

RECLUSION AND CULTIVATION IN CHINESE ART



Specialist Art Course Handbook



SOAS University of London
Thornough Street, Russell Square
London, WC1H 0XG

Xiang Shengmo (1597-1658), *Invitation to Reclusion* (detail)
Handscroll, ink on paper, 1625-1626
Collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art

China has a unique history of celebrating people withdrawal from society. These recluses were often scholars who had either chosen not to or been prohibited from serving in the imperial bureaucracy. Instead, they inhabited rural spaces, where they focused on cultural, moral and spiritual cultivation. This course explores the unique contribution these individuals made to Chinese art history, the material and visual culture that surrounded them in seclusion, and explores how this historic ideal of seclusion has been refracted in contemporary art.

This course runs consists of six weekly lectures from 16 June – 21 July 2020. Each lecture is followed by an extended Q&A, moderated by either the course tutor or a guest speaker. The course including contributions from the leading scholars, museum curators, art dealers and auction house specialists. It is offered in series of weekly online lectures, followed by tutor led Q&As. The lectures explore themes of seclusions in paintings, calligraphy, scholars' objects, and ceramics. The course concludes with an examination of the relationship between these historic objects and contemporary art. Join us to reflect on the resonance between this pre-modern cultural practice and our current global predicament.

LIMITED FREE PLACES ON 'RECLUSION AND CULTIVATION IN CHINESE ART'

A limited number of free places on *Reclusion and Cultivation in Chinese Art* are available to those shielding from covid-19, in line with SOAS' core value of promoting equality and celebrating diversity. To gain one of these places please write to the SOAS Diploma in Asian Art, enclosing a copy of your UK Government shielding letter, or equivalent evidence from your local jurisdiction.



A faux-bois brushpot with painted enamel decoration depicting Daoist immortal Zhang Guolao
Yongzheng mark and of the period (1723-1735)
Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum (682-1907)

COURSE TIMETABLE All times are in UK local time (GMT+1)

TUESDAY 16TH JUNE

13.30 – 13.35	Welcome	Dr Malcolm McNeill Dr Heather Elgood
13.35 – 15.00	Reclusion and Cultivation in Chinese Art: A Thematic Introduction	Dr Malcolm McNeill Q & A's - Dr Heather Elgood

TUESDAY 23RD JUNE

17.00 – 18.30	The Artful Recluse: Painting and Poetry in Seventeenth Century China	Prof Peter Sturman Q & A's - Dr Malcolm McNeill
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TUESDAY 30TH JUNE

1.30 – 16.00	Objects from the Scholar's Studio: Reclusion and Material Culture	Mr Leon Wender (China 2000 Fine Art) Q & A's – Dr Malcolm McNeill
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TUESDAY 7TH JULY

13.30 – 15.00	Chinese Painting and Calligraphy in the Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Digital object viewing session)	Dr Joseph Scheier-Dolberg Q & A's – Dr Malcolm McNeill
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TUESDAY 14TH JULY

13.30 – 15.00	Śākyamuni Emerging from the Mountains: A Chan/Zen Buddhist View on Returning to the World	Dr Malcolm McNeill Q & A's – Dr Michelle McCoy
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TUESDAY 21ST JULY

13.30 – 15.00	Old, New, Borrowed, Blue: The Guiguzi Guan Jar and Ai Weiwei Two part lecture followed by an extended discussion	Ms Rosemary Scott Ms Asia Chiao Q & A's – Dr Malcolm McNeill
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Ai Weiwei (b.1956)
Ghost Gu Coming Down the Mountain (installation shot
detail)
Ceramic, Glazed, edition 1/3
Collection of the Museum MUSEUM MMK FÜR
MODERNE KUNST
Image © Axel Schneider

CONTRIBUTOR PROFILES

COURSE DIRECTOR AND COURSE TUTOR

Dr Malcolm McNeill is the newly appointed Director of the SOAS Postgraduate Diploma in Asian Art, working alongside the current Director Dr Heather Elgood over the coming academic year in the lead up to her retirement. Alongside his role with the Diploma, Malcolm is a Senior Lecturer in Art Education in SOAS' department of the History of Art and Archaeology, teaching BA and MA courses.

