

EDUCATION



ACROSS KLAS

K-6

- » Eastern art and poetry often uses metaphor, where the seasons, or the beauty of a flower, are used to embody ideas like knowledge, politics or philosophy. Write your own short poem and create an artwork inspired by it.
- » Research the traditions of Chinese New Year and create a newspaper report which explains the traditions.
- » China, like Japan, Britain and other parts of Europe, have traditional methods and equipment to be used in the preparation of tea. Host a tea ceremony with your class.

ART MAKING

K-6

- » Use food colouring and brushes on wet paper and paint flowers or birds like the ones in the Chinese scrolls. Embellish with black ink once dry.
- » Traditionally, Chinese scrolls were not meant for permanent display, but rather were changed over time depending on the occasion, or in keeping with the seasons. Think about some special occasions over the year. Make a series of scrolls that you can put on display at different times of the year.
- » A lot of the scrolls in the MRAG collection have beautiful flowers, animals, and patterns in the landscapes. Use watercolour pencils or ink to create drawings of Australian plants and animals.



RESOURCES FOR EDUCATORS

Appreciating Chinese Calligraphy, (video) Asian Art Museum – Chong Moon Lee Centre for Asian Art and Culture. Sourced 9 August 2010 from: <http://www.asianart.org/educationalvideos.htm#china>

Asia: Art Gallery of New South Wales (website) Art Gallery of New South Wales. Sourced 9 August 2010 from: <http://www.asianart.com.au/>

Asia for Educators (website) Weatherhead East Asian Institute, University of Columbia. Sourced 9 August 2010 from: <http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/>

Kan, D. (1974) *The How and Why of Chinese Painting*. Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, New York.

Schardt, M. (1995) *Brushstrokes: styles and techniques of Chinese painting*. Education Kit, Asian Art Museum – Chong Moon Lee Centre for Asian Art and Culture.

CRITICAL AND HISTORICAL 7-12

- » Reproducing the work of masters is a respected tradition in Chinese art history, as emulation was a way of fostering techniques and skills. Consider the artists you have studied and consider how their work has affected your style or techniques.
- » Many of the scrolls in the MRAG Collection incorporate image and text into their compositions. This is similar to contemporary graphic design; both artworks have a sense of visual balance, where image, text, and blank space appear harmonious. Select a contemporary graphic of your liking with this sense of balance and harmony, and compare it with one of the MRAG scrolls. Discuss with your class how each artwork use the elements of design to create harmony.
- » Chinese culture reveres calligraphy as an art; alongside painting and poetry, calligraphy is considered one of the *three perfections* or *three incomparables*. Consider the effect this appreciation would have on Chinese culture including art, music and theatre, and do some research to learn more about attributes, skills and qualities admired by the Chinese people.

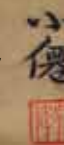
ART MAKING

7-12

- » Use ink, water and Chinese brushes to create life drawings of flowers or plein air landscape paintings. You will find useful techniques and instructions in the text, *The How and Why of Chinese Painting*, from the Resources for Educators section.
- » The idea of Western perspective is not present in many of the Chinese paintings in the MRAG collection. In the long, narrow format of a Chinese hanging scroll, the bottom of the painting represents the foreground and the top represents the distance. In a way, it is similar to an aerial perspective painting. Develop your own landscape painting, utilising Chinese perspective methods.
- » The Chinese first developed the techniques of papermaking and block printing. Develop a drawing into a block or lino print and print it onto your own handmade paper.

Education component developed by
Lauren van Katwyk
Education Curator

CHINESE SCROLLS



From The MRAG Collection



CHINESE SCROLLS



From The MRAG Collection

To 'read' a Chinese painting is to enter into a dialogue with the past; the act of unrolling a scrollprovides a further, physical connection to the work. An intimate experience, it is one that has been shared and repeated over the centuries.

Maxwell Hearn
Department of Asian Art
The Metropolitan Museum of Art

FROM CHINA TO MRAG

Maitland Regional Art Gallery (MRAG) is fortunate to receive donations of artworks for its Collection from many generous benefactors. Many of the Asian artworks in the MRAG Collection were collected by the grandfather of one of our benefactors while visiting China over a period of twenty years from the 1920s. A large number of the Asian artworks donated to MRAG are Chinese scroll paintings and most are vertical hanging scrolls on paper. 'Works on paper' is the primary focus for the MRAG Collection and it was in China that paper was first invented, during the Han Dynasty (around the first century AD).

Chinese scroll paintings show methods of drawing and composition which were influential in the development of European Modernism, especially in terms of composition and narrative. This influence can also be seen in many prints and works on paper found in the MRAG Collection.

