

Shao Mi (1592?-1642)

“Landscape for Guyin” 1627

Hanging scroll, ink on paper
134.6 x 29.2 cm. (53 x 11 ½ in.)

Inscription:

“I had not seen the transcendent master for a long time,
invited to seek him out my emotions were fixed and partial;
A blue waterfall pierces a slender rock,
old trees are covered with the remains of clouds.
In brewing tea red leaves are burned,
carrying a lute we sit on green mats;
By chance arriving beyond the dusty world,
facing you my thoughts float lightly,

During the tenth lunar month of the year 1627, I travelled again to Goulou Jing to visit the Daoist priest Guyin and did this (painting). Shao Gao, the old man Guachou.”

Artist’s seal:

Shao Mi zhi yin

Colophon:

“By winding stream the pine-tree shadows are straight,
green water flows beside the water pavilion;
A slanting bank is suitable for sitting side by side,
inviting a companion we search together for a cloudy place.
Without thinking strong conversation begins,
as though to startle those on the four sides of the hall;
Guazhou (Shao Mi) left this beautifully brushed painting,
which inspires me greatly.

At the end of the year 1800 during the Jiaqing reign-era, Wei Zhengqi, called Shiru.” Seals: three, illegible

Collectors’ seals:

*Muchai; Jingwan; Guanghan jingwan; Pan Jianhan micang cuixin chenji yin;
Pan Yanling; Qi’an; Qi’an duguo*

A mountain path winds along a stream past a misty village while above a waterfall drops from peaks partially obscured by clouds. The solid forms emerge from mist and clouds which mask their bases and create a sense of instability. This effect is enhanced by the technique, which features sharp and quick brushstrokes that enliven the surface of the paper and add to the air of spontaneity.

The artist, Shao Mi, was probably originally named Shao Gao, as here, although the seal reads *Shao Mi*.¹ Known as a poet and calligrapher as well as painter, Shao's father was a physician who lived at a place known as Lumu, located to the west of Shihu ("Stone Lake.") A sickly child, he consequently did not undergo the strenuous preparations for the civil service examinations. He developed certain peculiarities such as a mania for cleanliness and order, much to the despair of his wife and servants, constantly brushing and adjusting his garments or dusting and rearranging his ink-stones and desk top. When guests arrived, he conversed with them but never invited them inside while he leisurely prepared to go out with them. At parties he would drink only half a cup of wine and then drift off to sleep regardless of the company present. Probably due to his ill health, as well as to his easy-going disposition, he was described as being "as thin as a yellow crane and as free as a sea gull." Shao also collected curios and antiquities, naming his house Yichang ("Contentment Hall") and there took much delight in his treasures.

During his middle years Shao contracted a lung or kidney disease and delved deeply into pharmaceutical books, seeking prescriptions of medicine which might alleviate his affliction. As he grew increasingly uncomfortable, he became even more eccentric and introverted. After his death his writing, paintings, and possessions were scattered and lost as his family suffered impoverishment. One of his early biographers characterized him as "a recluse. His poetry and painting were highly prized by the people of Wu (Suchow) but he lived in seclusion at Guachou and called himself "The Old Man of Guachou."² A painting by Shao done for his friend Zhou Lianggong was inscribed by a friend in terms that could be applied to the present painting as well: "This quiet, isolated, and lonely scene has no place for noise and clamorous activity but the life-force would overcome a king. Those who sit within will certainly achieve pure enlightenment."³

1. Much of the following biographical material is drawn from Ellen Johnston Laing, "Shao Mi," in L. Carrington Goodrich and Chaoying Fang, editors: *Dictionary of Ming Biography 1368-1644*, New York, 1976, vol. II, pp. 1166-1168.
2. Zhou Lianggong: *Duhua Lu*, *Huashi congshu* edition, vol. 4, p. 2047.
3. *Ibid.*