

Celestial Fragrance labels

Wang Qian

Chinese, active mid 15th century, Ming dynasty

Plum Blossom, 1454

Ink on paper

The John R. Van Derlip Fund 43.5

Wang Qian came from the southern province of Zhejiang, where plum blossoms were a favorite motif of flower painters during the Ming period. The plum is long-lived; specimens said to be up to 1,000 years old are found in many places in China. The crooked and gnarled branches, young green shoots, and flowers are much admired. Furthermore, the physical toughness of the rugged old plum tree, which blooms in wintry desolation, symbolizes the ideal, secluded scholar, whose moral toughness makes him resilient. The inscription records the occasion of this careful rendering:

I have recently received gifts of a poem from my distinguished relative Shizhai, chief advisor to the Prime Minister and I greatly appreciate his kindness. Using the same rhyme, I have taken the occasion to combine a poem with flowers in ink as an expression of our sincere friendship.

*There never was found such a flower in the Northland
The wave of a brush, a slanting branch expresses an
image of thought.*

*Pure, clean, exalted and natural, it surpasses all
common plants*

*One fitting to present the family of a retired
statesman of the imperial court.*

*The first day of winter (November 7) in the fifth year
of Jingtai, being the cyclical year of jiaxu (1454).
Greetings from your humble relative Wang Qian.*

Attributed to **Cheng Ruoyun**

Chinese, active 12th century, Song dynasty

Willow and Duck, early 12th century

Ink on silk

Gift of Miss Alice O'Brien 62.70.3

After **Wu Yuanyu**

Chinese, active 1080-1104, early Ming dynasty

Swan and Cygnets, 14th-15th century

Ink and colors on silk

Gift of Miss Alice O'Brien 62.70.7

By the Song dynasty (960-1280), the Chinese had perfected a
pictorial art form called *huaniao* (flower-and-bird

painting). Chinese artists combined a highly descriptive approach to rendering plants and animals with themes that had psychological implications. Based on a composition by the 11th-century artist Wu Yuanyu, this carefully executed painting of a swan and cygnets forms a pair with another scroll of the same subject matter. The compositions express a psychological bond between parent and child that is emblematic of the traditional Confucian value of family unity. Large, paired paintings such as these were commonly hung in the reception halls of aristocratic homes as well as palaces during the early Ming period.

After **Wu Yuanyu**

Chinese, active 1080–1104, early Ming dynasty

Swan and Cygnets, 15th century

Ink and colors on silk

Gift of Miss Alice O'Brien 62.70.8

This painting is typical of professional flower-and-bird paintings of the early Ming period in its clear reference to older Song dynasty styles. With the overthrow of the Mongols in 1368 and the restoration of native rule, the tendency to

emulate the highly accomplished art forms of the pre-Mongol era was quite pronounced.

Wu Yuanyu, whose apocryphal name appears on this scroll, was a military officer in the Song courts of Emperor Shenzong (reigned 1068-1085) and Zhezong (reigned 1086-1094). He worked in the academy of painting and this portrayal of a swan and its cygnets, which forms a pair with a painting of the same subject matter, typifies the so-called Song academic style. Even though it was painted well after the time of Wu Yuanyu, it accurately captures the likeness and spirit of the earlier style.

Mianyi

Chinese, 1764-1815, Qing dynasty

Four Leaves from a Flower-painting Album, late 18th century, Qing dynasty

Ink and colors on paper

The Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund and Gift of funds from Louis W. Hill, Jr. 85.12.5

These delicate flower studies were painted by Mianyi, a grandson of Emperor Qianlong (reigned 1735-95). The four double leaves originally formed an album that was once in the imperial collection. The frontispiece, in fact, bears the seal of the Jiaqing emperor who reigned from 1796 to

1821. Like most of the educated elite, Mianyi was well versed in classical literature, music, and calligraphy, but he excelled at painting and is best known for his flower studies. The use of color (versus ink), interest in descriptive detail, and facile technique are typical not only of Prince Mianyi, but also of Chinese court tastes in general during the 18th century. This album illustrates the type of amateur painting practiced among the court intelligentsia. Descriptive, technically accomplished, and decorative, the aesthetics of these leaves are quite different from the more cerebral ink landscapes of the literati tradition.