ELEMENTS IN SCROLLS

Although paper was invented in China in the first century AD, the early Chinese paintings were painted on silk and it was not until the Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368) that Chinese painters began to paint more extensively on paper. Most of the scroll paintings in the MRAG Collection are on paper. Scroll paintings were created primarily with ink and washes of colour, with the artists using the same brushes for painting as for calligraphy. Intricate brush techniques were used and a good artist was able to imbibe their painting with *Qi*, the energy and the quality of life.

Many of the Chinese scroll paintings in the MRAG Collection are very old, one of the oldest *The Bearded Musician* was created in the Ming Dynasty in the 15th Century by famous Chinese artist Du Qun (1465-1487) and the most recent are the *Bird*

and *Flower* paintings by Wu Guan Dai (1862-1929) painted in 1922.

Over thousands of years painting, poetry and calligraphy, known in China as the *Three Perfections*, have been intimately linked to the visual, philosophic and aesthetic ideals of Chinese art. The combination and relationship between these three arts can be seen in many of the Chinese scrolls from the MRAG Collection also, as in most Chinese paintings, there are inner and symbolic meanings behind the actual content and composition. The paintings in the Collection by Wu Guan Dai include the combination of symbolic meanings and the *Three Perfections* of painting, poetry and calligraphy.

The *Bird and Flower* paintings by Wu Guan Dai include poetry, painting and calligraphy that relate to the changing of the seasons. In *Budgerigars* the plum blossom is symbolic of the promise of spring and is used to express the re-emergence and continuity of life. The accompanying poem in calligraphy reads:

Winter is nearly over and Spring is due soon

Combined, the poetry, painting and calligraphy, reflect the artist's expression of universal harmony within nature, and the harmony within the painting, of the physical elements, emotional expression and intellectual scholarship.

LANDSCAPE PAINTINGS

The vertical scroll is the ideal format for the monumental landscapes seen in many of the Chinese scrolls in the MRAG Collection. The Chinese phrase for landscape painting is *shan xie hua* which means 'mountain water painting' and we can see the landscape elements of water and mountains in many of the MRAG scrolls. These landscape paintings are also full of meaning and reflect the Chinese belief in *Nature* being immense and the *Human* being small and insignificant in comparison. Most of the landscape paintings are of imaginary idealised landscapes with the ascending mountains and water in these paintings symbolic of such things as the eternal process of change, the balance of *yin* and *yang*, the hardness, or masculine, of the mountain rock and the soft, feminine, flow of the water in the waterfalls and rivers. The mountains are also indicative of the inner drive and aspirations toward heaven.

(cover)
Wu Xiao Xian
Untitled (detail)
Ming Dynasty, 17th Century
Hanging scroll; ink and colour
on silk
130 x 67cm

(back)
Wu Guxiang (1843-1903)
Untitled (detail)
Year of Gun zhi (1900)
Hanging scroll; ink and colour
on paper
133 x 67cm

(below)
Wu Guan Dai (1862-1929)
Budgerigars, c.1922
Hanging scroll; ink and colour
on paper
100 x 32cm

These vast landscapes are meant to be immersive and the format of the vertical hanging scroll allows the viewer the opportunity stand back and take in the whole landscape - as well as the ability to get up close and discover the intricate stories inside the painting.

COPIES

Reproducing the work of the 'masters' is a respected tradition in Chinese art history. Students were encouraged to copy works of important artists to learn techniques and skills. Also, as a result, the ancient techniques and rules of painting were maintained over the centuries. This can often cause a problem for the Asian art experts when attributing the work to the correct artist. Some indicators that a work may be a copy of a 'master' include a different style of calligraphy, the artist not signing their name, or the quality of finish of the mounting of the painting not befitting that of an artist of standing, rather to an artist from more lowly means. Some of the scrolls in the MRAG Collection are 'copies' of reputable painters and calligraphers and as such have been classified as 'in the style of the artist'. Although still beautiful works in their own right, they are not quite as valuable as the original work by the 'master' in a financial sense, but nevertheless have aesthetic value.

The Chinese scrolls from the MRAG Collection allow us to view hundreds of years of history, practice, and artistry and also to reflect on the influences on art around the world through the ages, including those works on paper within our own Collection.

As tradition goes Chinese scrolls were not meant for permanent display, rather to be changed over depending on the occasion or the season or to just keep the room, in which they are displayed, interesting. So, just like all our exhibitions from the MRAG Collection, these scrolls will eventually be rolled up and stored away to be viewed again at another time, in other combinations, and shared with other audiences.

Cheryl Farrell
Senior Collection and Gallery Assistant
Maitland Regional Art Gallery

With thanks to our benefactor and also to
Marjorie Ho from East West Art