Before joining SOAS Malcolm worked as a Specialist in Chinese Paintings at Christie's, responsible for the European market. While at Christie's he also developed educational programming in his specialist field for the company's international clientele. He was closely involved in the marketing campaign that resulted in the sale of the important handscroll, *Wood and Rock*, ascribed to one of China's great scholar-artists, Su Shi (1037-1101), for US\$60m, the most expensive artwork ever sold by the auction house in Asia. Malcolm was employed previously at the V&A as an Assistant Curator in the Asian Department and as a project curator at the British Museum. As a doctoral researcher, Malcolm worked in the field of medieval Buddhist arts in East Asia, completing his doctorate in History of Art & Archaeology at SOAS with a thesis on narrative agency in Chan/Zen text-image relationships. He holds an MA in History of Art and Archaeology from SOAS, and a BA from Cambridge in Chinese Studies.

COURSE LECTURERS

Professor Peter Sturman, University Santa Barbra, specialises in the study of Chinese painting and calligraphy with a particular focus on text-image relationships. His primary focus is on literati culture of the Northern Song and its immediate aftermath, though he has also published on landscape painting of the tenth and eleventh centuries, court art of the late Northern Song, loyalist art of the Song-Yuan transition, the Ming-dynasty artist Shen Zhou (1427-1509), and painting and calligraphy of the seventeenth century. Among his notable publications are *Mi Fu: Style and the Art of Calligraphy in Northern Song China* (Yale University Press, 1997) and *The Artful Recluse: Painting, Poetry, and Politics in 17th-Century China* (The Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 2012), winner of the Alfred H. Barr Jr. Award for museum scholarship. His current projects include a book on the development of literati painting in the late Northern Song, participation in a collaborative study of Xu Wei (1521–1593), the noted Ming-dynasty playwright, poet, calligrapher, and painter, and an edited volume of studies and translations of texts on calligraphy during the Tang Dynasty. Professor Sturman has organised a number of noted international conferences, including one on painting of the Song dynasty that was held in Hangzhou (Zhejiang University, 2014).

Dr Joseph Scheier-Dolberg is the Oscar Tang and Agnes Hsu-Tang Associate Curator of Chinese Painting and Calligraphy at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. He has been working at The Met since January 2013. The exhibitions he has curated include "The Art of the Chinese Album" (2014) and "Streams and Mountains without End: Landscape Traditions of China" (2017/18). Joseph has published on a wide range of subjects, including the Qing imperial art collection, contemporary ink painting, the history of Chinese albums, and the appreciation of rocks in premodern China.

Mr Leon Wender (China 2000 Fine Art), along with his wife Karen, opened a gallery in New York City in 1980 that focused on bringing to Americans, who had been denied access during the years leading up to and throughout the Cultural Revolution, modern and contemporary Chinese culture. They exhibited works by extraordinary Chinese artists of the 19th and 20th centuries who, due to China's recent turbulence, were virtually unknown in the West, except to scholars and a handful of connoisseurs. The gallery attracted a loyal following and expanded its concentration to include Chinese furniture, scholar objects, and ancient paintings, making a name for itself with its fine and unusual collection. Over the years the gallery held numerous exhibitions, produced fine catalogues, and assembled shows of contemporary artists. The gallery was a participant in the International Asian Art Fair in NYC from 1996 through 2006, and also participated by special invitation in ARTS Singapore in 2002. Karen and Leon Wender have lectured on Chinese painting and curated exhibitions internationally, earning a reputation for thoroughness, attention to detail, honesty and graciousness. Today they work with the most important museums and collectors around the globe.

Ms Rosemary Scott was formerly the Deputy Keeper of the Burrell Collection, Curator of the Percival David Foundation and Head of the Museum Department at SOAS. Since 1997 she has been associated with the Christie's Asian Art Departments first as Senior Academic consultant, then as International Academic Director and now Senior International Academic consultant. She has published widely. Her publications include: *For the Imperial Court: Qing Porcelain from the Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art*, 1997 and 'Song Wares in the David Foundation in the Light of the Laohudong Excavations' in *Song Ceramics: Art History, Archaeology and Technology - Colloquies on Art & Archaeology in Asia* No. 22, Percival David Foundation, London, 2004.