Zheng Xie

Chinese, 1693-1765, Qing dynasty

Bamboo and Rocks, c. 1760

Ink on paper

Gift of Ruth and Bruce Dayton 95.54.2

Zheng Xie was born in Xinghua near Yangzhou in present-day Jiangsu province. Although his family lived in genteel poverty, Zheng was a good student and passed the highest government exams in 1736. He studied and produced poetry, calligraphy, and painting, while ably serving as district magistrate in Shandong province. Undisciplined, outspoken, and passionate about public service, Zheng resigned in frustration in 1753 and established himself as a distinctive

member of the group known as the Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou. He is best known as an artist who closely integrated calligraphy with orchid and bamboo paintings.

His poem reads:

*Bamboo and rock stand paired alone in harmony
The multitudes of plants and flowers are in vain
Spring, summer and autumn cannot transform them.
Only the elegant plum has greater virtue.*

Zhang Feng

Chinese, active 1628–after 1668, Qing dynasty

Magpies with Plum Blossom, 17th century

Ink and color on silk

Gift of Ruth and Bruce Dayton 96.97.31

Birds could convey good wishes and greetings through the puns on their names, which conjure up verbal associations with lucky ideas. *Xique* (magpie), for instance, is an auspicious bird whose caw heralds the approach of good fortune. Its name in Chinese forms a pun on the word *xie* ("happiness" and "joy."). Together with the plum blossom, a flower blooming in late winter and representing renewal and heralding spring, the composition expresses a good wish: "Magpies herald the arrival of the spring" (*xique baochun*).

China

Qing dynasty

Still Life for May Festival, 18th century

Ink and color on silk

Gift of Ruth and Bruce Dayton 96.97.33

The talismanic quality of a plant underlies the belief that planting certain flowers near one's home or placing them on the gates would protect the household from evil. The long-bladed grass of the sweet flag (*Acorus calamus*), with its strong aroma, was believed to ward off poisonous insects and evil forces. Therefore it was customarily hung on doors on the occasion of the May (*Duanwu*) Festival on the fifth day of the fifth moon. The figure with his hand holding a sword is Zhong Kui, a deity who exorcises ghosts and evil spirits. His image is often painted on household gates as a guardian spirit, as well as in places of business where high-value goods are involved.

Zhang Yu

Chinese, 1734-1803, Qing dynasty

Egrets, Lotus and Hibiscus Mutabilis, 18th century

Ink and color on paper

Gift of Ruth and Bruce Dayton 96.97.35

After the spread of Buddhist belief in China, the lotus was imbued with religious implications and became known as the sacred flower of Buddhism. To Buddhists, the lotus flower

blooms above the water, just as Buddha is born into the world but lives above the world; its fruits are said to be ripe when the flower blooms, just as the truth preached by Buddha bears immediately the fruit of enlightenment. The great popularity of the lotus in China during later periods, however, was not merely derived from its Buddhist connections, but also from the more general belief that the lotus, which grows out of mud but is not defiled, can be identified with noble purity and unflinching courage.

Wang Zhen

Chinese, 1867-1938, late Qing dynasty-Republic of China

Pine and Crane, 1932

Ink and color on silk

Gift of Ruth and Bruce Dayton 96.97.39

All the motifs in this painting are auspicious. Pine is a robust evergreen-like plum blossom, it is capable of withstanding the snows of winter. The two subjects are often combined with the crane—a bird symbolic of longevity, thus representing abundant blessings.

