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**ASIA SOCIETY MUSEUM PRESENTS FIRST MAJOR EXHIBITION TO EXAMINE
CHINESE RECLUSION AS A RESPONSE TO POLITICAL TURMOIL**

***THE ARTFUL RECLUSE: PAINTING, POETRY, AND POLITICS IN 17TH-CENTURY CHINA
LOOKS AT TRANSITIONAL PERIOD BETWEEN MING AND QING DYNASTIES***

March 6 through June 2, 2013



Shen Shichong, *Landscape* (detail), 1631. Handscroll, ink and color on paper. Private collection.

Asia Society presents a major exhibition of Chinese paintings that reveal the private world of the scholar-painters who lived during one of the most tumultuous periods of Chinese history—the end of the Ming dynasty (c. 1600–1644) and the early years of foreign conquest by the Manchu-ruled Qing dynasty (1644–c.1700). Many of the paintings are exhibited for the first time in the United States and drawn from seven private collections and six public institutions in the U.S. and Taiwan, including the Honolulu Museum of Art and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

The Artful Recluse showcases some of China’s most celebrated artists who, following a time-honored tradition in Chinese culture, withdrew from the turbulent and public life of politics to seek solace in nature, art, and private companionship. Using landscape and the natural world as their symbolic subject matter these artists created brilliant and diverse commentary through art. Many of the paintings include poems and inscriptions that enhance the images with masterful calligraphy. During this time, there was a shift in how disengagement was viewed and expressed with many artists asserting a new sense of self through their art and poetry.

“Asia Society is pleased to be showing magnificent works of art from a transitional, yet significant period in China’s history,” says Asia Society Museum Director Melissa Chiu. “The practice of reclusion has a history of over a thousand years in China. This exhibition looks at reclusion as a response to bureaucratic corruption within the government. Looking at these works in their historical context provides a new lens through which to consider the role of the individual in Chinese society and the way the intelligentsia responds to present-day issues.”



Bada Shanren, *Golden Fish, Lotus Pods, Globefish, and Bamboo* (detail), c.1689. Album of four leaves, ink or ink and color on paper. Private collection.



Chen Jiru, *Thatched Hut by Tall Pines*. Hanging scroll, ink on paper. Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of N. P. Wong Family

For some of these scholar-painters, like **Dong Qichang** (1555–1636) and **Chen Jiru** (1558–1639), reclusion meant engaging like-minded friends to study art and literature of the past, collecting art, and making art by evoking the ideas, styles, and brush manner of great masters. This intense focus on China’s literary and art-historical past resulted in a flourishing of developments in painting, as well as art theory, that influenced the development of art in the subsequent centuries and continues to affect the study of Chinese paintings to this day.

For other artists such as the monk **Kuncan** (1612–1673), worldly disengagement meant a strong commitment to Buddhism and to the Buddhist community, which played a significant role as both a physical and spiritual sanctuary for scholar-artists after the collapse of the Ming dynasty. Kuncan, like many artists, used images of nature to voice his distinct response to the loss of the country to foreign invaders. Others, such as **Wang Yuanqi**, exemplified the idea of practicing detachment despite being engaged in worldly affairs.

The exhibition is organized into two chronological sections—the late Ming and early Qing dynasties—and a number of sub-sections, including *Summoning the Recluse*, *Images of Self*, *Remnants and Loyalists*, *The Master of Hiding*, and a final section illustrating a return to dynastic stability.

The exhibition is organized by the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, where it premiered in fall 2012. Asia Society Museum is the only other venue for the exhibition. Susan Tai, Elizabeth Atkins Curator of Asian Art at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, and Peter Sturman, professor of History of Art and Architecture at the University of California, Santa Barbara, organized the exhibition and the accompanying catalogue. The 319-page catalogue is the first publication to explore in depth the theme of reclusion in painting and calligraphy within the broader context of political and social changes in the seventeenth century, and includes essays authored by leading scholars in the fields of art, literature, and history. At Asia Society, Adriana Proser, John H. Foster Senior Curator for

Traditional Asian Art, is the in-house curator for the exhibition.

The Artful Recluse is part of *China Close Up*, Asia Society’s yearlong programmatic focus on China. Through major exhibitions and programming in arts and culture, policy and business, and education, Asia Society explores China’s vibrant past and present as a window onto its exciting future. Details are available at AsiaSociety.org/ChinaCloseUp.

Exhibition support

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About Asia Society Museum

Asia Society Museum presents groundbreaking exhibitions and artworks, many previously unseen in North America. The Museum is known for its permanent collection of masterpiece-quality works gifted to the Society



Kuncan, *Temple on a Mountain Ledge*, 1661. Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper. Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1974.124.

by Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd. Through its exhibitions and related public programs, Asia Society provides a forum for the issues and viewpoints reflected in both traditional and contemporary Asian art.

Asia Society Museum is located at 725 Park Avenue (at 70th Street), New York City. The Museum is open Tuesday through Sunday from 11:00 A.M.–6:00 P.M. and Friday from 11:00 A.M.– 9:00 P.M. Closed on Mondays and major holidays. General admission is \$10, seniors \$7, students \$5, and free for members and persons under 16. Free admission Friday evenings, 6:00–9:00 P.M. The Museum is closed Fridays after 6:00 P.M. from July 1 through mid-September. AsiaSociety.org/museum