Ms Asia Chiao is an Associate Specialist in Modern and Contemporary Art at Christie's, Hong Kong. Asia first joined the Christie's Shanghai office, helping lead the company's Shanghai auctions and driving business development in Mainland China. After relocating to Hong Kong – Christie's Asia-Pacific headquarters – her primary responsibilities include business-getting (sourcing artworks for sale), market analysis, and cultivating relationships with collectors in the region, especially among the younger generation. Asia graduated from Stanford University with a BA in Art History and MA in East Asian Studies.

IN CONVERSATION WITH - Q&A MODERATORS

Dr Heather Elgood is the founder and Director of the SOAS Postgraduate Diploma in Asian Art, working alongside Dr Malcolm McNeill for the 2020-2021 academic year before taking full retirement. She was formerly Deputy Director of SOAS/Sotheby's Asian Arts Programme and Academic Director of the SOAS and Christie's Arts of Asia and Africa Programme. She is a specialist in the religious and ritual arts of Hindu and Buddhist India as well as Indian Buddhist wall painting, Pala Buddhist illustrated manuscripts and fifteenth – eighteenth century Indo-Islamic, Jain and Hindu manuscript illustration. Her publications include: *Hinduism and the Religious Arts*, London, 1999; 'The roots of village Hinduism' in *World Archaeology*, 2004; contribution to the textbook *A Handbook to the study of Hinduism* edited by Sushil Mittal and Gene Thursby, published by Routledge in 2007; "Space, Time, Direction and Movement" *Cambridge History of Religious architecture*, in Press.

As moderator of the opening lecture on this course, Dr Elgood brings her extensive experience as an educator and public speaker. She offers an insightful perspective from a specialist background outside of Chinese art, framing the course introduction within a wider art historical and cultural context.

Dr Michelle McCoy is an Assistant Professor in the History of Art and Architecture at the University of Pittsburgh. Her research addresses the relationship between art, science, and devotionism in premodern China and Inner Asia. Her current book project examines the visual and material culture of astronomy and astrology in the era leading up to the thirteenth-century Mongol conquest of Eurasia, when knowledge of the heavens that circulated across the continent transformed practices of visual depiction. She is part of a small, interdisciplinary global community of scholars of the Tanguts, an Inner Asian people who controlled the primary overland conduit linking East with Central and South Asia between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries and whose synthesis of Chinese, Himalayan, and Indic visualities plays a foundational role in the history of “Sino-Tibetan” art. McCoy’s other research areas include Buddhist image theories, visual semiotics, and theories and practices of translation. Increasingly turning toward digital tools for art historical research and analysis, she is an ongoing contributor to the Visualizing the Heavens trans-Eurasian database project at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin. She also serves as academic consultant for a suite of virtual-reality Buddhist grottoes currently in development with support from the Dunhuang Foundation. McCoy maintains an investment in the public exhibition of art objects, including the 2016 *Cave Temples of Dunhuang: Buddhist Art on China’s Silk Road* at the Getty Center, Los Angeles, the first-ever major North American exhibition on this singular repository of premodern Buddhist art.



Liang Kai (13th C.), Sakyamuni Emerging from
the Mountains
Hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk
National Treasure
Collection of the Tokyo National Museum
Collection of the Los Angeles County Museum
of Art

LECTURE SYNOPSES

DR MALCOLM McNEILL

Reclusion and Cultivation in Chinese Art: A Thematic Introduction

This lecture introduces the central themes and subject matter of the course, framing the distinctive ideal of scholarly reclusion in Chinese art and culture. Through a richly illustrated series of examples from pre-modern Chinese material and visual culture, this talk explores the distinctive approaches to reclusion undertaken by Chinese scholars, Buddhist monks, and Daoist hermits. Exploring representations of reclusion in material and visual culture, the talk introduces key historical and mythical figures famed for their withdrawal from the world. This thematic introduction will familiarise you with the various types of reclusion practiced in pre-modern China, and with the rich material and visual culture that helped shape this distinctive ideal.

PROFESSOR PETER STURMAN

The Artful Recluse: Painting and Poetry in Seventeenth Century China

Prof Sturman's lecture revisits the ground-breaking exhibition he curated in 2012, held first at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, and subsequently toured to the Asia Society New York. In this lecture, Sturman explores Chinese artists' wide-ranging uses of reclusion as a theme during the late Ming and Qing dynasties, framing the artistic legacy of major painters including Dong Qichang (1555-1636), Xiang Shengmo (1597-1658), Chen Hongshou (1598-1652) and Bada Shanren (1626-1705) against the social and political upheaval that shaped much of seventeenth-century China. Sturman provides rich, granular details of what reclusion meant in this specific time and place, illustrating how it shaped works of painting and calligraphy that became canonical for later generations of collectors and connoisseurs.

