



Berlin, 10 October 2017

**PRESS RELEASE**

**Kulturforum, Exhibition Halls**

Matthäikirchplatz 6, 10785 Berlin

Tue, Wed, Fri 10 am–6 pm, Thu 10 am–8 pm, Sat + Sun 11 am–6 pm

**Faces of China.**

**Portrait Painting of the Ming and Qing Dynasties (1368–1912)**

12 October 2017 – 7 January 2018

An exhibition organized by the Museum für Asiatische Kunst – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin and the Palace Museum Beijing, in cooperation with the Royal Ontario Museum Toronto

***Faces of China* is the first exhibition explicitly dedicated to Chinese portrait painting. A selection of more than 100 paintings from the collections of the Palace Museum Beijing and the Royal Ontario Museum Toronto, most of which have never been shown in Europe, spans a period of more than 500 years. The main focus is on the unique portraits of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912), including images of members of the imperial court, ancestors, military figures, and informal portraits of artists and famous women. These portraits evidence a blossoming of the genre that had never been seen before.**

Portrait painting has a 2000-year-old tradition in China. Beginning in the middle of 16th century, the late Ming Dynasty brought with it an economic boom and great intellectual openness that spurred a significant moment of florescence. It was in this period that Italian Jesuit painters visited the country, such as Matteo Ricci, who brought new techniques of European portrait painting with him in 1583. After the Manchu people conquered China in 1644 and established the Qing Dynasty, the imperial court in Beijing was host to a lively cultural exchange between China and Europe. This is particularly well reflected in the portrait paintings. The Jesuit painter Giuseppe Castiglione (Chinese name: Lang Shining; Milan 1688–Beijing 1766) is a key figure of this period.

Chinese portrait painting is characterized by two traditions of representation: images of ancestors and images of living figures. Ancestor portraits were created to honor deceased family members, who were venerated as part of religious observance within the family. Most were painted by professional but anonymous artists and are unsigned. On the other hand, there are portraits signed by often famous artists depicting well-known figures, such as officials, artists, poets, or those in the military, along with ordinary citizens shown in both single and group family portraits.

In exhibitions on Chinese portrait painting to date, only one of these traditions of representation has always been the central theme. However, *Faces of China* is deliberately dedicated to both of these two traditions, as developments in one always informed developments in the other. While the upper exhibition hall is dedicated to portraits of princely figures, officials, and artists, the focus in the galleries on the lower exhibition hall is on private individuals, families, and ancestral portraits.

Photographs may only be taken as part of the media coverage for the current exhibition/event. If you take photographs for any other purpose, it is your responsibility to establish beforehand any issues relating to copyright and terms of use. You are also responsible for obtaining permission for any additional usage rights (e.g. copyright for images of artworks, rights of personality, and so forth).

GENERALDIREKTION  
PRESSE – KOMMUNIKATION – SPONSORING

Stauffenbergstraße 41  
10785 Berlin

MECHTILD KRONENBERG  
HEAD OF PRESS, COMMUNICATION,  
SPONSORSHIP

MARKUS FARR  
PRESS OFFICER

Tel.: +49 30 266 42 3402  
Mobile: +49 151 527 53 886

presse@smb.spk-berlin.de  
www.smb.museum/presse



The works are placed in carefully chosen relationships in light of their original social and religious contexts, as well as their circumstances of production. Thus, large-scale imperial portraits are surrounded by imperial silk garments once worn in the Palace—both groups of objects are on loan from the Palace Museum Beijing. The ancestor portraits—loans from the Royal Ontario Museum Toronto—are placed alongside an altar table with a censer, candlesticks, and flower vases, intended for honoring deceased relatives. Further objects on display come from the extensive Chinese collections of the Staatliche Museen's own Ethnologisches Museum and Museum für Asiatische Kunst.

A collection of 365 preparatory studies for ancestral portraits that have never gone on display before, along with a series of presentation pieces in album form that artists showed potential clients as a way of sampling their wares, offers insight into workshop practices of the time. Also included in this collection are handbooks for portrait painters with woodcut illustrations, such as Ding Gao's *Secret Workshop Traditions of Portrait Painting*, which not only gives details on technique, but also explores scientific approaches to the art of portraiture, such as physiognomy. In addition, the exhibition deliberately highlights transcultural relationships to European portraiture by placing the Chinese portraits alongside a handful of European masterworks from the same time. So Anthony van Dyck's *Portrait of a Genovese Lady* (ca. 1623) from the collection of the Gemäldegalerie appears next to a Chinese portrait of similarly large dimensions and from the same time, depicting a male ancestor.

An extensive catalogue, published by Imhof Verlag, will accompany the exhibition.

*Faces of China* has received generous support from The Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation.

### **On the Way to the Humboldt Forum**

Highlights from the collections of the Museum für Asiatische Kunst and the Ethnologisches Museum of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin will remain on view for visitors during the move to the Humboldt Forum. *On the Way to Humboldt Forum* is the title of a series of dialogic special exhibitions, presentations and events that will take place until 2019 at the Kulturforum and the Museumsinsel Berlin, involving the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin's two non-European collections. For more information on the entire program please visit the website:

[www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/humboldt-forum/auf-dem-weg-zum-humboldt-forum.html](http://www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/humboldt-forum/auf-dem-weg-zum-humboldt-forum.html).

GENERALDIREKTION  
PRESSE – KOMMUNIKATION – SPONSORING

Stauffenbergstraße 41  
10785 Berlin

**MECHTILD KRONENBERG**  
HEAD OF PRESS, COMMUNICATION,  
SPONSORSHIP

**MARKUS FARR**  
PRESS OFFICER

Tel.: +49 30 266 42 3402  
Mobile: +49 151 527 53 886

presse@smb.spk-berlin.de  
www.smb.museum/presse