

Mountain Harvests

Chinese Jades & Other Treasured Stones



WORCESTER ART MUSEUM



1: *Circular Table Screen with Mountain Scene*, Qing dynasty (1644 - 1911), 18th century, nephrite, gift of Maria and John Dirlam, 1999.433

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Jade has fascinated the Chinese for thousands of years. It was believed to be a supernatural emanation of mountains and streams, embodying the essence of life, virtue, immortality and nobility. Extremely tough and pure in tone when struck, jade was esteemed as the fairest and most valuable of stones. Inextricably connected with Chinese culture, jade was fashioned into objects of magical, religious, philosophical and/or auspicious symbolism. Ancient

rulers used ceremonial jades as offerings enabling communication with heavenly and earthly powers. The possession and awarding of such jades also invested noblemen with rank and authority. The earliest jade objects, found in tombs dating from the late Neolithic period through the Han dynasty (ca. 2500 BCE-220 CE), include ceremonial disks, tools and talismanic pendants and sculptures of mythological beasts and real animals.



2: *Table Screen with Mountain Landscapes*, Qing dynasty (1644 - 1911), mid 18th century, nephrite, gift of Maria and John Dirlam, 1996.131

The mystique and beauty of ancient jades, as well as the association since the 5th century BCE of jade with Confucian virtues and Taoist immortal realms, inspired archaic revivals during later centuries. Many early patrons and collectors of jade could be found at the imperial court. In particular, the dynamic Manchu ruler Qianlong (r. 1736-95) secured a flow of jade (i.e., nephrite and jadeite) to be used for creating luxurious works. After taking military control of the western Xinjiang province in the late 1750s, the emperor received tribute gifts of nephrite boulders gathered in the Kunlun Mountains. He also facilitated the importation of nephrite from Siberia and jadeite from Myanmar (Burma).

When polished, nephrite gains a silky, slightly greasy surface; jadeite becomes more vitreous and lustrous. The difference is due to the fact that the crystals in nephrite form an interwoven fibrous structure while those in jadeite are separate, yet inter-locking granular entities. Nephrite occurs in white to spinach-green and russet colors, due to varying amounts of naturally occurring iron and by the presence of

small quantities of impurities. Jadeite is found in a wider range of colors, including greens, blue, lavender, yellow and pink, due to the presence of chemical impurities such as chromium and iron.

From the late 18th to the early 20th century, Chinese interest in sculpting jade and other stones of varied colors and patterns was unparalleled in any other culture. Respecting the original forms of stones, artisans created elegant accessories and sculptures using sand abrasives, cutting and polishing treadle wheels and hand-driven borers and drills. These art works were destined for the desks and display shelves of courtiers, officials, scholars and the increasingly wealthy bourgeoisie.

The Collectors

The Worcester Art Museum houses a very fine collection of Chinese jades and other semiprecious stones. A small number of archaic jades were purchased by the Museum in 1955. Most of the collection, however, consists of elegant Qing dynasty (1644-1911) works donated by two Worcester area couples.

Maria and John Dirlam of Southbridge, Massachusetts (illus. 3), began donating art works in nephrite and jadeite in 1996. John Dirlam is president of the J. I. Morris Company, a company that produces miniature screws and fasteners as well as polishing discs and pads. Both John and Maria Dirlam have been active supporters of Worcester County educational, cultural and human service organizations; John Dirlam serves as a Worcester Art Museum trustee.



3: Maria and John Dirlam with one of their favorite jade works



4: *Harry W. Goddard* by Arthur M. Hazard, 1927, © American Antiquarian Society



5: *The Goddard Women* by Mary Fairchild Low, 1922, © American Antiquarian Society

A trip to Hong Kong in the 1960s marked the beginning of John Dirlam's passionate interest in jade. He became a serious collector about twenty years ago, selecting objects that reflect a wide range of styles and subject matter. As a manufacturer, Mr. Dirlam appreciates tangible objects that reflect high levels of exacting workmanship. He particularly admires how jade artisans for millennia were able to create exquisite art objects out of rough jade boulders, without any of the sophisticated power tools and synthetic abrasives available today.

John Dirlam's interest in Chinese lapidary art parallels the collecting of an earlier leading Worcester County industrialist, Harry W. Goddard, (1863-1927). Mr. Goddard assembled his collection in the late 19th and early 20th century. In 1938 his wife, Grace (1866-1935), donated more than sixty works of Chinese jade and other stones in memory of her late husband. Harry Goddard (illus. 4) began his career at the Spencer Wire Company at the age of seventeen and rose to be its president, general manager and principal owner. He moved the manufacturing plant

from Spencer to Worcester and built a home at 190 Salisbury Street. The mansion was left to the American Antiquarian Society by his daughter, Eleanor Goddard Daniels. A painting, still on display in the house, shows Grace Goddard, her daughter Eleanor Goddard Daniels and granddaughter Eleanor Daniels (Branson Hodge) holding a Manchu court necklace (*chaozu*) of varied stones (illus. 5). A major industrialist and civic leader of his time, Harry Goddard served as a Worcester Art Museum trustee from 1923 until his death in 1927.

