

Ran In-Ting's Watercolors

East and West Mix in Images of Rural Taiwan

Ran In-Ting (Lan Yinding, 1903–1979) is one of the most famous artists of Taiwan. During the mid-twentieth century, appreciation of his watercolors spread to Europe and the United States. Fluent in both wet and dry brush techniques and with a deep understanding of Chinese brushwork, Ran In-Ting developed a unique style that emphasized the changes in fluidity of ink and watercolor. His watercolors often possess an elegant richness like that found in oil painting. In his works Ran In-Ting brings together his training in both traditional East Asian painting and western-style art to create dynamic compositions that illustrate Taiwan's complex heritage.

Ran In-Ting's impressionistic watercolors portray a deeply felt record of life in Taiwan, touching on the natural beauty of rural life and vibrancy of mid-century Taiwanese culture. Capturing the excitement of a dragon dance with loose and erratic strokes, the mystery and magic of the rice paddies with flowing pools of color, and the shimmering foliage of the forests with a rainbow of colors and dexterous strokes, his paintings are a vivid interpretation of his homeland.

The compositions attract and transport the viewer to the enduring but rapidly changing lands of Taiwan. Created by an artist tied to the past and looking through the lenses of both western and eastern art, these watercolor and ink paintings provide glimpses of the exotic beauty and culture of Taiwan. The artworks in this exhibition come from the Museum's significant collection of the artist's oeuvre, one of the largest such holdings in the United States.

Biography

Ran In-Ting (Lan Yinding)



Ran In-Ting (Lan Yinding) was born in 1903 in the town of Luodong, in the mountainous farming region of Yilan County on the northeastern coast of Taiwan. The tranquil farmsteads, ancient architecture, and colorful rituals of his native island, as well as the burgeoning city of Taipei, became an endless source of inspiration for his paintings.

The artist became interested in watercolor at a young age and began teaching art in 1921. Ran In-Ting studied painting with the eminent Japanese watercolor painter Ishikawa Kinichiro for four years beginning in 1925. During this time Ran In-Ting developed his signature style of painting, combining eastern and western techniques and methods of organizing a composition.

In 1959 the Government of the Republic of China awarded the artist the National Art Prize, the highest honor an artist could receive. He also exhibited in several European capitols, and the US State Department invited him to exhibit his works and give a number of speeches in different American cities.

He signed his works in both Mandarin Chinese characters and in Roman letters (Ran In-Ting). The red seal or “chop” that the artist used to mark his paintings is a ding (ting), a three-legged, bronze ritual food vessel originating with the Shang dynasty (ca. 1600–1050 BCE).

Ran In-Ting died in 1979, leaving a vivid record of daily life on his native island. Currently called Taiwan, meaning “Terraced Bay,” the island was also known as Formosa, which was the name given to it by 16th century Portuguese sailors, who upon seeing the island called it *Ilha Formosa* or “Beautiful Island.”

The Art of Taiwan

After more than 300 years of intermittent rule by China, Taiwanese art was closely linked with that of their mainland Chinese neighbors. The colonization of the island by the Japanese in 1895 resulted in the introduction to Taiwanese artists of a western approach towards painting techniques, artistic style, as well as aesthetics.

Interest in western art in Taiwan primarily began with the arrival of Ishikawa Kinichiro (Japanese, 1871–1945). Formerly a closed society, Japan opened its doors in the nineteenth century to the outside world, sparking cultural exchange between the East and West. Japanese prints became very popular in Europe, and the art of Japan influenced numerous artists including Van Gogh, Lautrec, Degas, Bonnard, Whistler, and Klimt. Less well known is the fact that this artistic exchange was reciprocal. Many Japanese artists traveled to Paris around the turn of the century to learn the western style of painting and to bring examples of western art back to Japan.

Kinichiro was among the artists who traveled to Europe in order to study western art. Following this he worked in Taiwan and became an exceptionally influential art instructor at the Taipei Normal College, where Ran In-Ting studied with him for four years. One of the founders of modern Taiwanese art, Kinichiro taught his students to study and paint their island home in a new way.

A Brief History of Taiwan

Taiwan is an island with a turbulent history marked by a series of occupations. The conflict and tension over its name alone reflect the pronounced changes in governmental authority and the debate over the proper governing authority of Taiwan. For the last four centuries, Taiwan has been ruled by various European entities as well as China and Japan. The question over the naming of the island and its people still continues. The island was named *Ilha Formosa* or “Beautiful Island” by sixteenth-century Portuguese explorers, and this western name is the name Ran In-Ting wrote in the paintings of his homeland.

