

# Color as a Holistic Medicine: Lan Ying and his Boneless Landscape

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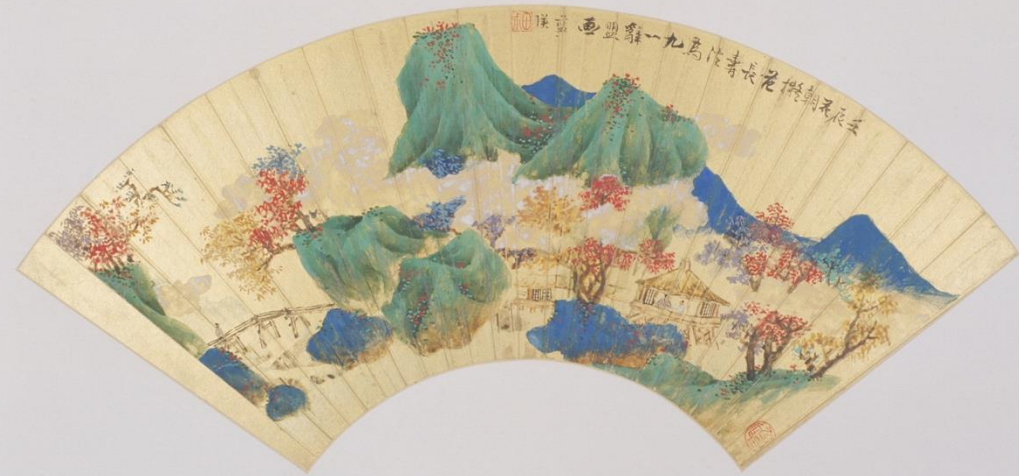


A watercolor painting of a landscape. A prominent blue mountain peak is on the left. The background consists of soft, blended washes of green and yellow, suggesting a valley or rolling hills. In the lower right foreground, there is a white flower with a yellow center, possibly a daisy. The overall style is soft and painterly.

How can art provide an approach to a healthy life?

- Lan Ying 藍瑛 (1585–ca. 1664), a professional artist of the seventeenth century
- Boneless landscape (*mogu shanshui* 沒骨山水): a style that mainly uses color washes to construct the scenery rather than relying on traditional ink outlines and brushstrokes

# Lan Ying's Boneless Landscapes: 1640s-1650s



Left: *White Clouds and Red Trees*, 1658, hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, The Palace Museum  
Middle: *Rouge Ridge (yanzhi ling)*, 1653, album, ink and color on gold-dusted paper, The Palace Museum  
Right: *Green Mountains and Red Trees*, 1652, fan, ink and color on gold-dusted paper, The Palace Museum

