

China Research Seminar Series (Lent 2021)
FAMES, University of Cambridge

A Scroll for One or Two?

Tracings of the Chinese Picture-Scroll (圖卷 *tujuan*) in History

Professor Shane McCausland
(SOAS, University of London)



5pm (London time), 3 February, 2021 (Wednesday)
via Zoom (pre-registration required)

Please register in advance for this seminar:

https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tJwlf-CrqjsvE9dLIa0FFRUJASuR_apT2mC1

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

Abstract

What is a picture-scroll? How is it read and by whom? And how did it come to be the premier format for the fine art of painting in dynastic China? The seminar poses such questions through a tracing of the picture-scroll's early development in medieval China, exemplified by the *Admonitions of the Court Instructress* scroll attributed to Gu Kaizhi (c. 344-c. 406) and by the emergence of the

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celebrated 'Xuanhe style' of scroll mounting at the court of Zhao Ji, the Northern Song artist-emperor Huizong (r. 1100-25). It considers the kinds of visual information the picture-scroll (or handscroll, as it is also known) privileged as a medium for visual representation and the ways that artists manipulated and exploited its inherent characteristics for expressive and rhetorical ends, for example for extended visual narration integrating text and images. The seminar examines how, unlike in China's other aesthetic formats such as screens, wall-scrolls and albums, the picture-scroll was uniquely changeable and extendable. This format afforded owners a historical stage on which to act by affixing their seals and inscribing their commentaries on or beside the transmitted 'painting heart' (*huaxin*), as the artwork at the centre of a scroll was known – with results ranging from sublime to contemptible and elegant to vulgar.

Speaker

Shane McCausland is an historian of visual arts and material culture with a focus on the painting and calligraphy produced in dynastic and modern China and a curator of the historical and contemporary arts of China. His work addresses the interpretation of aesthetic forms, traces, media and materials, and how these are contextualised in terms of visual disciplinary and interdisciplinary debates. Themes in his research and teaching have included post-formalism, critical iconology and mediality; visual neuroscience and cultural perception of perspectives; art's enchantment and agency; artist oeuvres and development, including studio and workshop practices and selfhood; ceramics and prints in China's visual culture; collecting, connoisseurship and canon formation; didactic, narrative and figural art in China and Japan; transcultural dynamics and appropriation, notably under the Mongol empire across Eurasia; and Chinese calligraphy, paleography, intertextuality and visual literacy.

As an undergraduate at Cambridge University, McCausland read Oriental Studies (Chinese) before working at Christie's Chinese department in London and Hong Kong in the early 1990s. Entering the graduate programme at Princeton University in 1993, he trained in Art History with East Asian Studies under Wen C. Fong. He curated his first Asian art exhibition, on Chinese landscape painting, at the Art Museum, Princeton University. He completed his doctoral thesis (2000) on the art of the southern Chinese polymath Zhao Mengfu (1254-1322), later published as *Zhao Mengfu: Calligraphy and Painting for Khubilai's China* (Hong Kong University Press, 2011). Returning to the British Isles, he held a string of posts in London, as a postdoctoral fellow in the Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art (1999-2002); a lecturer in Chinese art at SOAS (2002-03); and as a research fellow in the Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures (SISJAC, 2003-04). During that time much of his research was geared toward the *Admonitions of the Court Instructress* picture-scroll attributed to Gu Kaizhi (c. 344-c. 406) in the British Museum. In 2004, he joined the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin as Curator of the East Asian Collections and later Head of Collections, and was involved in a range of exhibitions, such as one of Leonardo da Vinci's 'Codex Leicester' from the Gates collection. He curated the loan exhibition, 'Telling Images of China: Narrative and Figure Paintings, 15th-20th Century, from the Shanghai Museum' (2010).

In 2009 he returned to SOAS, becoming Percival David Professor of the History of Art in 2015. He has served as a trustee on the Council of the Sir Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art. In 2014 he published *The Mongol Century: Visual Cultures of Yuan China, 1271-1368* (Reaktion). Since 2018, he has been Head of the School of Arts and a member of the SOAS Executive Board. He is lead curator and principal investigator of a planned 2024 exhibition on the arts of the Mongol world at the Royal Academy of Arts. His current book project, for Reaktion Books, is on the art of the Chinese picture-scroll.