

**Title:** *Travelers Among Mountains and Streams*

**Artist:** Fan Kuan (950 – 1032 C.E.)

**Date:** 1000 C.E.

**Culture:** Chinese

**Size:** 84 x 41 ½ inches

**Medium:** Hanging scroll; ink and light color on silk (facsimile)

**Acquisition #:** 96.15

**Additional works in the collection by the artist?** Yes \_\_\_ No X



**MoFA**  
Florida State University Museum of Fine Arts



### Historical Context:

Fan Kuan, a Chinese landscape painter, utilized Daoist philosophy and separated himself from society as a hermit and mountain dweller in order to immerse himself in and study nature for his landscape paintings, which were deeply valued at this time. When the southern Song Dynasty was formed in 1127, many other artists and poets also fled to the mountains for a similar purpose. The Song Period consisted of patrons who preferred artworks that reflected the Neo-Confucian ideal of the absolute truth of nature in their world. Fan Kuan's *Travelers Among Mountains and Streams* reflects this principle by presenting universal creation in its totality. The usage of empty spaces with crowded portions in the image displays the Daoist belief of yin and yang where opposites intertwine with each other.

During this time period literati artists utilized calligraphy-style brushstrokes to convey their personal sense of expression. These intellectuals created highly individualized works that went beyond the restrictions of the precise and illusionistic style of court art.

Asian scrolls were categorized into two types: handscrolls and hanging scrolls. *Travelers Among Mountains and Streams* is a hanging scroll that is unrolled vertically and hung on a wall. Scrolls placed in homes were meant to be admired and analyzed, rather than serve as decoration, so they would be stored in cabinets after a brief amount of time.

### Neo-Confucianism:

In addition to the Daoist theory of yin and yang, Fan Kuan also conveyed a balance between the Neo-Confucian values of li, the world's principles, and qi, a vital force from which all objects or events emerge. In *Travelers Among Mountains and Streams* the grandeur of the work represents li while qi is suggested by energy that is concentrated in the form of the solid rock.

### Media Description:

In his *Travelers Among Mountains and Streams* Fan Kuan displayed his mastery of cun, a type of brushstroke characterized by dabs to create texture and provide tangibility for the forms in the image. This type of brushstroke, along with thickening-and-thinning contour strokes and ink wash, can be seen in the depiction of the mountains. Additionally, the rocky outcroppings, covered with trees, were done with crisp and precise brushwork. Strong, clear brushstrokes define the trunks of the trees, and the detailed brushwork in the painting also distinguishes the foliage and types of trees (coniferous, deciduous, etc.). Mists that are represented through ink washes mark the roofs of the temple in the forest.

Fan Kuan organized and presented different aspects of a landscape within a single composition using a constantly shifting viewpoint. The various details placed throughout the image cause the viewer's eyes to move from each minute depiction to the next, as well as from the human and terrestrial world in the mountains to the celestial realm in the sky. The immense waterfall at the right is balanced by the mountain on the left while accenting the height of the mountain.

*Travelers Among Mountains and Streams* may be Fan Kuan's only surviving work. His signature is hidden in the leaves in the lower right corner of the image. The displayed work is a facsimile, or a copy, of the original scroll.

### Terminology:

**Daoism:** a philosophy developed by Laozi that emphasizes individual expression and harmony

**Neo-Confucianism:** a revival, or reinterpretation, of Chinese moral philosophy that focuses on the ideal of the absolute truth of nature

**Literati artists:** members of the scholar-official elite


### References:

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-art-history/south-east-se-asia/china-art/a/neo-confucianism-fan-kuan-travelers-by-streams-and-mountains>

<http://www.comuseum.com/painting/masters/fan-kuan/travelers-among-mountains-and-streams/>

<https://www.britannica.com/art/cun>

[https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/clpg/hd\\_clpg.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/clpg/hd_clpg.htm)

