First North American Survey of Paintings by Trailblazing Chinese Artist Chen Hongshou Opens at BAMPFA

On View October 25, 2017–January 28, 2018

Exhibition Showcases Rare Works by Seventeenth-Century Chinese Painter, Including Some Never Before Exhibited in US

(Berkeley, CA) July 25, 2017—One of the most influential artists of seventeenth-century imperial China is the subject of a major museum survey, the artist’s first in North America, when the UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA) presents Repentant Monk: Illusion and Disillusion in the Art of Chen Hongshou. The exhibition includes twenty-five rarely exhibited works that exemplify Chen’s important role in driving the course of Chinese art history. The paintings are drawn from BAMPFA’s own substantial holdings of Chinese art and from international collections, including works from the Shanghai Museum that have never been exhibited in the United States.

A celebrated figure in his own short lifetime, Chen Hongshou (1599–1652) continues to be regarded as one of imperial China’s most skilled figurative artists, known for bird-and-flower as well as landscape paintings that animate centuries-old artistic traditions with expressions of irony, pathos, and humor. Many of his works include poetic inscriptions, which are interpreted for visitors in audio guides created specifically for the exhibition. The guides are available in English and Mandarin, featuring readings by the musician Devendra Banhart and the entrepreneur and collector Jerry Yang.

Much of Chen’s artistic output took place during the period of social upheaval that characterized the transition between the Ming and Qing dynasties. In an attempt to escape the invading armies and bandits descending on his home, Chen briefly became a Buddhist at the fall of the Ming and adopted the sobriquet of "Repentant Monk" during the early Qing dynasty, a time during which his work took on strains of melancholy that reflected the political uncertainty of the time. The exhibition is accompanied by a monographic publication published by University of California Press that explores this history and provides new scholarly insights into Chen’s contributions to the development of Chinese painting.
“We’re delighted to introduce North American audiences to the remarkable paintings of Chen Hongshou by bringing many of this leading artist’s finest extant works to the United States for the first time in history,” said BAMPFA Director Lawrence Rinder. “It’s especially exciting to see these works on view alongside BAMPFA’s own holdings of Chen’s paintings, which affirm our deep and growing strength in Asian art.”

“Chen Hongshou’s work is informed by the tumultuous disruptions of his historical moment, as China transitioned between imperial dynasties and toward a new era of stylistic nuance in its figurative painting traditions,” said the exhibition’s curator Julia White, BAMPFA’s senior curator for Asian art. “These tensions and contradictions are bound up in the singular figure of Chen himself: a trained scholar unable to secure an official position through the traditional means of a court appointment, Chen turned to a life marked with disillusionment in society and the system and embraced a libertine lifestyle that is reflected in the subject matter of many of his works. His expressive and often slyly ironic renderings feel as fresh today as they did centuries ago.”

In conjunction with the exhibition, White has edited a 192-page illustrated catalog on Chen’s life and work. The publication includes new scholarly essays by Hiromitsu Kobayashi, professor emeritus at Sophia University in Tokyo; Shi-ye Li, assistant research curator of Chinese art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which is contributing multiple works to the exhibition; and Tamara Bentley, associate professor of Asian art history at Colorado College.

Liu and Bentley visit BAMPFA on Saturday, October 28, at 1 p.m. for a joint lecture and conversation, which is copresented by UC Berkeley’s Institute for East Asian Studies. Other public programs include:

- A curator’s talk with White on Thursday, October 26, at 12 p.m.
- A guided tour of the exhibition on Sunday, October 29, at 2 p.m.
- A joint lecture and conversation with UC Berkeley professors Patricia Berger and Robert Sharf on Saturday, November 4 at 1 p.m., exploring the role of Buddhism in Chen Hongshou’s work
- A discussion with the distinguished scholars Richard Vinograd and Anne Burkus-Chasson on Saturday, January 27 at 1 p.m., focusing on select figural works from the exhibition

All public programs are free with admission.

Support

Repentant Monk: Illusion and Disillusion in the Art of Chen Hongshou is organized by Senior Curator for Asian Art Julia M. White. The exhibition is made possible with lead support from the American Friends of the Shanghai Museum and the Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation. Additional support is provided by the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation; Henry Luce Foundation; Bonhams US and Hong Kong Chinese Paintings Group; Jane DeBevoise in honor of Professor James Cahill; the Asian Art Endowment Fund; Air China; Hok Pui and Sally Yu Leung; Fred Levin & Nancy Livingston, The Shenson Foundation in memory of Ben & A. Jess Shenson; Jenny and James Wan; Sunday and David Yu; John Deng; Arnold and Jr-ye Chang; J. Sanford and Vinie Zhang Miller; NanHai Art; and an anonymous donor. The catalog is made possible with major support from the Bei Shan Tang Foundation. The audio program is generously funded by Kadist, a contemporary art nonprofit located in San Francisco and Paris. Special thanks to musician Devendra Banhart and entrepreneur and collector Jerry Yang for contributing readings in English and Mandarin, respectively.
Above
Chen Hongshou: *Su Wu and Li Ling, with Attendants (Farewell of Su Wu and Li Ling)*, 1635 (detail); hanging scroll, ink and color on silk; 50 X 19 in.; University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive; purchase made possible through a gift from an anonymous donor.

Visitor Information
Address
2155 Center Street, Berkeley, CA 94720
Hours
Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.
Fridays and Saturdays, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Information
bampfa.org
(510) 642-0808

Gallery Admission
$12 general admission
$10 non-Berkeley students, disabled, 65+
Free for BAMPFA members; UC Berkeley students, faculty, staff, and retirees; 18 & under + one adult
Free First Thursdays: Free gallery admission on the first Thursday of each month

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About BAMPFA
An internationally recognized arts institution with deep roots in the Bay Area, the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA) is a forum for cultural experiences that transform individuals and advance the local, national, and global discourse on art and film. BAMPFA is UC Berkeley's premier visual arts venue, presenting more than 450 film screenings, scores of public programs, and up to twenty exhibitions annually. With its vibrant and eclectic programming, BAMPFA inspires the imagination and ignites critical dialogue through art, film, and other forms of creative expression.

The institution's collection of more than 19,000 works of art dates from 3,000 BCE to the present day and includes important holdings of Neolithic Chinese ceramics, Ming and Qing Dynasty Chinese painting, Old Master works on paper, Italian Baroque painting, early American painting, Abstract Expressionist painting, contemporary photography, and Conceptual art. BAMPFA's collection also includes more than 17,500 films and videos, including the largest collection of Japanese cinema.
outside of Japan, impressive holdings of Soviet cinema, West Coast avant-garde film, seminal video art, as well as hundreds of thousands of articles, reviews, posters, and other ephemera related to the history of film.