

Exhibition: *Alternative Dreams: 17th-Century Chinese Paintings from the Tsao Family Collection*

On View: August 7–December 4, 2016

Location: Resnick Pavilion



Image captions on page 7

(Los Angeles—June 17, 2016) The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) presents *Alternative Dreams: 17th-Century Chinese Paintings from the Tsao Family Collection*, one of the finest existing collections of Chinese paintings in the United States, formed over a period of 50 years by the late San Francisco Bay Area collector and dealer Jung Ying Tsao (1923–2011).

The 17th century witnessed the fall of the Chinese-ruled Ming dynasty (1368–1644), the founding of the Manchu-ruled Qing dynasty (1644–1911), and was one of the most turbulent and creative eras in the history of Chinese art. Comprising over 120 paintings, the exhibition explores ways in which artists of the late Ming and early Qing dynasties used painting, calligraphy, and poetry to create new identities as a means of negotiating the social disruptions that accompanied the fall of the Ming dynasty. *Alternative Dreams* presents work by over 80 artists, many of whom are the most famous painters of this period—including scholars, officials, and Buddhist monks.

“*Alternative Dreams* is a window into a lost world. The window comprises Chinese paintings and their accompanying calligraphies, through which one can explore key aspects of Chinese culture,” says Stephen Little, Florence & Harry Sloan Curator of Chinese Art at LACMA. “Among these is the respect for antiquity and the importance—for an artist—of transforming the past into something new and relevant for the present.”

About the Exhibition

Alternative Dreams is divided into nine sections arranged both chronologically and geographically: Dong Qichang and Painting in Songjiang; the Nine Friends of Painting; Painting in Suzhou and Hangzhou; Painting in Fujian and Jiangxi; Painting in Nanjing; The Anhui School; The Orthodox School; Buddhist Monks; and Flower and Bird Painting.

The first section of the exhibition, **Dong Qichang and Painting in Songjiang**, is devoted to Dong Qichang (1555–1636)—one of the most important painters and calligraphers of the Ming dynasty—and several of his followers. Dong was pivotal in the development of late Ming and early Qing painting. His paintings and theories on art history had a major impact throughout the rest of the 17th century and later, even into the modern era. Dong Qichang was both a remarkably innovative artist and an important art historian and theoretician who created the Southern School lineage of literati painting. By the 17th century the literati style of painting had become the dominant mode of painting. In addition, several of the calligraphic works in the Tsao Family Collection shed light on Dong's spiritual beliefs and practices, aspects of his life rarely discussed in depth. Dong's works include examples of painting and calligraphy and, in several cases, works that combine both.

The Nine Friends of Painting is based on the Qing dynasty poet and painter Wu Weiye's poem, *Song of the Nine Friends of Painting*. While the painters never actually formed a coherent group, the Nine Friends have endured as a fixture in the history of Chinese painting. This is no doubt because in his poem Wu Weiye conveys startlingly vivid images of the artists' paintings, and his reactions are visceral. The Nine Friends included Dong Qichang, Wang Shimin, Wang Jian, Li Liufang, Yang Wencong, Zhang Xuezheng, Cheng Jiasui, Bian Wenyu, and Shao Mi. Also included in this section are several painters loosely related to the Nine Friends: Wu Weiye himself, Puhe, Yan Shengsun, and Zou Xianji.

Painting in Suzhou and Hangzhou examines the work that came from two of the most affluent and culturally significant cities in the history of Chinese art. In the 16th century, Suzhou witnessed the flourishing of the Wu School of painting. Led by its towering giants Shen Zhou and Wen Zhengming, the Wu School was characterized by delicate brushwork and understated coloring—a contrast to the bolder and more calligraphic new landscape styles of Dong Qichang and his followers. Hangzhou had been the capital of the Southern Song dynasty in the 12th and 13th centuries and the birthplace of the Ming dynasty Zhe School of court and professional painting.

Painting in Fujian and Jiangxi explores the importance of these two southern provinces as major cultural and economic centers in the centuries leading up to the late Ming dynasty. Several of the most innovative painters from this period were natives of Fujian, including Wu Bin, Huang Daozhou, Wang Jianzhang, and Zhang Ruitu. Fujian is also identified with several key ceramic types, including Song dynasty (960–1279) Jian ware tea bowls and the late Ming porcelain type known as Dehua. In the 17th century, Fujian, with its major ports of Quanzhou and Fuzhou, played an important role in international sea trade. Jiangxi Province was also a major cultural and commercial center and home to many famous Chinese artists and intellectuals. Known for the great kiln center of Jingdezhen, which produced most of China’s blue-and-white porcelains from the 14th century onward, Jiangxi played a key role in the Ming economy. Jiangxi’s capital city, Nanchang, was a major administrative center in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, attracting many talented artists and producing several important 17th-century painters, represented in this section by Luo Mu and Bada Shanren (Zhu Da).