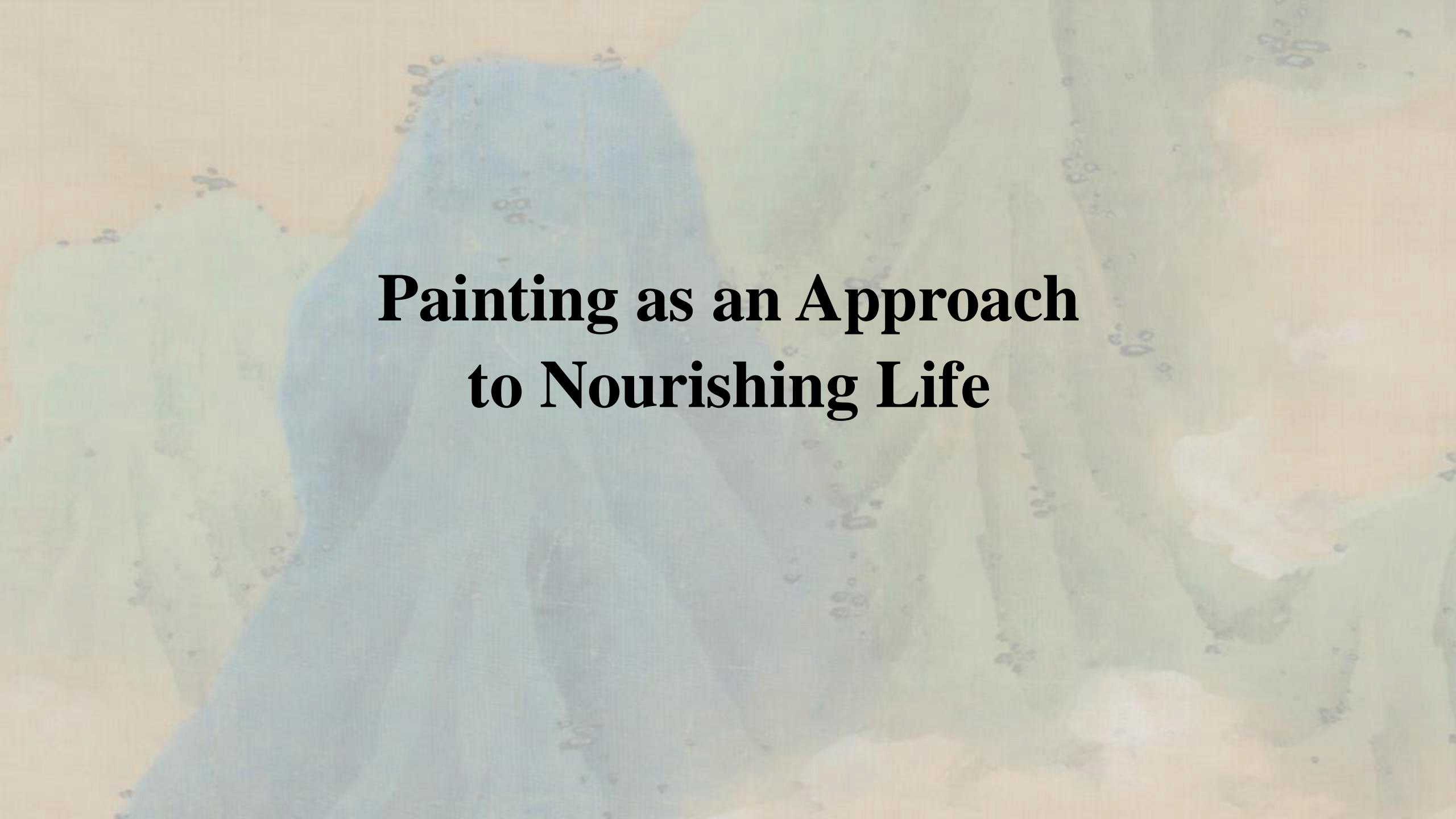
## **Structure of the Presentation**

- The relationship between painting and “nourishing life”
- The visual and material features of Lan’s boneless landscapes.

## Argument

Lan Ying's boneless landscape paintings embody the idea of “nourishing life,” or *yangshen* 養生, a kind of self-cultivation aimed at health preservation.

- The Daoist alchemical traditions of his color act as a symbol of Zhang Sengyou's 張僧繇 (active 502-519) style & link his paintings with antiquarianism
- The subjects resonated with divine foodstuffs and medicinal landscapes in ancient texts
- The materiality of the pigments reinforced the healing effect of the image and transformed the paintings into efficacious objects

A watercolor painting of a landscape. A large, prominent blue mountain peak dominates the center-left. To its right, there are rolling green hills. In the foreground on the right, a white flower with a yellow center is visible. The background is a mix of light green and yellowish tones, suggesting a bright, open landscape. The overall style is soft and painterly.

**Painting as an Approach  
to Nourishing Life**

## Nourishing life in the 17<sup>th</sup> century:

- A holistic approach that combined Daoist aspirations for longevity and immortality, Confucian ideals of self-cultivation, & the material culture
- It encompassed both the cultivation of the physical body (*yangxing* 養形) & the cultivation of the spirit (*yangshen* 養神)

Gao Lian 高濂 (ca. 1527–1603), *Eight Discourses on Respecting Life*  
(*Zunsheng baijian* 遵生八箋, 1591)



- “When the heart attains peace and joy, free from all afflictions, and one further maintains a balanced diet—eating proper food and taking medicinal nourishment—a lifespan of a hundred years is attainable.”
- The study of ancient treasures can bring tranquility, free from worldly pressures.
- Archaic paintings are divine because they are endowed with vital *qi* 氣 energy.
- *Qi* energy: the fundamental substance that pervades everything in the cosmos.

Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555-1636)

*The Thirteen Discourses on Antiques* (*Gudong shisan shuo* 古董十三說)

- Enjoying archaic artworks can dispel illness and prolong life.
- The aesthetic experience creates a sense of connection with the ancients, offering solace for depressed moods and irritable emotions.

