



## Pair of Jade Carved Ducks and Raw Jade

### Pair of Ducks

This pair of ducks from the late 19th or early 20th century are made of jadeite, as indicated by their extremely shiny surface. (Jade Mountain is made of nephrite.)

Ducks mate for life, so this pair is an ideal symbol of conjugal happiness and fidelity. Mandarin ducks are considered superior to other duck species and are distinguished by a tuft of feathers on the back of their heads, as can be seen in this pair. The ducks grasp the stem of a lotus while blossoms and leaves trail gracefully onto each duck's back. Since a lotus pod contains many seeds and its prolific flowering is symbolic of the fruits of summer, their presence suggests the early and abundant arrival of children.

In addition, one of many Chinese words for lotus is a homonym for harmony (he), perhaps connected to the lotus' importance as a Buddhist symbol. The lotus is a Buddhist symbol of purity and human potential, as the pure white lotus flower grows out of mud just as the Buddha is born into the world but lives above it. The fruits of the lotus are said to be ripe when the flower blooms, just as the Buddha's teachings immediately bear the fruit of enlightenment.

This pair of ducks holding lotus flowers might represent familial happiness and harmony in conjunction with human potential for enlightenment. They would be an appropriate gift for a newly married couple.

### Raw Jade

The term "jade" (in Chinese *yu*) refers collectively to a number of semiprecious stones that occur naturally around the world and have been used throughout history. The most common kinds of jade are jadeite and nephrite, which differ slightly in appearance and origin, though both come in a variety of colors from pink to green. Nephrite, a slightly

more expensive stone, comes from Central Asia and has been worked in China since the Neolithic period. Jade is admired for its hardness, translucency, smoothness and rarity. To many Chinese, it is emblematic of virtue, protection, and wealth, among other things.

Jadeite has a shinier surface than nephrite, comes mainly from Burma/Myanmar and was mostly unknown in China until the 18th century. The piece of raw jade on our Art Cart is nephrite. The pair of ducks discussed below is jadeite.

Jade goes through a remarkable transformation from “raw” when it comes out of the earth to “refined” after it is worked and polished. Jade naturally forms a skin on the outside hiding its beautiful interior.

Because of its extreme hardness, 6.5-7.0 (talc is 1.0, diamond is 10.0) on Moh's hardness scale, jade cannot be carved like many other, softer stones. Instead, jade is abraded using a paste of minerals harder than jade such as garnet and quartz. The paste is rubbed against the jade using bamboo or wood sticks and strings or steel cords to incise the jade surface or saw through it completely. As many as ten specialists are required to produce one piece of worked jade.

Patronage by the Qianlong emperor during the 18th century took the jade industry to new heights, especially in the manufacture of decorative objects as symbols of status and wealth. It was during Qianlong's reign that Jade Mountain was made in the imperial jade workshop, as well as the majority of our jade objects from the Thomas B. Walker Collection. Jade continues to be a precious material emblematic of China-- the medals for the 2008 Beijing Olympics were enhanced with white jade.

## **Resources**

China Art Cart Manual June 2009

## **Power and Beauty Connections**

### **Jade Mountain - Room 9**

The theme represented on this jade boulder, the largest piece of jade carving outside of China, refers to an event that occurred on March 3 in the lunar calendar of 353. Wang Xizhi (303-361), a scholar official and one of the most esteemed Chinese calligraphers of all time, together with 41 renowned scholars and officials, gathered at Lanting or Orchid Pavilion in Shaoxing (in present-day Zhejiang province), celebrating the Spring Purification Festival. The scholars engaged in a drinking contest: Wine cups were floated down a small winding creek as the men sat along its banks; whenever a cup stopped, the man closest to the cup was required to empty it and write a poem. In the end, 26 of the participants composed 37 poems.

Wang Xizhi was asked to write an introduction to the collection of these poems. Written in semi-cursive script and known as Preface to the Poems Composed at the Orchid

Pavilion (transcribed on the top of the mountain by the Qianlong Emperor), it is the best known and most copied calligraphic work in art history. While the mountain image alone is enough to convey a close association between the jade sculpture and many painted landscapes, the Qianlong Emperor's seal and poem carved at the top on the other side of the boulder reinforces the idea of the jade mountain as a three-dimensional landscape painting.

**Jade Mountain Illustrating the Gathering of Scholars at the Lanting Pavilion, 1790, 92.103.13** <https://collections.artsmia.org/art/4324/jade-mountain-illustrating-the-gathering-of-scholars-at-the-lanting-pavilion-unknown>

### **Covered Vase in Mughal Style 37.56 - Room 10**

#### **Pillow- room 8**

This pillow is carved in the form of a crouching boy holding a bird in his left hand. Hard pillows, usually made of ceramic, were common in China and several pottery examples in the form of children have survived from Sung times (960-1280). Pillows of jade, however, are extremely rare, and given the precious nature of the material, this piece probably was a decorative object intended for display rather than use. Children are auspicious to the Chinese, and they figure prominently in the artistic motifs of Song ceramics, as well as in the carved lacquer, paintings and textiles of the following dynasties. National holidays for both boys and girls are still celebrated in the Far East and the subject matter of this jade pillow, however strange to Western eyes, reflects a long-standing cultural value.

**Pillow, greenish white nephrite, 17-18<sup>th</sup> century, 92.103.8**  
<https://collections.artsmia.org/art/4343/pillow-china>

#### **Jades - Room 2**

Pair of Peacocks, 92.158.34.2  
Covered Vase, 29.19.1a,b  
Pilgrim Bottle, 32.47.5  
Brush Pot, 33.38.2  
Pair of Discs, 34.31.2 & 3

Hands of Buddha, 53.21  
Scholar's Table Screen 37.59a,b  
Ruyi Scepter, 38.44.2  
Amitabha Buddha, 92.103.14a,b  
Covered Vase, 92.103.19a,b

#### **Collection Connections**

China, Neolithic jades, G215

China, Ming and Qing jades, G210