

CHINESE PAINTERS: A CRITICAL STUDY

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Chinese Painters: A Critical Study by Raphaël Petrucci

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RAPHAËL PETRUCCI

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A CRITICAL STUDY

BY

RAPHAEL PETRUCCI

TRANSLATED BY

FRANCES SEAVER

WITH A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE BY

LAURENCE BINYON

OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

AND WITH TWENTY-FIVE ILLUSTRATIONS IN DUOTONE



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PREFACE

A TRANSLATOR can have but one aim—to present the thought of the author faithfully. In this case an added responsibility is involved, since one who had so much to give to the world has been taken in his prime. M. Petrucci has written at length of art in the Far East in his exhaustive work *La Philosophie de la Nature dans l'Art d'Extrême Orient* and elsewhere, and has demonstrated the wide scope of his thought and learning. The form and style in *Peintres Chinois* are the result of much condensation of material and have thus presented problems in translation, to which earnest thought has been given.

In deference to the author's wish the margin has not been overladen and only a short tribute, by one able to speak of him from personal knowledge, has been included, together with a few footnotes and a short bibliography of works of reference indispensable to the student who will pursue this absorbing study. The translator takes this opportunity to make grateful acknowledgement of her debt to the authors named, who have made such valuable information available, and to those friends who have read the manuscript and made many helpful suggestions.

FRANCES SEAVER

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

IN Raphael Petrucci, who died early in 1917, the world has lost one of the ablest and most devoted students and interpreters of the art of the Far East. He was only forty-five years of age, in the prime of his powers, brimming with energy and full of enterprises that promised richly. Though he did not die in the field, he was none the less a victim of the war. He had exhausted himself by his labours with the Belgian ambulances at La Panne, for Belgium was his adopted country. He had a house in Brussels, filled with a collection of Chinese and Japanese art, and a little cottage near the coast just over the borders of Holland. He came of the great and ancient Sienese family of the Petrucci, but his mother was French and he spent much of his earlier life in Paris, before settling in Brussels and marrying one of the daughters of the painter Verwée. He had also spent some time in Russia. In Brussels he was attached to the Institut Solvay.

He was a man of science, a student of and writer on sociology and biology. He lectured on art and had a knowledge of the art of the world which few men in Europe rivalled. He wrote a philosophic novel, *La Porte de l'Amour et de la Mort*, which has run through

several editions. He published a book on Michelangelo's poetry. At the same time he was a scientific engineer. When war broke out Petrucci was on his way home from Italy, where he had been engaged, I believe, on some large engineering project and he only got out of Switzerland into France by the last train which left Basle. He came to England for a time, looking after a number of Belgian refugees, including some very distinguished artists. At the end of 1914 he was engaged by the India office to do some valuable work in London on the collection of Chinese and Tibetan paintings brought back from Tun-huang by Sir Aurel Stein. He then worked at La Panne for the Belgian army hospital (he had had a medical training in his youth), went to Provence for a rest, fell ill and died in Paris after an operation.

Raphael Petrucci was a man who seemed to incarnate the boundless curiosity and the various ability of the men of the Italian Renaissance. But for some years before his death he had concentrated his powers chiefly on the study of Oriental art, of the Chinese language, and of Buddhist iconography. His most important work in this line is *La Philosophie de la Nature dans l'Art d'Extrême Orient*, a sumptuously printed folio published by Laurens in Paris, with illustrations by the Kokka Company, and written with as much charm as insight. Petrucci's knowledge of Chinese gave him an authority in interpreting Chinese art which writers on the subject have rarely combined

with so much understanding of art in general, though as a connoisseur he was sometimes over-sanguine. His translation from a classic of Chinese art-criticism, originally published in a learned magazine, has lately appeared in book form. With his friend, Professor Chavannes, whose death, also in the prime of life, we have had to deplore still more recently, Petrucci edited the first volume of the splendid series *Ars Asiatica*. The present work, intended for the general reader and lover of art, illustrates his gift for luminous condensation and the happy treatment of a large theme.

A man of winning manners, a most generous and loyal friend, Petrucci wore his manifold learning lightly; with immense energy and force of character, he was simple and warm-hearted and interested in the small things as well as the great things of life.

LAURENCE BINYON

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