In her memoir, the Goddard's granddaughter, Eleanor D. B. Hodge, remembers her grandfather as an avid collector who on special occasions would allow her to see his "dazzling" collection of objects made from jade and other precious stones. Mr. Goddard seems to have had a particular fondness for colorful stones since two-thirds of his collection was made from non-jade material including agate, amber, amethyst, carnelian, chalcedony, coral, lapis lazuli, malachite, rock crystal, rose quartz, soapstone and turquoise.



6: *Incense Burner with Lid, in the Shape of a Bronze Color-Mixer*, 18th century, nephrite, bequest of Mrs. Harry W. Goddard, in memory of Harry W. Goddard, 1938.34

Select Masterpieces

The Dirlam and Goddard donations reflect a special admiration for works created during the first half of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), the last golden age of lapidary art in terms of technical virtuosity and artistic inventiveness. Many elegant masterpieces date from the prosperous 18th century when the Qianlong emperor doubled the size of the Chinese empire through a series of military campaigns. He also became famous for his devotion to family and scholarship and for his patronage of literature, art and architecture.



7: *Triple Vase with Magnolia, Magpie, Peony and Phoenix*, Qing dynasty (1644 – 1911), 18th century, carnelian, bequest of Mrs. Harry W. Goddard, in memory of Harry W. Goddard, 1938.59

A connoisseur of Chinese antiquities, Qianlong sought to “restore the ancient ways” and wrote numerous poems about jade. He encouraged his jade artisans to use ancient bronzes and jades in the imperial collection as inspiration for their work. Some jade vessels were close copies but most were creative amalgamations of the archaic forms and decorative motifs of earlier eras. The spinach-green jade incense burner (illus. 6) emulates the shape of color mixers used in ancient times to store and mix artists’ paints. The lid has a central knob in the shape of a large coiled dragon that plants its outstretched paws on four young dragons. The sides of the vessel are embellished with phoenix-shaped handles as well as low-relief patterns of serpentine animals and variations of the character for longevity.

Qianlong also encouraged his jade artisans to render naturalistic subjects. In contrast with the understated style of earlier periods, 18th century works were often made larger, more realistic, detailed, extravagant, and polished. Exquisite in color and sculptural artistry, the carnelian vase features a magpie, messenger of good news and harbinger of spring, amidst magnolia (illus. 7). On the reverse is a phoenix amidst peonies, announcing summer or the advent of a wise ruler.

Jade and other colored stone objects featuring plant and animal subjects were charged with symbolic meaning. The double-gourd box (illus. 8), crafted into two interlocking



8: *Box in the Shape of a Double-Gourd*, Qing dynasty (1644 – 1911), 18th century, nephrite, gift of Maria and John Dirlam, 1997.136



9: *Double Carp Vase*, Qing dynasty (1644 - 1911), mid 18th century, nephrite, bequest of Mrs. Harry W. Goddard, in memory of Harry W. Goddard, 1938.69

halves, can simply be enjoyed for its beauty and skillful craftsmanship. However, it is also emblematic of the unity of heaven and earth and reminiscent of the dried gourd containers used by Taoist sages for their magical elixir. The two butterflies signify joy and marital romantic bliss, as well as a doubling of wishes—the word butterfly, *die*, is a homophone for “to repeat.” Similarly, the stem with its trailing tendrils is interpreted as a wish for a family of many generations.



10: *Brush Holder*, Qing dynasty (1644 - 1911), mid 18th century, nephrite, gift of Maria and John Dirlam, 1996.130

Scholars hoping to gain positions in the Confucian bureaucracy and access to the highest social and cultural spheres, including the imperial court, were required to take civil service examinations. Only the wealthy had the time and means to memorize classical texts and gain the calligraphic, literary and musical skills needed to pass the tests. The double carp vase (illus. 9) would have been an ideal gift for literati-officials. The vase is shaped like two carp leaping from swirling waves. The larger carp is shown being transformed into a dragon. According to legend,



11: *Boulder with Mountain Scenes: Two Deer on a Path*, Qing dynasty (1644 - 1911), late 18th —early 19th century, nephrite, gift of Maria and John Dirlam, 1997.137

carp that succeeded in swimming upstream in the Yellow River and passed the rapids of Long-men (Dragon Gate) turned into dragons. The carps’ feats of vigor and perseverance were compared to traditional Chinese scholars who spent years studying for the rigorous examinations.

