



Self-Portrait, 1937, oil on canvas

Between Tradition and Modernity: The Art of Fan Tchunpi

September 7–December 8, 2013 | Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College

This exhibition explores the extraordinary life and work of Fan Tchunpi (1898–1986), one of the most important and prolific Chinese women artists of the modern era. As the first solo exhibition of the artist's work since her 1984 retrospective at the Musée Cernuschi (Asian Art Museum) in Paris, *Between Tradition and Modernity* examines Fan Tchunpi's search for an artistic language that would speak for the self and the nation in an age of crisis and revolution.

Fan Tchunpi was born on March 3, 1898, into a wealthy family in Fuzhou, the seaport capital of Fujian Province on the southeast coast of China. In the early twentieth century, China witnessed the end of its old imperial system and the rise of a modern nation state. The collapse of the Qing Dynasty in 1911 and the establishment of the Republic of China in Nanjing in 1912 led artists, in their search for a new national identity, to travel and study abroad. After the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty, a group of young participants in the revolution was awarded with scholarships to study abroad, among them Fan Tchunpi's elder sister Fan Tchunying, who at the age of twenty-six had played a leading role in Tongmenghui, the revolutionary organization of Sun Yat-Sen. It was Fan Tchunying who forbade the family to bind her younger sister's feet and who insisted that she be given a high-quality education. The generous scholarship given to former revolutionaries also allowed them to be accompanied by a younger sibling, and Fan Tchunying decided to bring her fourteen-year-old sister with her to France in 1912, where they would both receive a high-quality Western education. In 1916, Fan Tchunpi became the first Chinese woman artist to enroll in the prestigious Académie Julian, whose former students included Pierre Bonnard, Maurice Denis, Marcel Duchamp, Jacques Lipchitz, Henri Matisse, and Édouard Vuillard. This progressive Paris art school prepared its students for the notoriously rigorous and competitive entrance examinations of the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris and other cities throughout France. In January 1917, Fan Tchunpi was accepted into the École des Beaux-Arts, Bordeaux, where she excelled in the privileged studio class of *modèles vivants* (drawing the human figure by working with live models rather than plaster casts), as well as in drawing from sculpture at the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Bordeaux, before graduating in 1920.

Through her French academic training, Fan Tchunpi was introduced to the art of the Western canon while also being exposed, through her teachers and fellow students, to modern artists such as Paul Cézanne, Claude Monet, and Pierre Auguste Renoir. Returning to Paris, Fan Tchunpi passed the strict entrance exam for the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts—a more traditional art school than the Académie Julian or the École des Beaux-Arts in Bordeaux—which had trained such French masters as Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, Eugène Delacroix,



Fig. 1. *Sunset on Lake Annecy*, 1922, oil on canvas. This painting was made around the time of Fan Tchunpi's wedding to Tsongming Tsen and depicts Lake Annecy and the spectacular mountain range that surrounds it. With its agitated, linear brushstrokes and heightened color effects, it reveals the lessons that Fan Tchunpi learned from the work of Pierre Auguste Renoir, Claude Monet, and other French impressionist painters during her studies in Paris and Bordeaux.

Edgar Degas, and Henri Matisse (fig. 1). Fan Tchunpi was the first Asian woman to be accepted into this famous educational institution, where her teachers included the French painter Ferdinand Humbert, who instilled in Fan Tchunpi a lifelong interest in life drawing and painting the female nude with accuracy and subtlety. Among her fellow students and closest friends was Xu Beihong, who also worked under the more French-sounding name Ju Péon, another Chinese artist whose intensive training in the West would have a decisive impact on his future work. Fan Tchunpi's career received a significant boost in 1924, when two of her paintings were selected for exhibition in the Salon de la Société des Artistes Français in Paris. She was the first Chinese female artist to exhibit at the salon, and her works were critically acclaimed in the press. One of the paintings, *The Flute Player*, was reproduced on the front cover of the renowned art magazine *Les Annales*.