Painting in Nanjing considers the notable painters and artistic styles that emerged from this vital political, commercial, and artistic center during the Ming and Qing dynasties. Nanjing had symbolic relevance in the 17th-century because it had been the first capital of the Ming dynasty, prior to the move of the capital to Beijing in the early 15th century. Nanjing continued to function as the secondary capital of the Ming, complete with its own imperial palace. In the troubled early years of the Qing dynasty, Nanjing figured prominently as a site linked to the fallen dynasty, and was a haven for many Ming loyalists. In 17th-century painting, calligraphy, and literature, Nanjing resonated as a nexus of nostalgia and lost dreams. The city was a major spiritual center and became home to Buddhist temples and monasteries. Many of the most important 17th-century Chinese painters either came from or lived in Nanjing, and the city gave birth to the eponymous Nanjing School—not an organized school of painting as such, but instead a group of artists whose works share certain eclectic features. These include celebrations of the visual beauty of Nanjing and its environs, a penchant for meticulously detailed views of nature with sophisticated atmospheric effects, and dramatic uses of light and dark ink.

In the 17th century, a distinct style of landscape painting, characterized by dry brushwork and the simplification of landscape forms, developed in Anhui Province. **The Anhui School** style evolved from several sources, including the Wu School, the late Ming achievements of Dong Qichang (both theoretical and technical), and the unique, otherworldly topography of the Yellow Mountains (Huangshan), located in southern Anhui. This section includes several painters who, despite not being from Anhui, are often grouped with the Anhui painters because of similarities in style and

technique. Along with the dry brushwork and simplification of forms came a love of spatial ambiguities, which are often visible in works by painters Hongren and Dai Benxiao and in the works of artists from other parts of China who were heavily influenced by the Anhui style, including Zou Zhilin and Fu Shan. Anhui merchants were engaged in many lucrative businesses in the 17th century, including the manufacture of the finest papers, brushes, inks and inkstones, woodblock printing, and the transport of porcelain from the great kiln center of Jingdezhen in Jiangxi Province to other parts of China.

The Orthodox School takes its name from the term “orthodox lineage” (*zheng zong*). Painters of this school believed that they were the sole carriers of the flame of Dong Qichang’s Southern School of painting. The most famous of the Orthodox School painters were known as the Four Wangs, a group of early Qing dynasty landscape painters. Three of the Four Wangs were born into privileged households—Wang Shimin, Wang Jian, and Wang Yuanqi. Like Wang Shimin and Wang Jian, Wang Yuanqi was born into affluence and served as a high-ranking official in the Manchu government. He was also one of the Kangxi emperor’s favorite painters. Painters of the Orthodox School played an important role in landscape painting at the imperial court, especially as it represented continuity with a distant and glorious past. This section is represented with works by the Orthodox School painters Wang Hui and Yun Shouping.

Buddhist Monks considers the thematic overlap that many important painters had with Buddhist philosophies and traditions. The artists Hongren, Kuncan, Bada Shanren, and Shitao all became Buddhist monks, either before or after the Manchu conquest of 1644. They never, however, formed an actual group or school, and their painting styles are noticeably different. They were active in different geographical areas: Hongren in Anhui Province; Kuncan in Nanjing; Bada Shanren in Jiangxi Province; and Shitao in Yangzhou, Beijing, Anhui, and Nanjing. All four artists were born during the Ming dynasty and died in the early Qing Kangxi reign. Although it is often assumed that these artists became Buddhist monks as a political act, closer examination of their lives reveals that they were serious Buddhist practitioners. As such they were knowledgeable about Buddhist history, philosophy, and metaphysics. Each was, at one time or another, a Buddhist ritual master. Many more 17th-century artists either studied Buddhism or found refuge in the Buddhist faith than is generally realized. Even though they were not ordained as Buddhist monks, these lay Buddhists included Dong Qichang, Li Liufang, Ding Yunpeng, Gao Cen, Zhang Feng, Ma Shouzhen, and Shao Mi.

The final section, **Flower and Bird Painting**, highlights the important role these auspicious symbols serve in Chinese culture. Certain groups of plants and birds are especially famous: the Three Friends of Winter (pine, plum blossoms, and bamboo), for example, represent strength, purity, and resilience. Similarly, birds function as potent symbols: cranes are emblematic of longevity and immortality, and magpies symbolize happiness and marriage.