Wealthy scholar-officials were avid collectors of elegant desk accessories that reflected their sophisticated taste, moral values and idealized reclusive life-style. They valued jade as a stone with qualities (luster, translucency, pure tone, tough compactness, angularity without sharpness) that exemplified the five



12: *Water Container with Lion-Dogs*, Qing dynasty (1644 - 1911), 18th century, turquoise, bequest of Mrs. Harry W. Goddard, in memory of Harry W. Goddard, 1938.37

virtues of a perfect Confucian gentleman (charity, rectitude, wisdom, courage and justice). They also felt drawn to the “jade” peaks and pavilions said to exist in the Taoist realm of immortals. Scenes of scholars, immortals and animals living amidst the mountains were favorite motifs on jade table screens, brush holders, and decorative boulders (illus. 1, 2, 10 and 11). A light color area and wispy clouds in low relief on the boulder suggests that the two deer are out walking on a slightly hazy moonlit night (illus. 11). Jade artisans were often inspired by woodblock print reproductions of paintings and re-created the designs in differing planes of relief, sometimes even piercing the walls of the vessel.

Brush washers and water droppers, used to dilute ink, were made of the highest quality jade or colorful stones and often had symbolic motifs or shapes. Displayed during different seasons, they offered philosophical inspiration and topics of conversation. One such accessory, in turquoise imported from Tibet or Mongolia, is shaped like a large boulder; its surface is enlivened by playful Buddhist lion-dogs symbolic of valor and energy (illus. 12). The lion-dog, posing on the

lid with a paw on its cub, refers to a play-on-words that conveys the wish that the son may follow in his father’s footsteps and rise to the status of a high-ranking official.

Sculptures of revered male and female figures of myth, faith and good fortune were often commissioned as gifts symbolizing wishes for success, spiritual development and a long, happy life. Confucian gentlemen-scholars, eccentric Taoist gods and immortals, and Buddha’s enlightened disciples were frequently depicted amidst lofty mountains. The Buddhist monk shown here (illus. 13) is meditating next to a waterfall. The flowing water design is continued on the underside of the sculpture and on its wooden stand. The woman depicted on the coral vase (illus. 14) could be the virtuous Taoist Queen Mother of the West, Xiwangmu or the compassionate Lady Ma. The latter is more likely since Lady Ma is often described as carrying a basket containing sacred mushrooms, flowers and fruit accompanied by a deer. Coral was emblematic of longevity and official promotion since it was popularly believed to come from a tree at the bottom of the sea that blooms once each century.



13: *Buddhist Monk (Lohan) with Staff Meditating Near Mountain Stream*, Qing dynasty (1644 - 1911), 18th century, nephrite, bequest of Mrs. Harry W. Goddard, in memory of Harry W. Goddard, 1938.67

By developing friendly relations with Myanmar (Burma) in 1784, the Qianlong Emperor was able to secure a steady supply of jadeite. Fewer objects were made in jadeite; it is rarer than nephrite and has always been favored for luxury gift items and jewelry. The lustrous lavender-tinted jadeite boulder, depicting a detailed scene from the Taoist mythological Penglai Islands (illus. 15), exemplifies the technical virtuosity of 20th century masters using modern tools and abrasives. An immortal with long eyebrows is seated near a cave, sheltered by an old pine. Holding both a vessel with the elixir of immortality and a rabbit, which according to legend pounds the herbs of the elixir, the sage observes the arrival of two cranes.



15: Boulder with Mountain Landscape and Taoist Sage, 20th century, jadeite, gift of Maria and John Dirlam, 1996.129



14: Covered Vase Decorated with Female Figure Holding Lingzhi Fungus and Peony Branch, Accompanied by a Boy, a Crane and a Deer, Qing dynasty (1644-1911), 18th century, coral, bequest of Mrs. Harry W. Goddard, in memory of Harry W. Goddard, 1938.70

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This brochure was compiled by Louise Virgin, Curator of Asian Art, and Susannah Baker, Curatorial Assistant. Expertise regarding the technical nature of the stones was generously provided by Arthur H. Brownlow, Professor of Geology, and Philip Klausmeyer, Andrew W. Mellon Conservator in Paintings and Conservation Science, at WAM. The masterpieces highlighted in this brochure were featured as part of the exhibition *Mountain Harvests: Chinese Jades and Other Treasured Stones*. March 4, 2006 through March 4, 2007.