In 1925, Fan Tchunpi returned to China with her husband, Tsongming Tsen, a politician, poet, and writer who had moved to France in 1912 at the age of sixteen to receive a Western education as well. The couple had married at Chaparon, a village on Lake Annecy, three years earlier, following a long engagement. In 1923, Sun Yat-Sen organized the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) along Leninist lines, and Tsongming Tsen grew eager to return to China, believing that his homeland was on the verge of a second revolution. Sadly, political corruption quickly set in, so much so that Fan Tchunpi's sister, Fan Tchunying, disappointed by the behavior of her former revolutionary comrades, committed suicide in 1923. As Tsongming Tsen pursued his political career, Fan Tchunpi taught painting at the National Kwongtung University

(now Sun Yat-Sen University) and Zhixin College in Guangzhou in southern China. A critically acclaimed exhibition of her work in Canton in 1925 led the National Government to purchase her painting *Dragging a Rattan Leisurely On and Gazing Over the Fence* (a line by Lu You, a Chinese poet of the Southern Song Dynasty, 1125–1210 AD). In 1931, the painting went on public display at the Sun Yat-Sen Memorial Hall in Guangzhou, a building dedicated to the memory of this important proponent of democracy in modern China.

In recent years, there has been considerable scholarly interest in the transfer and adaptation of European academic training to Chinese universities, colleges, and art schools during the Republican period (1911–37). Like many Chinese artists trained in the West during the 1910s and 1920s, Fan Tchunpi brought back the lessons and teaching methods she had learned in France, thereby contributing to a new institutional system for arts education in China that was explicitly modeled on the French Beaux-Arts tradition. A strong emphasis was now placed on painting the human body, life drawing, understanding anatomy, single-point perspective, foreshortening, and the three-dimensional rendering of objects in space through subtle variations in light and shade. In the 1920s, academic realism replaced the atmospheric, multi-perspectival representation of landscape that had defined Chinese painting for centuries. Whereas Chinese brush-and-ink painting represented a codified visual language that prized the individual's mastery of technique and understanding of tradition, academic realism was understood as offering a form of scientific objectivity that could help solve the problems of a nation then undergoing seismic political and social change. As a realist painter with extensive European academic training, Fan Tchunpi was perfectly aligned with the cultural policies of the new government, and her teaching, as well as the numerous exhibitions and publications of her work in China in the 1920s and 1930s, helped to establish a new academic realist tradition there. This trend would later inform social realism, which became the official art form of her country following the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Under Mao Zedong's leadership, art was expected to serve political ends, and the legacy of social realism can be discerned in contemporary artistic practice in China to this day.

Fan Tchunpi's stay in China was short lived, and in 1926 she returned alone to Paris, where she took an artist's studio on the Avenue de Saxe and began to study privately with Paul-Albert Besnard, the director of the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, and in doing so joined his circle of artists, writers, and intellectuals (fig. 2). In 1928, Fan Tchunpi exhibited four paintings, all of them portraits, in the Salon des Tuileries exhibition in Paris, and over the next two years she traveled around Europe, completing a large number of landscape paintings, before returning to China

to reunite with her husband in 1930. During the next decade, Fan Tchunpi experimented with traditional Chinese ink-painting techniques, which she fused with the Western styles of French impressionism and academic realism that she had learned in Paris. Her work became well known in China at this time, thanks to two widely circulated publications: the *Collection of Fan Tchun Pi's Paintings*, which was published in 1932 by the Zhonghua bookstore and publishing house in Shanghai, and the volume with the same title but different contents that was published in 1938 by the Shanghai Commercial Press. Printed in three colors, beautifully bound, and featuring an introduction by the noted Chinese scholar and educator Cai Yuanpei (1868–1940), this latter publication emphasized the vital role that Fan Tchunpi had played in reviving traditional Chinese ink- and brush-painting techniques.

