

36. Ye Xin [Yeh Hsin] (1600?-1673 or later)

“Landscape” 1631

Fan painting, ink on paper
17.2 x 54.5 cm. (6 7/8 x 21 1/2 in.)

Inscription:

“On a summer day of the year 1631, Ye Xin.”

Artist’s seals:

Ye; Xin



Stubby branches and twigs characterize the trees growing throughout the scene. Earthy embankments and peaks are given form and texture by repetitive dottings and internal overlappings of broad brushstrokes. Much of this style originated with the Yuan master Wu Chen (1280-1354) (fig. 1), and the present artist, Ye Xin, was clearly extending that tradition in the present work.

Ye was born in Yunjian the present Huating in Jiangsu province. His birth and death dates are not recorded in standard sources, but in 1669 his friend Zhou Lianggong (1612-1672) recorded that he was *zhangnian* or “old in years” “a senior.”¹ This would suggest that Ye was then about seventy years of age and thus born about 1600. His dated works range from 1631 to 1673; a landscape dated considerably later, to 1686, is of questionable authenticity.

Born and raised in the hometown of Dong Qichang (1555-1636), it is not to be wondered that Ye’s initial stylistic orientation, as seen in the present work, was toward the literati masters of the Yuan era. His connections with the orthodox school of Tung continued into later years; an album by Ye bears a colophon by Shen Hao mentioning Dong Qichang and another by Wang Jian dated 1661.² An album painted in 1672 by another of the Four Wangs, Wang Hui (1632-1717), bears a colophon by Ye Xin.

In later years Ye moved to Jinling (Nanjing), almost certainly after the fall of the Ming dynasty in 1644. By the early 1650s he was painting such local scenes as Mount Chung and collaborating with such other artists as Cuo Zhe and Gao Cen, both of whom, like Ye himself, came to be known as among the “Eight Masters of Chin-ling (Nanking).” It should be noted, however, that Ye continued to refer to himself as from Huating in his inscriptions, suggesting a lasting loyalty to the place of his origins. Judging from extant dated paintings, Ye Xin was most active in Nanking from the late 1640s to the 1670s, and it was during that period that he became quite close to Zhou Lianggong. No fewer than one hundred paintings were done by Ye for Zhou before 1648 and several of Ye’s later paintings were inscribed as having been done for Zhou, who included a long biography of the artist in his *Dubualu*, a record of contemporaneous artists who were known to him.³

“People say that Rongmu (Ye Xin) has an extremely different nature and that he does not suffer relationships for long. As far as I have seen, how can I not believe them! Li Zanhuang was not willing to look at Bofu’s (Bo Zhuyi) poems, fearing that if he viewed them he would change his mind (about the poet). I own paintings by Rongmu which I am never willing to look at, but I am unable to stop. Each time I view one for pleasure my mouth opens (in wonder) and my brow wrinkles (in thought) at the same time. For this old man excels in composition and is able to take what he sees and, piece by piece, transfer it to the paper. Everything that passes through his brush, even the inadvertent things, still are possessed of extraordinary spirit, and thus frequently transport people to beautiful places.

Often he would chose a poem by Tao (Qian) and for me did small paintings, a full hundred. He used the brush clearly and distinctly, leading me to conclude that the verses of Master Tao had doubled in remote tranquility. I had built the Bai Tao Fang, ‘Pleasure-boat of One Hundred (Paintings after) Tao’s (Poems)’ while in Fujian (1647-1654) in which to store them, but during my time of troubles (1655-1661, when he was accused by the government and imprisoned), Zhang Qiaoming carried them away (in order to protect them). Recently they were returned by (Zhang’s) son Haixu, As soon as they were back again to their original viewer, my two eyebrows wished to dance! When Jiang Wuson (Jiang Chenglie) of Kuaiji (Hangzhou) saw them, he said that they had something never before achieved.

People have said that Jung-mu was a disciple of Yao Jianshu (Yao Yunzai) but he only followed his ideas and in reality never studied under him.⁴ It was also said that when Jianshu saw Rongmu’s paintings it was like when Wei Furen (272-349) saw Zhong Taifu’s (Zhong You, 151-230) calligraphy and sighed ‘This fellow will of a certainty surpass my fame.’ What is said by people is perhaps based on a similar comment by Jianshu. Rongmu name is Xin. Born in Yunjian, he moved to live in Baimen (Nanjing.) He has neither sons nor daughters and looks like an eunuch or an old woman. Truly is his nature different from that of other men!”

Zhou Lianggong seems to have recorded his friend quite honestly, acknowledging that he had difficulty with relationships, looked like an eunuch or an old woman, and was truly different by nature from other men. However, he was also protective of Ye Xin’s reputation, devoting quite some space in his biography of the artist to the fact that he was not a disciple of Yao Yunzai and only influenced by that artist. And Zhou clearly honored and greatly valued the talent of Ye Xin: “...this old man excels in composition and is able to take what he sees and, piece by piece, transfer it to the paper. Everything that passes through his brush, even the inadvertent things, still are possessed of extraordinary spirit...” It is seldom in Chinese biographical records of painters that the personality and character of the artist is realized so evocatively.

1. Zhou Lianggong, *Dubualu, Huashi congshu*, edition, chapt. 4, p. 57.
2. *Rangli guan guoyanlu*, 1892, chapt. 32, p. 18b.
3. Zhou Lianggong, *op.cit.*, chapt. 3, pp. 45-46.
4. Ye may well have met Yao Yunzai after he moved to Nanjing but he was already an accomplished painter by then, hence not likely to have been a disciple of Ye.



Fig. 1. Wu Zhen: "Poetic Feeling in a Thatched Pavilion," after Cleveland Museum of Art, *Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting*, Cleveland, 1980, cat. 109.