The European colonization of Taiwan began in 1624 when the Dutch established a commercial base on the island. In 1662 Chinese forces loyal to the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) defeated the Dutch and took control of the colony, and in 1683 Taiwan was annexed by the Qing dynasty (1644–1921). The Chinese ceded the island to Japan in 1895 after China’s defeat in the Sino-Japanese war. While officials briefly tried to resist Japanese rule and created the Republic of Taiwan, the island fell to Japan five months later.

With the end of World War II in 1945, Japan ceded Taiwan to China. Since 1927 China had been divided by civil war between Chiang Kai-shek’s Kuomintang or National Chinese Party and the Communist Party of China led by Mao Zedong. After the communist victory on the mainland in 1949, some two million Chinese, mainly from the Nationalist government, military, and business communities, fled to Taiwan. These were turbulent times on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, with violence and repression of dissidents on the part of both political parties.

Born and raised on the island he called Formosa, Ran In-Ting did not flee from these distant political upheavals, but saw them come to his homeland. Caught in the middle, he was the product of modern Japanese art instruction and painted compositions that reflected both traditional Chinese and modern western influences. Staying far away from political discourse, Ran In-Ting concentrated on the human experience as he portrayed the past and present of his “Beautiful Island.”



Ran In-Ting (Chinese, Taiwan, 1903–1979)
Beside the Temple Wall, a Good Market Place, 1959
Watercolor

Gift of Margaret Carney Long and Howard Rusk Long
in memory of the Boone County Long Family (81.26)

Using a particularly rich palette for this painting, Ran In-Ting portrays a market next to a temple wall on a sunny day. The members of the family in the right foreground are much larger than the other figures in the scene. This gives the piece a remarkable sense of depth, which it otherwise would not contain. Cast in shadow under an overhang decorated with lanterns, these three figures appear to come from a rural area, while many of those shopping at the nearby market come from urban areas as indicated by their modern clothes. Ran In-Ting married the traditions and increasing urban development surrounding him into unique works of art that documented a changing Taiwan.



Ran In-Ting (Chinese, Taiwan, 1903–1979)

