

Alfreda Murck and Wen C. Fong, editors, *Words and Images: Chinese Poetry, Calligraphy, and Painting*. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1991, \$75.00 (cloth)

Aïda Yuen

Volume 17, Number 2, 1990

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1073084ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1073084ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

ISSN

0315-9906 (print)

1918-4778 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Yuen, A. (1990). Review of [Alfreda Murck and Wen C. Fong, editors, *Words and Images: Chinese Poetry, Calligraphy, and Painting*. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1991, \$75.00 (cloth)]. *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 17(2), 193–194.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1073084ar>

ALFREDA MURCK and WEN C. FONG, editors *Words and Images: Chinese Poetry, Calligraphy, and Painting*. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1991, \$75.00 (cloth).

In 1984, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York received a gift of over a hundred pieces of Chinese painting and calligraphy from John M. Crawford, Jr., a well-known collector and connoisseur. In commemoration of this event, the museum held a symposium in the following year, and *Words and Images* features 23 of the essays presented at the time. This volume is a serious collaborative effort by scholars mostly known for their leadership in the field of Chinese art history. Not surprisingly, therefore, the content of these essays and the manner in which they are presented often presume an audience with some knowledge of or at least a sensitivity towards Chinese art history and aesthetics. For example, when discussing calligraphic script forms such as "seal," "clerical," "standard," "running," and "wild," very little effort is made to describe and distinguish between them; it is taken for granted that the readers are familiar with these terms. In addition, readers often encounter some technical analyses, the understanding of which requires a certain level of background in the topics, such as some basic dynastic history and a familiarity with pivotal personalities. Thus, those without such background might be turned off or at least find the reading laborious. Not to mention that in order to appreciate fully the calligraphic works discussed, the ability to read Chinese is most helpful, if not required. On the other hand, for readers of Chinese, there is a not-so-common bonus in this book: modern technology has made it possible to put names and titles in Chinese characters side-by-side with their English or English phonetic equivalents within the text, while in the past, all the Chinese names and titles were commonly given in romanization, which makes the reference less direct or clear. Moreover, since these articles are each meant to stand on their own, the authors have tried to make their writing cohere by giving well-summarized background information on their subjects. Since *Words and Images* goes well beyond "coffee-table" writing, readers with great interest in Chinese art will be rewarded with great precious and uncommon historical information and reference material. For example, even the introductory paragraphs in many of these essays are replete with the latest research and/or heavily footnoted.

The tie between the articles in this book is the general theme of "The Three Perfections," which traditionally comes to refer to poetry, calligraphy, and painting. In the long history of Chinese cultural history, the three arts have each developed their own system of aesthetics with different levels of sophistication at different points in time. By the Northern Sung Dynasty (960-1127), the strong link between the three arts became obvious; as the idea of what it meant to be a learned person involved the ability to master all three arts, an ink painting with poetic inscriptions came to represent one's status as a member of the *literati* and/or social elite. Since painting and calligraphy share the same medium, and the phenomenon of the painter as

calligrapher is more a rule than exception, the two arts are often construed as having the same origin. The matter is further complicated by the willingness of the Chinese to see "poetry in painting and painting in poetry." As Yu-King Kao points out in his article, the affiliation between painting and poetry is hardly surprising, since "visualization is the most tangible part of the poetic imagination" (p. 74). In relating poetry and painting, other authors supply various theories constructed around the artist's mind and its ability inexhaustibly to create words and images that perform various levels of narrative, poetic, and symbolic and even cryptic functions. To make their theories more precise, different authors at various points explain these functions in terms of "eidetic vision," "inscape," "lyric aesthetics," "internalization," "picture idea," etc., ideas that facilitate the comprehension of painting and poetry as a single aesthetic experience. As Richard Edwards writes in "Painting and Poetry in the Late Sung,"

The painter must imagine what the poet saw and commit himself to the precision of his art. . . . The relation most readily becomes complementary rather than imitative: the suggestiveness of the poet necessitates the painter. It is the visual imprecision of the poetry that both allows and gives meaning to the precision of the painting. (p. 412)

As discussion moves on to the Ming (1368-1644) and Ch'ing (1644-1911) Dynasties, the authors all seem to agree that it is not enough just to assimilate painting with poetry; it has become apparent that the inscribed poems often do not repeat the visual message in the paintings in these late periods. One of the main objectives in *Words and Images* is to show how discrepancies in representation give rise to higher meaning. The analyses of the art of Chu Ta, Shih-t'ao, and K'un-ts'an are most satisfactory in these terms.

Among "The Three Perfections," calligraphy is treated most independently. Apart from showing how this art, through its formal dynamics, can mirror the internal state of the creator and at the same time comment on tradition and history, the authors do not seem to pay much attention to assessing the contribution of calligraphy to the overall experience of the poetry-painting.