*Random Notes of the Studio for Meditating on Painting* (*Huchanshi suibi* 畫禪室隨筆)

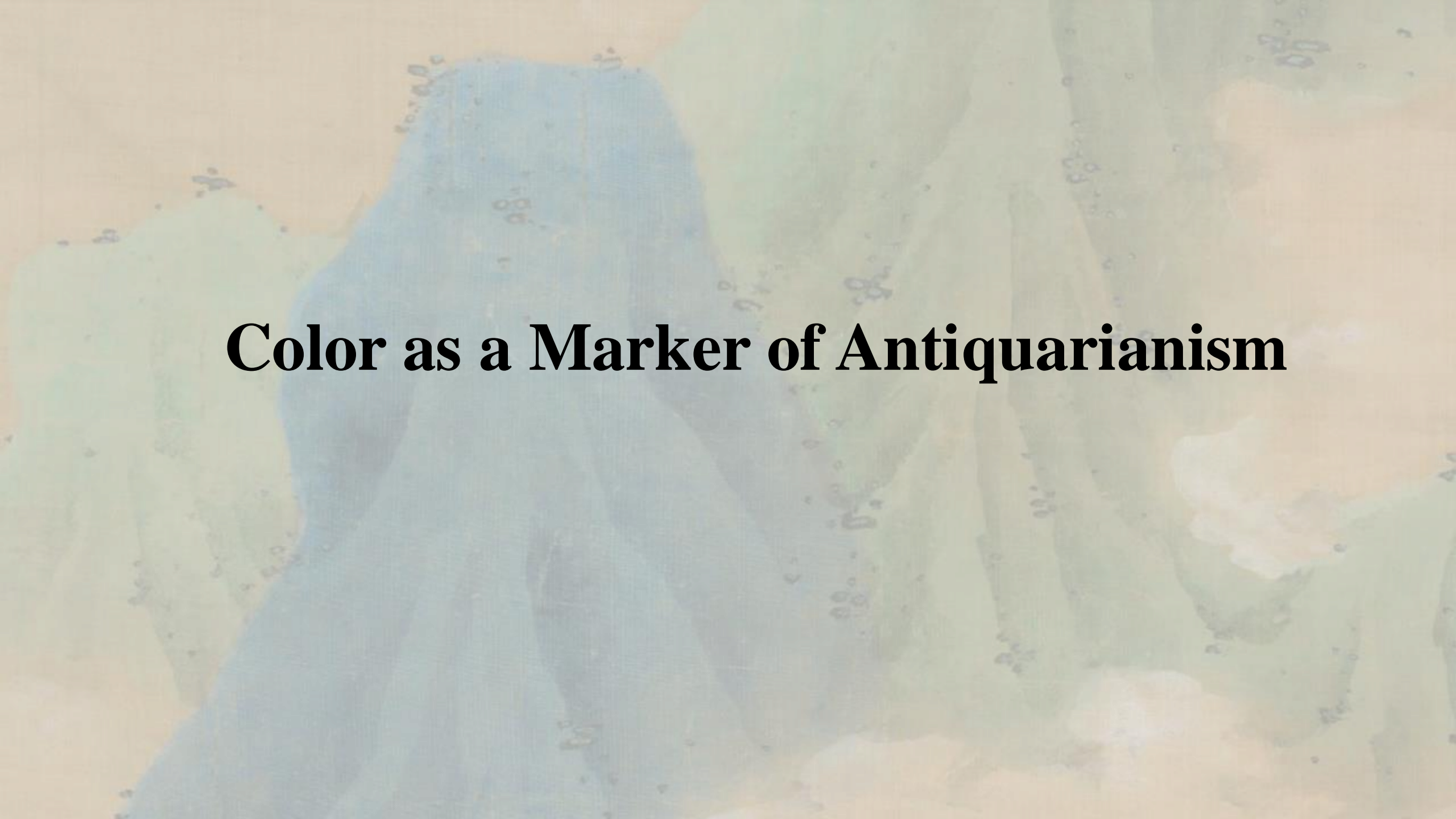
- “Clouds and mists as nourishment” (*yunyan gongyang* 雲煙供養)
- “The Dao of painting, which is to hold the entire universe in your hand, [means] that before your eyes nothing is lacking in vitality, and therefore painters often attained great longevity.”



