

# Four Shows Of Oriental Art in Paris

## 2 Devoted to Chinese, 2 to Japanese Painting

By John Ashbery

PARIS, Dec. 11.—There are at the moment a number of exhibitions of Oriental art in Paris, of which the most interesting is no doubt the "Paintings by Chinese Men of Letters" at the Musée Cernuschi (7 Ave. Velasquez; to Feb. 28).

Painting and drawing have been considered prerequisites of culture for centuries in China, just as horsemanship, fencing and the ability to turn out a sonnet were once essential to the equipment of the *honnête homme* in France.

But writing and painting are much more closely related in the Orient than elsewhere. Both require manual dexterity; both must express spontaneously and *correctly* a fleeting impression. The combination of spontaneity and exactitude is one of the things that appeal to us in this art, which must obey the rules even when it beaks them: the Chinese have a name (yi-p'in) for the so-called "unconstrained style."

### Private Collection

This exhibition includes outstanding examples of painting by writers from the collection of Mme. Ling Su-hua, of London. The earliest is by the 14th-century master Ni Tsan, a scroll covered with 13 poems about the melancholy of autumn, and illustrated with drawings of trees, rocks and a straw hut: the poetry and painting not only complement each other, but form a single entity, delicate and tragic in feeling.

But the most beautiful piece in this collection is a long scroll showing two rivers, the Siao and the Siang, flowing together, by the 17th-century painter Tcha Che-piao.

It is once again an evocation of autumnal scenery, full of virtuosic passages despite its thistle-down fragility. With the meagrest of means the painter represents effects of mist and distance, and a flock of birds so tiny they can scarcely be seen without a magnifying glass.

Twenty paintings from the 14th to the 19th century make up this distinguished exhibition, which is completed by samples of artists'

equipment (inkstones, inkwells, brushes, seals) and a handsome selection of drawings by Mme. Ling Su-hua herself.

### At Petit Palais

In contrast, the exhibition of Japanese paintings from the 18th and 19th centuries at the Petit Palais is a disappointment. This institution has accustomed us to important large-scale surveys of art from distant parts of the world, such as the recent Persian and Mexican exhibitions, which have nothing in common with the indifferent selection of Japanese art they are showing now.

The paintings of the 18th-century painter Taiga are charming at

times, especially a composition of black bamboos on gold, and the landscapes of Tessai (1836-1924) have an almost expressionist vigor, but they do not save the ensemble.

The Musée Guimet is showing Chinese paintings acquired during the past ten years. Among the jewels of this small but beautiful exhibition are an anonymous portrait of a monk from the Yuan period (1280-1368) done in a microscopic realist style that suggests Flemish primitives; a Ming copy of a Yuan genre scene of horses and their groom, full of dramatic foreshortening and bold contrasts of tone; a Corot-ish landscape by the 17th-century Pata-chan-jen; a curious "official"

painting of an emperor's tour of inspection from about 1700. (6 Place d'Iéna; to Dec. 31).

Finally, the Galerie Janette Ostier has a lively show of popular Japanese art (paintings, drawings, prints and sculpture) of the 17th to 19th century, cruder but in every way more enjoyable than the Petit Palais exhibition. Some of these comic lampoons of coquettes, pompous philosophers, monks and self-important demons would make handsome Christmas presents. (26 Place des Vosges; to Dec. 31).

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The American Cultural Center at 3 Rue du Dragon is showing the work of seven Americans in Paris. Two of them—Petlin and Koenig—are already familiar to Parisians from their gallery exhibitions here. The others, except for fleeting appearances in group shows, are showing here for the first time.

Significantly, perhaps, the abstractionists have only a slight majority here—four out of seven. In any case Beryl Barr-Sharrar's luxuriantly colored, tensely organized abstract canvases show that the movement is still a vital one. So do the contour-map surfaces of Richard Luboski's *matière* paintings, all soft highlights and transparent shadow, though I am less sure about Koenig, who lacks the force needed to bring off the austere means to which he limits himself.

Michael Todd proposes half-humorous assemblages involving workmen's pants and spray-paint; one would like to see more of his curious masks made from shoe-trees and assorted odds and ends.

Of the figuratives, Rubington's dim nudes, lit by a gelatinous yellow light that suggests Carrière, are powerful when they come off; ditto for Petlin's complex and distressing dream landscapes, done in a flawless surreal technique. Kosta Alex's small genre sculptures have an acidulous charm. (To Dec. 15).

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Fleur Cowles shows paintings in which various things are happening to flowers. Done in a meticulous magic-realist technique, they have a poetic quality sometimes verging on the macabre, as in "Flowers in Flight," a tree swarming with butterflies and brilliant insects, or the "Portrait of Salvador Dali" as a dahlia, whose waxy petals symbolize the famous mustache. (Galerie André Weil, 26 Ave. Matignon; to Dec. 15).



Ink and color landscape by Tch'a Che-piao (1615-1698).

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