Around the subject of "The Three Perfections," *Words and Images* explores dozens of other issues, such as the practical reasons for painting inscriptions, poetic styles and phonic patterns, development of Ch'ing Dynasty painting academy, the problem of the refined against the vulgar, changes in aesthetic criteria, and even the impact of the rise of historical criticism. Throughout the volume, the authors introduce many important statesmen, theories and treatises, hence, as mentioned before, it is a highly informative source of reference. However, the sheer amount of information included is one of the problems of this book; some authors do not hesitate to mention chains of names and titles, which makes the reading rather tedious. At any rate, *Words and Images* is not meant to be completely read at a single sitting.

Nonetheless, the editors have done a commendable job in organizing the articles, so that although they are not specifically designed to follow a sequential order, the articles still give an impression of cohesiveness if read in the order in which they are presented. Fur-

thermore, *Words and Images* contains many very accomplished analyses. For example, Chiang Chao-shen's article on the tragic painter T'ang Yin displays the author's deep knowledge of literature, his skills in critical methods and connoisseurship. At the same time, Chiang is able to infuse his arguments with sympathetic commentaries that add to the serious content of the article a nice touch of personal involvement.

In general, *Words and Images* is a handsome volume: the paintings or calligraphic works reproduced are suf-

ficiently clear. This is most important, since much discussion involves the examination of signatures, seals, and compositional details. In addition, the illustrations follow closely the reference in the text, so that the readers do not need to do much flipping back and forth. As a result, reader's participation is greatly facilitated.

AIDA YUEN
Columbia University

LIVRES REÇUS / BOOKS RECEIVED

ATHANASSOGLOU-KALLMYER, NINA MARIA *Eugene Delacroix: Prints, Politics and Satire*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991. \$40.00 (cloth).

BAROLINI, HELEN *Aldus and His Dream Book: An Illustrated Essay*. New York: Italica Press, 1991. \$17.50 (paper).

BURKE, PETER *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991. \$35.00 (cloth).

COHEN, JEAN-LOUIS *Le Corbusier and the Mystique of the USSR: Theories and Projects for Moscow, 1928-1936*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992. \$49.50 (cloth).

CONE, MICHÈLE C. *Artists Under Vichy: A Case of Prejudice and Perspective*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992. \$35.00 (cloth).

CONNOR, CAROLYN L. *Art and Miracles in Medieval Byzantium*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. \$65.00 (cloth).

COOPER, HELEN A., editor *Eva Hesse: A Retrospective*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992. \$60.00 (cloth).

DE CASO, JACQUES *David d'Angers: Sculptural Communication in the Age of Romanticism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992. \$49.50 (cloth).

DOEZEMA, MARIANNE *George Bellows and Urban America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992. \$45.00 (cloth).

HUGHES, GARY K. *Music of the Eye: Architectural Drawings of Canada's First City 1822-1914*. St. John: The New Brunswick Museum, 1992. \$19.95 (paper).

HERBERT, ROBERT *Impressionism: Arts, Leisure, and Parisian Society*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991. \$30.00 (paper).

JOHNS, ELIZABETH *American Genre Painting: The Politics of Everyday Life*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992. \$40.00 (cloth).

KEMP, MARTIN *The Science of Art: Optical Themes in Western Art from Brunelleschi to Seurat*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992. \$35.00 (paper).

KORNHAUSER, E. M., et al. *Ralph Earl: The Fate of the Young Republic*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992. \$60.00 (cloth).

LAVIN, MARILYN ARONBERG, editor *IL60. Essays Honoring Irving Lavin on His Sixtieth Birthday*. New York: Italica Press, 1990. \$45.00 (cloth).

MORFORD, MARK *Stoics and Neostoics: Rubens and the Circle of Lipsius*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. \$42.50 (cloth).

NELSON, ROBERT S. *Theodore Hagiopetrites: A Late Byzantine Scribe and Illuminator*. Wien: Verlag der oesterreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1991. 2 Parts: Texts and Plates—Text: 152 S., Quart, br.; Plates: 92 Taf., 4 F- u. zahlr. S/W Abb., Quart, br. Oes 1.260; DM 180 (cloth).

NORN, OTTO, and SØREN SKOUGAARD JENSEN *The House of Wisdom*. Copenhagen: Christian Ejlert Publishers, 1990. £25.50 (cloth).

PALUDAN, ANN *The Chinese Spirit Road: The Classical Tradition of Stone Tomb Statuary*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991. \$39.00 (cloth).

PARELINGER, ELIZABETH, H. BACHERT, and A. COMINI *Käthe Kollwitz*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992. \$45.00 (cloth).

POWERS, MARTIN J. *Art and Political Expression in Early China*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992. \$50.00 (cloth).

ROUGLE, CHARLES *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992. \$19.50 (cloth).

STEVENS, MARYANNE, editor *Alfred Sisley*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992. \$50.00 (cloth).

UNRAU, JOHN *The Balancings of the Clouds: Paintings of Mary Klassen*. Winnipeg: Wildflower Communications, 1991.

WILMERDING, JOHN *American Views: Essays on American Art*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. \$65.00 (cloth).

WILSON-BAREAU, JULIET, et al. *Manet: The Execution of Maximilian*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992. \$35.00 (cloth).

YELLIN, JEAN FAGAN *Women & Sisters: The Antislavery Feminists in American Culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992. \$13.00 (paper).