

Scholar in Landscape by Liu Yuan-ch'i, 1601

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on view in G203

(pronounced lee-yo yoo-ahn-chee)

submitted by Jim Allen

Medium: painting-hanging scroll/ Ink on paper

Creation place: Asia, China

Style: Ming dynasty

See also Chou Tun-I, Gazing Out Over Lotus, OOM for October



Gallery label

Liu Yuan-ch'i was a pupil of Ch'ien Ku (1508-78) who, in turn, was a direct disciple of

Wen Cheng-ming (1420-1559), one of the four great masters of the Wu School. Not surprisingly, this painting accords well with sixteenth-century Suchou literati values and ultimately the late style of Wen Cheng-ming.

This large scroll, intended for a main hall (*ta chung-t'ang*), is one of Liu's earliest and most ambitious paintings. The majority of his output was on a small, intimate scale, and this monumental scroll, nearly eleven feet high, appears to have been his masterwork. A lone scholar is shown crossing a small bridge in the bottom foreground. He gazes up past a rustic retreat toward a pavilion situated high on a rocky promontory in front of a cascading waterfall. In spite of the densely patterned surface, the composition is clearly articulated and the brushwork generally relaxed and easy. The basic theme, flattened and somewhat mannered trees, pictorial structure, and dotted textures are all reminiscent of the ink landscapes produced by Wen Cheng-ming during the last decades of his career.

Literati painters were not professional, but were self-taught. They studied the great master painters of the past for inspiration and emulated techniques and brush strokes. The theme, composition and dot-textured brushwork of this painting are reminiscent of Wen Cheng-ming, a great master of the 16th century. Like the art of calligraphy, the brushes used by the literati painters were soft and flexible. Great skill was required to vary the thickness of line, darkness of tone, and variety of stroke by the pressure applied to brush on the paper or silk. This painting is considered by many to be Yuan-ch's's masterpiece.

In the Qing dynasty, Literati painting was established as the dominant tradition and become orthodox.

Questions:

You can start with Chou Tun-I Gazing Out Over Lotus and then compare it to Scholar in a Landscape.

As you can see, these are very tall paintings, nearly 11 feet high. Take a moment to look at them up close as well as at a distance. What's going on in these paintings? What do you see that makes you say that?

Both paintings feature a scholar in a landscape. What adjectives come to mind when describing these landscapes? How would you describe the relationship between the scholars and their natural surroundings? What are the scholars looking at? What do you think the scholars are thinking? What do you see that makes you say that?

Where do you retreat when you need a moment of silence?

Who else can you find in the paintings? What are they doing?

How would you describe the brushwork, the way the artist applied the ink? Compare the way the artist applied the ink in the Chou Tun-I painting and the Scholar painting. How are they similar. How do they differ? What do you see that makes you say that?

Which picture is simpler and easier to understand? WDYSTMYST?

In both pictures a scholar is immersed in nature, in one contemplating an idealistic setting, in the other embarking on a journey through a mountainous landscape. Each represents a shared ideal of the beauty of nature and humans place within it. The concept of withdrawal into the beauty of nature was a major theme for poets and painters during the Ming dynasty. The order and structure within the natural world provided a place of solace for humans to retreat (like our Scholar's Studio).

Landscape paintings were the next best thing to being there. As a viewer you can imagine yourself in the little cabin or embarking on a journey up the mountain path across the bridge to the waterfall, to rest within the humble thatched hut in order to contemplate life.