Qiu Ying 仇英 (1494-1522)  
*Appreciating Antiquities in the Bamboo Garden*  
album leaf, ink and color on silk  
The Palace Museum



In the style of Tang Yin 唐寅  
(1470-1525)  
*Tao Gu and Qin Ruolan*  
16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century hanging scroll  
ink and colors on silk  
the British Museum



# **Color as a Marker of Antiquarianism**



Cinnabar- a marker of Zhang Sengyou, an artist of the Six Dynasties (222-589).

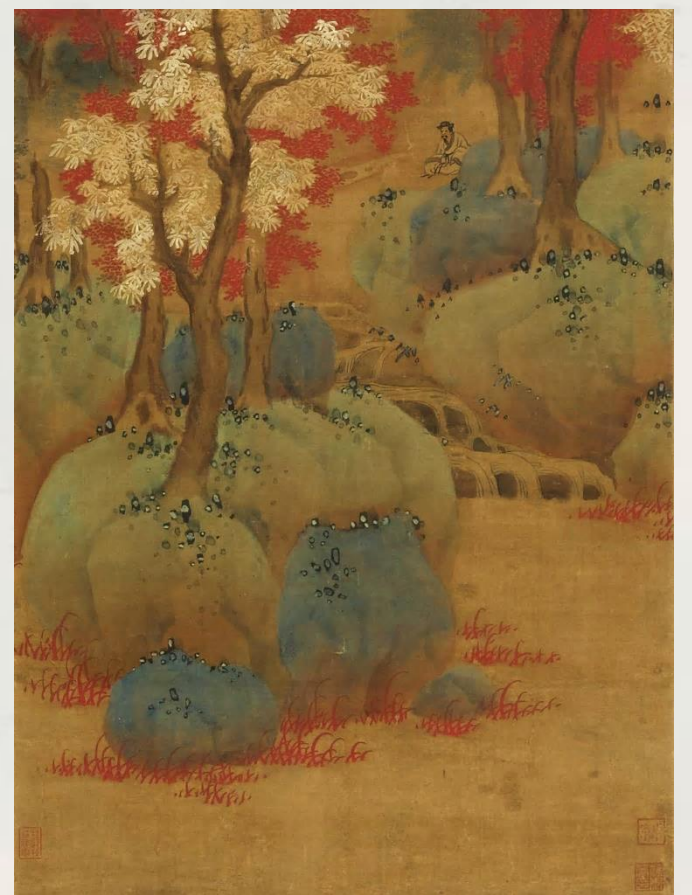
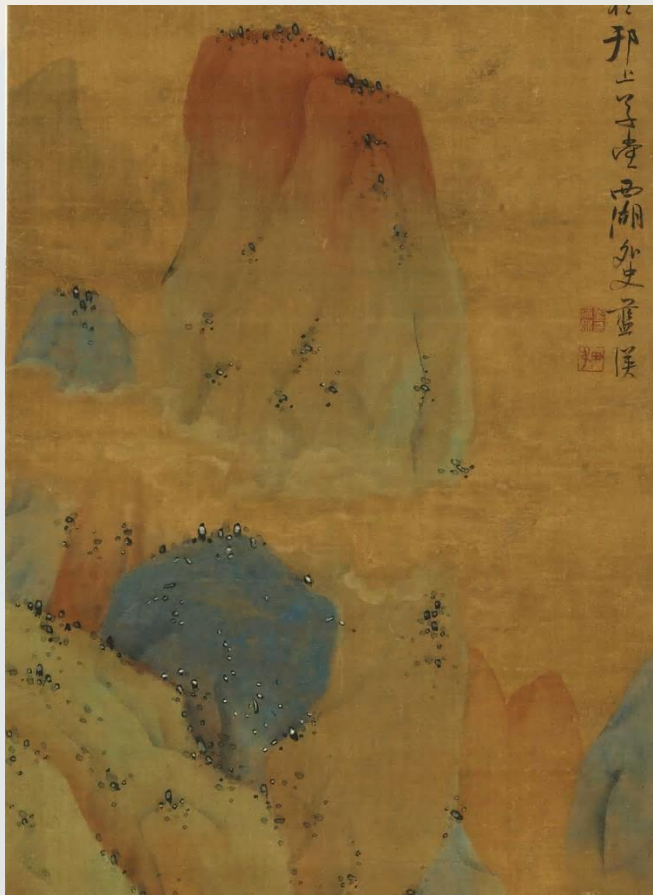
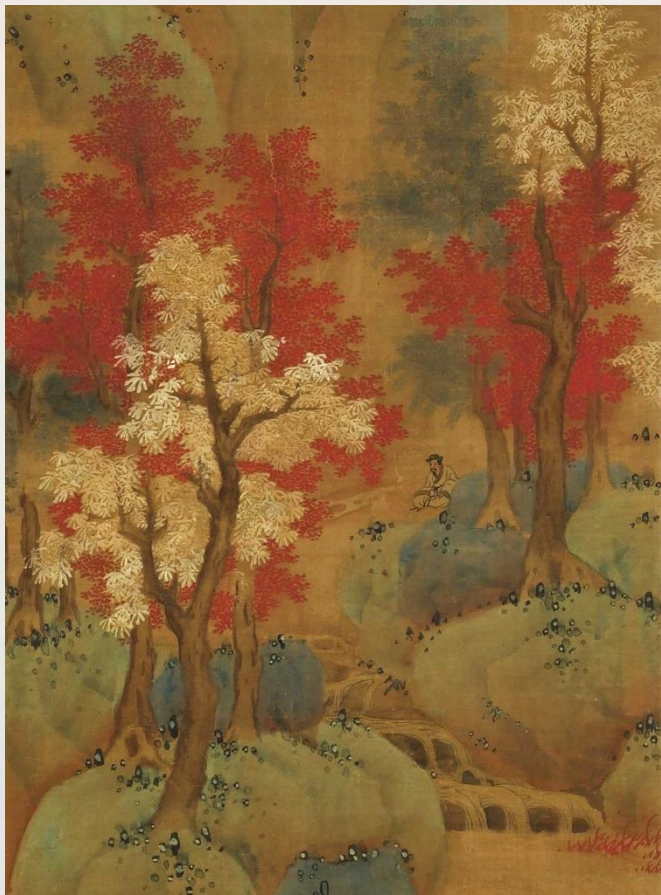
Lan Shen 藍深 (fl. late 17th c)