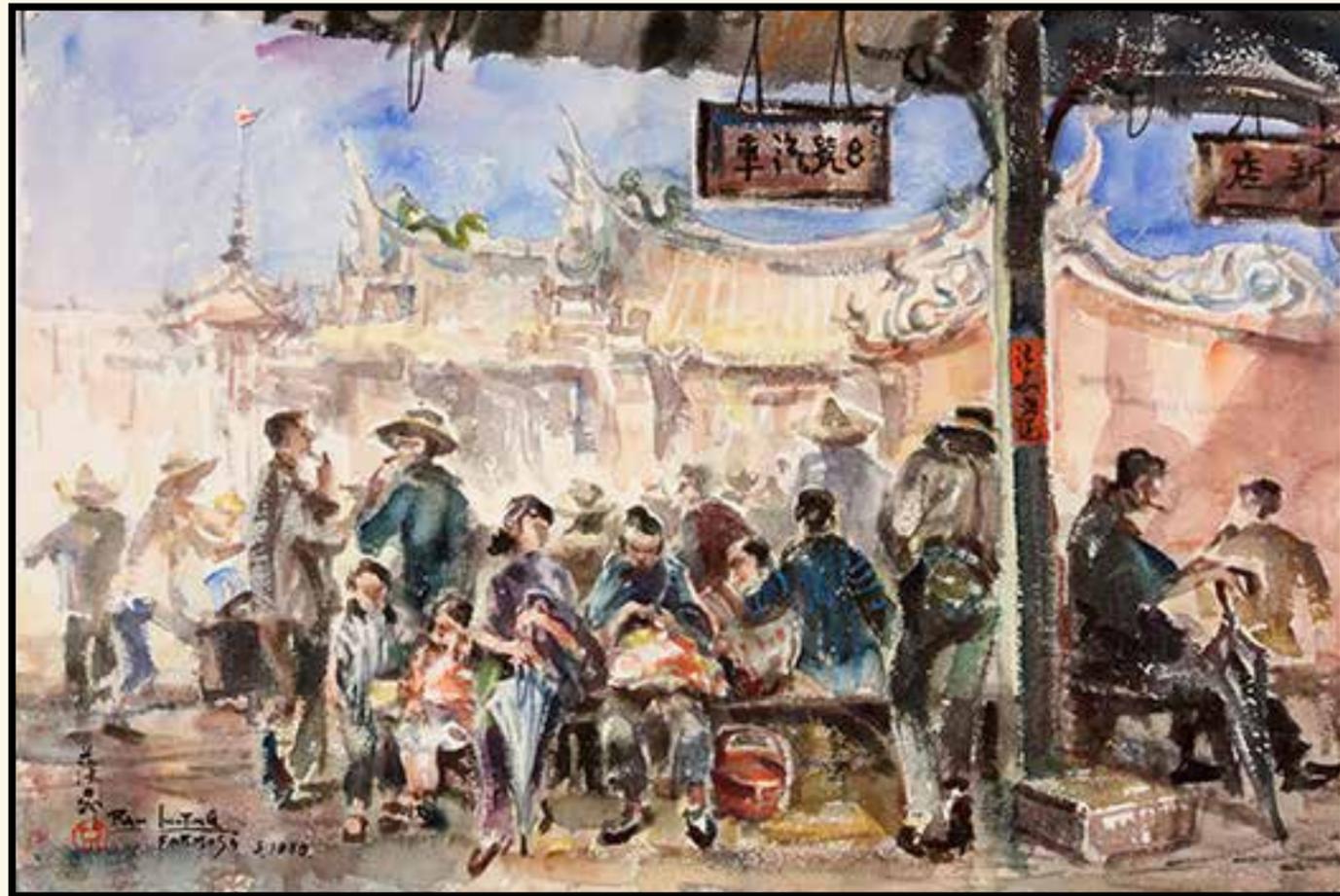
Bridge over the Ravine, ca. 1950s

Ink on paper

Gift of Margaret Carney Long and Howard Rusk Long
in memory of the Boone County Long Family (81.13)

This work reflects Ran In-Ting's artistic training in Japan and the influence of the literati style of Japanese painting. Japanese literati painters were known for their dramatic landscapes in which shallow compositions lacked the western perspective of deep space. Although they used other mediums as well, the literati painters commonly worked in ink.

Bridge over the Ravine belongs to the tradition of Japanese *sumi-e* (pronounced su-me-a) painting. Literally meaning ink picture, *sumi-e* refers to a type of ink painting that utilizes Asian brush techniques derived from the Chinese art of calligraphy. The goal was to capture the essence of the subject, rather than to capture a realistic likeness. Influenced by Taoist and Buddhist philosophical traditions, *sumi-e* often relate to the theme of the harmony of existence.



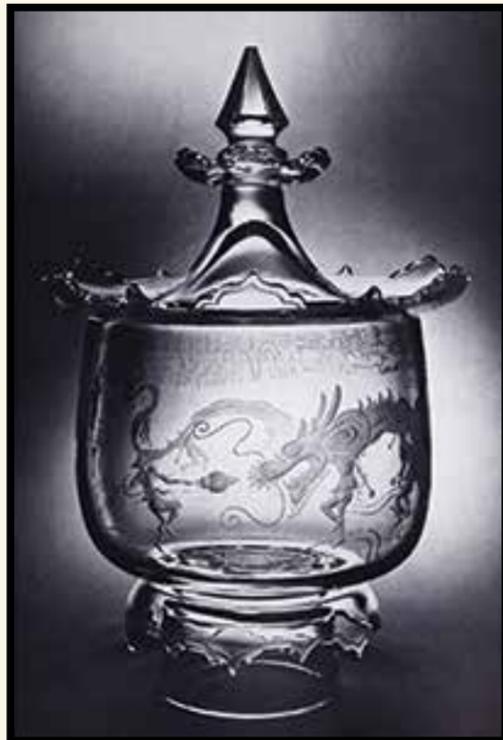
Ran In-Ting (Chinese, Taiwan, 1903–1979)

Bus Stop, 1959

Watercolor

Gift of Margaret Carney Long and Howard Rusk Long
in memory of the Boone County Long Family (81.27)

Filled with energy, thanks to Ran In-Ting's lively brushwork, this daily scene shows people calmly waiting for the bus near buildings depicted in the style of centuries-old Taiwanese temples. Communal transportation is now a part of everyday life for many of the men, women, and children who travel between suburban and rural Taiwan. By leaving the background out of focus and painting the foreground figures with a high level of detail, the artist concentrates the attention of the viewer on the commuter's experience.



