

Wen Shun (1764-1808) 渴純

“Ascending the Heights at Shiwu” 1802

石屋登高圖

Handscroll, ink and color on paper
34.2 x 140 cm. (13 1/2 x 55 1/8 in.)

Title slip:

By Wen Shun, the artist

Inscription:

“Two days after the ninth day of the ninth month of the year 1802, District Magistrate Juetang called together like-minded men at Shiwu. After a bit of drinking, we again ascended the heights. As usual we used the rhyme of the Xitie (the Lanting rubbing), and when linked verses in five, six, and seven characters were done, we added a painting on the wall. As evening came on I returned home and painted this scroll.

Shiwu is on a range half way up Mount Penglai, where Tao Chenbai used a furnace to refine cinnabar. There is room for a table and stool, and inside one can hear the faint sound of a spring. Outside is a winding path bordered by clumps of green bamboo. Viewed from a distance it seems that people are walking on the bamboo. To the east is Mount Xiang at the foot of which offerings are made. To the west is Mount Pengmu, where there is a shrine dedicated to Pengzu. On the summit there are such sites as Chienzhangyan, Xianrenzhang, Juarenji, Qipinghen, and Suoyiyan as well as three Buddhist temples, erected by later people. Looking toward the sea over the mountains, they are countable one by one. Cliffs wall in the four sides, and blue-greenery is about to drip. Truly is this a greatly splendid view! Although I do not possess the brushwork of Li Sixun (of the Tang dynasty), I have drawn the three mountains above the sea. However, without a painting I could not have described it, and it does not matter if it resembles it or not. So I have just followed my memory of that superb time.

Wen Shun, called Chunmei, painted and inscribed this.”

Artist’s seals:

Shun chi yinxin; Chunmei; Zhongliiegong wushi congsun

Collector’s seal (of famous Cantonese collector Deng Cangwu):

Deng shi cangwu jiancang

The painting is characterized by contrasting tones of warm and cool colors, a practice that began among the literati masters of the Yuan dynasty. The style of brushwork, which features overlapping

texture strokes on the interior of rocks and mountains as well as strong vertical accents that render grass and shrubbery, also derive from the 14th century masters.

Deng gao, “Ascending the Heights,” was a common practice on the ninth day of the ninth month with a view to increasing one’s longevity. Shiwu, “Stone Room,” a famous scenic spot since the Six Dynasties period, is located west of Dancheng in Xiangshan prefecture of Zhejiang province. In the present painting the house appears in the approximate center of the painting, just to the right of two figures ascending on the rising path, with the yellow-robed figure extending one hand upward.

Wen Shun, called Yizhai and known as Chunmei, was from Wucheng, the modern Wuxing in Zhejiang province. Having been a student in the National University,

Wen was subsequently appointed Assistant Instructor in the Confucian School in Chuzhou. Wen studied painting when young with Shen Congqian, and was also associated with the calligrapher Liang Tongshu, so his own talents were nurtured to the point where he was declared the “number one hand in Wuxing.”

Wen Shun is often confused with a Ming dynasty person with the same name and identical by-name. The earlier Wen Shun was born in 1539, according to *Mingshi*, earned the *jinshi* degree in 1565, and died in 1607 at the age of 68. The later Wen Shun, who was greatly admired by Ruan Yuan, died at the age of 44 while still in office.