

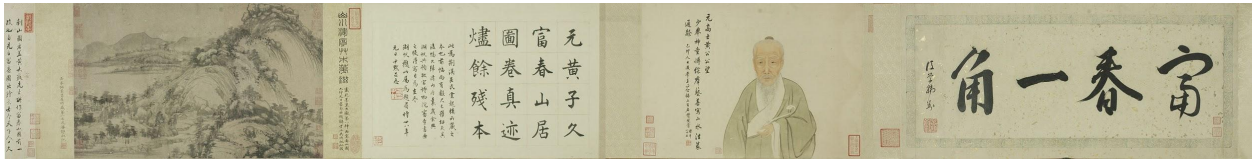


2.5a Reading 5: “Chinese Landscape Example”

Excerpted from *Khan Academy*

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-asia/imperial-china/yuan-dynasty/a/gongwang-dwelling-in-the-fuchun-mountains>

Reading #5: “Chinese Landscape Example Huang Gongwang, *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains*”



Huang Gongwang, “The Remaining Mountain” (first part of the scroll), *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains*, 1350, handscroll, ink on paper, 31.8 x 51.4 cm, Zhejiang Provincial Museum, Hangzhou



Huang Gongwang, “The Master Wuyong Scroll” (second part of the scroll), *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains*, 1350, handscroll, ink on paper, 33 x 636.9 cm, National Palace Museum, Taipei

A story of survival

Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains is a legendary *shanshui* (landscape) painting created by the Yuan dynasty painter, Huang Gongwang. This handscroll, which is over 22 feet long, has a fascinating history. There are many stories associated with it—there are even stories about the inscriptions that have been added to the scroll over the years.



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As the story goes, the handscroll escaped destruction because a nephew disobeyed his uncle’s dying wish. In the late Ming dynasty (1368–1644), a collector named Wu Hongyu was so fond of this handscroll that he put it next to him while sleeping and eating, even carrying it when he fled in bare feet during the Manchu conquest. On his deathbed in 1650, Wu instructed his nephew to burn the handscroll so that it could accompany him into the afterlife. The handscroll started to burn. Fortunately, Wu’s quick-thinking nephew saved it by substituting another painting, unbeknown to the near-death Wu.

What is a Chinese handscroll painting?

Imagine you are hiking in a national park with a video camera. You film your progress on the hike with a range of camera shots: wide shots, medium shots, close ups, and so on. Appreciating a handscroll painting is similar to this visual journey. Due to their horizontal format, you cannot view the entire handscroll all at once. Although museums often display handscrolls completely unrolled, from beginning to end, this is not the way artists intended for them to be experienced.

To view a handscroll one must begin by holding it in your hands. The handscroll is held by your left hand while the opening end of the handscroll is held by the right. The scroll is unrolled towards the left, shoulder width and at arms length so that the first section can be viewed. The right hand then rolls the start of the scroll to the left to re-roll the viewed section. The left hand then



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unrolls further towards the left until the new section is revealed for viewing. The right hand again re-rolls the viewed section.

The format of the handscroll allows for multiple perspectives in the same painting, embracing the landscape’s breadth and depth along the river and mountains as a continuous journey progressing through time and space.

While landscape is a subject of both Chinese and western art, they differ in their respective approaches. A Chinese landscape is not a visual record of a particular day or a single view, but rather it captures the flow of traveling through changes in atmosphere and multiple perspectives. According to Huang’s own inscription on the handscroll, it took him three to four years to finish the painting. It was not consciously constructed, but executed in a spontaneous state.

Methods and techniques

The handscroll was executed with brush and ink on paper. The use of brush and ink was thought to denote the artist’s spirit and temperament. The *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains* handscroll is a visual feast of methods and techniques, with bold tones and subtle shades, wet and dry brushwork, sparse and dense applications of ink, as well as the twists and turns of calligraphic lines.



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Huang Gongwang, "The Master Wuyong Scroll," (detail) *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains*, 1350, handscroll, ink on paper, 33 x 636.9 cm, National Palace Museum, Taipei

Huang paid respect to earlier masters by appropriating the textural strokes they developed. For example, Huang used hemp-fiber textural strokes and alum-head textural strokes associated with the painters Dong Yuan and Juran (both of whom lived in the 10th century). The term "alum head" is also used to describe the form of the boulders more generally. "Hemp-fiber" strokes refer to layers of long and thin strokes from the top to bottom of the mountain, while "alum-head" strokes shape the angular, small rocks on the top of the hills.



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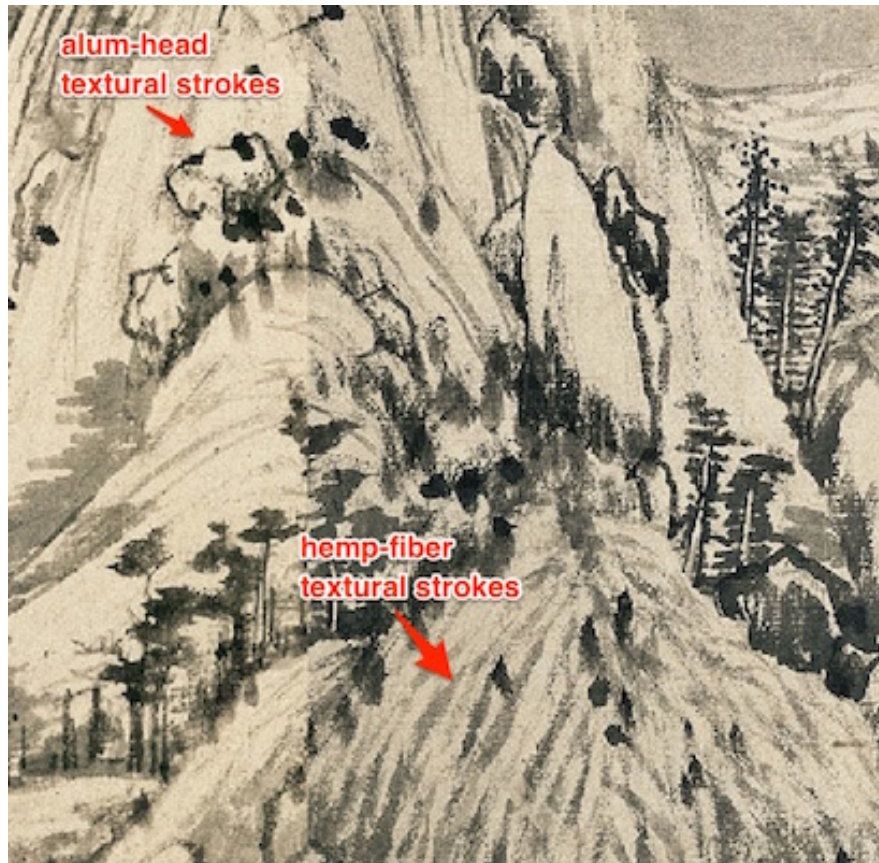


Diagram of brushstrokes

A place in Chinese art history

While respecting tradition and past masters, Huang's handscroll created a dynamic composition and achieved a vitality that surpassed previous painters. Huang's influence on later generations of literati painters was enormous. In the wider context of Chinese art history, his work is considered a national treasure.

Essay by Hung Sheng