Ran In-Ting (Chinese, Taiwan, 1903–1979)

Dragon Dance, 1958

Watercolor

Gift of Margaret Carney Long and Howard Rusk Long
in memory of the Boone County Long Family (81.6)

The dragon dance originated as a folk tradition that was performed to help bring rain, ward off plagues, and bestow blessings onto the community. This folk dance is often accompanied by music played on traditional Taiwanese drums and is still performed at celebrations today. The dragon dance is seen on such occasions as New Year's Day, weddings, and national holidays.

The presentation of the dragon dance requires great skill and athleticism on behalf of the dancers, due to the weight of the dragon and the difficulty of maintaining a flowing movement among all of the dancers. In this vibrant watercolor Ran In-Ting shows the fluid action of the performance as the body of the dragon winds through the composition.

Ran In-Ting's international fame grew in the 1950s, and in 1954 Steuben Glass chose another version of the artist's dragon dance to be engraved on a large glass bowl. This glass piece, along with those featuring designs by thirty-five other artists from sixteen Far and Near Eastern countries, formed part of the exhibition *Asian Artists in Crystal*, which opened at the National Gallery of Art in 1956 and toured internationally.



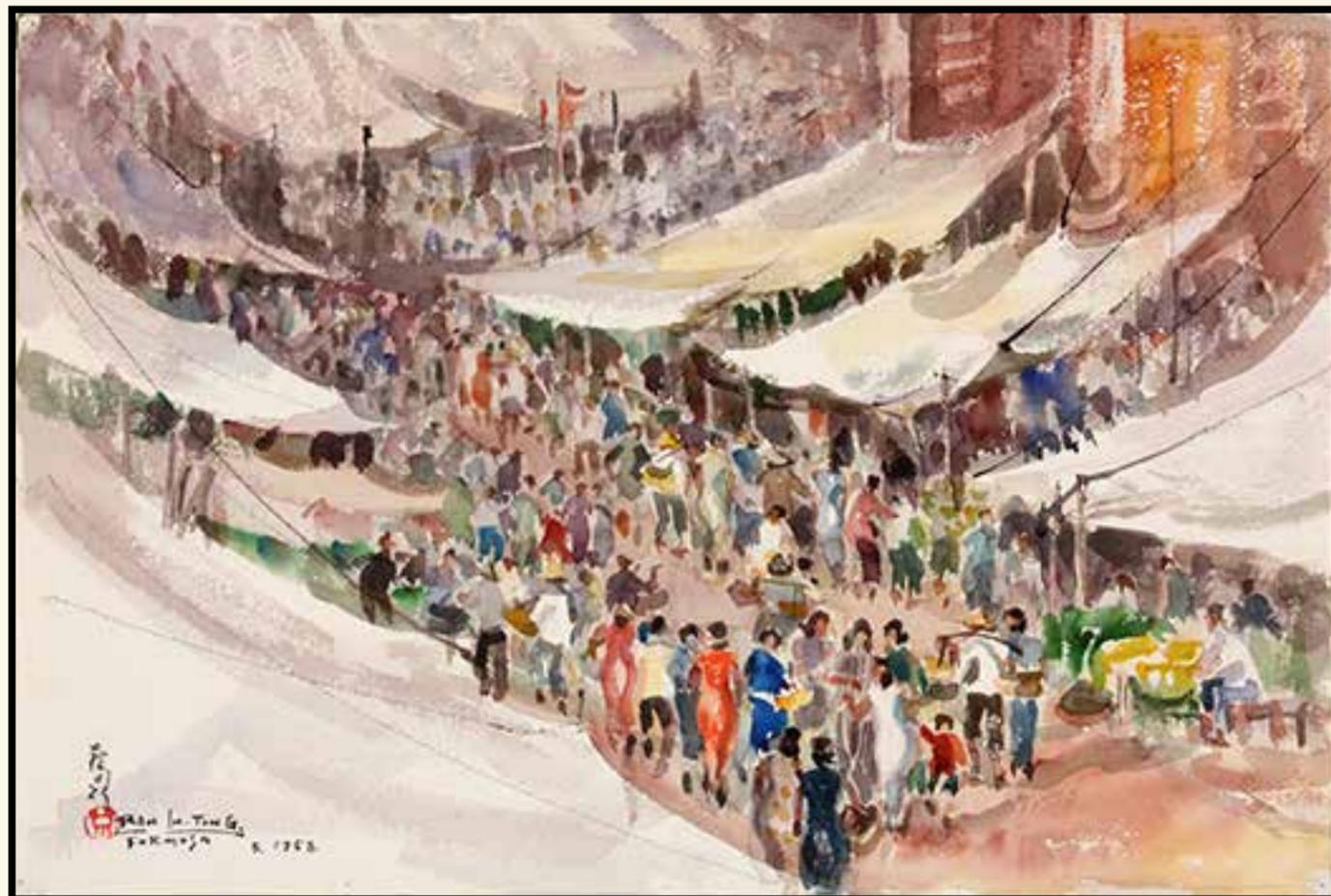
Ran In-Ting (Chinese, Taiwan, 1903–1979)