Xi Gang

Chinese, 1746-1816, Qing dynasty

Bamboo and Plum Blossoms, 18th-19th century

Ink on paper

Gift of Ruth and Bruce Dayton 96.97.42

From Qiantang in Zhejiang province, Xi Gang was best known as a poet, calligrapher, and painter of landscapes and flowers. This small handscroll features bamboo and white plum in an elegantly refined composition. A grouping comprising the plum blossom, the pine, and bamboo is known in China as the "Three Friends of the Cold Season." The symbolism derives from the natural qualities of these plants: the plum blossom defies winter and triumphs over cold; the upright pine remains green throughout the year; the bamboo is capable of withstanding the snows of winter. Together, they form an emblem of Confucian virtue, a moral grouping of exemplary plants that endure when all others have succumbed.

Guan Daosheng

Chinese, 1262-1319, Yuan dynasty

Chrysanthemums, 13th-14th century

Ink and colors on fabric

Bequest of Louis W. Hill, Jr. 96.146.298

The history of Chinese flower-and-bird painting up to the Tang dynasty (618-907) represents a gradual, cumulative mastery of the artists' means of description and expression.

Two groups of artists dominate: the academy school and the scholar-painters. The first group worked mainly with descriptive line and color on silk. They pursued a meticulous, naturalistic rendering, a dazzling surface and a sensuous effect. This painting is a good example of this style. The chrysanthemum flowers in autumnal solitude, embodying purity in its yellow blossoms. It is a favored motif among literati artists.

Guan Daosheng, a native of Qingpu, in present-day Shanghai, was an accomplished poet, painter, and calligrapher of the Yuan dynasty. She was married to Zhao Mengfu (1254-1322), a prince and descendant of the Song dynasty who became one of the most influential scholars, painters, and calligraphers in Chinese history. Their second son, Zhao Yong, also became a famous painter and calligrapher.

Gu Jianlong

Chinese, 1606-after 1687, Ming dynasty

Begonia and a Bird, 1670

From an album of 24 leaves

Ink and colors on silk, and ink on gold-dusted paper

Gift of Ruth and Bruce Dayton 97.83.2

Compiled in 1670 and dedicated to a Mr. Xiaoweng, this album contains 12 leaves of paintings on silk and 12 leaves

of calligraphy on gold-dusted paper, each by a different artist.

Zhu Da

Chinese, 1626–1705, Qing dynasty

Two Chicks, c. 1694

Ink on paper

Gift of Ruth and Bruce Dayton 97.133.1

Zhu Da, also known as Bada Shanren, often expressed complex ideas using simple images. It is likely that these quickly rendered chicks express the artist's loyalty to the former Ming dynasty, while indicating his contempt for the ruling Manchus. Zhu Da saw himself as being in, but not part of, the society around him. With his imperial lineage eradicated by the conquering Manchus, he was unable to submit to the foreign rulers.

Although the chicks are of the same species and face in complementary directions, they do not look at each other. Each isolated chick exists in a separate world. The inscription reads: *Painted in the Garden of Yellow Bamboo by Bada Shanren, the nineteenth day of the third lunar month.* The nineteenth day of the third lunar month is now known to commemorate the day in 1644 when the last Ming emperor hanged himself as rebel forces approached the capital.

Wu Changshuo

Chinese, 1844-1927, Qing dynasty-early Republic of China

Pomegranates, 1927

Ink and colors on paper

Gift of Ruth and Bruce Dayton 98.169.1

The pomegranates represent vigorous fertility because of the fruit's numerous seeds—a pun implying sons. The image in art, therefore, is imbued with a good wish for numerous offspring.

