

Boundless Peaks



Ink Paintings by Minol Araki

Minol Araki in Taipei, October 2007
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Born in China to Japanese parents, Minol Araki (1928–2010) studied traditional Chinese ink painting in his youth but took up modern industrial design after immigrating to Japan in his late teens. Araki’s design work took him to cities throughout Asia and North America, where he eagerly sought out old Chinese and Japanese paintings to sketch and copy but became equally entranced by contemporary Western art and modern Japanese traditionalist painting. All the while he painted prodigiously. Although he actively sold and publicly exhibited his paintings, Araki nevertheless promoted himself as an amateur painter in the vein of scholar-painters from Chinese antiquity. And, despite being an insider in the art scene of Taipei, Taiwan, he endeavored to engineer an artistic legacy as an outsider in Japan, where—his own Japanese heritage and earnest attempts notwithstanding—he and his painting remain mostly unknown. Such dualities and contradictions are also at the heart of Araki’s artistic output. Small and introspective or grand and imposing, his paintings invariably pivot on unexpected and distinctive marriages of disparate artistic sources and impulses.

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Minol Araki

and Modular Design



Araki at the launch of PIPa, 1969
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and Kazukuni Sugiyama

Minol Araki studied industrial design in the mid-1950s at Kuwasawa Dezain Kenkyūjo. This cutting-edge design school in the heart of Tokyo followed Bauhaus pedagogical principles that emphasized the unity of art and design. By 1960 he had launched his first studio, NOL, which designed home electronics for companies such as YORX Electronics and Radio Shack. This work produced a steady and lasting income, enabling him to travel widely and paint wherever he went.

In the late 1960s he established PIPa, a design studio headquartered in New York, creating functionally innovative, upmarket housewares manufactured in Japan and sold at high-end department and design stores. PIPa's product line included series of modular housewares. This interest in modular design is profoundly linked to the types of paintings Araki began creating at this time—works consisting of multiple panels that could be hung together to create continuous compositions, displayed individually or in discrete groups, or hung all together but divided by doorways or windows. With each panel measuring precisely $71\frac{11}{16}$ by $35\frac{13}{16}$ inches (the dimensions of a standard Japanese rush mat, or tatami), his five largest paintings, all displayed in this exhibition, consist of 12 horizontal or 24 vertical panels and measure an astonishing 70 feet wide.

Splashed Ink

The paintings in this gallery represent Minol Araki's enduring exploration of the splashed-ink-and-color landscape idiom favored by his mentor, the world's best-known Chinese painter, Zhang Daqian (1899–1983). By the time Araki met him in 1973, Zhang's eyesight was poor, and he had abandoned detailed brushwork in favor of layered splatters and pools of ink and bright mineral pigments. Zhang's, and subsequently Araki's, paintings in this mode represent a synthesis of the ancient Chinese "broken-ink" and "splashed-ink" techniques epitomized in the works of the Chinese painter Yujian (active mid-1200s) and his Japanese champions such as Sesshū Tōyō (1420–1506), inflected with modern Western abstract art. In 1983, the year of Zhang's death, Araki's intensive decade of engagement with this style of painting culminated in *Boundless Peaks*. The first of five monumental modular paintings, this work is both a tribute to Zhang and an exposition of Araki's own cultural and artistic identity.



Yujian (Chinese, active mid-13th c.), *Mountain Market in Clearing Mist*, mid-13th century, fragment of a handscroll mounted as a hanging scroll; ink on paper. Idemitsu Museum of Art, Tokyo



Sesshū Tōyō (Japanese, 1420–1506), *Splashed-ink Landscape*, 1495, hanging scroll; ink on paper. Tokyo National Museum

In the Lotus Pond

Minol Araki, Zhang Daqian, and Bada Shanren

One summer day in 1973, Araki and a friend sat sketching a famous lotus pond near the National Museum of History in Taipei, Taiwan, when the pair were approached by an older man who paused to investigate Araki's sketches. This man turned out to be a leading member of Taipei's art scene, and he offered to introduce Araki to Zhang Daqian (1899–1983), the Chinese painter famous for his lotus paintings, who had recently settled in the city. Their first meeting a few days later initiated a decade-long relationship, until Zhang's death in 1983. No subject matter seen in Araki's body of work is as intimately tied to Zhang Daqian as lotuses, a rich pictorial theme that Araki explored and reimagined through his final years. Thanks to his relationship with Zhang, an avid art collector, he also came into contact with a short handscroll in Zhang's collection by the Chinese painter Bada Shanren (c. 1626–1705). The impact of that painting, which shows a family of mynah birds in a lotus pond, can be seen in many of the works in this gallery.



Bada Shanren (Zhu Da), Chinese, c. 1626–1705, *Birds in a Lotus Pond*, c. 1690, handscroll; ink on satin. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of John M. Crawford Jr., 1988 (1989.363.135)