Market Day, 1956

Watercolor

Gift of Margaret Carney Long and Howard Rusk Long
in memory of the Boone County Long Family (81.20)

To successfully paint a dense crowd of people while giving so many of the figures a unique sense of individuality is the mark of a master watercolorist. As viewers work to discern various details, they become part of the throng and tumult of a day at the market.



Ran In-Ting (Chinese, Taiwan, 1903–1979)

Market Place, 1958

Watercolor

Gift of Margaret Carney Long and Howard Rusk Long
in memory of the Boone County Long Family (81.24)

The high perspective that Ran In-Ting used to design this composition reflects his training in the western style of painting. The western formal approach was introduced to Taiwan by Ran In-Ting's mentor, the Japanese artist Ishikawa Kinichiro. The abbreviated strokes used to represent the distant figures also reflect the artist's training with Ishikawa.

Ran In-Ting's use of the white color of the paper in the composition demonstrates his mastery of the watercolor medium. In watercolor, the color white is not painted; rather it comes from leaving the paper unpainted and allowing it to show through the composition. Shades of gray, blue, and yellow endow the white canopies with a vibrancy and sense of movement. These canopies also guide the viewer through the market and serve to frame the composition.



Ran In-Ting (Chinese, Taiwan, 1903–1979)

Marketing in the Summer, ca. 1950s

Ink on paper

Gift of Margaret Carney Long and Howard Rusk Long
in memory of the Boone County Long Family (81.17)

In this scene, Ran In-Ting adopted several tones and patterns to give a coloristic effect to an essentially monochromatic ink painting. Although he simplified the forms of the figures, he used patterns to create distinctions in the clothing of the fashionably dressed modern women at the market.

Three children sit amidst the branches of the large tree on the right side of the painting, watching the people come and go from the market. The abbreviated strokes the artist utilized to suggest the leaves and branches demonstrate his endless creativity in the rendering of different forms and textures.



Ran In-Ting (Chinese, Taiwan, 1903–1979)

Moon-Gate in an Old Garden, 1958

Watercolor

Gift of Margaret Carney Long and Howard Rusk Long
in memory of the Boone County Long Family (81.29)

The moon-gate is an ancient feature of Chinese architecture that dates back to at least the third century. The Buddhist symbol for the universe, the moon-gate represents the separation of the human world from the natural world, or heaven, and also symbolically functions as a corridor between the two.

In this watercolor, Ran In-Ting depicts the human world living in harmony with nature. Over time the wall and the garden have blended together. Tree branches from the garden spill over the wall, blurring the line between where the human world ends and the natural world begins.



Ran In-Ting (Chinese, Taiwan, 1903–1979)

