

Northern Song and Yuan Dynasty

1235 / 1271-1379 CE



SILK ROAD
VIRTUAL MUSEUM

THE EXHIBITION

The art produced in this tumultuous period is produced both by court painters (and supporters on the new regime) and by the (self-)exiled literati of the former regime. They are shown in a rough chronological order, each with a brief background on first appearance.

The exhibition has selected 42 paintings from 11 museums located in 4 different countries. There is also a 'taster' for the forthcoming exhibition of stoneware and porcelain.

In 1206 already the Mongols under Genghis Khan controlled much of present-day northern China (northern Song) but it was only in 1271 that Kublai Khan declared himself emperor the whole country, with the capital in present-day Beijing.

The Yuan dynasty disdained the Han ruling classes until deep into the 14th century but by then it was too late. Widespread corruption and high taxation coupled with floods and plagues, whipped the discontent into open revolt.

In 1368 Beijing fell to rebel forces.

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FEATURED IN THE EXHIBITION



DWELLING IN FUCHUN MOUNTAINS

Huang Gongwang
Dimensions 31.8x688.3cms
Zhejiang Provincial Museum,
Hangzhou, and National Palace
Museum, Taipei

'Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains' is one of the most celebrated paintings in Chinese history—and one of the luckiest to survive. A devoted owner once ordered it burned upon his death so he could enjoy it in the afterlife. His son, wisely, substituted another painting. Centuries later, Emperor Qianlong covered a copy with praise, thinking it was the original. Fortunately, the real work remained untouched—though eventually it was split in two and now resides in separate museums.

Painted by Huang Gongwang, the scroll captures the quiet majesty of the Fuchun Mountains with flowing brushwork, soft ink washes, and a sense of meditative stillness. Its landscapes reflect Daoist ideals of harmony with nature. Here, the painting is presented as a single continuous work, just as the artist intended.



NOBLE HORSE

Gong Kai 龚开
29.8x56.8cms
Osaka Municipal Museum of Fine Arts, Osaka,
Japan

Horses acted as a metaphor for the state of society – portrayed as ridden in hunts by court painters and emaciated and neglected by the opponents of the regime. Noone missed the point of this small painting. Just in case, the artist added a small poem: "His hoofs swift as flying birds/ His mane like wind-blown snow./ He seems to fly without wings, /Leaving the world behind."



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FISH AMONG WATER PLANTS

Lai'an (来安)

89.6x48.3cms

Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Ma, USA. 11.6170

Some artists stayed aloof from the political turmoil and focussed on their inner development. Lai'an was a Buddhist monk. In Daoist art, fish symbolize abundance, harmony, and the fluidity of life, reflecting Daoist principles of balance, adaptability, and natural flow.



TILLING RICE (AFTER LOU SCHOU)

Cheng Qi (傳)程榮

Hand scroll 32.7 x 1049.8 cm

National Museum of Asian Art,
Washington DC., USA. F1954.21

For a nomadic peoples like the Mongols, it must have been quite a shock to be responsible for activities as farming and harvesting. This 'instruction manual' for rice production was 'copied' from an earlier version, but the artist still could not resist adding delightful individual details.

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