and belief systems, as well as the scholarly elite. Makers have continuously reinterpreted, reshaped, and recast the genre in different mediums and formats over centuries, keeping it relevant. These nine works explore expressions of Mountain and Water over time, considering artistic processes and materials and original audiences.

Wai Yee Chiong, Curator of Asian Art

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CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Utagawa Hiroshige 歌川広重
1797–1858; b. and worked in Edo, Japan
Landscape, 1830–1850
Monochrome woodblock print (*ishizuri-e*)
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. **34.109**



Utagawa Hiroshige 歌川広重
1797–1858; b. and worked in Edo, Japan
Landscape, ca. 1850
Monochrome woodblock print (*ishizuri-e*)
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. **34.376**



Utagawa Hiroshige 歌川広重
1797–1858; b. and worked in Edo, Japan
Landscape, Sparrow and Bamboo, ca. 1850
Monochrome woodblock print (*ishizuri-e*)
Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. **34.378**



Compositionally, Hiroshige drew from traditions of Mountain and Water ink painting to create these landscapes using expressive brushstrokes and blank space. The woodblock cutter and printer then skillfully reproduced Hiroshige's brush compositions, inking the background in black and leaving the landscape outlines in white. The resulting effect is similar to a stone rubbing, another historically revered East Asian art form that was mainly appreciated and collected by elite classes. By fusing ink painting and stone rubbing, these prints highlighted centuries of cultural and artistic exchange between China and Japan. They also made these traditions accessible to new and wider audiences.

China, Qing Dynasty (1644–1911)

Landscape, 1736–1795

Jade

Bequest of John M. Crawford, Jr. **1989.110.43**

Skilled jade workers transformed this pale green stone into a pine-studded mountain with a waterfall and river. Small mountain sculptures like this one have been popular with wealthy Chinese audiences since the 1100s. On the back of this example is a verse the poet Su Shi (1036–1101) composed in response to a painting of a mountain he once saw, creating the sense that this sculpture is a painting turned to stone.



Su Shi's poem reads in part:

*Here I see verdant cliffs, shadowing a deep valley,
and a hundred cascades that fly down the cliffs,
twist through forests, coil around rocks, hide and reappear,
then rush down to the valley mouth to form a stream*

Attributed to Tōyo Sesshū 雪舟等楊

1420–1506; b. in Bitchū, Japan; worked in Japan

Landscape, ca. 1500

Ink and color on paper

Bequest of John M. Crawford, Jr. **1989.110.94**



Ink washes are juxtaposed with bold brushstrokes to create this majestic scene of mountains and water. A small figure crossing the bridge in the foreground emphasizes the landscape's monumentality.

Attributed to Sesshū, a Japanese Zen Buddhist monk, the painting represents ideals favored by the Zen sect and their patrons in the 1400s and 1500s. Beginning in the early 1200s, traveling monks brought ink paintings by Chinese Chan Buddhist monks to Japan, where they served as prototypes for Japanese ink paintings. This example's unusually large size indicates that it might have been commissioned by a wealthy patron for display in a temple or large manor house.

Brian Shure (Former RISD faculty, Printmaking)

b. 1952 in Cleveland, Ohio; works in Colorado

Paul Mallowney, printer; works in Oregon

Yoshimura Shosaku, mounter; works in Japan

Geku, 2000

Spitbite aquatint, drypoint, and burnishing, printed in metallic ink on indigo paper, mounted on a silk scroll

Mary B. Jackson Fund **2001.6**



During an artist residency in Japan, Brian Shure sketched sites within the Ise shrine complex, one of the most sacred places in the Shinto religion. Shure transferred his sketches into print using techniques including spitbite aquatint and drypoint. The resulting panorama, presented here, shows Geku, Ise's outer shrine. The site is dedicated to the sun goddess Amaterasu-Omikami and Toyo'uke-no-Omikami, deity of food, clothing, and housing.

Wucius Wong 王無邪

b. 1936 in Guangzhou, China; works in Hong Kong

Robert Franklin, printer

1930–2012; b. in Long Island, New York; worked in Philadelphia

Towards Enlightenment B (Green), 1991

Color offset lithograph

Gift of the Brandywine Workshop and Archives, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania **2014.66.43**



Mountains and rivers are reimagined as abstract shapes in Wucius Wong's *Towards Enlightenment B (Green)*. Triangular pine trees are visible throughout the work, echoing the angular shapes and vertical lines of the piece. Wong studied traditional Chinese ink landscape paintings, but found new ways to visualize landscapes through geometrical forms.

Huang Yan 黄岩

b. 1966 in Jilin, China; works in China

Chinese Landscape No. 4, 1999

Chromogenic print

Gift of Larry Warsh and Museum purchase: gift of Mark Pollack (RISD BFA 1976, Textiles) **2024.97.12**



[M]an was subject, landscape was the object, a landscape painted on the human body was the materialization of the union between subject and object.

—Huang Yan, on why he painted landscapes on his body

This photograph captures Huang Yan's exploration of traditional Chinese mountain and water art. He and his wife, artist Zhang Tienmei, painted rivers, mountains, trees, and rocks on his chest and arms, altering both his body and our engagement with traditional landscape paintings.

As with the jade landscape in this exhibition, we are encouraged to look closely to discover this work's details and appreciate its three-dimensionality.

Zhang Xiaoli 張小黎

b. 1989 in Guiyang, China; works in Toronto, Canada

Vanished Trail, 2024

Chinese ink and color on *xuan* paper

Elizabeth T. and Dorothy N. Casey Fund **2025.1**



Towering peaks and pine trees are replaced with colorful Lego blocks that ascend into swirling clouds in this whimsical piece. Zhang Xiaoli created this playful vertical composition by painting in the traditional *gongbi* method—using detailed brushstrokes to render precise outlines.

Like Wucius Wong, Zhang is interested in geometry, and here she breaks landscape motifs into individual parts. Her work also engages with the *Mustard Seed Garden Painting Manual* and other historical Chinese instructional guides, which teach aspiring artists how to paint by following a series of steps.