

SPLASHES OF COLOR

Chinese Woodblock Prints from the You Wei Du Zhai Collection

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PORTLAND ART MUSEUM, OREGON

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It should be no surprise that China, where ink and paper were first invented, was the culture to first perfect the art of making color woodblock prints. Yet the achievements of Chinese woodblock artists remain largely unknown in the West—as opposed to Japanese prints, which have been avidly collected and studied since the late nineteenth century.

Chinese color prints were designed from the outset as luxury items for the educated elite. Long held in private collections in China, these prints seldom found their way to the West.

Published in multi-volume books, they featured the classical subjects of Chinese painting—especially nature studies—and were often embellished by beautiful calligraphy. Designed to replicate paintings as closely as possible, Chinese color prints make use of sophisticated techniques to evoke the nuances of brushwork and watercolor pigments on paper.

The exhibition opens with a selection of rare, early prints from *The Ten Bamboo Studio Collection of Calligraphy and Painting*. First issued in 1633 in the southern city of Nanjing, *Ten Bamboo Studio* was not only one of the first books to be printed in multiple colors, but also introduced shading and overprinting, techniques that give the prints a loose and exuberantly painterly feel. The most deluxe editions include blind printing, for designs in low relief.

The next landmark in color printing appeared half a century later, again in the city of Nanjing, with the publication of *The Mustard Seed Garden Painting Manual*. Issued in stages between 1679 and 1701, it was intended to provide models for aspiring painters. As a visual art history textbook, it was immensely popular in both China and Japan.

After 1701, for reasons yet to be understood, color printing in China receded into the background, only to be reinvigorated in the late nineteenth century with a revival of decorative letter papers. Under the aesthetic aegis of the leading writers and painters of the day, publishers in Shanghai, Tianjin, and Beijing revived old designs and created new ones, with a palette more vibrant than ever.

This exhibition, thanks to generous loans from the You Wei Du Zhai Collection, brings a rich array of masterworks of Chinese color printing to Portland audiences for the first time.



The Ten Bamboo Studio Collection of Calligraphy and Painting

The Ten Bamboo Studio Collection of Calligraphy and Painting (*Shizhuzhai shuhuapu*) is the fruit of the vision and labor of one extraordinary man, Hu Zhengyan. Trained as a physician, Hu was a skilled painter, calligrapher, seal carver, papermaker, and printer who lived and worked in Nanjing, a great metropolis on the Yangzi River that had been an important cultural center since ancient times. Hu's lifetime coincided with the end of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644)—a tumultuous period when many forms of artistic production went into steep decline. Astonishingly, Nanjing remained a vibrant center of literati culture and the publishing industry through this era of chaos.

Brilliant, innovative, and well connected, Hu took up the then-current vogue for printed painting manuals (*huapu*) and orchestrated several printing projects. The most ambitious of these was *The Ten Bamboo Studio Collection of Calligraphy and Painting*, for which he persuaded some thirty painters and one hundred twenty poet/calligraphers to contribute designs. The resulting 356 leaves were organized into eight volumes, each focused on a category of nature studies: orchids, bamboo, plums, ink flowers

(round compositions), scholar's rocks, birds, and fruit, along with a general introductory volume. The series, possibly begun as early as 1619, was completed and published in 1633.

Hu personally supervised the carving of the blocks and oversaw the printing, and he is given credit for introducing history-making innovations that served to make a woodblock print more closely resemble a hand-brushed painting. Shading, achieved by partially wiping color off an inked block, captures the effect of washes and varying degrees of pressure of the brush, while overprinting (overlapping different tones or hues of ink) produced a broader and more nuanced palette of colors. A few leaves even employed embossing or blown ink, although these time-consuming and expensive touches were dropped in later printings.

Today, no complete set of the original *Ten Bamboo Studio* prints survives; even partial sets are extremely rare. The works in the exhibition are all from very early printings.

The Mustard Seed Garden Painting Manual

The Mustard Seed Garden Painting Manual (*Jieziyuan huazhuan*), which followed *The Ten Bamboo Studio Collection of Calligraphy and Painting* half a century later, is without question the best-known opus

of Chinese color woodblock printing. It was also a product of the fertile environment of Nanjing.

The impetus for this publishing project is attributed to the dramatist Li Yu, whose estate in Nanjing was known as the *Jiezi yuan* (Mustard Seed Garden). Li persuaded his friend Wang Gai to compile and create designs that instructed the reader how to paint, beginning with simple motifs and components such as rocks, trees, and figures, and advancing to complex landscapes. Many of the images of completed landscapes were based on Li's private collection, while others drew on prestigious private collections in southern China. Li's son-in-law, Shen Xinyou, published the first set of books in 1679. Two decades

later, in 1701, Wang Gai and his two brothers, Wang Nie and Wang Shi, collated Part II, with two volumes each on orchids, bamboo, plum blossoms, and chrysanthemums. Later the same year, they issued Part III, with designs of plants, insects, and birds.

