

*"The wise find pleasure in water; the virtuous find pleasure in hills.  
The wise are active; the virtuous are tranquil.  
The wise are joyful; the virtuous are long-lived."*

Confucius (551 – 479 B.C.)

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ODON WAGNER GALLERY

WANG YIHUA



# WATERWAYS

PAINTINGS BY WANG YIHUA



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October 27 - November 18, 2006

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## WATERWAYS: PAINTINGS BY WANG YIHUA

When faced with an artwork by Wang Yihua, it is immediately apparent he has a masterful understanding of the technical tools of painting. These canal scenes of Zhouzhuang depict a 900 year-old city, where sixty percent of the houses survive in their original state from the Ming and Qing Dynasties. The paintings are executed in a style of high realism, inviting the viewer to enter the ancient scenery through them. What is remarkable about the paintings of Wang Yihua, is not so much that he has mastered the skills to render a scene lifelike, but rather the fact that these skills have become like a second nature; it is clear that the artist does not labour with these techniques. He seems most concerned with conveying a strong sense of place, imbued with personal meaning and poetry. "All of the elements deliver the soul a sense of immeasurable continuity, a well established history and culture, and a strong sense of the life force that flows through nature" says Wang. It is these esoteric concepts embodied in the execution, which make the paintings of Wang Yihua so fascinating.

Oil painting has been in China since as early as the Ming Dynasty, when techniques were introduced to the people through Jesuit missionaries.<sup>1</sup> Many of the painters who learned Western techniques were already schooled in Chinese painting and calligraphy, so the paintings they created reflected this multiplicity. Oil painting continued to spread and develop in China throughout the twentieth century. The Cultural Revolution encouraged socialist realism in both visual art and literature, and though it was restrictive with political parameters, it continued the progression of oil painting through this tumultuous period. Today, there is a diverse community of artists working in what would be described from a western standpoint as a classical or academic style. Amongst the pluralism of postmodern art, there has been a marked resurgence in the appreciation of realism and Wang Yihua has found an enthusiastic audience for his artwork both locally and abroad.

Discussing his subject matter, Wang Yihua describes the delicate harmony of nature and human ingenuity that exists in the small villages of the Jiangnan region, which literally translated, refers to the land south of the Yangtze River. "History, the meaning of home, and simple humanity, are the fabric of the scene. Through these peaceful paintings of a village suspended in time, Wang emphasizes the collective sense of identity in a place – the universal rather than the personal. Although the location has a personal significance, indeed is inextricably linked to his own sense of identity, there is an objective distance inherent in these paintings. They sometimes depict figures, but these figures are remote from the viewer, unaware of the fact that they are observed as they go about their daily tasks. The people who inhabit his canal paintings are not specific to a personality or a particular time. They are merely a small part of the bigger picture; painted

details that service a greater idea of coexistence and continuity. In many ways, these quiet scenes capture the profound meaning to be discovered in small acts of everyday life, by anyone, anywhere.

There is a wistful tone to the artist's description of Zhouzhuang. He refers to "an indescribable sense of yearning and nostalgia for home". The nostalgia in Wang's paintings is not only a feeling of longing, but also a different temporality, generally where things happen slowly as in a memory or dream. Namely, there is a slower sense of time in looking at these pictures, something imbued in their execution. Wang makes a holistic overall statement with the organization of the composition and with light. Within this larger structure, there are a multitude of smaller moments unfolded in the details, revealing themselves gradually to the viewer over an extended period of looking. It is in these many moments of interest, all serving the overall idea of the picture in a cohesive manner, that one experiences a temporality that is akin to the slow process of looking and thinking in painting.

Viewing this exhibition, we are drawn into the peaceful scenes with their seductive surfaces, feeling that while we may be outsiders to the canal villages and their suspension in time, we may experience some of Wang's nostalgia in the manner of technical execution. The paintings remind us that inspiration may still be found in the physical world, and that beauty still has the power to move us in and of itself.