Qi Baishi

Chinese, 1863-1957

Lotus, early 20th century

Ink and colors on paper

Gift of Ruth and Bruce Dayton 99.19

Wu Changshuo

Chinese, 1844-1927

Chrysanthemums, 1925

Ink and colors on paper

Gift of Ruth and Bruce Dayton 99.127.3

Qi Baishi

Chinese, 1863-1957

Crabs, 1945

Ink on paper

Gift of Ruth and Bruce Dayton 99.127.4

Gao Qipei

Chinese, 1660-1734, Qing dynasty

Flower-and-Bird Finger Painting from an Album of Ten Leaves,

1684

Ink and colors on paper

Gift of Ruth and Bruce Dayton 99.176.8

Gao Qipei was born in Jiangxi to a family of Manchu ethnicity. He was a successful official in southern China, but is best known today as a painter. He initially gained reputation painting landscapes and figures in traditional style. By age twenty, he became known as an eccentric who preferred using his fingers instead of a brush. Some earlier painters had also preferred finger painting, but Kao went further. He grew his fingernails long to make them more effect instruments, and used his entire hand in a highly individualized style.

Gao Fenghan

Chinese, 1683-1748, Qing dynasty

Ink Lotus after Bada Shanren, 1727

Ink on paper

Gift of Ruth and Bruce Dayton 2000.38.2

Born in Shandong province, Gao Fenghan passed a special government exam in 1728 and was appointed to office in Anhui province, where he met many scholars, officials, and artists, including several from Suzhou, Nanjing, and Yangzhou. The model for this painting is the great individualist painter, Zhu Da, or Bada Shanren (1626-1705), who had a tremendous impact on Yangzhou area painters and influenced Chinese artists well into the 20th century.

Wet ink has been applied in spontaneous washes that effectively capture the lushness of the lotus leaves and a wet, humid atmosphere. The formal and abstract interests of the artist, as well as his personality, are expressed in a visual performance that emphasizes the immediate emotions of the painter in spontaneously rendered images. Gao became a good friend of the eccentric Yangzhou artist Zheng Xie.

Xu Gu

Chinese, 1824-93, Qing dynasty

Loquats, 19th century

Ink and colors on paper

Gift of Ruth and Bruce Dayton 2000.153

Xiang Shengmo

Chinese, 1597-1658, Qing dynasty

Album of Ten Leaves, 1656

Ink and color on paper

Gift of Ruth and Bruce Dayton 2001.70.4.1-10

Xiang Shengmo was born into one of the most prestigious families in Jiaxing, in Zhejiang province. He quickly gravitated to calligraphy and painting, leading the life of a cultured ascetic. The Manchu invasion reached Jiaxing in 1645 and many of Xiang's friends and relatives died in the vain attempt to save their city, while the homestead was destroyed and the art collections lost. Following this upheaval, Xiang probably painted more as a source of income. This exceptional album of flowers shows him at the height of his technical and expressive powers. He worked here in pure color without ink outlines and in shaded brushstrokes, which give the impression of three-dimensional modeling. Xiang was an important figure in the lineage of flower painters, from Shen Zhou and Chen Chun of mid Ming dynasty to the Yangzhou school of the 18th century. The tone of these poems is more somber and pessimistic than that of his earlier works. This exquisite album comprises relatively obscure flowers, such as wintersweet, cockscomb, apricot, pear, daylily, and cassia, rather than the traditional bamboo or plum.

Leaf 1: Apricot

I dare say that in the mountains there is no need for calendars,

*Watch of the approach of the red apricot, for then it
is time to plow;*

*Seeing this glory I cannot help but think of the Tang
imperial Jasper Garden,*

*Where graduates who ruled the country were first asked
to enter into service.*

*Sold along the streets during the second month of
spring,*

*They point out the village entrance at three-forked
mountain roads;*

Where people live in jade towers, will horses neigh?

*[The point] where the color of grass merges with that
of the sky cannot be fixed.*

*During the spring of the year 1656, composed and
painted by Xiang Shengmo.*

Wang Wu

Chinese, 1632-90, Qing dynasty

Plum, Narcissus and Rock, 1679

Ink on paper

Gift of Ruth and Bruce Dayton 2001.138.3

Wang Wu was a member of an important Ming dynasty literati family and was also a noted connoisseur and poet. This painting of plum, narcissus, and rock makes use of standard

literati subject matter—the plants and rock symbolizing the harmony of nature and the tenacious character of the scholar-official.

