

OBJECT IN FOCUS

## A Spring Gathering (detail)



Shen Zhou 沈周 (1427–1509). Three inscriptions on painting by Hongli, the Qianlong Emperor (1711–1799, reigned 1735–96).

Colophon by Wen Zhengming 文徵明 (1470–1559)

China

Ming dynasty, ca. 1480?

Ink and color on paper

10 7/16 x 51 5/8 in

Purchase—Charles Lang Freer Endowment. Freer Gallery of Art, F1934.1

## Describe

As we open the painting from the right, a gentleman sits in the doorway of a modest studio or residence located among rolling hills. A serving boy stands beside him holding a scroll. They are waiting for the arrival of the gentleman's friends. One friend with a walking stick is crossing the small bridge. His boat is moored nearby. Further left, another scholar approaches by boat, bringing a box of food and a jar of wine. His serving boy is rowing the boat. The scene is set in a beautiful mountain river landscape. Sprouting willows and blossoming peach trees suggest it is springtime. The artist is Shen Zhou (1427–1509), an elite painter considered one of the Four Masters of Ming.

## Analyze

In his remarks at the far left, Shen Zhou dedicated the painting to Hua Fang (1407–1487). Hua was from a prominent wealthy family and was known for his charitable acts. He is probably the figure seated inside the pavilion. Gardens and estates were considered symbols of wealth, cultivation, and social status. Artists during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) often honored their patrons by portraying them in a garden studio, thus commenting on the owner's character and aesthetic taste. The painting here should not be taken as a realistic depiction of either Hua or his property. Rather, Shen was suggesting Hua as a cultivated host in a well-designed, natural-looking garden.



## Interpret

The scroll has quite a few collector seals of the Qianlong Emperor (reigned 1735–96). He also added three poetic inscriptions in 1765, 1782, and 1791 across the top of the painting, and a fourth one in 1793 before the beginning of the painting. Such continuous attention clearly indicates the emperor's admiration for this work. Wen Zhengming (1470–1559), the star pupil of Shen Zhou, wrote a long inscription in 1545 in an attachment to the painting, commemorating his teacher. These seals and comments compose a vivid history of the painting's circulation.

## Inquire

- Use the [zoom feature](#) to look closely at the scroll. What colors, lines, and textures do you notice? How does the artist use these elements to convey depth and perspective?
- Select a character from the scroll. What can this person see or observe? What might the person know, understand, or believe? What might the person care about? What might the person question or wonder about? Write your answers in “I” statements as if you were writing from their perspective.
- Write a narrative inspired by this scroll. Why are the people visiting the man? How do they know each other? What conversation might take place between the gentleman and his friends?

## Resources

View this object online at <https://asia.si.edu/object/F1934.1/>

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