Laura Peturson  
July 2006

<sup>i</sup> Essay from Christie's catalogue, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Chinese Art, May 28, 2006, p.234

<sup>ii</sup> Svetlana Boym; The Future of Nostalgia (Basic Books, 2002)

*The Waterways exhibition features most of Wang Yihua's oeuvre of the past four years. In addition to six newly available works, this catalogue features twelve previously sold paintings. We wish to express our gratitude to the owners who have kindly loaned their paintings to us for this exhibition.*

1

*Morning Light, Zhouzhuang*

oil on canvas, 32 x 34"/80 x 85 cm

Private collection, Woodbridge, Ontario



2

*Along the Canal, Zhouzhuang*

oil on canvas, 28 x 28"/70 x 70 cm





3

*A Morning's Journey*

oil on canvas, 28 x 35"/70 x 90 cm



4

*Morning Chores at the River*

oil on canvas, 47 x 39"/119 x 100 cm  
Private collection, Toronto, Ontario



5

*Morning Light on the Canal*

oil on canvas, 49 x 71"/125 x 180 cm



6

*Canal View, Zhouzhuang*

oil on canvas, 30 x 59"/75 x 150 cm  
Private collection, Toronto, Ontario





7

*Bridge Over Canal, Zhouzhuang*

oil on canvas, 26 x 32"/65 x 80 cm

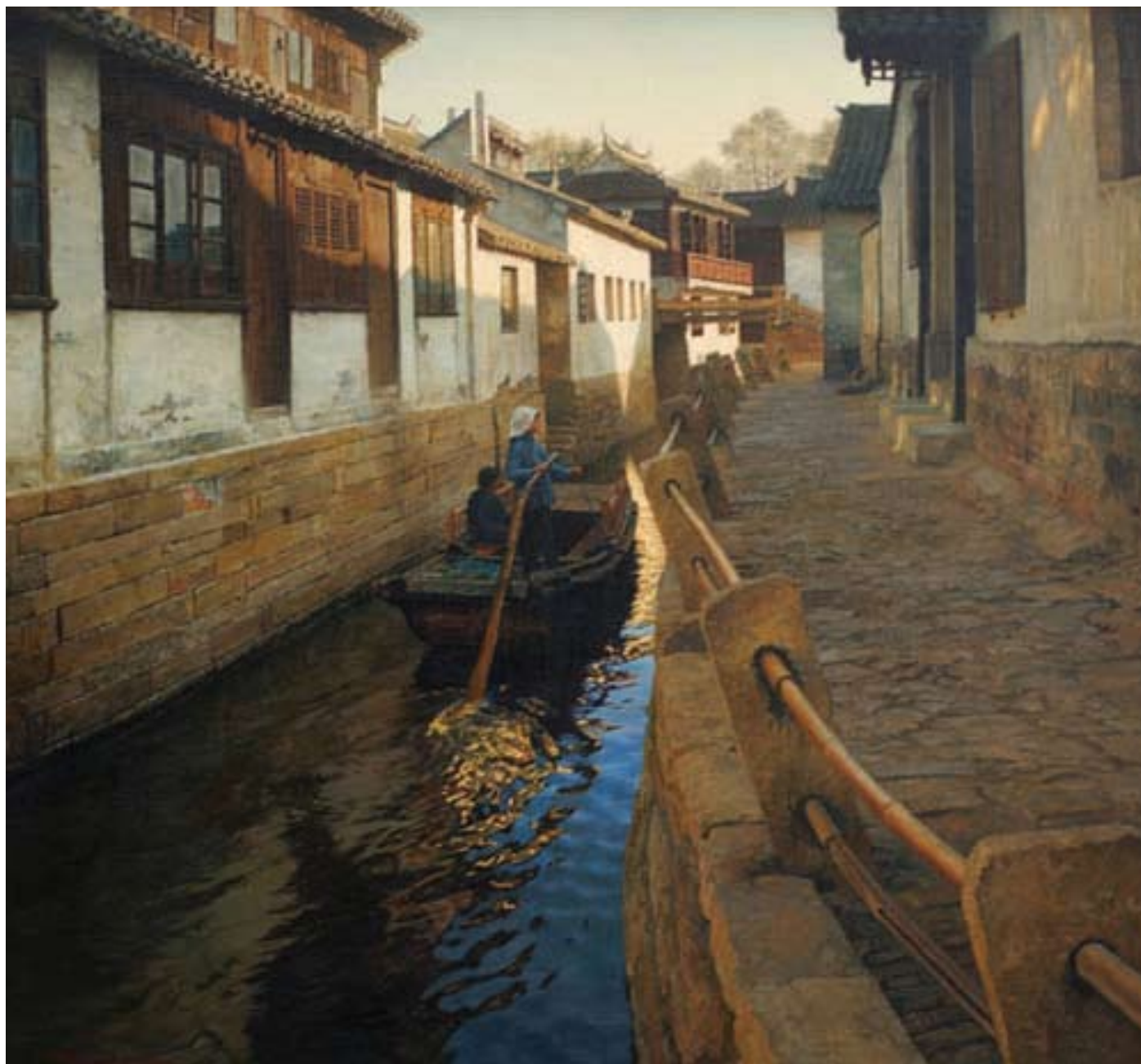
Private collection, Haverford, Pennsylvania



