

Wandering in Nature: Art Exhibition of Dengbai Yuejin

The Confucius Institute at Webster University partnered with the St. Louis County Library Mid-County Branch to exhibit the work of Chinese artist Dengbai Yuejin from September 6th to 9th.

On the opening day, a variety of activities were offered to introduce Chinese painting to the public. Dr. Tongyun Yin, Curator of Asian Art at the Lizzadro Museum in Illinois, and the artist engaged in a dialogue on appreciating Chinese art. They explained, for example, how the subjects of a painting often carry subtle meaning and how titles are carefully selected to reflect this. The artist also talked about his personal journey as an artist.

Afterward Dengbai gave a live demonstration of his freehand painting style, painting subjects like catfish and shrimp with black ink on rice paper. As he painted, he explained that a skilled Chinese artist can create five distinct colors—ranging from deep black to a middling burnt color to palest gray—using the same black ink. Each stroke should reveal the concision and depth, aiming to produce the three characteristics of Chinese fine art: pureness, symbolism, and naturalism.

With the painting complete, the table opened up for members of the audience to try their hand at Chinese ink-brush painting. As they worked, Dengbai gave them pointers, and also found clever ways to turn their mistakes and random blotches of ink into images. For several audience members, he wrote their names and titles in Chinese characters along the side of their painting, and at the end he took a photo with his new “students.”

On Monday, September 9th, the last day of the exhibition, Dengbai Yuejin gifted one of his paintings, called “Harmony and Inclusion,” to the St. Louis



Dengbai delivers a lecture on his paintings



Dengbai speaking to his audience

County Library Mid-County Branch. This painting will hang in the library for all to see as a lasting memory of this event.



Above: Attendees of Dengbai's lecture try their hands at traditional Chinese ink painting.

This exhibition provided a venue for St. Louis community members to not only appreciate a master of Chinese art, but also learn about the underlying modes of thinking in this art form. In this way, art can be considered one window through which to understand a culture. In a room filled with delicate, masterful items of art, the true beauty of this day could in fact be said to come from the way in which it brought together St. Louisans of different backgrounds in a spirit of discovery and appreciation.