



Tao-chi (1641–1710, about). Leaf from his *Reminiscences of Nanking*, an album of twelve leaves; ink and colour on paper. Collection of The Art Museum, Princeton University

*Art International* Dec. 15, 1974

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by Lucy Lim

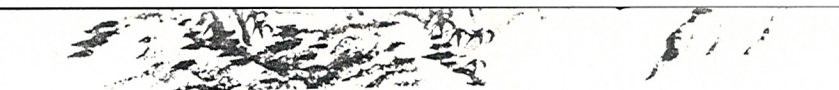
*Studies in Connoisseurship* at The Art Museum of Princeton University:

individual painting as a “discovery”. By using the combined disciplines of Western art historical methods and Sinology (training in and knowledge of the Chinese language, history, literature, philosophy, etc.), they seek to construct general observations about specific paintings and their art historical contexts. The methodology is to proceed from the particulars to the general, dictated by a skeptical frame of mind that will accept no painting as authentic until it has been proven to be so. The intriguing procedure is analogous to that adopted in detective work. This similarity is borne out in chapter III of the exhibition catalogue under the heading “Case Studies in Connoisseurship”, which is subdivided into entries such as mistaken authorship, forged identity, two *mala fide*, one *bona fide*.

The specific paintings selected for a systematic scrutiny belong to the Sackler collection in New York and Princeton, which includes paintings from the 14th through the 19th centuries. The strength of the collection lies in 15 works of painting and calligraphy by Tao-chi (1641–ca. 1710), a Ming loyalist, half Taoist, half Buddhist, a wild “mountain man”, and a leading individualist painter of the early Ch’ing period. As the collection also includes a modern forgery, an album of six landscape leaves in Tao-chi’s style, as well as copies of two of Tao-chi’s works, it affords a good opportunity for comparative study and, in four instances, copies are paired with the originals in the exhibition. Works by 23 other Chinese artists are represented.

Tao-chi’s major works, in general, display a bold and uniquely impressive manner of brush style. The strokes are freely and bluntly applied, creating an impressionistic effect of wild dabs and splashes of ink and colors. In the tangled thickets of brushstrokes and brilliant, ecstatic colors, we sometimes perceive a consistent rhythm winding through the composition or a subtle interplay of tones and values. The artist exhibits his peculiar wit in the distortion of spatial principles and other structural devices. What seems most remarkable is his ability to endow such ordinary themes as vegetables and flowers with unusual dignity and humor—all accomplished with just a few strokes here and there, as if carelessly and randomly applied. For an audience which may be saturated with the current fashion of photo-realism in this country, this show will be a most welcome antidote which offers, in addition, a world of much visual beauty.

On another level, the exhibition demonstrates the advanced stage to which the study of Chinese art has progressed in this country through the extensive use of original sources. Chinese scholars and antiquarians of the past, to be sure, had discoursed and written at length about Chinese art and art objects. Treatises on painting were published; records and catalogues of artifacts and paintings in famous collections were numerous and still exist today (though sometimes in corrupted form). These literary sources have been invaluable to specialists in Chinese art. The major obstacle posed by the Chinese texts is that the authors typically offer subjective opinions without further substantiating their statements with examples or explanations. It is often difficult, if not impossible, to visualize a literary description of a particular object with accuracy. Still, the information provided by the writings of Chinese connoisseurs of art—usually scholars versed in several disciplines—



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*“Studies in Connoisseurship” at The Art Museum of Princeton University:*

An exhibition of 41 Chinese paintings from the Arthur M. Sackler collection marks a momentous occasion in the history of Chinese art exhibitions and art historical studies in the United States. As reflected in its title, “Studies in Connoisseurship”, the show focuses on the problems of authenticity, which abound in Chinese painting due to the repetitions or re-workings of stylistic traditions or idioms. As artists usually copied ancient models while experimenting with new styles, it was the norm, rather than the exception, that the works of a single master at a given period would be characterized by a great diversity of styles. This feature makes it extremely difficult to distinguish works produced in different periods but couched in the same idiom. Which is the original and which is the copy is a recurring question in Chinese painting. The paucity of authenticated evidence in many cases renders stylistic analysis (a Western contribution to the study of Chinese art) inadequate and misleading at times.

Because of the full complexities of Chinese painting, the authenticity of a traditionally attributed work should not be accepted on face value. On the basis of this premiss, the organizers of this exhibition, Marilyn and Shen Fu of the Chinese art history department at Princeton University, set forth to investigate each

theme as vegetables and flowers with unusual dignity and humor—all accomplished with just a few strokes here and there, as if carelessly and randomly applied. For an audience which may be saturated with the current fashion of photo-realism in this country, this show will be a most welcome antidote which offers, in addition, a world of much visual beauty.

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The exhibition is accompanied by a handsome, large-format book-catalogue with detailed entries and 386 illustrations, 12 in color. After the show opened in Princeton last winter, it traveled to Cleveland and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. It will be exhibited at New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art in the spring of 1975.