

Golden 105

Chapter 105 Picture within Picture (2)

Seeing the old man get angry, Song Jun quickly said, "Grandpa Fang, please don't be angry, please don't be angry! You're even angrier than my grandfather! Please let me explain.

"Explain? What's there to explain? Your grandfather wouldn't have let you bring this painting to me for framing. It must have been your own idea, right? I'm telling you, you're not short of money, there's no need to try to fool people with something I've framed."

The old man's temper remained unabated. You see, mounting and calligraphy and painting have always complemented each other. It is often said that "the painting is 30% painting and 70% mounting." If a piece of calligraphy or painting is mounted by a contemporary mounting master, it can really fool many newcomers to collecting.

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In his article "The Difficulty of Mounting Paintings," published in the People's Daily on January 3, 1957, the renowned modern painter Fu Baoshi stated, "As a work of art, besides the artistic level of the painting determining the painter, mounting is the most important step," demonstrating the importance of mounting in the entire art of calligraphy and painting.

Before liberation, mounting masters had a low social status, which led to a shortage of talent in the mounting industry. The mounting skills that had been passed down for more than 1,500 years were almost lost. It was only after liberation that the status of craftsmen improved, which enabled those old craftsmen to pass on their skills.

As for Mr. Fang, he is a towering figure in the entire Chinese calligraphy and painting mounting industry, with countless disciples and grand-disciples. Therefore, calligraphy and paintings that have been mounted by him are all genuine works with considerable value. Even if this painting of Tang Bohu's "Li Duanduan" is a fake, if it has been mounted by Mr. Fang, it might just be sold as a genuine work.

"Grandpa Fang, this painting belongs to my younger brother. He just wants it reframed so he can hang it in his own home. He absolutely doesn't intend to resell it using your name. You see, the scroll rod is

made of very poor quality material; it's no longer suitable for hanging in the main hall. I just thought it was a small matter, nothing more than a small favor for you. If you're not happy, we can simply not frame it."

Song Jun was quite unhappy after being reprimanded and was already secretly regretting it. He should have just found any framer instead of provoking this old man.

"Is everything you said true?" Old Master Fang's expression softened slightly as he looked at Song Jun and asked.

"Grandpa Fang, how could I dare to lie to you? If you make one phone call, my old man will break my legs."

After hearing Song Jun's words, Old Master Fang finally looked Zhuang Rui up and down. Having lived to such an old age and seen countless people, he could naturally tell that Zhuang Rui was not the kind of person who would cheat or be cunning. His anger gradually subsided.

"Young man, the price I charge for framing paintings and calligraphy is very high. The painting you bought has poor brushwork and no artistic conception. You might as well buy a print from a bookstore and hang it at home. It's not worth it for me to frame it."

The implication in Old Master Fang's words was that he was already making an excuse. If he were to frame such a obviously fake work, it would become a laughing stock.

"Grandpa Fang, I know this painting is fake, but since I bought it, I can't just burn it as waste paper. I just want to replace these two pivots so it can be hung up."

Zhuang Rui pretended to be casual, pointing to the painting spread out on the table. In fact, he was already very anxious. According to his guess, since the old man agreed to frame it, he would naturally be able to discover the trickery of the painting within the painting during the process.

However, Zhuang Rui didn't expect that after glancing at the painting's authenticity, the old man was unwilling to make a purchase, not even giving it a second look. Generally, people familiar with a particular field prioritize their area of expertise. If the painting hadn't been so obviously fake, the old

man might have examined its mounting and framing. This shows how much effort and cunning the forger went into making the painting go unnoticed.

"oh?"

Grandpa Fang gave a noncommittal reply, but his eyes followed Zhuang Rui's finger to the scroll rod of the painting, and he commented, "The top and bottom rods and the scroll head are indeed made of wood, but the materials are terrible. Judging from the age of this painting, it should be a copy from the Republican era. It's only been a few decades and it's already almost rotten. I really don't understand why anyone would bother to frame a painting like this. Huh?!"

As Grandpa Fang spoke, his eyes, which had been half-closed, suddenly widened, and he let out a surprised and uncertain cry. He walked to the table in one step, his movements so nimble that they did not resemble those of an eighty-year-old man.

"This...this is our Wu-style craftsmanship, and it's even an antique-style mounting. Who would use this technique to mount this tattered painting?"

As he spoke, Grandpa Fang put on a pair of reading glasses and began to carefully examine the framing of the painting, muttering to himself incessantly. Zhuang Rui, standing to the side, was somewhat puzzled.

