

Zhu Lunhan (1680-1760), attributed

朱論瀚

“Luohan”

羅漢

Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper
142.2 x 68.1 cm. (57 1/2 x 26 7/8 in.)

Colophon by Xie Guansheng (late 18th-early 19th century):

“In this finger painting by master Hanzhai (Zhu Lunhan) he trusted his hand and daubed ink for the coarse robe and unkempt hair, creating an image that is surpassingly fine. The eye-brows and eyes are not accurate and the mouth and nose run together, making him appear like Momu (fourth wife of Emperor Huang who was ugly but very clever). However, the spirit and forms have a very distinct flavor, but his reasons are difficult to explain. In this painting by the master, dark and light are clear and extraordinary and are especially superb, and the flavor of the spirit goes beyond the fingers and ink, and thus it is a true image.

During the sixth lunar month, summer of the year 1810, Xie Guansheng from Nanhai got this on a boat in Piling.” *Xie Shi shu-hua zang yin* (“Collection seal of Master Xie for calligraphies and paintings”)

The standing figure wears sandals and a long flowing robe that covers the top of his head; he holds an incense burner on a stand as though making an offering. The use of coarse brushwork for robes and finer strokes for the figure is a convention going back at least to the 10th century, but the device here is brought completely up-to-date by the use of the artist’s fingers and fingernails to execute major portions of the image. The physiognomy here is quite unusual—a point made by the writer of the colophon—and appears to be non-Chinese in nature. Of course the original Luohan were of foreign origin, but the image here is quite different from the usual

treatment of Luohan. One possible source for this figure are the Western prints and drawings of religious figures like the Virgin Mary that accompanied missionaries to China from the early 17th century onward.

Xie Guansheng, writer of the colophon, was born in Nanhai, the modern Guangzhou. He and his elder brother Xie Lansheng (1760-1831) were equally famed in painting and became known as the Two Xie. Although their father was not a painter, he was a noted connoisseur of paintings and calligraphy, and the younger son’s acute eye can be seen here as well as in various other of his attributions of unsigned paintings to known artists.