<p><b>Level:</b> K-5 Next Generation Sunshine State Standards <b>Big Idea:</b> Historical and Global Connections <b>Enduring Understanding 1:</b> The arts reflect and document cultural trends and historical events, and help explain how new directions in the arts have emerged. <b>Benchmark:</b> VA.3.H.2.1 Compare differences or similarities in artworks across time and culture.</p>	<p><b>Procedure:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Explain to students that ancient Chinese artists believed in intertwining opposites (i.e. positive and negative space).</li> <li>2. Students will look at Mi Youren's <i>Cloudy Mountains</i>.</li> <li>3. Students will observe the blank space above and below the mountains.</li> <li>4. Students will learn this is called negative space.</li> <li>5. Students will observe the space the mountains occupy.</li> <li>6. Students will learn this is called positive space.</li> <li>7. Students will look at Fan K'uan's <i>Travelers Among Mountains and Streams</i>.</li> <li>8. Students will be challenged to differentiate the positive from the negative space.</li> <li>9. Students will create their own landscape drawings implementing both positive and negative space.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Activity:</b> Students will examine Mi Youren's <i>Cloudy Mountains</i>. Students will realize that the space above and below the mountains is blank. Students will learn that this is called negative space. Students will examine the mountains on the scroll and observe the space they occupy. Students will learn that the space is called positive space. Students will then look at Fan K'uan's <i>Travelers Among Mountains and Streams</i> and see if they can differentiate the positive from the negative space. Students will be asked to create their own landscape drawings with distinct separations between positive and negative space.</p>	<p><b>Materials:</b> Image of Mi Youren's <i>Cloudy Mountains</i>; image of Fan K'uan's <i>Travelers Among Mountains and Streams</i>; drawing paper of any size; markers.</p>
<p><b>Objectives:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students will learn that ancient Chinese artists would intertwine opposites such as negative and positive space.</li> <li>2. Students will learn the definition of positive and negative space.</li> <li>3. Students will learn to recognize positive and negative space.</li> <li>4. Students will create landscape drawings implementing both positive and negative space.</li> </ol>	 <p>Mi Youren; <i>Cloudy Mountains</i>; before 1200; handscroll; ink on paper; 10 7/8 x 22 7/6 in.</p>
<p><b>Level:</b> 9-12 Next Generation Sunshine State Standards <b>Big Idea:</b> Critical Thinking and Reflection <b>Enduring Understanding 1:</b> Cognition and reflection are required to appreciate, interpret, and create with artistic intent. <b>Benchmark:</b> VA.912.C.1.2 Use critical-thinking skills for various contexts to develop, refine, and reflect on an artistic theme.</p>	<p><b>Objectives:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students will be introduced to the practice of balancing opposites in Chinese historical art.</li> <li>2. Students will learn about the Daoist theory of yin and yang.</li> <li>3. Students will analyze the balancing of opposites in Fan K'uan's <i>Travelers Among Mountains and Streams</i>.</li> <li>4. Students will create their own works with a focus on balancing opposites.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Activity:</b> Fan K'uan utilized the Daoist theory of yin and yang to convey a balance between opposites in his piece, <i>Travelers Among Mountains and Streams</i>. Students will examine the work and notice the balance between positive and negative space. Students will reflect on other pairs of opposites such as: humanity vs. nature, the minute vs. the colossal, mortality vs. the divine. After this discussion, students will each select a pair of opposites and create their own works using their selections. Students must explain ways they balance opposites.</p>	<p><b>Procedure:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Show Fan K'uan's <i>Travelers Among Mountains and Streams</i> from the opposite side of this Object Guide.</li> <li>2. Review the information on the opposite side of this Guide and explain to students the Daoist principle of yin and yang present in Fan K'uan's <i>Travelers Among Mountains and Streams</i>.</li> <li>3. Students will discuss the way the work balances the opposites of positive and negative space.</li> <li>4. Students will determine other pairs of opposites in the work during class discussion.</li> <li>5. Using one pair of choice, each student will create a work that balances these opposites.</li> <li>6. Students will present their works in class explaining the way opposites were balanced in their works.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Materials:</b> Image of Fan K'uan's <i>Travelers Among Mountains and Streams</i>; media of choice on which to draw or paint; drawing or painting materials</p>	