In 1932, while living and working in Shanghai, Fan Tchunpi began to explore traditional methods of Chinese brush-and-ink painting (*guohua*), which she learned from Gao Jianfu (1879–1951)



Fig. 2. *Nu de dos* (*Nude from the Back*), 1929, oil on canvas. Fan Tchunpi recalled making this painting at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière, which offered models and life classes at a much more reasonable rate than other art establishments in Paris in the 1920s.

and his brother Gao Qifeng (1889–1935), the founders of the Lingnan School. As this school's name suggests, its artistic center was situated “south of the mountain range” (*ling nan*) around Guangzhou in southern China. Having absorbed Western pictorial devices, such as single-point perspective and the use of light and shade, the brothers updated Chinese ink painting through their naturalistic scenes of modern daily life in China, which also demonstrated their patriotism and concern for the fate of their country. Fan Tchunpi first met Gao Jianfu after she submitted several canvases to an arts festival and exhibition that he organized in Guangzhou in 1925 to raise funds for the construction of the Sun Yat-Sen Memorial Hall. Gao Jianfu immediately recognized her talent as a painter. Over the course of the 1930s, Fan Tchunpi was deeply influenced by the Lingnan School painters, who shared her interest in revitalizing the tradition of Chinese ink painting and calligraphy as a self-conscious expression of national identity (fig. 3). She and her husband began to collect Lingnan School work at this time, along with earlier examples of Chinese ink painting as well as works by contemporaries such as Qi Biashi (1864–1957), whose portrait Fan Tchunpi would paint in 1943. The Xiehanglou collection, as it came to be known, was eventually donated to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts by Fan Tchunpi and her children.

In 1939, Fan Tchunpi was severely wounded, and her husband killed, in a failed assassination attempt on the Chinese political leader Wang Jingwei (1883–1944) by gunmen loyal to Chiang Kaishek, who had replaced Sun Yat-Sen as leader of the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) after the latter died in March 1925. Abandoning his earlier left-wing beliefs, Wang Jingwei had become increasingly anti-Communist after the death of Sun Yat-Sen and had engaged in a protracted political struggle with Chiang Kaishek for control of the Kuomintang, up until Japan invaded China on July 7, 1937, in an orgy of killing, rape, and destruction. The Japanese Empire invited Wang Jingwei to form a Japanese-supported collaborationist government in Nanjing, and he served as the president of this puppet regime until he died, shortly before the end of World War II. Wang Jingwei, his family, and a small retinue of colleagues and friends, including Fan Tchunpi and Tsongming Tsen, were visiting Hanoi in French-held Indochina when the 1939 attack took place. The assassins, armed with submachine guns, broke into a villa where they expected Wang Jingwei to be sleeping and sprayed the bedroom with bullets. Tsongming Tsen died from multiple gunshots to the stomach the following day, March 21, 1939; Fan Tchunpi was hit numerous times, with one bullet grazing her lung and another piercing her thigh, and remained in the hospital for over a month. Upon her release, she began the long process of rebuilding her life. At the age of forty-one, Fan Tchunpi, a mother of three young boys, was suddenly a widow.



Fig. 3. *Blind Beggar with Child*, 1936, watercolor and sumi ink over pencil on thin off-white Chinese paper. Fan Tchunpi was deeply influenced by the Lingnan School painters, as seen in this work's style and subject matter, which reflects the poverty and bitter struggle for survival that many people had to endure in China during the 1930s.

In 1948, just three years after the end of the war, when many of her husband's friends and former political colleagues were in prison and some condemned to the firing squad, Fan Tchunpi agreed to a solo exhibition of her paintings in Shanghai. The Chinese art world was stunned by her audacity in displaying her work under her married name on the eighth anniversary of her husband's death. Many also applauded her courage in coming forward as the widow of Tsongming Tsen at a time when it would have been more prudent to have remained in hiding, rather than face the possible wrath of the Chiang Kaishek regime.

In the fall of 1949, however, after Communist forces had taken control of China, Fan Tchunpi and her children fled the country and moved to Paris, via Hong Kong. Living and working in Montparnasse, Fan Tchunpi continued to paint and exhibit her work at the official salon exhibitions, beginning with the 1949 Salon de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts. That same year, four of her paintings were shown at the Grand Palais in Paris. In May and June of 1951, the Galerie de Conti, at that time one of the leading galleries in the French capital, exhibited thirty paintings and watercolors by Fan Tchunpi. In his appreciation of the artist on the occasion of the exhibition, René Grousset, the Director of the Musée Cernuschi and a distinguished scholar of Asian art, wrote: "The wealth of her talent hardly surprises us, for to the ancient methods of her countrymen she has added the secrets revealed by Western Art. With subtlety and without friction she has known how to merge the two tendencies. The ease of her style testifies in this respect to a complete mastery. Her nuances, sometimes of an extreme consciousness, like those of the old Sung masters, banishes from her compositions the accessory, the incident, the superfluous line that would disturb the purity of the whole."