Mounted on either side of the painting are seven poetic colophons dated July 10 and 11, 1775, evidently written as a poem competition upon viewing the painting. The authors were all scholar-official members of the court. In fact, three inscriptions are by sons of the Qianlong Emperor, Prince Yongxuan (1746–1832), Prince Yongxing (1752–1863), and Prince Yongji (1752–76).

Wang Wu's poem reads:

*When can I be free from these ties to worldly affairs?
The bright window responds with a long time of
silence.
Outside, the homeward birds catch the glow of sunset,
Feeling chilly, flowers hide behind the rock.
Man's drifting life is just like a dream,
So don't try to recollect past glories.
However, I am still interested in going on an
excursion,
And I will prepare my shoes while waiting for the
return of spring.*

Wang Wu painted this scroll playfully in the 12th moon of the year of wuwu (1678).

Jin Junming

Chinese, 1602-75, Qing dynasty

Leaves from the Album "Three Friends of Winter," 1669

Ink on paper

Gift of Ruth and Bruce Dayton 2001.139.3.1-12

Zhao Ziyong

Chinese, 1786-1847, Qing dynasty

Zhao Guangqi

Chinese, active early 19th century, Qing dynasty

One Hundred Crabs, 1835

Ink on paper

Gift of Ruth and Bruce Dayton 2002.4.3a,b

Tall reeds bend gracefully over a bank of grass enclosing a host of crabs scuttling along the water's edge with pincers held high. The artists are father and son. Zhao Ziyong was from Nanhai, modern Canton. He earned his second-level degree in 1816 and was appointed a district magistrate in Shandong. A number of the so-called Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou had served in Shandong during the preceding century, and this connection seems to have influenced Zhao Guangqi to follow their expressionistic approach to painting. A standard theme in paintings, the crab, like bamboo and orchid, lent itself to expressive brushwork. Originally mounted as four hanging scrolls, the composition

takes on a panoramic effect, difficult to achieve in the single, hanging-scroll format.

The shorter of the two inscriptions reads:

One hundred crabs,

Set free in river or lake

They come and go as they please.

Reeds continue through the end of spring

And the fragrant may-weed through autumn;

Throughout their lives they are unwilling

To lower their paired eyes,

Hoping to see to the end of the pure

And sometimes muddy stream.

Painted and inscribed by Zhao Guangqi during an autumn month in 1835.

Attributed to **Jin Shi**

Chinese, Qing dynasty

Pheasants and Bamboo, mid 15th century

Ink on silk

Gift of Ruth and Bruce Dayton 2002.4.4

Two pheasants perch on a rock beneath overhanging chrysanthemums at the foot of towering bamboo and fragrant osmanthus. Both the chrysanthemum and osmanthus blossom in autumn, suggesting that this painting was meant to hang during the fall season. Interestingly, a strain of red

osmanthus with intense fragrance was developed during the early Ming dynasty at Jin's birthplace.

Jin, whose signature appears on this work, was born in the Yin district, modern Ningbo, in Zhejiang province. In 1441, he passed the provincial examination and was appointed Secretariat Drafter at the Hall of Literary Splendor (*Wenghuadian*). He was best known for his calligraphy and paintings of bamboo and rocks, especially those done in the ink-outline style. The careful delineation of form, subject matter, and compositional features seen here are all grounded in Song dynasty (960–1279) flower-and-bird painting. The revival of Song pictorial styles was common during early Ming, especially in Zhejiang province.

