

*Pine Branches, Rocks,
and Mynas*

松石八哥

Hanging scroll

Ink and color on paper

60³/₄ × 16⁵/₈ in. (153 × 42 cm)

Private collection

SIGNATURE:

Sanbaishiyinfuweng Qi Huang 三百石印
富翁齊璜 [Qi Huang, An Old Man Rich
with Three Hundred Stone Seals]

ARTIST'S SEALS:

Qi Da 齊大 (square / relief); *Jipingtang*
寄萍堂 (square / intaglio, lower right)

LITERATURE:

Jujiang 2010, pp. 36–37, ill. p. 37.

A GROUPING of pine, rock, and myna bird is emblematic of good wishes. Each of the three individual elements alone symbolizes good wishes, and all are popular as themes in painting, porcelain, and folk art. Evergreen, the pine is a centenarian; the huge rocks are forever fixed and immovable. There is a saying: “The pine lives a thousand years, and the rock endures ten thousand years.”¹ Together they represent longevity and good health. Rocks are the bones of the earth, silent and impregnable, formed by nature. Like modest gentlemen, they are not given to flattery and are by nature pure and refined. Pines have no fear of the cold. They stand straight, tall, and unyielding and have thus become a symbol of the Confucian ideal of the gentleman. The myna bird has a straightforward temperament and is an intelligent bird with plain feathers—a bringer of good news and a favorite of the literati since ancient times.

This piece is an elegant embodiment of the soul of Chinese culture. The quiet pine and rocks act as a foil for the myna’s artless vivacity. In their contrasts (stillness / movement, large / small, voiceless / full of song and chatter) we can perceive the rhythms of nature. Qi Baishi limits the elements of the painting’s composition to these three symbols, rendered in pairs: two mynas, two rocks, and two pine branches. The relationship between the two components of each pair, joined with the interactions of the three pairs, work together to create a surge of energy contained within the vertical format.

The rocks provide the central strength supporting the composition. Broad at the top and narrower at the bottom, they rise, twisting at different angles from the lower right, with the closer one leaning in from outside the edge of the picture. The artist employs a moist brush and light ink in modeling these structures, stroke by forceful stroke, varying the ink’s density and moisture. He leaves some areas white, creating effects of protrusions and hollows, as well as light and shadow. The resulting forms are solid and have a three-dimensional feeling. Overall, Qi Baishi’s use of ink and brush is straightforward and direct, reflecting the naturalness of the stone, its utter simplicity, and its lack of adornment.

Growing from the crevices of the larger rock formation from which jut the two pinnacles, the pine boughs spread downward between the viewer and the rocks and create a sense of depth in the painting. Their intertwining construction is complex, and the large, central curve keeps the energy recirculating within the composition. Qi Baishi uses greater-seal-script strokes for the pine branches and iron-wire seal-script lines for the needles, revealing his profound mastery of the brush in both styles.

1. 松壽千年、石壽萬年。





Detail 19-1

FACING PAGE: Detail 19-2

Although physically separated, the two mynas appear to be engaged; their interaction is the most nebulous of the three paired motifs, but it is the painting's main focus. A range of ink tones shapes the feathers that cover the birds' bodies, so that one can almost feel the softness of the light ink feathers at the neck and belly. Qi Baishi frequently painted monochrome ink myna birds to offset colored flowers and plants. Here he renders pine and rocks in monochrome ink and adds visual interest with the birds' yellow beaks and red claws, a device that also serves to contrast the birds' nimble liveliness with the calm simplicity of the pine and stones. Qi Baishi's early depictions of myna birds were influenced by Zhu Da's cool manner. This depiction of the birds as having a mild, innocent temperament is from a period after Qi Baishi's style underwent a metamorphosis during his time in Beijing.

DXK

富就齊漢