After an extended period of travel abroad in the mid-1950s, during which time her work was widely exhibited in Hong Kong and Japan, she left Paris in 1957 to live in Brookline, Massachusetts, with her eldest son, Meng Chi Tsen, who was at that time teaching in Boston (fig. 4). She spent most of the rest of her life in New England (fig. 5; see next page), painting landscapes and making ceramics in relative obscurity until 1984, when the Musée Cernuschi in Paris celebrated her life and work in a retrospective exhibition of sixty paintings, reflecting the sixty years that had passed since her work had first been shown in public at the 1924 Salon de la Société des Artistes Français. Fan Tchunpi also taught extensively as an instructor at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the Boston Centre of Education, the Cambridge Centre of Education, and at her studio, before her health began to fail in the mid-1980s. In 1985, she moved to Geneva, Switzerland, to live with her son Chunglu. She passed away in Geneva on September 16, 1986, at the age of eighty-eight.

The works of art by Fan Tchunpi on display in this exhibition demonstrate her ability to successfully bridge Chinese and Western painting modes. Her paintings and works on paper also reflect the turbulent age in which she lived. Twentieth-century China experienced war and revolution, as well as a period of reorientation and renewal that introduced dramatic changes to her homeland. She experienced, at first hand, the transforming conditions of modernity that brought the Chinese artistic tradition into question, and she also lived through the Japanese occupation during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–45),



Fig. 4. *The Marshes Have Many Fragrant Grasses*, 1960, oil on canvas. The grieving woman's traditional garments imbue the painting with a timeless quality, while the loosely rendered, shimmering brushstrokes, which give the impression that the scene is blurred as if seen through eyes filled with tears, make this one of the most remarkable and moving works within the artist's oeuvre.

which merged into World War II and was followed by the civil war between the Nationalists and the Communists that ended with the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The Communist revolution forced Fan Tchunpi and her three sons into exile in Europe, and eventually the United States. Despite the upheaval and trauma associated with these events, which also encompassed the murder of her husband in 1939, Fan Tchunpi remained deeply committed to her vocation as an artist, and especially to her efforts to create a synthesis of Chinese and Western painting traditions and techniques. We celebrate that commitment in this landmark exhibition.

Michael Taylor, Director, Hood Museum of Art

Xinyue Guo, Dartmouth Class of 2014



Fig. 5. *White Mountain Landscape*, about 1960, oil on canvas. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College: Gift of Meng Chi Tsen, Chunglu Tsen, and Wen-ti Tsen, the artist's sons; 2012.84. Mist, which lends an ethereal quality to traditional Chinese painting, is used here to soften and blur the massive rock formations, whose immensity is also diminished by the placement of some strangely oversized trees—rendered in broad, vigorous brushstrokes—that dwarf the mountains in the foreground.

