

# WU Changshi

Wú Chāngshí 吴昌硕

1844–1927 Twentieth-century painter and calligrapher

**Wu Changshi was best known for his calligraphy in the *zhuan* (seal) and *shigu* (stone drum) scripts. Despite his commercial appeal, the ultimate ideal of literati painting—to combine poetry, calligraphy, and painting—was realized in his work.**

**Wu Changshi, Qing dynasty scroll. Wu brought together the conventions of painting and calligraphy in his loosely brushed artwork. Collection of Shaanxi Artists Association and Shaanxi Academy. PHOTO BY JOAN LEBOLD COHEN.**



**T**he career of Wu Changshi represents the process of evolution from the artistic patterns of late imperial China to those of the modern era. Born into a declining scholarly family in Anji, Zhejiang Province, he moved to Shanghai and became a professional painter. Wu was best known for his calligraphy in the *zhuan* (seal) and *shigu* (stone drum) scripts. His calligraphy and painting were famed for their *jinshiqi*, or antiquarian epigrapher's taste.

In his youth Wu studied briefly with Ren Yi (1840–1895) but was mostly self-taught as a painter. Although his favorite themes were usually flowers and rocks, Wu's pictures are to be seen not as images from nature but rather as arrangements of plants and rocks in an abstract space. Conventions of calligraphy and painting were brought together in his loosely brushed artwork. Thus, despite his commercial market, the ultimate ideal of literati painting—to combine poetry, calligraphy, and painting—was realized in his work.

Kuiyi SHEN

## Further Reading

- Andrews, J., & Kuiyi Shen. (1998). *A century in crisis: Modernity and tradition in the art of twentieth century China*. New York: Guggenheim Museum and Abrams.
- Cahill, J. (1988). The Shanghai school in later Chinese painting. In Mayching Kao (Ed.), *Twentieth-century Chinese painting* (pp. 54–77). New York: Oxford University Press.