“Zhang Sengyou’s boneless technique relies entirely on the brilliance of cinnabar and lead, akin to the richness of the Six Dynasties literary style.”

Cinnabar and Lead (*danqian* 丹鉛):

- Pigments used in painting
- Ingredients of Daoist elixirs

Lan Ying, *Cinnabar Cliff and Red Trees*, 1642, hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, Shanghai Museum



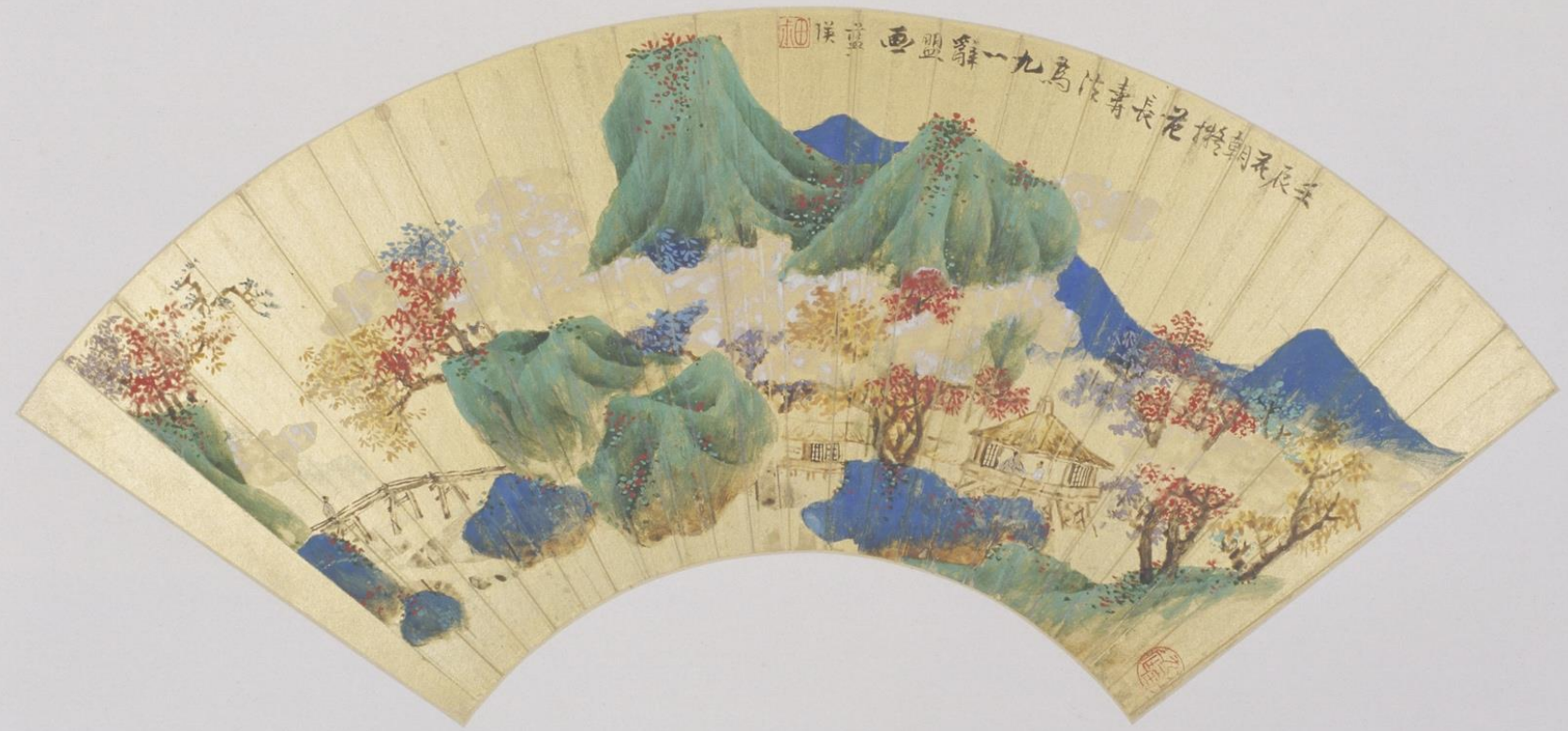
Gu Kaizhi's 顧愷之 (c. 345–c. 406)