MR LEON WENDER – CHINA 2000 GALLERY

Objects from the Scholar's Studio: Reclusion and Material Culture

By the late imperial period at least partial participation in the ideal of reclusion had become a prerequisite for those who sought to be identified as scholars. While the preceding lecture focused on works of calligraphy and painting that explored themes and experiences of reclusion, this talk focuses on the objects that surrounded the recluse: the material culture of the scholar's studio. Leon and Karen Wender of China 2000 Gallery have decades of experience in collecting and dealing in Chinese painting and scholars' objects. This talk introduces objects found in the scholar's studio, explains their uses and functions within a reclusive and non-reclusive scholarly life, and offers a collector and dealer's perspective on how the appreciation and value of scholar objects has evolved in the modern era.

Chinese Painting and Calligraphy in the Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Drawing on examples from the Metropolitan Museum of Art collection, this digital viewing session provides an introduction to how to read Chinese landscape paintings in relation to the central theme of this course. Dr Scheier-Dolberg introduces a selection of paintings connected to the theme of reclusion, whether through narrative details, stylistic choices, or the textual overlays of poetic inscription. These paintings illustrate how visual and material culture shaped and communicated what it meant to be a recluse in pre-modern China. The paintings themselves are idealised pictorial spaces, representing the environment into which a recluse was supposed to withdraw. However, they are also objects passed through historic collections, and augmented with subsequent commentary in colophons and inscriptions. These appended commentaries illustrate how objects mediated, communicated and augmented experiences of reclusion, sometimes across vast historical distances.

Śākyamuni Emerging from the Mountains: A Chan/Zen Buddhist View on Returning to the World

The penultimate lecture explores an end to reclusion, seen in the painting theme Śākyamuni Emerging from the Mountains. These images depict the historical Buddha Śākyamuni departing from the mountains at the end of his period of ascetic reclusion. This subject emerged in the visual culture of the Chan Buddhist tradition, more widely known through its Japanese successor, Zen. In the hagiographic narratives of the Buddha's life, his return to the world is a pivotal moment, prefiguring Śākyamuni's eventual enlightenment. Chan clerics claim a direct connection to this enlightenment through a lineage of masters and disciples traced back to the historical Buddha. Dr McNeill examines the visual representations of this narrative theme in Song and Yuan China. He illustrates how paintings of this subject shaped monastic identities in this period. He concludes by exploring how the subject resonates with the both the historic traditions of reclusion at the centre of this course, and with our shared experience of lockdowns and confinement in today's world.

Old, New, Borrowed, Blue: The Guiguzi Guan Jar and Ai Weiwei

The final lecture in this programme is centred on a single object: a Yuan period blue and white guan type jar depicting Warring States period sage Wang Yi (Guiguzi). Wang Yi is shown returning to the service of the state of Qi after a period of withdrawal, in a decorative scheme demonstrably derived from a woodblock print dated 1320. The jar was formerly in the collection of Major General Baron H. van Hemert tot Dingshof, and was offered for auction at Christie's in London on 12 July 2005. It fetched a total of £15,688,000 – at the time the highest price for a Chinese work of art ever sold at auction. The jar, and its historic sale, prompted a powerful response from contemporary artist Ai Weiwei: in his ceramic installation *Ghost Gui Coming Down from the Mountain*. Scott offers a close reading of the Guiguzi jar, exploring its art historical, technical, and cultural significance, contextualised alongside its provenance and historic sale. Chiao takes Ai Weiwei's *Ghost Gui Coming Down from the Mountain* as a point of departure to discuss themes of reclusion, withdrawal and confinement in the practice of East Asian contemporary artists today. This event is followed by an extended discussion, chaired by Dr Malcolm McNeill.

**RECLUSION AND CULTIVATION
IN CHINESE ART**
WEEKLY ONLINE WEBINAR

COURSE FEE
£480

TO BOOK YOUR PLACE PLEASE CONTACT:

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COURSE DIRECTORS

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