

Annex A: He Xiangning: Ink and Intent Sections and Key Artworks

A Pioneer Abroad

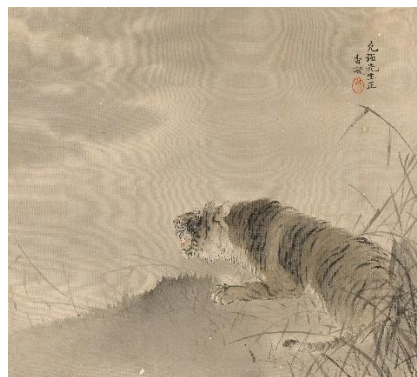
In 1903, He Xiangning travelled to Japan with her husband, Liao Zhongkai, an early member of the *Kuomintang*. Recognising the potential of art as a tool for the revolutionary cause, Sun Yat-sen – who would later become the first president of the Provisional Government of the Republic of China – encouraged He to pursue artistic training. She first studied animal painting under Japanese imperial court painter Tanaka Raishō before enrolling at the Private Women’s School of Fine Arts in 1909, becoming one of the earliest Chinese female artists to study art in Japan.

He’s artistic practice was largely influenced by her career. Her depictions of lions and tigers served as an expression of national strength and revival and are finely detailed and attentive to visual modulation and atmosphere – a departure from the classical literati painting, which would later influence the naturalism and realism styles of the early 20th century.

The exhibition opens with **In Remembrance of Shuangqing Studio (1878-1925)**, which pays homage to the first marital home shared by the artist and her husband, known as *Shuangqinglou*. This name reflects moral integrity and purity often associated with the moon. The section introduces visitors to He’s time living with her husband in Japan, including her early paintings and archival materials that highlight her involvement in *Tongmenghui*, a society aimed at the overthrow of the Qing dynasty. She was among the first women to join the movement.



He Xiangning. *Lion*. 1914. Ink and colour on silk, 63 × 49 cm. Collection of He Xiangning Art Museum.



He Xiangning. *Tiger*. 1910. Ink and colour on silk, 26 × 30 cm. Collection of He Xiangning Art Museum

Tiger (1910) and *Lion* (1914) exemplify He’s early artistic practice, which was influenced by the naturalistic and realistic styles prevalent in Japan during that period. However, He also incorporated her own artistic expression, combining the techniques of *xieyi* – the freehand brush

tradition in Chinese painting – with elements of Western realism to create vivid and lifelike depictions of the animals. The seal impression on *Lion* reads *Shuangqinglou*, referencing her first marital home as well as a line from one of her early poems that read “May this night return year after year, with both people and the moon in purity and clarity.”

The Friends of Winter by the Shores of Baima Lake (1926-1937)

Disillusioned by factional strife within the Kuomintang, He Xiangning retreated from politics and moved to Shanghai, where she joined several literary and artistic groups, including the Friends of Winter Society and the Chinese Women’s Calligraphy and Painting Society. *The Friends of Winter by the Shores of Baima Lake* explores her practice during this time, when she made an important shift, moving away from her meticulous silk-painting style to ink on paper.



He Xiangning. *Pine and Chrysanthemums*. 1931. Ink and colour on paper, 173 × 273 cm. Collection of He Xiangning Art Museum.

Pine and Chrysanthemums (1931), the largest artwork in *Ink and Intent*, spans over 2.5 metres and was created in Paris, France. Within the artwork is an inscription by He Xiangning’s close friend and poet, Liu Yazhi, that reflects on the people, the nation, and revolutionary heroes from 1911 to 1931. The dense pine and lightly rendered chrysanthemums are set in contrast, balancing strength with softness.



He Xiangning, Jing Hengyi, Chen Shuren, Yu Youren. *Pine, Bamboo and Plum Blossoms*. 1928. Ink on paper, 137 × 34 cm. Collection of He Xiangning Art Museum.



He Xiangning, Jing Hengyi, Chen Shuren, Yu Youren. *Pine, Bamboo and Plum Blossoms*. 1936. Ink and colour on paper, 143 × 47.4 cm. Collection of He Xiangning Art Museum.

Known as the “Three Friends of Winter”, the pine, bamboo, and plum blossom are admired for their resilience in the cold, as well as their purity and steadfastness. For literati painters like He, this motif often served as a means of self-expression and encouragement when portrayed in an unrestrained and spontaneous style. Between 1928 and 1936, artists Jing Hengyi, Chen Shuren, Yu Youren, and He collaborated on this subject on several occasions but only four such works are known to survive – two of which are on display at *Ink and Intent*.

An exclusive look at He Xiangning’s involvement with Southeast Asia

In 1929, He Xiangning brought over 300 artworks to Singapore and the Philippines for fundraising art exhibitions in support of the Zhongkai Agricultural and Industrial School. *Ink and Intent* presents original works from the 1929 exhibitions alongside archival materials, connecting past events with present-day encounters of He Xiangning’s activities in Southeast Asia.

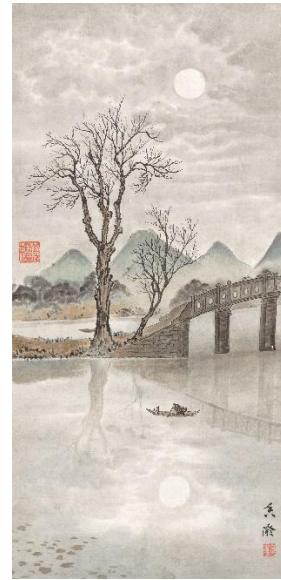
Among the works featured are her celebrated paintings of plum blossoms, which exemplify her distinctive artistic approach. She often began by rendering the aged trunk in dense ink with deliberate, weighty strokes, before extending new branches in lighter ink and adding blossoms at their tips. This pairing of old trunks with new growth recurs throughout her plum blossom works across her career.