While many designs in *Mustard Seed Garden* were printed in monochrome ink—true to the paintings on which they were based—the plum, chrysanthemum, and bird and flower pages are masterworks of color printing. Carrying forward the innovations of *Ten Bamboo Studio*, shading and overprinting were used to create prints of remarkable beauty.



Mustard Seed Garden would prove to be enormously influential in Japan as well as China. Educated Japanese could read the Chinese texts, of course, and aspiring painters eagerly studied the pictures for models. To meet the growing demand, a Japanese publisher in Kyoto issued a partial reprint in 1748, followed by a supplement in 1753.

The exhibition includes several examples from very early Chinese printings and a volume from the 1748 Japanese edition.

Letter Paper

Decorated paper for writing sacred Buddhist texts was a highly developed art form in China by the Tang dynasty (618–907), whence it traveled to Japan. Not long afterwards, it was taken up for writing poetry or letters. These exquisite papers featured collages of dyed paper, marbled ink, and stamped abstract or nature motifs. Printed designs for letter paper came into use by the eleventh century. The genre was brought to new heights by none other than Hu Zhengyan, the polymath who had created *The Ten Bamboo Studio Collection of Calligraphy and Painting* in 1633. In 1644, Hu issued *The Ten Bamboo Studio Letter Papers* (*Shizhuzhai jianpu*), a collection of deluxe paper samples with designs by many of the artists he had recruited for his earlier publication.

Hu's volume of letter paper was rediscovered in the 1930s by two luminaries of the literary world in modern China, the writer Lu Xun (1881–1936) and the journalist, archaeologist, and scholar Zheng Zhenduo (1896–1958). Eager to show the artistry of this volume and the new letter papers being designed by contemporary artists, Lu and Zheng published a very limited edition of a collection of letter papers titled *Beiping Letter Papers* (*Beiping jianpu*) in 1934. The work caused a sensation and so encouraged Rong Bao Zhai, a prominent publisher in Beijing, to issue an edition of their own letter paper (*Beiping Rong Bao Zhai Letter Paper Collection*) in 1935 and again in 1952. The artists who contributed designs to Rong Bao Zhai were among the foremost painters of the twentieth century, such as Qi Baishi, Zhang Daqian, and Puru.

Even before the 1930s boom in letter papers in Beijing, artists and publishers in Shanghai and Tianjin had begun to design and print decorative papers. The exhibition includes examples from all three cities, dating from the 1880s to the 1950s.

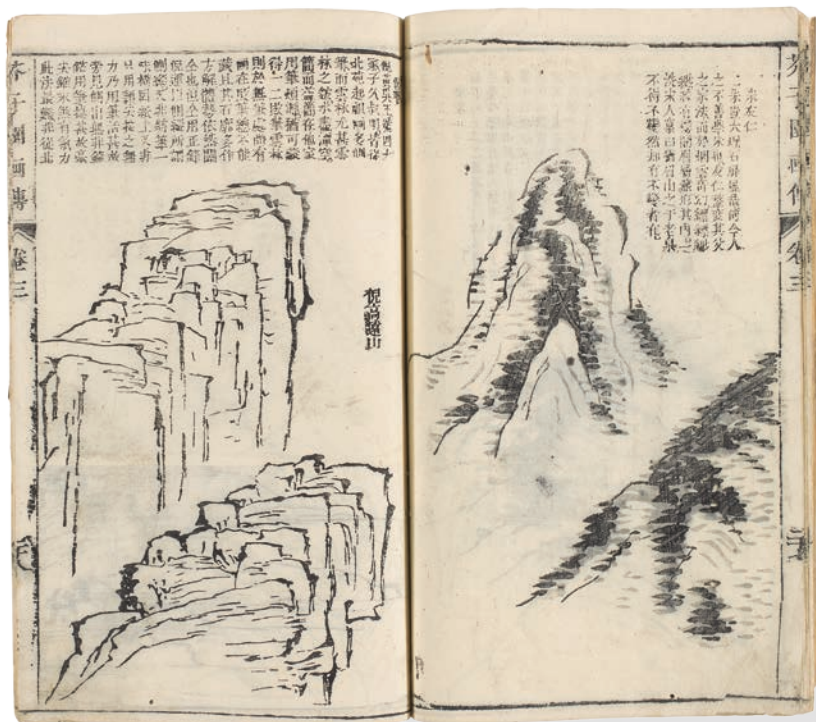


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RECOMMENDED READING

Thomas Ebrey, "The Editions, Superstates and States of the *Ten Bamboo Studio Collection of Calligraphy and Painting*," *East Asian Library Journal* 14 (2010), 1-119.