8

*Reflections, Zhouzhuang*

oil on canvas, 34 x 32"/86 x 81 cm  
Private collection, Bay Harbour, Florida



9

*A Summer Day, Zhouzhuang*

oil on canvas, 37 x 51"/95 x 130 cm



10

*Sunlit Canal*

oil on canvas, 55 x 34"/140 x 85 cm  
Private collection, Edmond, Oklahoma





11

*Reflections on the Canal, Zhouzhuang*

oil on canvas, 32 x 40"/80 x 100 cm

Corporate collection, Richmond Hill, Ontario



12

*Morning on the River*

oil on canvas, 39 x 47"/99 x 119 cm  
Private collection, Edmond, Oklahoma



13

*Waterway in the Summer*

oil on canvas, 16 x 24"/41 x 60 cm



14

*Canal in Zhouzhuang*

oil on canvas, 43 x 40"/110 x 100 cm  
Private collection, Washington, D.C.





15

*Canal Scene with Willow*

oil on canvas, 43 x 40"/110 x 100 cm  
Private collection, Toronto, Ontario



16

*Morning Shadow*

oil on canvas, 36 x 36"/90 x 90 cm

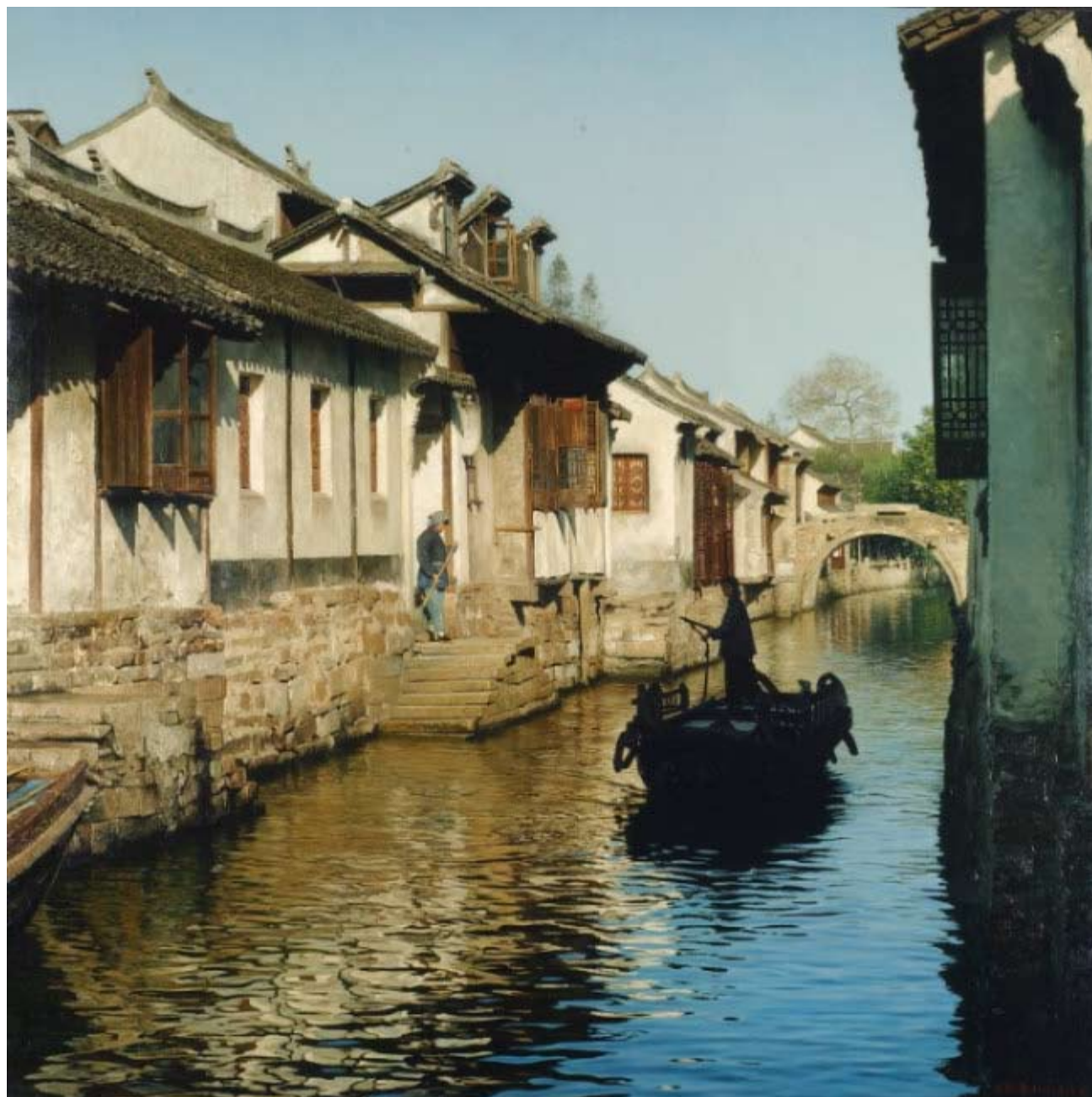
Private collection, Port Carling, Ontario



