



c. 1460 (Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644;
Tianshun Period, 1457–1464)

Ink on paper;
mounted as a handscroll (detail)

1 foot, 8 ³/₄ inches x 31 feet, 2 ⁵/₈ inches
(51.8 x 952.2 cm)

XIA CHANG

Chinese, 1388–1470

LOOKING QUESTIONS

What materials did Xia Chang use to make this image?

Make a list of everything you see. Is this a still life, a seascape, a portrait, or a landscape?

What kinds of brushstrokes can you find (smooth, pointed strokes, blurry dots, pale washes, and vertical slashes)?

What does each kind of brushstroke depict?

Where are we in relation to this scene (above, below, or at eye level)?

This is part of a long scroll that unrolls from right to left. What do you think Xia Chang painted in the sections before and after this one?

BAMBOO UNDER SPRING RAIN

This painting of bamboo growing along a riverbank is one section of an enormous handscroll, over thirty feet long, made more than five hundred years ago in China. Only one section of the **scroll** is viewed at a time, as it is unrolled **horizontally** from right to left. The painter, Xia Chang (sha chung), was a member of the **literati**, a class of highly educated men who were also calligraphers and artists. Xia Chang is known primarily for his ink paintings of bamboo.

Xia used an unusual **point of view** for this painting—close up and very low, as if we, the viewers, were floating on the surface of the river like water bugs, watching the bamboo forest glide by. His elegant black brushstrokes dance across the paper, each one unique, becoming clusters of bamboo leaves. Blurry dots and thin, gray **washes** convey the softness of the mossy riverbank. He painted the **angular** rocks with a drier brush, giving them a rough **texture**. All these brushstrokes and tones **contrast** with the open space created by the white paper.

Bamboo represents values and qualities the literati admired in nature. It is supple and graceful, but also tough and unbreakable. Like a pine tree, it is an evergreen, which means it thrives in the winter. In Chinese, the word for “node” (a bump on a branch) or “joining point” sounds just like the word for “integrity,” and bamboo has many nodes. Paintings of bamboo require similar skills, tools, and materials as

calligraphy: brush, ink, and water. For centuries, only talented literati highly trained in calligraphy were considered worthy of making black ink paintings of bamboo.