Clarissa von Spee, ed., *The Printed Image in China from the 8th to the 21st Centuries* (London: The British Museum Press), 2010.



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CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

All of the individuals mentioned below, with the exception of the publisher for no. 23, are Chinese. Their names are given in Chinese order, with the family name preceding the personal name, followed by the Chinese characters. Life dates are given when known. Unless otherwise indicated, all were active at the time the work in question was originally published. When the Chinese title of a work is known, the Chinese characters and pronunciation are provided and the standard English translation is given. Titles without Chinese are descriptive.

Unless otherwise indicated, all works are from the You Wei Du Zhai Collection.

The Ten Bamboo Studio Collection of Calligraphy and Painting

十竹齋書畫譜

Shizhuzhai shuhuapu

Compiled and published by Hu Zhengyan 胡正言 (1584/85–1673/74) in Nanjing, China

First issued in 1633; reprinted repeatedly thereafter

A. Deluxe first-edition single-leaf prints mounted in album format

1633

Picture and calligraphy together: 11³/₄ x 23¹/₁₆ inches

- Lichened Stone and Broad-leaved Plant and Poem**, from Introductory Volume
Image with signature of Gao Yang 高陽 and two of his seals, Gao Yang 高陽 and Qiufu 秋甫
Poem and calligraphy with signature of Zhang Xuemao 張學懋 and his seal, Siyu 四愚
Color woodblock print with shading, overprinting, and embossing

- Pair of Vertical Rocks and Poem**, from Introductory Volume
Image with signature of Gao You 高友 and his seal, *Gao You zhi in* 高友之印
Poem and calligraphy with signature of Wang Louding 王鏤鼎 and his seal, Longguang 龍光
Color woodblock print with shading and overprinting
- Stacked Rocks and Grasses and Poem**, from Volume of Round Compositions
Image with signature and seal of Liu Zhen 劉禎
Poem by Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫 (1254–1322)
Calligraphy with signature Li Yingshi 李營室 and his seal, Zongding 宗定
Color woodblock print with shading and overprinting
- Stacked Rock and Poem**, from Rock Volume
Image with seal of Gao Yang, *Gao Yang zhi in* 高陽之印
Poem and calligraphy with signature of He Weiran 何偉然 and his seal, Xianlang 仙郎
Color woodblock print with shading and overprinting
- Eroded Rock on a Stand and Poem**, from Rock Volume
Image with seal of Gao Yang, *Gao Yang zhi in* 高陽之印
Poem and calligraphy with signature of Zhang Shihe 張世和 and his seal, Jietian 介天
Color woodblock print with shading and overprinting
- Eroded Rock and Poem**, from Rock Volume
Image with seal of Gao Yang 高陽之印
Poem and calligraphy with signature of Wen Zhenheng 文震亨 and his seal, Zhenheng 震亨
Color woodblock print with shading, overprinting, and blown ink
- Snow-covered Rock and Poem**, from Rock Volume
Image with seal of Gao Yang, *Gao Yang zhi in* 高陽之印
Poem and calligraphy with signature of Wang Rumu 王汝

沐 and his seal, Jiuxian 九仙
Woodblock print with shading and overprinting

- Moss-covered Twisted Rock and Poem**, from Rock Volume
Image with seal of Gao Yang, *Gao Yang zhi in* 高陽之印
Poem and calligraphy with signature of Min Jingxian 閔景賢 and his seal, Tuxingshi 土行氏
Woodblock print with shading and overprinting

B. First-edition printed books

1633 or shortly thereafter

Butterfly binding

9 Orchid Volume

Woodblock prints; some pages with black and gray ink only, others with color, including shading and overprinting
9⁷/₈ x 11⁹/₁₆ inches (open)

10 Plum Blossom Volume

Woodblock prints; some pages with black and gray ink only, others with color, including shading and overprinting
9¹³/₁₆ x 11¹/₂ inches (open)

11 Volume of Round Compositions

Woodblock prints; some pages with black and gray ink only, others with color, including shading and overprinting
9³/₄ x 11⁵/₈ inches (open)

12 Rock Volume

Woodblock prints; some pages with black and gray ink only, others with color, including shading and overprinting
10 x 11⁵/₈ inches (open)