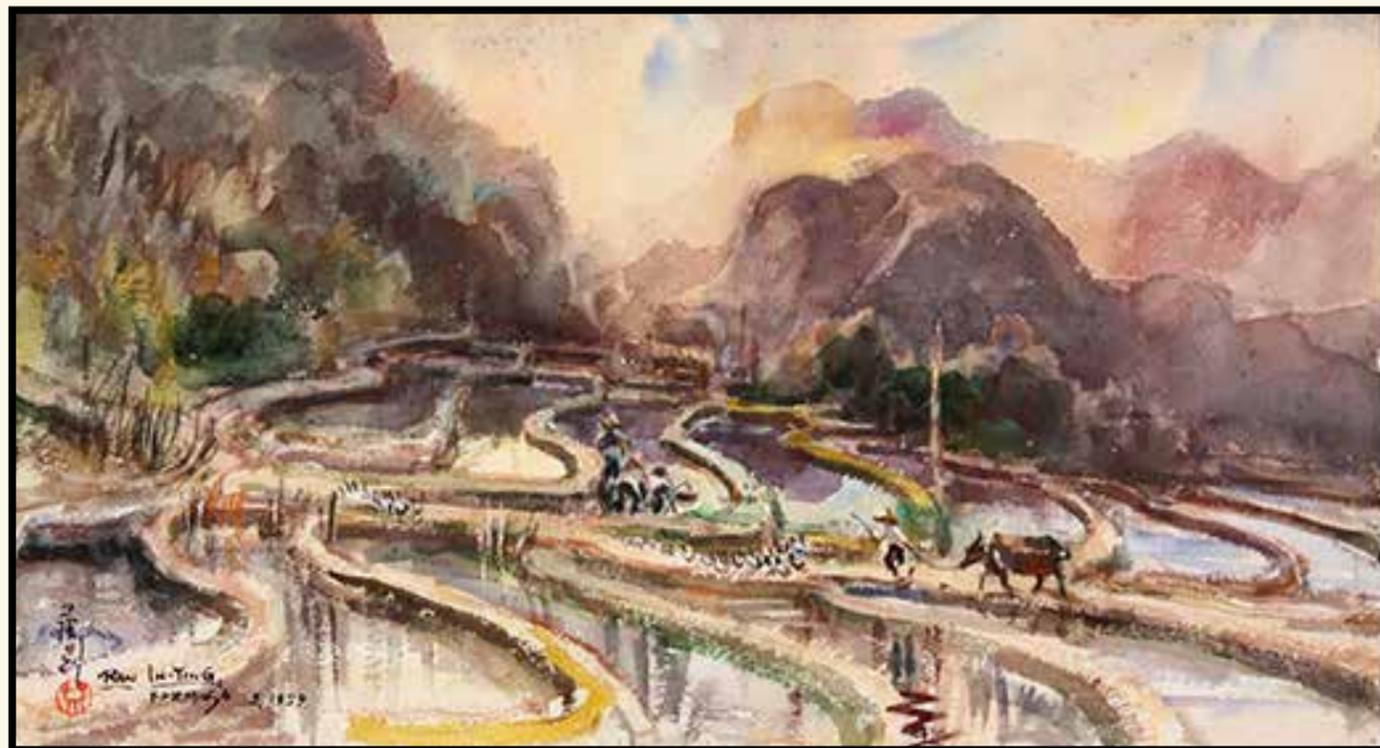
Mountain Village, ca. 1950s

Ink on paper

Gift of Margaret Carney Long and Howard Rusk Long
in memory of the Boone County Long Family (81.18)

With only the white of the paper and shades of gray and black, Ran In-Ting here portrays a rich impression of nature. He achieves this through a variety of strokes and by using both dry and wet applications of the medium. The rich, fluid passages of gray provide a delicate and distant background to the lush foreground.

In this scene we see a couple and a small boy with ducks following after them. The small boy appears to be holding a stick in his hand, perhaps because he is directing the ducks as he skips or marches up the steps to his village, seen in the near distance. A charming scene, this work of art provides a glimpse of everyday life in rural Taiwan.



Ran In-Ting (Chinese, Taiwan, 1903–1979)