Following the Manchurian Incident in 1931, He returned to China and actively participated in

national civic efforts, organising the *Calligraphy and Painting Exhibition for the Relief of National Crisis* and mobilising artists to raise funds in support of resistance against Japanese aggression and aid refugees

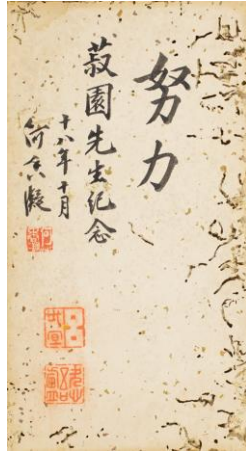


He Xiangning. *Plum Blossoms, Rock and Peonies*. c. 1920s. Ink and colour on paper, 146 × 45 cm. Collection of He Xiangning Art Museum.



He Xiangning. *A Moonlit Scene*. c. 1920s. Ink and colour on paper, 80 × 38 cm. Collection of He Xiangning Art Museum.

The exhibition also features archival sections that provide visitors with more information about He's practice, deepening their understanding of Chinese ink works. One of these stations is dedicated to He's visit to Singapore in October 1929, where she attended large welcome gatherings with prominent Chinese community leaders hosted by Aw Boon Haw and Chinese Consul-General Tang Liu. Aw and Tang expressed strong recognition and appreciation for the revolutionary contributions of He and her husband and extended their support for He's exhibition and fundraising efforts.



Inscription: Press On! For Mr Khoo Seok Wan's keepsake. Republican year 18, October, He Xiangning in Lin Zexu, *Album of Treasured Ink*. Ink on paper. c. late 18th to early 20th century. Collection of Ong Cheng Kian and family, descendants of Khoo Seok Wan.

Visitors may also view an original inscription by He Xiangning for Khoo Seok Wan, one of Singapore's pioneer ink artists and a prolific literary figure, reflecting her connections with prominent culture figures from Singapore's Chinese community.

Art and Activism in a Time of Turmoil

War and Frontiers at Dusk shines a light on He Xiangning's resilience, expressed through both her art and activism during wartime. Following the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War after the Marco Polo Bridge Incident in 1937, He turned to art to rally morale and foster solidarity. Her paintings from 1938 to 1948 bore the symbolism of literati paintings, which were majestic and bold. The poetic inscriptions that accompanied these paintings also articulated her political convictions, highlighting how her art became an extension of her societal influence.



He Xiangning. *Green Plum Blossoms*. 1943. Ink and colour on paper, 57 × 36 cm. Collection of He Xiangning Art Museum.

Painted while He was living in temporary lodgings in Guangxi during the Second Sino-Japanese War, *Green Plum Blossoms* (1943) reflects a plain and unadorned quality shaped by harsh conditions and a scarcity of materials, which led her to improvise. Even so, she remained optimistic and relied on the sale of paintings to support herself.

Reproductions of He Xiangning's heartfelt letters to her daughter are also displayed in this section, giving visitors an intimate look at the hardships she faced and how she continued to pursue art and to rally activists.

A Legacy for Chinese Ink Art

The final section, *Longevity in Art and Life*, looks at the later years of He Xiangning's life and career after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Described by He as the most contented and stable period of her life, this period saw He create artworks that explored motifs related to moral integrity and virtues, as well as landscape paintings that increasingly incorporated elements inspired by antiquity. He also collaborated with renowned artists such as the Chinese painters Fu Baoshi, Xu Beihong and Pan Tianshou, helping to shape modern Chinese art. Here, visitors will get a glimpse of the evolution of Chinese art and the new form of literati exchange from 1949 to 1972.



He Xiangning. *The Tall Pine Stands at the Sea's Edge*. 1960. Ink and colour on paper, 135 × 140 cm. Collection of He Xiangning Art Museum.



He Xiangning, Fu Baoshi. *Appreciating the Snow*. 1962. Ink and colour on paper, 132 × 37 cm. Collection of He Xiangning Art Museum.

The Tall Pine Stands at the Sea's Edge (1960) demonstrates He's mastery in capturing the purity of trees and the uniqueness of flowers within a single composition. At the request of the then 82-year-old artist, the painting was inscribed by Chen Yi, then Vice-Premier of China. Depicting the endurance of horticulture even in winter, the work is often seen as reflecting He's own resilience and longevity. Other works in the exhibition also bear inscriptions by national leaders, including Liu Shaoqi and Shen Junru, attesting to the respect and esteem she commanded. In the same year, He was elected Chairperson of the Chinese Artists Association, becoming the first and only woman to date to hold the position since the founding of the People's Republic of China.

Appreciating the Snow (1962) is a figure painting jointly created by He Xiangning and Fu Baoshi. Playing on each of their strengths, He adopts the willow as her motif, setting slender branches diagonally across the composition, while Fu deftly renders a lady in red who glances back amid falling snow, showcasing a natural and unified collaboration that depicts a mood of hesitation and parting. The painting is reflective of He's continued collaboration with friends, fellow activists and artists, which continued even in the later years of her practice.