CHRONOLOGY

1898	Birth of Fan Tchungpi on March 3 in Fuzhou.	1920	Having graduated from the École des Beaux-Arts in Bordeaux, Fan Tchungpi enters the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris, under the tutelage of Ferdinand Humbert.
1911–12	Fall of the Qing Dynasty and establishment of the Republic of China.	1921	Founding and First Congress of the Chinese Communist Party. Fan Tchungpi makes her first oil paintings.
1912	Fan Tchungpi and her sister Fan Tchungying move to Paris to receive a Western education through a Chinese government scholarship.	1922	Marriage of Fan Tchungpi and Tsongming Tsen takes place on September 4 in a ceremony in Chaparon, a village on Lake Annecy in the French Alps.
1914	Following the outbreak of World War I, Fan Tchungpi and her sister move to the relative safety of the south of France. After brief stays in Nantes and Toulouse, they eventually settle in Bordeaux.	1923	Fan Tchungpi's sister Fan Tchungying commits suicide on June 14 in Shanghai.
1916	Fan Tchungpi becomes the first Chinese woman artist to enroll in the prestigious Académie Julian in Paris.	1924	First Congress of the Nationalist Party in China. Two paintings by Fan Tchungpi are selected for exhibition in the Salon de la Société des Artistes Français in Paris. She is the first Chinese female artist to exhibit at the salon, and one of her paintings, titled <i>The Flute Player</i> , is later reproduced on the front cover of the French art magazine <i>Les Annales</i> .
1917	China enters World War I on the side of the Allies. In September, Fan Tchungpi begins her studies at the École des Beaux-Arts in Bordeaux. She also becomes engaged to Tsongming Tsen in the same year.		

- 1925 Opening of the Forbidden City and the Palace Museum. Fan Tchunpi and Tsongmeng Tsen return to China. While her husband pursues his political career, Fan Tchunpi teaches painting at the National Kwongtung University (now Sun Yat-Sen University) and Zhixin College in Guangzhou in southern China. A critically acclaimed exhibition of her work in Canton prompts the National Government to purchase her painting *Dragging a Rattan Leisurely On and Gazing Over the Fence*.
- 1926 Returning to Paris, Fan Tchunpi takes private lessons with Albert Besnard and participates in his lively circle of artists, writers, and intellectuals.
- 1928 Fan Tchunpi exhibits four portrait paintings at the Salon des Tuileries in Paris.
- 1929 Fan Tchunpi makes a brief visit to China, where she paints a portrait of Wenxin Jingwei, the daughter of the Chinese political leader Wang Jingwei.
- 1930 Fan Tchunpi and Tsongming Tsen travel in France, Switzerland, and Italy, before returning to China. The family initially lives in Beijing, where Fan Tchunpi is briefly hospitalized for a chronic fever, before settling in Nanjing, at that time the capital of the Republic of China.
- 1931 Birth of Fan Tchunpi and Tsongming Tsen's first son, Meng Chi.
- 1932 Fan Tchunpi makes her first ink paintings after studying traditional Chinese brush-and-ink techniques with the artist brothers Gao Jianfu and Gao Qifeng. Also that year, *Collection of Fan Tchun Pi's Paintings*, the first book devoted to the artist's work, is published by the Zhonghua bookstore and publishing house in Shanghai.
- 1934 Birth of Fan Tchunpi and Tsongming Tsen's second son, Chunglu.
- 1936 Fan Tchunpi makes a painting expedition to Huangshan, a mountain range in the southern Anhui province in eastern China that has inspired artists and writers for centuries. Birth of Fan Tchunpi and Tsongming Tsen's third and final son, Wen-ti.
- 1937 Following the Japanese invasion of China on July 7, which begins the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–45), Fan Tchunpi and her children leave Lushan and move to Hong Kong.
- 1938 The Shanghai Commercial Press publishes an album of Fan Tchunpi's paintings in color with an introduction by Cai Yuanpei.
- 1939 Fan Tchunpi is severely wounded and her husband killed in an attempted assassination of the Chinese politician Wang Jingwei at his residence in Hanoi in March. After she recuperates in Japan, Fan Tchunpi and her children move to Nanjing.
- 1941 China enters World War II on the side of the Allies.
- 1943 Fan Tchunpi meets the celebrated Chinese artist Qi Baishi in Beijing and paints his portrait.
- 1945 Civil war between the Communists and the Nationalists. Fan Tchunpi moves her family to Shanghai.
- 1948 At great personal risk, Fan Tchunpi exhibits her work in Shanghai.
- 1949 Establishment of the People's Republic of China. Fan Tchunpi and her three sons immigrate to Paris, via Hong Kong.
- 1951 Fan Tchunpi has a solo exhibition at the Galerie de Conti in Paris.
- 1954 Death of Tsen Sing, Fan Tchunpi's sister-in-law, on April 2 in Hong Kong. Fan Tchunpi attends the funeral and stays on in Hong Kong to exhibit her work at the Alliance Française, then travels to Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand over the next two years.
- 1956 Exhibitions of Fan Tchunpi's work take place in Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka, Bangkok, Penang, and Singapore. After returning briefly to Paris, Fan Tchunpi visited Florence, Italy, where she paints the city and the surrounding Tuscan landscape.
- 1957 Fan Tchunpi leaves Paris to live with her oldest son, Meng Chi Tsen, in Brookline, Massachusetts.
- 1958 Fan Tchunpi tours the United States by car.
- 1966 Closure of universities and art schools in China during the Cultural Revolution.
- 1972 Fan Tchunpi returns to China after twenty-three years in exile. She is received by the Chinese premier Zhou Enlai and spends more than a year traveling and painting in her homeland, eventually completing more than one hundred works.
- 1978 Fan Tchunpi returns to China for an exhibition of her work in Beijing, which prompts her to donate forty paintings to the Chinese government.
- 1984 Retrospective exhibition of Fan Tchunpi's work is held at the Musée Cernuschi in Paris.
- 1985 Her health failing, Fan Tchunpi moves to Geneva, Switzerland, to live with her son Chunglu.
- 1986 Fan Tchunpi dies on September 16 in Geneva.