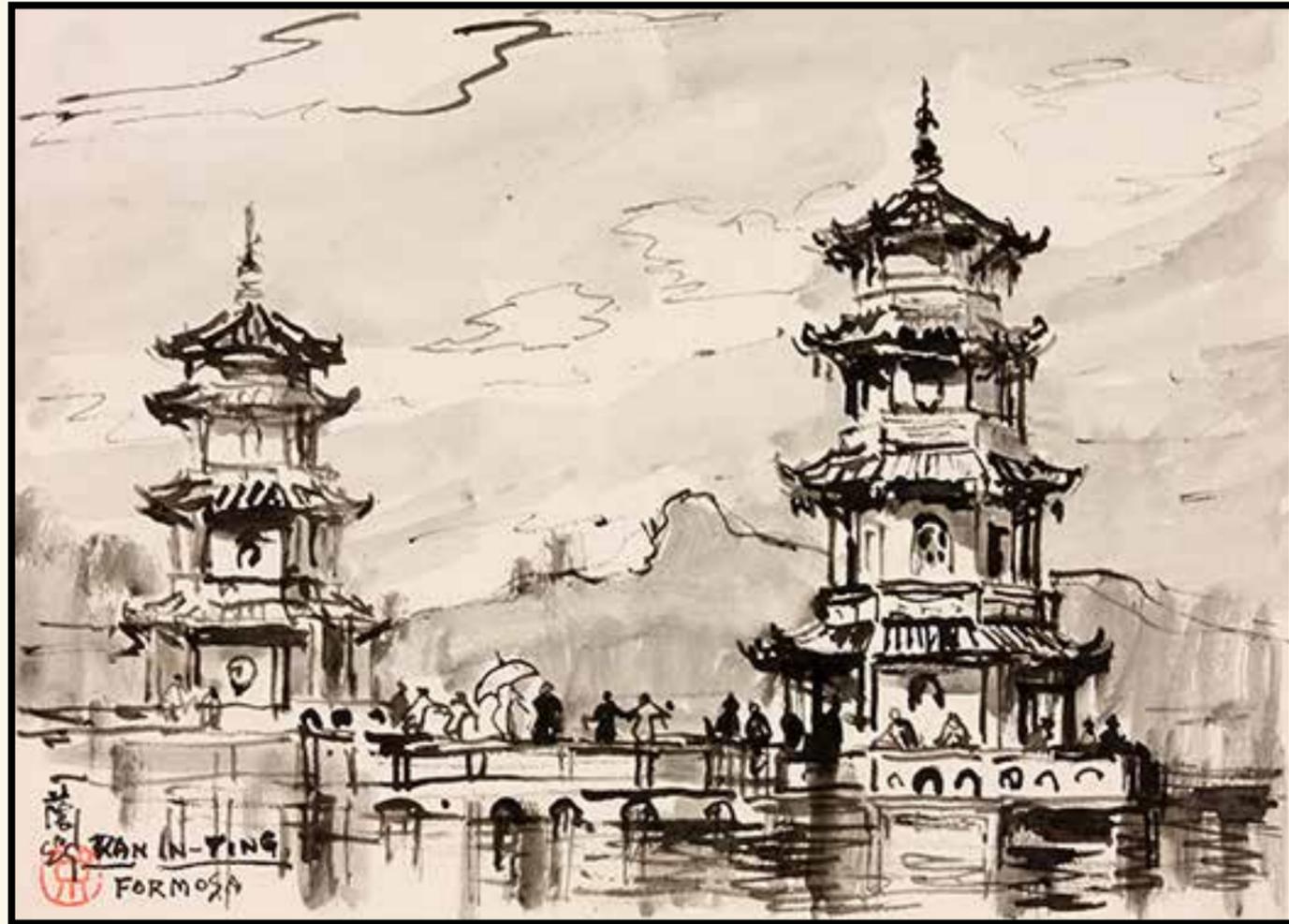
Rice Paddy on Mountain Slope, 1959

Watercolor

Gift of Margaret Carney Long and Howard Rusk Long
in memory of the Boone County Long Family (81.30)

Soaring mountains frame a terraced field of rice paddies in this glimpse of traditional farm life. Workers tend to the watery fields, as a farmer guides his water buffalo, and ducks wander near the water. Rice paddies have been an integral part of the Taiwanese landscape for centuries.

Not only does this painting showcase Ran In-Ting's talent in controlling the fluid watercolor medium, it also reveals his gift as a colorist and his talent at portraying water and its reflections. The flowing colors, curving rice paddies, and majestic mountains combine to show a breathtaking view of Taiwan's agricultural sector.



Ran In-Ting (Chinese, Taiwan, 1903–1979)

Two Pagodas, ca. 1950s

Ink on paper

Gift of Margaret Carney Long and Howard Rusk Long
in memory of the Boone County Long Family (81.9)

This ink painting by the artist Ran In-Ting is a powerful rendering of Taiwanese architecture nestled in a natural landscape. Rendered in bold, dark lines with numerous details, the pagodas dominate the serene setting, which Ran In-Ting only roughly sketched. An unforgiving medium, ink painting requires a steady hand and absolute certainty on the part of the artist, since any mark once made can never be erased.



Ran In-Ting (Chinese, Taiwan, 1903–1979)

