

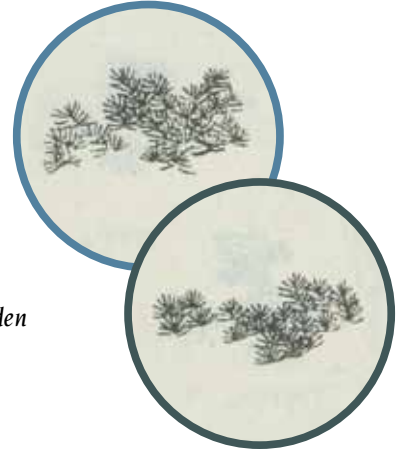
## Bamboo and Pine Trees



Bamboo and pine trees are very common designs in Chinese brush painting. Both plants are very important symbols in Chinese culture.

Pine trees are evergreens and keep their green needles through the long winter. They are a symbol of long life. Bamboo looks very delicate, but because it bends in strong winds and does not break, it symbolizes strength and flexibility in Chinese culture.

These examples of bamboo and pine trees are from the *Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting*, first published in China in the year 1679. Many famous Chinese artists began learning painting with the help of this manual.



■ Can you find bamboo and pine trees in Ruby's paintings?

■ What holiday do many American families celebrate with a decorated pine tree?

## Black Ink



Chinese black ink (called "mo") is made from burnt pine tree soot mixed with animal glue, molded and dried into hard sticks, which are decorated with gold. Ink makers have guarded their special recipes carefully, never writing them down, and have passed down their special formula to their apprentices. To make liquid ink from an ink stick, painters must rub it with drops of water on a fine-grained rock, such as slate.

In Chinese color theory, black contains all colors and it is possible to create an infinite number of shades of black ink.

■ Find the paintings that use only black ink. (Hint: both traditional landscapes and large abstract paintings use only black ink.) Which painting do you prefer?

## Chinese Writing



In China, painting and writing developed together, using the same skills and tools (brush and ink). Chinese writing is composed of symbols that stand for ideas. These symbols, called characters, are written in columns, from top to bottom, unlike English letters, which are written in rows from left to right. Ruby Wang writes her English signature with the letters going from top to bottom, just like Chinese characters. Sometimes she also adds her Chinese signature next to the English. Her Chinese name is "Chih Ning."

■ How many paintings have the artist's signatures in both English and Chinese?

## Chinese Landscape Painting

The word for landscape painting in Chinese is "shanshui hua," which means "mountain water painting." The name shows the importance of these landscape elements in Chinese painting. Mountains rise up; water flows down. The Chinese see mountains and water as symbols of the eternal process of change and of the balancing yin and yang.

"Yin and yang" describes how opposite forces are interconnected and interdependent in the natural world. Many natural opposites (such as male and female, light and dark, high and low, hot and cold, water and fire, life and death, and so on) are thought of as physical examples of the yin-yang concept.

■ Find the paintings with mountains and water. How are the hills and rivers around Binghamton different from the mountains and water in Ruby Wang's paintings?



## Red Chinese Seals



Carved seals, dipped in red paste and pressed on paper, have been used on documents in China for thousands of years. Seals are carved from stone, but used like rubber stamps are today.

Chinese seals are like signatures. Emperors used seals to proclaim their laws to the people, officials used seals to signify their power, merchants used seals to demonstrate their honesty, landholders used seals to mark the edges of their property, and common people used seals to mark their personal belongings.

Ruby Wang has many different seals in different shapes and sizes. She chooses which seals to use for artistic reasons. Many of her paintings use two red seals. One is carved with "Hwa," her maiden name. She often prints it next to the "H" in her English signature. The seals with two characters means "Chih Ning," Ruby's Chinese name.

■ Draw a seal that represents your name and signature:

## Ruby Wang on ink, brush, and paper

As a traditional Chinese artist at heart, the use of ink and brush on rice paper is so familiar, and yet, it still intrigues me. With great curiosity I have studied these materials and have not ceased to explore their use.

The effects of different manipulations of the hand and the different positions of the brush on paper are magical: how to hold the brush, how much pressure to apply, and how to mix colors and shades. All these achieve various effects. Of course, years of experimentation have been laborious, yet they have been joyous. When my brush dances and glides across the paper, it is as though the strokes are guided by Chi (Qi) – or, “life force.”

In 2009, four years after I had returned to Wuxi, my birthplace in China, I realized that there are millions of wonderful artists in this densely populated and massive country. The techniques that I had discovered are actually quite mundane. As I lamented that nothing is new under the sun, a different discovery blossomed for me. Paper became a new dawn for me. With many types of paper made

by numerous manufacturers, there are almost as many variations as with the brush. The playful and accidental interactions of paper, ink and water produce wondrous effects. These free interactions display the totality of the “Way” in Chinese Taoism.

If I were to classify the progression of my work into early, middle and late stages, I would name these stages Copy, Paste and Splash. I started painting traditional landscapes as a teenager and though now in my eighties, I still grope and struggle with the same content, the same materials.

When I was about 15 years old, my mother sent me to Master HUANG Bi Jun’s “White Cloud Hall” to study painting. Seven years went by quickly with countless exercises, imitating paintings by great masters. When I got to the National Taiwan Normal University, I became exposed fully to the discipline of the arts. During that time I followed Master WU Yong Xiang and painted flowers and birds. My love and pursuit for art was endless.



I moved to the United States in 1957 and after five cycles of the Chinese zodiac (60 years), the changes in my paintings tell the story of my journey exploring art, blending East and West cultures. Following my heart and exploring a variety of approaches allowed me to break free from the boundaries

of traditional Chinese painting. I became influenced by Impressionism, the Fauvism of Matisse, Naturalism, and Cubism. I found that what had seemed opposites could coexist and thrive. I began to combine traditional Chinese painting strokes with Western eye-catching colors and expanded my art into a radiant new expression of my life in a very different world.

Most recently, I have rediscovered the powerful potential of water and ink. My “splash ink” Living Water series was a new breakthrough in my creativity. Inspired by my Christian faith, I believe that living water is the river that feeds the soul.

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Family Guide Design: David Skyrca  
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Photography: Chris Focht, Karen Madsen  
This exhibition is supported by:  
The Confucius Institute of Chinese Opera, Binghamton University  
The Institute for Asia and Asian Diasporas, Binghamton University  
This Family Guide was produced with support from an outreach grant of the Association for Asian Studies, Council of Conferences.  
Thanks to the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco for permission to use information from *Brushstrokes — Styles and Techniques of Chinese Painting* by Molly Scharlt, 1995.

Family

Guide

Between Two Worlds:  
Paintings by Ruby Wang