

## TWO CHICKS

Beth K Karon



**Artist:** Zhu Da, Chinese, 1626 - 1705  
aka Bada Shanren, Chu Ta, Pa-ta-Shan-jen

**Date:** C.1694 - Qing Dynasty

**Accession number:** 97.133.1

**Location:** G 203

**Inscriptions:** Stamps inscriptions in black ink at URC of image and eight lines of inscription in ink at lower right border; three stamps at URC; four stamps at LLC; two stamps at LRC; two stamps in border at text.

**Gallery Label:** Zhu Da painted chickens on several occasions. The artist often expressed complex ideas through 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 make obeisance 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 is isolated from the other and exist in virtually separate worlds.

The inscription reads: *Painted in the Garden of Yellow Bamboo by Pa-ta-Shan-Jen, the nineteenth day of the third lunar month.*

The "nineteenth day of the thrid lunar month" is now known to commemorate the day in 1644 when the last Ming emperor hanged himself as rebel forces approached the capital.

### The Rest of the Story:

Two of the most outstanding artists of the early Qing period were descendants of the Ming Royal House: Zhu Da (1626–1705) and Zhu Ruoji (1642–1707), both of whom became better known by their assumed names, Bada Shanren (literal meaning *Mountain Man of the Eight Greats*) and Shitao, respectively, though as noted above, Zhu Da had other aliases.

Zhu Da, a painter of the shuimohua and a calligrapher, was a child prodigy, having begun painting and writing poetry in early childhood. In 1644, the Ming dynasty collapsed when the Ming emperor committed suicide and the Manchu army from the north attacked Beijing. There was a great amount of uncertainty about Zhu Da's position in society because he was a Ming prince at the time of the dynastic upheaval, so he sought refuge in a Buddhist monastery. There he became a "crazy" Buddhist monk, shamming deafness and madness in order to escape persecution after the fall of the Ming dynasty. Lodging his feelings of frustration and vulnerability in his art, he created a deeply personal expressionist style that reflects his ambivalence about his life in hiding and his failure to acknowledge his identity as a Ming prince.

The Qing dynasty became more firmly established, and subsequently there was less and less insecurity among the Qing regime about the remaining Ming loyalties and possible future rebellions. After 40 years and the more stable conditions, the artist left the monastery and re-entered society. He fully abandoned his monastic life and developed his career as a professional painter.

This is about the time he started using a series of descriptive pseudonyms - most notably *Bada Shanren* by which he is most often known today. *Bada Shanren* written in a stylized vertical writing looks like the characters for *laugh* and *cry*. By signing his paintings this way, he implies his confusion and feelings of grief for the fate of his country and home.

He often painted odd subjects in his paintings to express his cynical feelings and sadness of the fall of the Ming Dynasty. He always expressed his emotions by his paintings through symbolism, implication, and exaggeration. He used simple but bold brushwork with simple pattern, perilous images, and cool tone of compendious style.

His paintings were usually in ink monochrome, and the subjects (birds, fish, flowers, plants) were given a curious, glowering, sometimes even perverse personality. He used an abbreviated, wet style that was deceptively simple and captured the very essence of the subjects. He was influenced by the "sketching ideas style" of Li Liang and Xu Wei of the Ming Dynasty, but still developed his own unique style in his flower-and-bird paintings: on one piece of paper, he would paint one bird or one fish or one flower to create a sense of mystery.

His landscapes were inspired by the dashing shorthand of the 10th century masters Dong Yuan and Juran.

Bada Shanren also incorporated calligraphy skill into paintings, not only in brushwork, but also in abstract thinking. He was able to use ink to express virtually everything in the nature. It seemed that in his eye, birds, flowers and mountains were all black and white. He refused to use colors. To him, color was a kind of disturbance to his paintings. The strong symbolization of his paintings indicated his extreme feelings, including his curses and avoidance to the reality and condolence to the Ming Dynasty.

Unlike most Chinese painters, he does not fit easily into any one traditional category: in character and personality he was the complete eccentric and individualist.





Juran style landscape

**TOUR SUGGESTIONS:**

Other than Asian tours:

Animals

Cultural Reflections

Signs of the Times

Artist Choices (Why is the Sky Yellow)

**QUESTIONS:**

Describe what you see.

What do you not see?

How are the two birds related to each other/interact with each other, if at all?

What feelings/emotions are evoked?