



Landscape

c. 1500

(Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644)

Shen Zhou

(Chinese, born 1427, died 1509)

*Ink on paper; mounted as
a hanging scroll*

172 1/2 x 53 inches (438.2 x 134.6 cm) (mounted)

Shen Zhou (shen-joe), a famous **literati** painter of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), created this grand landscape. Born to an aristocratic family, Shen Zhou refused to work as a civil official and instead pursued his passion for painting, **calligraphy**, and poetry. His style is distinctively simple, letting a few delicate brushstrokes describe shapes, textures, and volume.

Chinese hanging scroll landscapes, like this one, are meant to be viewed from the bottom to the top. In the foreground, a scholar rows a boat and converses with another scholar in a boat across the reeds. A young attendant sits behind him, perhaps preparing tea. The leafless trees on the left draw the viewer's eyes to the middle ground, where the river narrows to a stream. In the thatched-roof cottage on the right, a third scholar sits at a window, contemplating nature's beauty.

The background begins with the mist in the valley behind the pine trees, whose straight trunks lead the viewer's eyes to the rocky outcrops on the mountaintops. The fullness of the mountains balances the emptiness of the river above the conversing scholars. The placement of objects, the succession of trees and rocks in front of the mountains, and the narrowing of the stream suggest depth.

Shen Zhou, a highly trained poet and **calligrapher**, has written one of his poems in the upper right: "Across the great lake I see the two old men. Their disheveled sidelocks brave the frost and wind. Their fishing poles lie neglected; books alone they hold dear in this world." Is it Shen Zhou who sits in the cottage admiring the view?

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