China

Qing dynasty

Peacock with Flowers and Fantastic Rocks, 17th century

Ink and colors and gold on silk

Gift of Ruth and Bruce Dayton 2002.4.6

With tail feathers spread in full array, a peacock strolls in a garden resplendent with roses, peonies, magnolias, peach blossoms, and bamboo set among fantastic blue-green *taihu* rocks. While these specific flowers were standard auspicious motifs during both the Ming and Qing dynasties, the peacock reflects a new layer of meaning occasioned by the Manchu conquest in 1644. The new rulers, coming from

their homeland to the north of China proper, presented themselves as protectors of Chinese culture in the face of social and political chaos. They appropriated the image of Mahamayuri, the "Peacock Mother of the Buddha" and "Protectress of the North" as one of their political emblems.

This painting featuring a dignified and noble bird among auspicious plants would have made an appropriate gift for a high Manchu official. It would have served a purely decorative purpose within the public spaces of an upperclass household.

The painting is a good example of the academy school. The artistic merit of this work is more dependent on intimate naturalism than any kind of conventional stylization.

China

Yuan-early Ming dynasty

The Pleasure of Fishes, late 14th-early 15th century

Ink and colors on silk

Gift of Ruth and Bruce Dayton 2002.176

Meticulously rendered in subtle gradations of ink and light colors, this rare handscroll successfully conveys the illusion of an underwater realm of aquatic creatures and plants in which fish move freely and happily about. The exceptionally accurate descriptive detail, based on the

direct observation of nature, can be traced to the naturalism first encountered in Song dynasty (960–1279) plant-and-animal paintings.

The subject matter here is symbolic, however, and is rooted in philosophical Daoism. One of the best-known stories from the Daoist classic, the *Zhuangzi*, describes two men walking by a river. Seeing fish swimming freely in the water, Zhuangzi remarks to his Confucian companion, "Huizi, the fish are happy." The rationalist Huizi argues that Zhuangzi cannot possibly understand the feelings of fish. Zhuangzi retorts that true understanding should be acquired intuitively by observing nature, accepting its power, and living harmoniously with it. The obvious freedom of the fish allowed them happiness. Huizi, a Confucian-trained man obsessed with logical explanations, was unable to grasp the point.

Zhao Yunhe

Chinese, 1874–1955

Gourds, 1932

Ink and colors on paper

Gift of Ruth and Bruce Dayton 2003.199.2

In Chinese popular culture, there has long been a convention of using plants or animals to embody certain propitious meanings. The image of melons–gourds in this case–connected one to another by vines, suggests generations of sons and

grandsons stretching on without interruption. The pun comes from the word *dai* (belt)—the vine-linked melons—that provides a homophone on the word *dai* (generations).

Wang Zhen

Chinese, 1867–1938, Republic of China

White Chrysanthemums, 1929

Ink and colors on paper

Gift of Ruth and Bruce Dayton 2004.12.3

A native of Wuxing county in Zhejiang province, Wang Zhen began his career as an apprentice in a Shanghai mounting shop. While painting as a sideline, he became a very successful businessman in the Shanghai shipping industry. By 1906 he had retired and returned to his native county, where he painted under the name "Man of the White Dragon Mountains." In 1911, he became a student of Wu Changshuo and gradually adopted the teacher's broad and simple style of painting. It is known that he "ghost-painted" for his teacher. Wang was also a philanthropic Buddhist and besides his bird-and-flower painting he was known for a "free-sketch" style of painting portraits and Buddhist figural subject matter.

The inscription of this depiction of white chrysanthemums reads:

Master Tao (Yuanming) was originally from a military lineage. After surviving the hardships of icy frost and a hundred smeltings, he conjured an image of chrysanthemums as "snow lions ready to do battle with the west wind."

During mid-winter of 1929, painted by "White Dragon Mountain Man."

The great poet Tao Yuanming (Tao Qian, 365-427) is hailed in Chinese history as a master of rural poetry and a paragon of integrity. Having left government service in disillusionment, he chose to lead a simple life of poverty and hardship rather than compromise his principles. Famous for his cultivation of chrysanthemums, Tao became a symbol of the virtuous, scholarly recluse, a model to which Wang Zhen obviously aspired.

