



Press Release

Rediscovery of the Past

Reflected Beauty: Chinese Reverse Glass Paintings from the Mei Lin Collection

September 23, 2021

The University Museum and Art Gallery (UMAG) of the University of Hong Kong (HKU) will present *Reflected Beauty: Chinese Reverse Glass Paintings from the Mei Lin Collection* from September 24, 2021 to January 30, 2022. Chinese reverse glass paintings have rarely been displayed in museums and few studies have considered their compositional elements and iconographic themes. Surviving eighteenth century paintings were often created for the export market and catered to the taste of western patrons in Europe and North America. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the production of reverse paintings became much more locally focused, with artists creating scenes filled with auspicious symbols and literary references that merchants sold mainly within China.

The subject matter of the current exhibition is the large and multifaceted phenomenon of the more indigenous paintings rendered in finely executed detail. Thanks to the fruitful collaboration with the Mei Lin Collection, we have been able to assemble a group of late Qing dynasty and early Republican period paintings. Some of these images are styled as mirrors and mounted as pocket mirrors or table screens that depict scenes from mythology or popular literature, auspicious objects, or portraits of women and children, as well as ‘reflected beauties’ in both intimate and larger sizes.

By introducing such diversity, the artworks provide a general overview of the themes represented for the Chinese market. While in the eighteenth century the pleasure of viewing a Canton harbour scene in London was typical for export trade paintings, in later centuries the cultural identity of the painted subjects took on greater significance, as an increasing number of Chinese—not simply the affluent merchant class of the eighteenth century—were well versed in the literary and musical references.

These portraits also focus on domestic scenes and the shifting standards of beauty, which can be viewed as historic records documenting Chinese civilisation at a time when the dynastic system had ended, and modernity characterised not just politics, but also sociocultural developments. These values give importance to a medium that bridges folk and fine art and highlights the paintings’ significance when viewed as exceptional documents offering rarely preserved insights into an increasingly urban lifestyle.

For more images and captions of the exhibits, please click [here](#).





Details of the Exhibition

Period: September 24, 2021 (Friday) to January 30, 2022 (Sunday)

Opening Hours:

9:30 am – 6:00 pm (Tuesday to Saturday)

1:00 pm – 6:00 pm (Sunday)

Closed on Mondays, University and Public Holidays

Venue: 1/F T.T. Tsui Building, UMAG, HKU, 90 Bonham Road, Pokfulam, Hong Kong (Please enter the museum via the Fung Ping Shan Building)

Tel/Email: (852) 2241 5500 (General Enquiry) / museum@hku.hk

Admission: Free

Website: <http://www.umag.hku.hk/en/>

Connect with UMAG on Social Media:

Facebook: http://bit.ly/umag_facebook

Instagram: @umag_hku, #UMAG, #ReversePainting

Weibo: @香港大學美術博物館 UMAG

YouTube: http://bit.ly/umag_youtube

LinkedIn: http://bit.ly/umag_linkedin

About University Museum and Art Gallery of the University of Hong Kong (UMAG)

UMAG was founded in 1953 as the Fung Ping Shan Museum. It was originally established as the Fung Ping Shan Library in 1932 in honour of its benefactor. For more information on UMAG, please [click here](#).

Media enquiries

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