*On Painting the Cloud-Terrace Mountain* (*hua yuntaishan ji* 畫雲台山記):  
provides instructions on using cinnabar to depict the divine red cliffs

Lan Ying, *Cinnabar Cliff and Red Trees*, 1642, hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, Shanghai Museum

The background is a soft watercolor wash. It features a large, vertical, light blue shape on the left side, which tapers towards the bottom. To the right of this blue shape, there are various washes of light green and pale orange, creating a textured, painterly effect. The colors are blended and layered, giving the background a sense of depth and movement.

# **Color as a Symbol of Special Diet**



*Classic of Mountains and Seas (Shanhai jing 山海經)*

“Mount Mi has many cinnabar trees. Their leaves are round; their stems are red. They have yellow flowers and red fruits that taste like malt sugar. If one eats from these, one does not feel hungry. From this mountain, the Cinnabar River flows westward into Millet Marsh, where white jade is abundant. In the cinnabar river flows jade jelly, whose source is hot and bubbly, and the Yellow Emperor drank and feasted on it.”

## The later interpretations:

- Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365–427)
- Guo Pu 郭璞 (276-324)
- Wen Zhenheng's 文震亨(1585-1645) *Superfluous Things* (*Zhangwu zhi* 長物志)
- Gao Lian's *Eight Discourses on Respecting Life*

Lan Ying, *Rouge Ridge* (*yanzhi ling* 胭脂嶺), 1653, album, ink and color on gold-dusted paper, The Palace Museum





# **Color as the Medicine for Longevity**



Five-color medical stones discovered in the tomb of the King of Nanyue of the West Han dynasty (202 BCE-9 CE)

Cinnabar



The five-color system possesses the power to affect the *qi* energy and blood circulation in the human body

*Compendium of Materia Medica* (*Bencao gangmu* 本草綱目):

“Cinnabar cures five organs and numerous diseases, nourishes the spirit, rests the soul, boosts the *qi*, brightens vision, and dispels evil spirits and demons, etc. Long-term consumption was thought to grant spirit clarity and prevent aging.”

# Conclusion

- Lan's paintings embody the Ming elite's aesthetic, intellectual, and experiential understandings of life nourishment.
- Use color as a bridge between art and healing.
- The mythical geography and magical foodstuffs invite viewers into the auspicious mountains infused with elixirs.
- The materiality of the color pigments transforms paintings into numinous objects to balance the *qi* energy.

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Thank You!