Wu Changshuo

Chinese, 1844-1927, late Qing dynasty-Republic of China

Bamboo and Rock after Zheng Xie, 1919

Ink on paper

Gift of Ruth and Bruce Dayton 2004.12.4

By the end of the Qing dynasty, the Chinese art world had become rather bleak. Following the revolution in 1911, however, many artists influenced by the revolution and by Western ideas began to experiment with a renewed freedom of

expression. One of the most important and pivotal painters of this new generation was Wu Changshuo. Born into a scholarly family in Zhejiang province, he began studying calligraphy and seal carving at the age of thirty. He developed a style of powerful brushwork, pure colors, simple compositions, and sharp contrasts that had both broad appeal and a lasting influence on 20th-century Chinese painting.

The inscription on this image of bamboo and rock situated Wu within an illustrious lineage of bamboo painters, from the Song dynasty master Wen Tong (1018-79) to the Qing dynasty eccentric Zheng Xie (1693-1765). He astonished his audience by creating, in this improvisatory way, rough approximations of more standard representations.

The inscription reads:

For years I have sketched bamboos, without losing my enthusiasm. After drinking (wine) my brushstrokes are often praised for their strength.

Even if I were to follow Wen Tong, who could record (my name) in the Hall of Ink Gentlemen?

During the spring of 1919, I followed Zheng Xie's style, but I have been unable to capture his spirit in my painting.

Wu Changshuo, at the age of seventy-six years.

Tu Zhuo

Chinese, 1781-1828, Qing dynasty

Plum Blossoms, Bamboo, and Narcissus, 19th century

Ink on paper

Gift of Ruth and Bruce Dayton 2004.246.1

Zhu Sheng

Chinese, 1617-91, Qing dynasty

Bamboo Landscape

Ink on paper

Gift of Ruth and Bruce Dayton 2004.246.5

One common technique used in the flower-and-bird painting is *daoyun*, a reverse-saturation method where the flowers or plants are left in reserve, as areas of white against an ink-wash ground. The method emerged out of the painter's attempt to capture the brilliant whiteness of blossoms and plants in moonlight, or in a winter setting as seen in this scroll.

China

Qing dynasty

Birthday Portrait of a Young Manchu Lady, c. 1800-50

Ink and colors on silk

Gift of Ruth and Bruce Dayton 2005.54.3

As indicated by the subject's blue robe adorned with circular *shou* (longevity) characters, this exquisitely detailed portrait was commissioned to celebrate the birthday of the aristocratic young woman, shown seated at a black-and-gold lacquer table on a garden terrace. She has a fashionable hairstyle and several objects of expensive refinement. On the table near her elbow are a snuff bottle, fan, *ruyi* (wish granting) scepter, and a porcelain flower vase. At her feet are a blue-and-white jardinière, and an unusual tissue container or sewing box, possibly of Western derivation. Both objects are profusely decorated with butterflies, an auspicious motif, whose character (*die*) is a pun for the word meaning "age seventy to eighty," another way of wishing someone a long, happy life.

Xue Linxing

Chinese, born 1951

The Tang Imperial Consort Yang Guifei

Ink and colors on paper

Lent anonymously X2005.4

The beautiful woman depicted in this painting, who wears a peony blossom on her headdress, is Yang Guifei, the imperial consort of the Tang dynasty Emperor Xuanzong (reigned 712-756). It was during Xuanzong's reign that the peony became a favorite flower because it was likened and identified with the imperial favorite woman. Blessed with majestic elegance,

splendor, and aristocratic associations, the peony is hailed as the "King of all Flowers." It is one of the most enduring and pervasive images in Chinese literature and art, standing firmly as the symbol of honor, wealth, and nobility.