Catalogue

17th-Century Chinese Paintings from the Tsao Family Collection

Stephen Little (Editor), Wan Kong (Editor) | \$85.00, hardcover, 668 pages

This book features 15 works by Dong Qichang; paintings by masters such as Gong Xian, Hongren, Zhu Da, Daoji, Wang Hui, and Wang Yuanqi; and extremely rare works by lesser-known artists, scholars, officials, and Buddhist monks. Divided into sections that encompass both the late Ming Dynasty and the early Qing Dynasty, this volume also includes an interview with Jung Ying Tsao and fascinating essays on a number of themes, including the interplay of image and text, literary gatherings and their relationship to the creation of paintings, Buddhist aspects of landscape painting, and the theory of 17th-century Chinese landscape painting. Rounding out the volume are new and authoritative interpretations of the Tsao Collection written by Stephen Little and Wan Kong, with leading scholars and remarkable new translations by Jonathan Chaves, Ronald Egan, and others, of the Chinese poems and prose texts inscribed on the paintings and calligraphic works in the exhibition.

Programming

Symposium

Saturday, October 15 | 9:15 am–4 pm

Sunday, October 16 | 9:30 am–3 pm

Bing Theater

LACMA will host a symposium in conjunction with *Alternative Dreams*. The focus will be Chinese art and culture of the 17th century (late Ming and early Qing dynasties). The presentations will explore such subjects as 17th-century painting and calligraphy, the role of poetry in the creation and experience of Chinese painting, the resurgence of Buddhism among late Ming and early Qing artists, and the depiction of dreams in Chinese literature and painting.

The symposium will feature the following speakers:

- Jonathan Chaves (George Washington University)
- Ronald Egan (Stanford University)
- Katharine Burnett (UC Davis)
- Raoul Birnbaum (UC Santa Cruz)
- Lynn Struve (Indiana University, Bloomington, IN)

- James Benn (McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada)
- Mark Meulenbeld (University of Wisconsin, Madison)
- Alan Yeung (Harvard University)
- Craig Yee (Ink Studio, Beijing)
- Chin-sung Chang (Seoul, Korea)
- Qianshen Bai (Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, China)
- Stephen Little (LACMA)
- Wan Kong (LACMA)

Andell Family Sundays—A Family Collection: Chinese Paintings

September 4, 11, 18, 25 | 12:30 pm

Los Angeles Times Central Court

This weekly family event features artist-led workshops and friendly gallery tours and activities thematically based on special exhibitions and LACMA's permanent collection. Be inspired by *Alternative Dreams* and start your own collection of art. Begin by making your own paintings in art workshops, then add works made by friends and family.

Credit: This exhibition was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and made possible by the Mozhai Foundation.

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About LACMA

Since its inception in 1965, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) has been devoted to collecting works of art that span both history and geography, in addition to representing Los Angeles's uniquely diverse population. Today LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection that includes over 130,000 objects dating from antiquity to the present, encompassing the geographic world and nearly the entire history of art. Among the museum's strengths are its holdings of Asian art; Latin American art, ranging from masterpieces from the Ancient Americas to works by leading modern and contemporary artists; and Islamic art, of which LACMA hosts one of the most significant collections in the world. A museum of international stature as well as a vital part of Southern California, LACMA shares its vast collections through exhibitions, public programs, and research facilities that attract over one million visitors annually, in addition to serving millions through digital initiatives such as online collections, scholarly catalogues, and interactive engagement. LACMA is located in Hancock Park, 30 acres situated at the center of Los Angeles, which also contains the La Brea Tar Pits and Museum and the forthcoming Academy Museum of Motion Pictures. Situated halfway between the ocean and downtown, LACMA is at the heart of Los Angeles.

Location: 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA, 90036. lacma.org

Image captions:

(Left) Dong Qichang (1555–1636), 董其昌, *Landscape in the Style of Wang Meng* (ca. 1308–1385), from the album, *Landscapes and Calligraphies*, 山水書法合冊, album leaf, ink on paper, The Tsao Family Collection, L.2012.32.6, photo by Michael Tropea

(Center, left) Bada Shanren (1626–1705), 八大山人, *Rock and Bird*, from the album, *Landscape, Flowers, Birds, Calligraphy*, 山水花鳥書法冊, Qing dynasty, Kangxi reign, 1698, album leaf; ink on paper, The Tsao Family Collection, L.2012.32.88, photo by Michael Tropea

(Center, right) Fu Shan (1602–1683), 傅山, *Horsemouth Cliff*, from the album, *Landscapes*, 山水圖, Qing dynasty, ca. 1659, album leaf; ink on paper, The Tsao Family Collection, L.2012.32.42, photo by Michael Tropea

(Right) Chen Jiru (1558–1639), 陳繼儒, *Cloudy Mountains in the Style of Mi Fu*, 仿大米雲山, Ming dynasty, Wanli reign, 1596, Hanging scroll; ink on satin, The Tsao Family Collection, L.2012.32.17, photo by Michael Tropea

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