Pine Branches, 1972, sumi ink over pencil on Japanese paper

CHECKLIST | All objects are collection of the artist's family unless otherwise indicated.

Sunset on Lake Annecy, 1922,
oil on canvas, 18 x 24 in.

Girl in Red Dress, 1929, oil on canvas,
32 x 39 in.

Reclining Nude, 1929, oil on canvas,
24 x 32 in.

Nu de dos (Nude from the Back), 1929,
oil on canvas, 32 x 23 in.

The Reading Lesson, 1929, oil on
canvas, 24 x 32 in.

Portrait of Madame Lin, 1934,
oil on canvas, 46 7/8 x 32 1/32 in.

Portrait of Meng Chi with Toy Cars,
1936, oil on canvas, 27 11/32 x
35 15/16 in.

Blind Beggar with Child, 1936, water-
color and sumi ink over pencil on thin
off-white Chinese paper, 40 3/4 x 24 in.

"A Thread of Sky" in Huangshan, 1936,
oil on canvas, 36 x 26 in.

Self-Portrait, 1937, oil on canvas,
51 11/32 x 35 15/16 in.

Portrait of Mlle Wang (Girl in Braids),
1942, oil on canvas, 18 3/4 x 15 1/4 in.

Gilded Lion in the Forbidden City,
Beijing, 1943, oil on canvas, 24 x 29 in.

Still Life with Fish and Vegetables, 1943,
oil on canvas, 24 x 32 in.

Louvre Guard, 1954, watercolor and
sumi ink over pencil on fine, off-white
Chinese paper, 16 x 13 in.

Portrait of Sun Duoci, 1954, watercolor
and sumi ink over pencil on Japanese
paper, 23 3/4 x 27 in.

Gnarled Tree, Kyoto, 1955, oil on
canvas, 25 x 21 in.

Temple of Yasaka, Japan, 1955, oil on
canvas, 21 x 26 in.

Rooftops, Florence, 1956, oil on canvas,
18 x 22 in.

Italian Landscape, 1956, oil on wood
panel, 15 x 18 in.

Peonies in a Vase, about 1960,
watercolor and sumi ink over pencil
on fine, off-white Japanese paper,
23 3/4 x 33 5/8 in.

White Mountain Landscape, about
1960, oil on canvas, 32 x 50 in. Hood
Museum of Art, Dartmouth College:
Gift of Meng Chi Tsen, Chunglu Tsen,
and Wen-ti Tsen, the artist's sons;
2012.84.

*The Marshes Have Many Fragrant
Grasses*, 1960, oil on canvas, 51 x 38 in.

Snow in New England, 1962,
oil on canvas, 24 x 18 in.

Pine Branches, 1972, sumi ink over
pencil on Japanese paper, 23 3/4 x
33 1/4 in.

A selection of ceramics and
photographs

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