

News

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The Bold Brush of Au Ho-nien Asian Art Museum presents new ink works from living legend of the Lingnan school



San Francisco Jan. 28, 2019 — Steely-eyed eagles perched on pines, sea spray churning against a rocky shore, the knowing gaze of a well-fed monk, and — what's this? — a tiny car in the corner of a vast mountain range, chugging along as peaks loom in mists above. All the drama of life contained in eloquent strokes of ink. *The Bold Brush of Au Ho-nien*, an original exhibition at the Asian Art Museum on view from May 31 to Aug. 25, 2019, will showcase 22 scroll paintings from the decades-long career of Au Ho-nien, beloved master of the Lingnan school.

Lingnan means “South of the Mountains” in Chinese, and the Lingnan school of painting originated in the Guangdong area in the south of China at the end of the 19th century. The founders sought to advance the conservative tendencies of late Imperial ink painting by incorporating unconventional influences from around the world. Now centered in Hong Kong and Taiwan, as well as many places across the mainland, Lingnan painters have always been proud of their southern, regional identity as measured against classical Chinese painting.

The Bold Brush includes nine new artworks created especially for this exhibition in 2018, demonstrating how Au, a living legend now in his eighties, continues to innovate across a range of subjects: from animals and landscapes to expressive figures plucked from

millennia of Chinese literature and history. This is the first solo exhibition of Au's work at the Asian Art Museum.

"Au Ho-nien embodies the best of what the Lingnan school represents, skillfully combining the humanistic spirit and techniques of traditional Chinese fine art with Western aesthetics to create what scholars describe as an 'eclectic fusion,'" says Dr. Jay Xu, director and CEO of the Asian Art Museum. "Visitors to *The Bold Brush* will be the first to see many fresh works from Au, who is easily one of the most celebrated living ink wash painters and continues to surprise and delight his audiences in new ways."

"Because Au is a household name for those who love Chinese brush painting — especially San Francisco's Chinese American community — we worked closely with the artist to select paintings that we feel reflect the ecological and cultural diversity of the Bay Area," says Li He, exhibition organizer and Asian Art Museum associate curator of Chinese art. "From nature scenes and animal portraits to mythical characters that convey both the timeless and the forward-looking spirit of the region, *The Bold Brush* makes it clear that ink-based art continually evolves and offers visitors new ways to connect with a traditional genre."

Au Ho-nien represents the third generation of the Lingnan school and is considered its leading figure, succeeding Chao Shao-an. He currently maintains his primary studio in Taipei, Taiwan, where he has trained thousands of students and ensured the continuity of the Lingnan school.

"In many ways, Au's paintings of people and animals are his most impactful because he paints elements of himself into the figures," says Xu. "What you're really seeing is a vivid portrait of the artist, one that speaks directly to us, his audience, with the grace, warmth and above all that bit of sly humor which has made him such an inspirational teacher and master of his 'bold brush.'"

Highlights of the exhibition, which is composed entirely of vertical hanging scrolls, include the vigorous *Old Steed* from 2018, which showcases Au's ability to handle realistic nature subjects; *Wu the Elder Selling Pancakes* from 1980, an excellent example of the expressiveness of his portraits; the wide format *Gulls Soaring over Sea Spray* from 1986, which reveals Au's fluency with landscape as well as his characteristically dynamic calligraphy; and *Scenery Around Taroko Gorge* from 2018, with the car detail mentioned above, that nods to Au's timeliness and essential playfulness.



Due to the ongoing museum transformation project, the Asian Art Museum's collection galleries of Chinese paintings will be closed for refurbishment while *The Bold Brush of Au Ho-nien* is on view.

Exhibition Organization and Publication

The Bold Brush of Au Ho-nien is organized by the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco. This exhibition is a part of Today's Asian Voices, which is made possible with the generous support of Salle E. Yoo and Jeffrey P. Gray.

The exhibition is accompanied by an original 64-page softcover catalogue published by the Asian Art Museum, featuring a foreword by Jay Xu and an introduction by Li He, which will be available in May 2019 (\$19.95).

About the Asian Art Museum

The Asian Art Museum—Chong-Moon Lee Center for Asian Art and Culture is one of San Francisco's premier arts institutions and home to a world-renowned collection of more than 18,000 Asian art treasures from throughout Asia spanning 6,000 years of history. Through rich art experiences, centered on historic and contemporary artworks, the Asian Art Museum unlocks the past for visitors, bringing it to life while serving as a catalyst for new art, new creativity and new thinking.

Information: 415.581.3500 or www.asianart.org

Location: 200 Larkin Street, San Francisco, CA 94102

Hours: The museum is open Tuesdays through Sundays from 10 AM to 5 PM. Hours are extended on Thursdays until 9 PM February through September. Closed Mondays, as well as New Year's Day, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day.

Museum Admission: FREE for museum members and children (12 & under). \$25 for adults and \$20 for seniors (65 & over), youth (13–17) and college students (with ID). On Target First Free Sundays and on Thursday evenings, 5-9 PM (February-September), admission to the museum is \$10. Please check website for updates.

Access: The Asian Art Museum is wheelchair accessible. For more information regarding access: 415.581.3598; TDD: 415.861.2035.

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