C. Leaves from first-edition books

1633 or shortly thereafter

- Camellias and Plum Blossoms**, from Plum Blossom Volume
Signature of Shen Cunde 沈存德 and his seal, Cunde 存德
Color woodblock print with shading and overprinting
10¹/₄ x 11⁵/₈ inches
- Camellias and Plum Blossoms**, from Volume of Round Compositions
Signature of Gao You 高友 and his seal, *Gao You zhi in* 高友之印
Color woodblock print with shading and overprinting
10¹/₈ x 11⁹/₁₆ inches
- Stacked Rocks with Grasses**, from Volume of Round Compositions
Signature of Li Ying 厲穎 and his seal, undeciphered
Color woodblock print with shading and overprinting
10 x 11⁹/₁₆ inches
- Banana Tree and Rock**, from Volume of Round Compositions
Seal of Gao Yang, *Gao Yao zhi in* 高陽之印
Color woodblock print with shading and overprinting
10 x 11³/₄ inches

The Mustard Seed Garden Painting Manual

芥子園畫傳

Jieziyuan huazhuan

A. Part I: Landscape Motifs

Compiled and edited by Wang Gai 王概 (1645–1707)

Preface by Li Yu 李漁 (1610–1680)

Published by Li's son-in-law Shen Xinyou 沈因伯 (active late 17th–early 18th century) in Nanjing, China

First issued in 1679; reprinted repeatedly thereafter
Stitched binding

17 **Volume III: Rocks and Mountains**

1679 or shortly thereafter
Woodblock prints; two leaves with a second tint block in gray
10 x 11 1/2 inches (open)

18 **Volume IV: Figures and Architecture**

1679 or shortly thereafter
Woodblock prints; four leaves with a second tint block in gray, one leaf with a light rose block
10 5/16 x 11 3/4 inches (open)

B. Part II: Orchids, Bamboo, Chrysanthemums, and Plum Blossoms

Compiled and edited by Wang Gai 王概 (1645–1707) and his brothers Wang Shi 王著 (1649–1734) and Wang Nie 王臬 (active late 17th–early 18th century)

Published by Shen Xinyou 沈因伯 (active late 17th–early 18th century) in Nanjing, China

First issued in 1701; reprinted repeatedly thereafter
Stitched binding

19 **Volume II, Books 1 & 2: Bamboo**

1701 or shortly thereafter
Woodblock prints; several leaves with a second tint block in lighter gray, a few leaves with color and shading
11 3/8 x 11 5/8 inches (open)

C. Part III: Birds and Flowers

Compilation and publication information as for Part II, above

20 **Lotus**

1701 or shortly thereafter
Color woodblock print with shading and overprinting
10 7/16 x 12 1/2 inches
Portland Art Museum, Museum purchase: Elia M. Hirsch Fund, 39.5.12



21 **Oriole and Willow**

1701 or shortly thereafter
Color woodblock print with shading and overprinting
10 7/16 x 12 1/2 inches
Portland Art Museum, Museum purchase: Elia M. Hirsch Fund, 39.5.9

22 **Bee and Flowering Branch**

1701 or shortly thereafter
Color woodblock print with shading and overprinting
10 7/16 x 12 1/2 inches
Portland Art Museum, Museum purchase: Elia M. Hirsch Fund, 39.5.7

Japanese Edition, Kaishi'en gaden

23 **Part III: Birds and Flowers**

Compiled and edited by Wang Gai 王概 (1645–1707) and his brothers Wang Shi 王著 (1649–1734) and Wang Nie 王臬 (active late 17th–early 18th century)

Published by Kawaminami Shiroemon 河南四良右衛門 (firm name: Kananro 河南樓; Japanese, active mid-18th century) in Kyoto, Japan
1748

Color woodblock prints bound in book with stitched binding
11 13/16 x 13 3/8 inches open

Letter Paper

箋譜

Jianpu

24 **Letter Paper with Cicada Design**

With signature and seal of Ren Xun 任薰 (1835–1893)
1880s

Publisher unknown
Woodblock print on dyed paper
6 11/16 x 4 15/16 inches

25 **Japanese Letter on Chinese Letter Paper with Design of Woman Seated by a Table**

Artist unknown
Paper, 1880s or thereafter; date of letter unknown

Publisher unknown
Woodblock print on dyed paper
9 3/16 x 4 5/8 inches

26 **The Wen Mei Zhai Collection of Letter Papers**

文美齋詩箋譜
Wen Mei Zhai shijianpu
1911

Multiple artists, mostly from Shanghai, China
Published by Wen Mei Zhai, Tianjin, China
Color woodblock prints bound in book with stitched binding
11 7/16 x 11 1/2 inches (open)