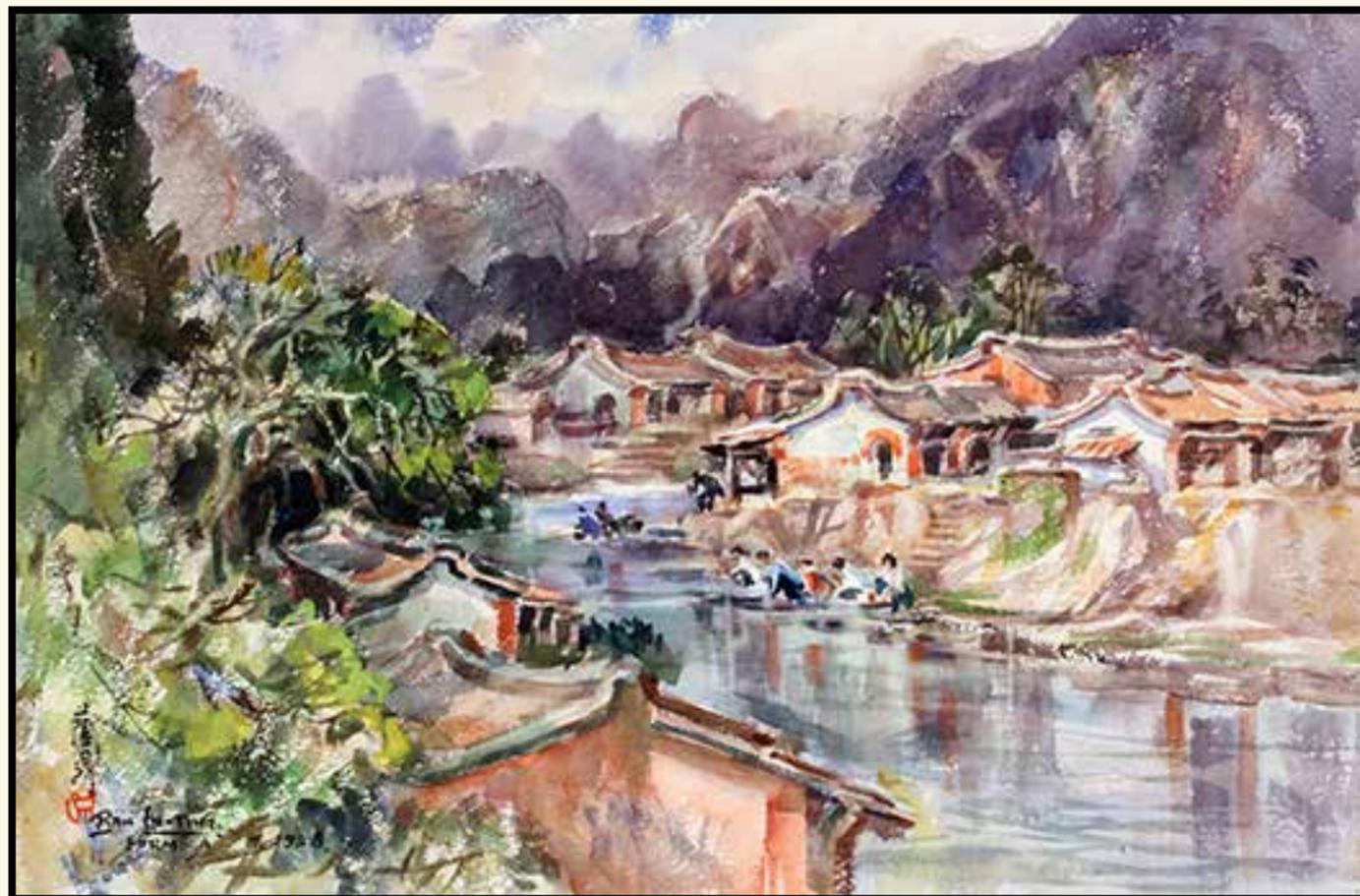
Village in the Bamboo Forest, 1958

Watercolor

Gift of Margaret Carney Long and Howard Rusk Long
in memory of the Boone County Long Family (81.19)

Bursting with color and life, this painting captures the play of color and light in a particularly vibrant fashion using both fluid and dry strokes. Details such as ducks paddling in the water, water buffalo eating the fresh green grass, and people moving away from us merge the viewer into the bucolic charm of this scene.

Despite the industrial development taking place on the island at this time during the late 1950s, rural life remained paramount. Much of the population did not migrate to the cities, and small villages like this one continued to flourish.



Ran In-Ting (Chinese, Taiwan, 1903–1979)

Village on a Stream, 1958

Watercolor

Gift of Margaret Carney Long and Howard Rusk Long
in memory of the Boone County Long Family (81.23)

This watercolor shows a typical Taiwanese village located along a stream, with women washing clothes in the flowing water. Ran In-Ting employed a wide variety of techniques in the application of the watery medium to capture the fresh green foliage, the play of light and reflection on the water's surface, the nearby hills, and atmospheric haze of the distant mountains and sky.

The buildings depicted in the painting represent traditional Taiwanese homes. At the same time, some of the roofs appear to be tiled instead of thatched, which reflects the changes and prosperity that occurred in rural Taiwan during the 1950s after the implementation of new land reform laws.