Song Jun had some knowledge of mounting and framing, and after explaining it to Zhuang Rui, Zhuang Rui finally understood what Old Master Fang meant.

Originally, the mounting business in Suzhou and Yangzhou has a history of hundreds of years since the Ming and Qing dynasties. It has carried on the past and opened up the future, and is famous throughout the country. It is collectively known as Wu mounting. Among them, it is divided into several categories. The one that specializes in mounting red and white vertical scrolls and couplets, which are used for weddings, funerals and other celebrations, is called the "Red Gang".

Those who specialize in mounting ordinary calligraphy and paintings are called "guilds," while those who specialize in mounting precious calligraphy and paintings for famous calligraphers and collectors before liberation are called "antique-style mounting."

Most of the artisans who can make "antique-style pool decorations" are highly skilled veterans. Even before the liberation, there were very few such people. Grandpa Fang knew most of them. It's no wonder he was stunned when he suddenly saw such a fake "antique-style pool decoration".

Because the old man was already convinced that the mounting of the painting must have been done by a master mounter before the liberation. However, he couldn't understand why such a complicated and costly mounting technique was used to mount a fake painting.

Grandpa Fang took off his gloves, found a magnifying glass, and carefully examined the painting from beginning to end. He then touched the mounting material of the scroll with his hand. After more than ten minutes, he took off his glasses, sat back in his chair, and frowned without saying a word.

The old man was quite puzzled. No matter how he looked at it, the painting was undoubtedly a fake, but the mounting technique was "antique-style mounting." There was another problem: the materials used in "antique-style mounting," whether it was the top rod, the bottom rod, the wooden rod, the paper tube, or the scroll head, were all selected from the best materials. Before the liberation, the scroll heads used in "antique-style mounting" were even made of precious sandalwood.

Two questions were troubling the old man. First, if the most complex mounting technique was used, why use such inferior materials? The reason the old man hadn't examined it closely earlier was because the materials were so poor; he hadn't even considered that the painting used the "antique-style mounting" technique. Second, naturally, was why go to such great lengths to mount such a fake.

No matter what profession you're in, those who reach the top are always people with extremely persistent personalities. The old man is no exception. Even though he's over eighty years old, he still frowns and ponders, trying to figure out what mindset the mounting master was in when he mounted this piece of work.

"Young Song, where did you get this painting from?"

Grandpa Fang spoke up, asking Song Jun, who was standing to the side looking somewhat bewildered. Song Jun had just come to the table and looked at the painting; it was indeed a fake, as could be seen from the paper used—it couldn't have been older than the Republican era.

"Grandpa Fang, I already told you, this painting isn't mine," Song Jun replied, somewhat amused and exasperated.

"Oh, right, this is the young man. What's your name, young man? Can you tell me about the origin of this painting?"

Since entering the room, Grandpa Fang only now remembered to ask Zhuang Rui's name. However, Zhuang Rui was not angry. Anyone who has lived to be over eighty years old probably wouldn't be interested in asking the names of everyone they've ever met.

Zhuang Rui introduced himself and then told everyone about the black market auction. There was nothing to hide, but he deliberately emphasized that he was persuaded by someone and bought it on impulse. Although it only cost three thousand yuan, he wanted to keep it as a memento, which is why he found Song Jun and asked Old Master Fang for help.

Grandpa Fang sat back down in his chair, pondered for a moment, then stood up and said to Song Jun, "Go call Xiao Lü and tell him I don't have time today and to ask him to come another day."

Song Jun agreed and took out his phone to make a call. Zhuang Rui, who was listening nearby, heard it clearly. It turned out that the "Little Lü" the old man was talking about was actually Manager Lü, whom he had met before. Zhuang Rui couldn't help but find it amusing. He wondered what kind of expression Manager Lü, who was also quite old, would have when someone called him "Little Lü".

"Young man, hold onto this painting and come with me. Young Song, come along too."

After seeing that Song Jun had finished his call, Grandpa Fang stood up and walked towards a room next to the living room. Zhuang Rui put away the scroll on the table and followed behind with Song Jun.

To use a popular phrase, this room should be the old man's studio. The room is very spacious, with three windows, all made of transparent glass, allowing for excellent light transmission and making it very bright.

In the center of the room, there was a wooden table about one meter high with a smooth and flat surface. Song Jun quietly explained to Zhuang Rui that, in the industry, this table was a mounting table. There were also many other items on it, which, although cluttered, gave people a sense of order.