27 **The Hundred Flowers Collection of Letter Papers**

(Volumes 1 & 2)
百華詩箋譜
Baihua shijianpu
1911

Zhang Zhaoxiang 張兆祥 (active 1892–1907)
Published by Wen Mei Zhai, Tianjin, China
Color woodblock prints with shading and overprinting, bound in book with stitched binding
11 7/16 x 12 1/2 inches (open)

28 **Beiping Rong Bao Zhai Letter Paper Collection** (Volumes 1 & 2)

北平榮寶齋詩箋譜
Beiping Rong Bao Zhai shijianpu
1935

Multiple artists
Published by Rong Bao Zhai, Beijing, China
Color woodblock prints with shading and overprinting,



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bound in book with stitched binding
12 5/8 x 15 inches (open)

29 **Envelope with Design of Antiquities**

博古詩筒
Bogu shitong
1930s

After a design by Hu Zhengyan, in his *Ten Bamboo Studio Letter Papers*, 1644

Published by Rong Bao Zhai, Beijing, China
Color woodblock print with embossing and shading
8 5/8 x 3 11/16 inches

30 **Letter Paper: Rong Bao Zhai Woodblock Water Prints**

信牋榮寶齋木版水印
Xinjian Rong Bao Zhai muban shuiyin
Published by Rong Bao Zhai, Beijing, China
1930s

Each leaf with the publisher's seal Rong Bao 榮寶
Color woodblock prints with shading and overprinting
Sheets 10 3/16 x 6 1/4 inches; envelopes 3 11/15 x 6 11/16 inches

31 **Rong Bao Zhai Letter Papers after Old Models**

榮寶齋製仿古詩箋
Rong Bao Zhai zhi fanggu shijian
1936

Published by Rong Bao Zhai, Beijing, China
10 5/8 x 6 1/8 inches (each sheet)

Color woodblock prints with shading

a) *Mouse with Grapes*, with signature of Qi Baishi 齊白石 (1863–1957) and his seal Muren 木人; publisher's seal, *Rong Bao Zhai zhi* 榮寶齋制 (Made by Rong Bao Zhai)

b) *Mouse with Bean Pod*, with signature of Wang Xuetao 王雪濤 (1903–1982) and his seal, Tao 涛; publisher's seal Rong Bao 榮寶



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c) *Mouse with Red Peppers*, with signature and seal of Wang Yuyi 王羽儀; publisher's seal, *Rong Bao Zhai suozaosao* 榮寶齋所造 (Made by Rong Bao Zhai)

32 Letter Paper with Persimmon Design

With seals of Chen Hengke 陳衡恪 (1876–1923), Xiuji 朽記 and a second, undeciphered seal
1930s

Published by Rong Bao Zhai, Beijing, China
Color woodblock print with shading
10¹/₈ x 5¹⁵/₁₆ inches

33 Letter Paper with Design of a Traveler on a Donkey

With seal of the artist Puru 溥儒 (1896–1963), *Puru zhi in* 溥儒之印, and signed with his art name Xinyou 溥儒
ca. 1935

Published by Rong Bao Zhai, Beijing, China
Color woodblock print with shading and overprinting
10³/₄ x 6¹/₂ inches

34 Grapes

With signature of Qi Baishi 齊白石 (1863–1957) and his seal, Jiping 寄萍
1950s

Published by Rong Bao Zhai, Beijing, China
Color woodblock print with shading and overprinting
12³/₁₆ x 8³/₈ inches

35 Tadpoles

With signature of Qi Baishi 齊白石 (1863–1957) and his seal, Laobai 老白
1950s

Published by Rong Bao Zhai, Beijing, China
Color woodblock print with shading
Image: 11 x 7 inches; sheet: 14³/₈ x 9⁷/₈ inches

36 Letter Written in Chinese on Letter Paper with Ladybug and Gourd Design

Letter paper with signature of Qi Baishi 齊白石 (1863–1957), and his seal Qi Da 齊大
1930s

Calligrapher unknown; letter dated to 1974
Published by Rong Bao Zhai, Beijing, China
Color woodblock print
10¹¹/₁₆ x 6¹/₂ inches

The Museum is deeply indebted to Thomas Ebrey for sharing his exhaustive knowledge of Chinese prints and providing detailed cataloguing information for each work. We are also grateful to Professor Lei Xue of Oregon State University for deciphering many of the signatures and seals.

Splashes of Color: Chinese Woodblock Prints from the You Wei Du Zhai Collection is organized by the Portland Art Museum and curated by Maribeth Graybill, PhD, The Arlene and Harold Schnitzer Curator of Asian Art.

Front Cover Image: #3



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