

## ■ ARHS 530: Chinese Gardens

Carol Brash

5-8:30 PM Thursdays

May 22 – July 31, 2008 (no class 7/3)

*A garden is evidence of faith. It links us with all the misty figures of the past who also planted and were nourished by the fruits of their planting.* – Gladys Taber

In the area now called China, people have been creating gardens for thousands of years. Each generation links itself to the past through the visual and literary (as well as the edible) fruits of their gardens. Chinese scholars often retired (sometimes in protest) to gardens to write history, having faith that some misty figure of the future would understand and appreciate their gardens of words. Today reinterpretations of some of these early ideas appear in diverse sites ranging from the reconstructed garden at the Minneapolis Institute of Art to the “Lucky Bamboo” sold at Home Depot.

Some of the topics we will investigate include the shift from the garden as a site of agricultural production to a site of aesthetic/cultural production, the complicated relationship of nature and artifice, gardens as repositories of memory, and the relationship of gardens to the other arts. Through a critical examination of western scholarship on Chinese gardens and also of reconstructions of Chinese gardens, the course will also challenge the Orientalist notion of a “timeless” Chinese garden. Although the course will survey the vast history of gardens in China, the focus will be primarily on gardens of the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties. Students will examine pictorial representations, attend required field trips to local museums and gardens (scheduled during class time as much as possible), and read excerpts from landscape and garden texts in translation, as well as selections from secondary literature. Gardens we will consider include painted versions of the Garden of Delight in Solitude and the Garden of the Artless Administrator; reconstructions of the Garden of the Artless Administrator, The Garden of the Master of the Fishing Nets, the gardens at the mansion of Prince Gong, and the Yuanmingyuan; and contemporary constructions based on historic models such as the Garden of Awakening Orchids in Portland and the park attached to the Sun Yatsen Memorial Hall in Taipei, Taiwan. Our exploration will include visits to local Chinese gardens including the Garden of Pursuing Harmony at the Minneapolis Institute of Art.

*This course fulfills the Non-Western Art core requirement.*

Suggested background reading (also included in the course readings):

Clunas, Craig. *Fruitful Sites: Garden Culture in Early Modern China*. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996).

Keswick, Maggie. *The Chinese Garden*. 3rd edition. (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2003).