17

*Boat on the River*

oil on canvas, 44 x 44"/112 x 112 cm  
Private collection, Toronto, Ontario



18

*A Calm Morning*

oil on canvas, 51x 34"/130 x 85 cm







#### BIOGRAPHY OF WANG YIHUA

- 1961 Born in Xian, Shaanxi Province, China
- 1987 Graduated from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing  
Participated in the Four Youths Oil Painting Exhibition organized by the International Art Gallery, Beijing
- 1988 Participated in group exhibitions at the International Art Gallery, Beijing
- 1991 Solo exhibition at the SCITECH Building, Beijing
- 1992 Solo exhibition at the Contemporary Art Gallery of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing
- 1994 Group exhibition at the International Art Gallery, Beijing
- 1995 Group exhibition at the International Art Gallery, Beijing
- 1996 Participated in the China Art Expo, Beijing, granted Award of Excellence  
Group exhibition at Wang Fung Gallery at the Beijing Imperial Archives Museum  
Paintings publicized in the Asian Art Journal magazine
- 1997 Participated in the China Art Expo, Beijing
- 1998 Participated in the 1<sup>st</sup> Chinese Painting and Oil Painting Exhibition at the China Art Gallery held by the Beijing Jiuzhou Calligraphy and Painting College
- 2000 Solo exhibition "Crossings - Enchanting Jiangnan" at Galerie du Monde, Hong Kong
- 2002 Painting *Yearning for Knowledge* auctioned at Mother's Choice Gala Ball in Hong Kong  
Solo exhibition "Familiar Places, Familiar Faces" at Galerie du Monde, Hong Kong
- 2003-04 Exhibited at Odon Wagner Gallery at Art Miami, Miami Beach, FL, USA
- 2003-05 Exhibited at Odon Wagner Gallery at the Toronto International Art Fair, Toronto, Canada
- 2006 Solo exhibition "Waterways: Paintings by Wang Yihua" at Odon Wagner Gallery, Toronto, Canada

Wang Yihua's paintings have been acquired by eminent collectors, including the Honourable Qiao Shi, the retired Chief Executive of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, Beijing, China.

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## CREDITS

### CURATORS

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### INTRODUCTION

Laura Peturson

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Front cover: *A Summer Day, Zhouzhuang*, oil on canvas, 37x 51"/95 x 130 cm